Labour Market Needs Assessment in Mersin

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Executive Summary

The relations between the people of Mersin and Syrians date back many years due to the economic and touristic ties between them. From 2011 onwards, Mersin also started to host Syrian refugees. While unofficial estimates vary, there are understood to be more than 147,400[1] Syrian refugees in Mersin. As the field research undertaken for this study revealed, any analysis undertaken in Mersin must reflect the presence of two distinct groups of refugees: those with limited socio-economic resources who have to work to survive and those who arrived with a certain amount of capital and were able to establish a business. It is important to take this dual structure of the refugee population into account when developing projects and programmes in Mersin.

The in-depth interviews revealed that refugees with limited socio-economic resources are employed in certain sectors such as metal construction, agriculture and furniture manufacturing. However, as the results of the study confirm, these employed refugees face various challenges in the labour market. First of all, temporary employment (including subcontracting) has become ever more prevalent with the arrival of refugees in Mersin. Most of the employed refugees are involved in low-paid, labour-intensive work such as seasonal agricultural labour. Secondly, the refugees experience social problems in many ways. In particular, the local host community is not happy about sharing the local labour market with them, especially as the rate of unemployment in Mersin is above the national average unemployment rate[2]. According to an İŞKUR report[3], the unemployment rate in Mersin was 12.4% in 2013, whereas it was 9.7% in Turkey as a whole. Daily wages have also fallen with the arrival of the refugees in Mersin, adding to the tensions. In addition to these tensions with the host community, refugees face challenges because employers find it difficult to trust them for various reasons, including reasons related to their skills and working culture. There are on-going problems with regards to work permits among refugees as well. Last but not least, language is an important barrier to finding a job. As a consequence, informal employment is found to be very common among refugees in Mersin. This brings with it issues of job security, social security and health cover.

Unemployment is common among refugees in Mersin. Almost 61% of the 231 refugees interviewed were unemployed. The vast majority (90%) of the employed refugees who were interviewed reported that they did not have a contract. About 88% had no social security because they did not have a proper work

[1] http://mersin.goc.gov.tr/tr/page/goc_gecici-koruma-4713
[2] BIAMER. 2014. *Suriyeli Göçmenlerin Sorunları Çalıştayı Sonuç Raporu* (Final Report of the Workshop for the Problems of Syrian Immigrants).
[3] İŞKUR. 2016. *Mersin İşgücü Piyasası Araştırma Raporu* (Mersin Labour Market Research Report).

contract provided by their employers. Moreover, 98.3% of the refugees interviewed said that they had not been given a work permit, even though 38.8% of them were currently employed.

The situation of the more wealthy Syrians is very different. Mersin was reported by in-depth interview participants to be the second-ranking city in Turkey in terms of Syrian investments. However, the Syrian firms cannot necessarily be regarded as sources of job opportunities, since they are no more allowed to employ refugees without work permits than other firms. The data obtained during the study revealed that Syrian enterprises are mostly engaged in the food, construction and textiles sectors. Syrian entrepreneurs themselves face some challenges. With respect to legal procedures, the tax system and the roles of notaries, they are unfamiliar with the procedures, the documents necessary, the places to apply and the various regulations. Furthermore, they lack the knowledge and ability to conduct market feasibility studies in the city. Finally, the majority of shops run by refugee artisans are not registered, nor do they have the necessary networks to employ the most suitable people.

Based on the information obtained from in-depth interviews, the sectors that generate the most demand for labour in Mersin are textiles, food, agriculture (lemon and citrus production), machinery and metal working, construction, and logistics. This pattern reflects the existence of a port and a free trade zone in the city, its climate and geographical location, and the growing population. By contrast, tourism is not a developed sector in Mersin, possibly owing to insufficient infrastructure and the city's lack of an airport. Although the glass and soda industries employ many workers in Mersin, they are reported to be maintaining their current staff structures rather than employing new people; in other words, they do not currently have vacant positions. Nevertheless, certain sectors are expected by the in-depth interview participants to grow significantly in the years to come. These sectors include energy, trade, innovative and information technologies, construction, chemicals and services for the elderly.

Both previously conducted research and the field research carried out by UDA indicated that there is a need for workers able to perform various crafts in sectors like textiles, construction and metal works in Mersin. Many interviewees pointed out that employers often complain about the lack of craftsmen, skilled intermediate workers and qualified operational staff with the necessary vocational training and experience. This suggests that there is a gap between the skills of the labour force and the skills demanded by the labour market.

When the refugees interviewed were asked about their skills, the most frequent responses were physical and bodily strength (almost 46%) and knowledge of an occupation (almost 39%). The refugees who were employed were found to be working mostly in manufacturing (30%), services (15%) and professional, scientific and technical activities (11%). The reasons most frequently given for being unemployed were: lack of job opportunities (43%), lack of skills (26%), and disinterest in working/reluctance to work (22%). The refugees interviewed believed that vocational training courses on textiles machinery operation (20%),

computer literacy (15%), construction skills (14%), cooking (12%) and entrepreneurship (11%) would help them to find jobs or create income.

The employers interviewed stated that refugees seeking work needed knowledge of an occupation (73%), communication skills (47%), a knowledge of Turkish (32%), physical and bodily strength (30%) and sales and marketing skills (29%). Some of the employers reported that they had vacant positions. These included positions for machine operators, tailors, agricultural engineers, technical staff, sales staff, cleaners, waiters/waitresses, packers, mechanical engineers, dishwashers and service staff. The employers thought that it would be useful to provide refugees with vocational training courses on food processing operations (35%), textile machinery operation (29%), office work (27%), construction skills (27%), entrepreneurship (26%) and business management (23%).

1. Background

1.1. General Overview

Turkey's refugee situation

Turkey is a country of 79,814,871 inhabitants hosting the largest refugee population in the world[4]. Currently, there are 2,973,980 Syrians registered officially under Temporary Protection by the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) of the Ministry of Interior of Turkey (MoI)[5] as well as 295,401 persons of concern registered with the UNHCR, most whom are Iraqis (131,440), Afghans (120,529), Iranians (31,848) and Somalis (3,526)[6].

Most of the refugees (2,719,007, or 91%) live outside camps in urban settings, while 9% (254,973) are accommodated in 26 camps in the south-eastern region[7]. This region is also the place where 75% of the refugees are located. As for Mersin, it currently ranks sixth among host provinces, with 147,185 Syrians registered[8].

The situation faced by Turkey is exceptional in terms of international migration paradigms in the sense that it is a middle-income country, and that it is very rare for middle-income countries to come to host refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants on such a large scale.

Turkey's economy is the 18th largest in the world, with a GDP amounting to USD 712 billion[9], and a GPD per capita of USD 9,387 in 2015[10]. Turkey has been one of the fastest growing countries since the 2000s (more than 6% every year until 2008, and 9% in 2010-2011, following the world economic crisis). This reflects the country's macroeconomic and fiscal stability, well-regulated financial markets, healthy banking system, and low ratio of public sector debt to GDP (33%)[11].

As for the unemployment rate, it reached 13% in January 2017 (i.e. 3.95 million people) - or 15.2% in the case of the official non-agricultural unemployment rate[12]. It must be added that the unemployment rate is above the national average in those regions of the country that host the most refugees, as shown in the figure below.

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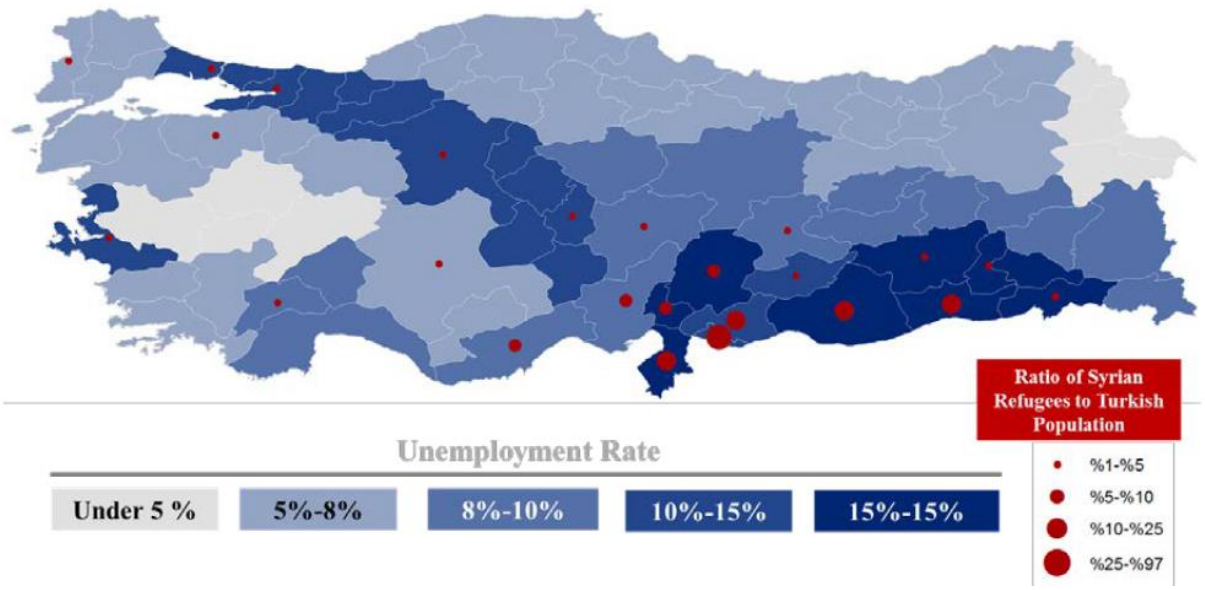
[4] TURKSTAT, http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/Start.do, accessed on 12 April 2017.
[5] As of 6 April 2017: Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management, http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/temporary-protection_915_1024_4748_icerik.
[6] UNHCR Turkey Factsheet, January 2017.
[7] Republic of Turkey Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management, http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/temporary-protection_915_1024_4748_icerik, accessed on 12 April 2017.
[8] İbid.
[9] World Bank, http://data.worldbank.org/country/Turkey, accessed on 12 April 2017.
[10] World Bank, http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkey/overview, accessed on 12 April 2017.
[11] CIA World Factbook, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html, accessed on 12 April 2017.
[12] TURKSTAT, http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1007, accessed on 12 April 2017.

Figure 1. Unemployment rate and ratio of Syrian refugees to Turkish population by province in 2015 (in percentage)



Source: TEPAV (April 2016)

Integration of refugees in the labour market

As of 2017, the status of the Syrian refugees is still considered temporary. The members of the other main groups of asylum seekers in Turkey (i.e. Iraqis, Afghans, Iranian and Somalis) either hold humanitarian residence permits that offer few rights or under a conditional refugee status which is equally temporary, pending resettlement by the UNHCR[13].

In January 2016, Turkey granted labour market access to the Syrians “under temporary protection" by enabling them to apply for work permits starting six months from the date when they registered.

The main provisions of the work permit legislation (for persons under the Temporary Protection Regime) are as follows:

- Applicants must have completed their registration with the DGMM under the Temporary Protection Regime at least 6 months prior to their application;
- They may work only in the province where they are registered;
- The application shall be lodged by the employer. However, those who meet the criteria for an independent work permit (in order to be self-employed) may lodge their applications directly;

[13] GÜRAKAR SKRIBELAND Ö., Seeking asylum in Turkey. A critical review of Turkey's asylum law and practices, Oslo: NOAS, April 2016, pp 5-42.

- Employers must observe a 10% limit on the proportion of persons under Temporary Protection among their total staff unless they prove that they cannot find the skills and competences they require by other means within four weeks;
- The total cost of the process is TRY 558;
- Work permits are issued for one year. They may be renewed initially for three years and then for six years;
- Foreigners are not allowed to apply for a work permit in order to work as judges or prosecutors, attorneys, notaries, security guards in private or public enterprise, or dentists, in the professions of pharmaceuticals, veterinary practice, private hospital management, or in numerous jobs related to fishing and maritime activities;
- Non-profit organisations and the agricultural sector are not bound by the 10% quota.

It is important to stress that, in accordance with the law, Syrians under Temporary Protection are only entitled to receive work permits on the condition that their employers apply on their behalf. In other words, only those Syrians who can find an employer to make the application are able to receive work permits. By the end of December 2016, 13,298 Syrians under Temporary Protection had received work permits[14] out of a total of 1.8 million refugees of working age. As mentioned by the in-depth interview participants and confirmed by the findings of the quantitative research conducted by UDA, the majority of refugees cannot or do not obtain work permits for various reasons and remain in the informal labour market.

The main reasons why refugees remain in informal employment can be listed as follows[15]:

- language barriers;
- the existence and prevalence of unregistered employment;
- the need for Syrians to accept low-paid jobs;
- the fact that the great majority of the Syrians would have great difficulty finding any other job, especially in the formal sector.

The UNHCR assessed the Syrian refugee population at the national level as follows in 2016[16]:

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[14] KADKOY O., *Syrians and Labor Market Integration: Dynamics in Turkey and Germany*, German Marshall Funds of the United States, February 2017, p 2.
[15] Desk review conducted as part of the present study.
[16] *The market assessment report*, Unpublished: UNHCR, March 2016, 26 p.

- The UNHCR estimated that there are 6,000-7,000 Syrian entrepreneurs in Turkey. Of all the foreign capital companies in Turkey, 7.9% are wholly or partially owned by Syrians (3,680 out of 46,743). Among these companies, 33% are active in wholesale trade, but the construction sector is equally important. **Mersin** is one of the most important places in Turkey for Syrian business development: in 2015, 15% of all new businesses were created by Syrians[17].

- The UNHCR concluded that the best way to find livelihood opportunities for Syrian refugees was to find jobs in areas where Turkish people are unwilling to work. This would help to avoid social problems due to the perception that Syrians are taking jobs from Turks. Such professions might include: sewing machine operator, leather worker (including shoemaking), agricultural harvester (fruits, nuts, cotton), HVAC technician, waiter, sous-chef, metal worker, plastic injection machine operator, furniture maker, casting and forging worker, CNC operator, quality controller, weaving machine operator, and marble cutter.

- There are 60,000 Syrian former micro-entrepreneurs with experience in crafts like shoe repairing and tailoring, or in running pastry shops, restaurants and similar businesses. These Syrians are ready to establish micro-enterprises and to serve their own community. However they have not been able to bring their capital and/or machinery from Syria. They therefore need to find sufficient capital to restart their business. They also need some training in order to ensure the healthy start-up and development of their businesses. This could include topics like sales and marketing, and the basics of business finance and accounting.

1.2. Objectives

The overall purpose of this study was to conduct a labour market assessment of the province of Mersin.

The objectives of this assessment were threefold:

1) To identify the sectors and activities with growth potential and market demand that offer opportunities for refugees' employment and self-employment;

2) To identify fields of Vocational Training relevant to labour market needs for refugees in Mersin, taking gender-specific preferences and constraints into account;

3) To identify specific training subjects that would:

   a. increase refugees' employment and self-employment opportunities;

   b. increase refugees' stability in terms of income and integration in host communities;

   c. help refugees to understand the labour market and business opportunities as well as labour market gaps;

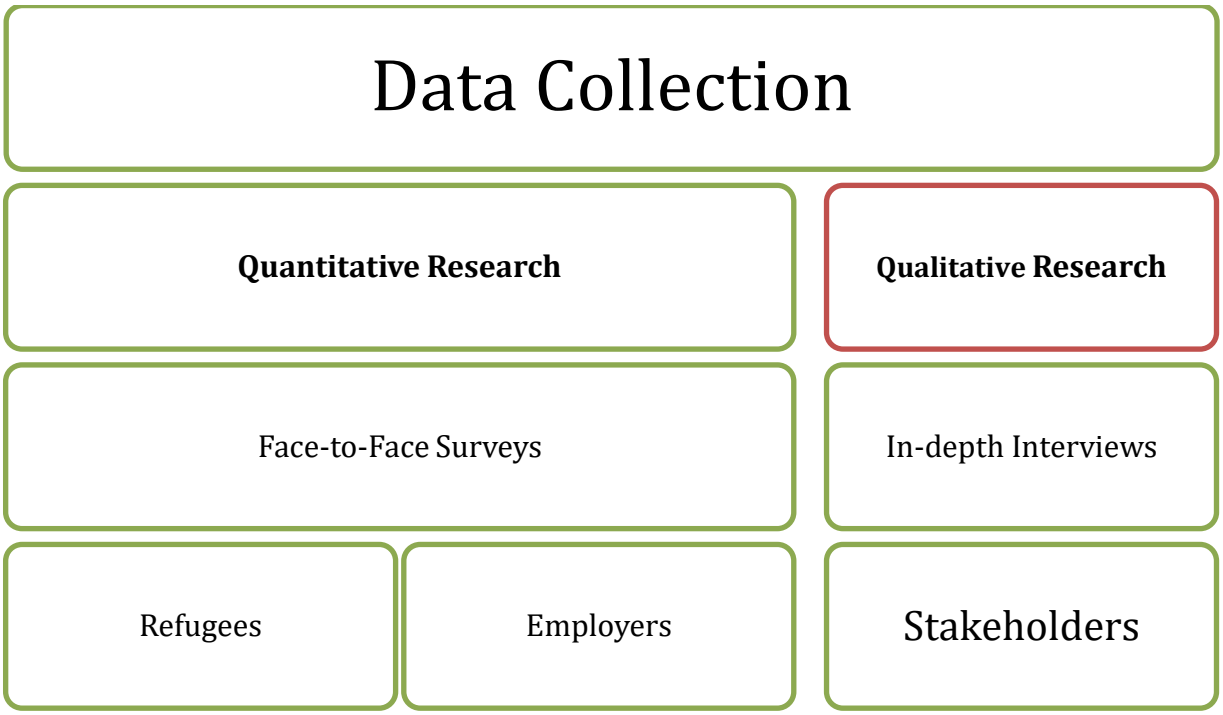
[17] KADKOY O & KAYMAZ T, *Syrians in Turkey – The economics of integration*, Ankara: TEPAV, September 2016, p 5.

d. be most beneficial, and have the greatest impact, in terms of improving the beneficiaries' chances of attaining sustainable livelihood opportunities.

2. Methodology

In order to reach the aforementioned objectives, UDA Consulting collected secondary data from a desk review and primary data from a field survey.

Figure 2 Primary Data Collection Strategy



2.1. Quantitative Data Collection

The field survey first entailed face to face interviews led through a structured questionnaire with 200 refugees living in Mersin. These interviews were conducted with the aim of grasping their situation in terms of livelihoods, employment status and training needs. The interviews were conducted between March 31 and April, 4, 2017.

The refugees were selected randomly according to ACTED's future vocational training target, i.e. 60% men and 40% women. The initial plan was to survey 120 men and 80 women, but during the course of the field study a greater quantity of data was collected with the aim of generating more precise results. In the event, data was collected from 231 refugees. The breakdown is given in Table 2:

Table 1. Final Sample Size and its Breakdown by Gender, Age and Employment Status

Age Group	Women		Men		TOTAL
	Unemployed	Employed	Unemployed	Employed	

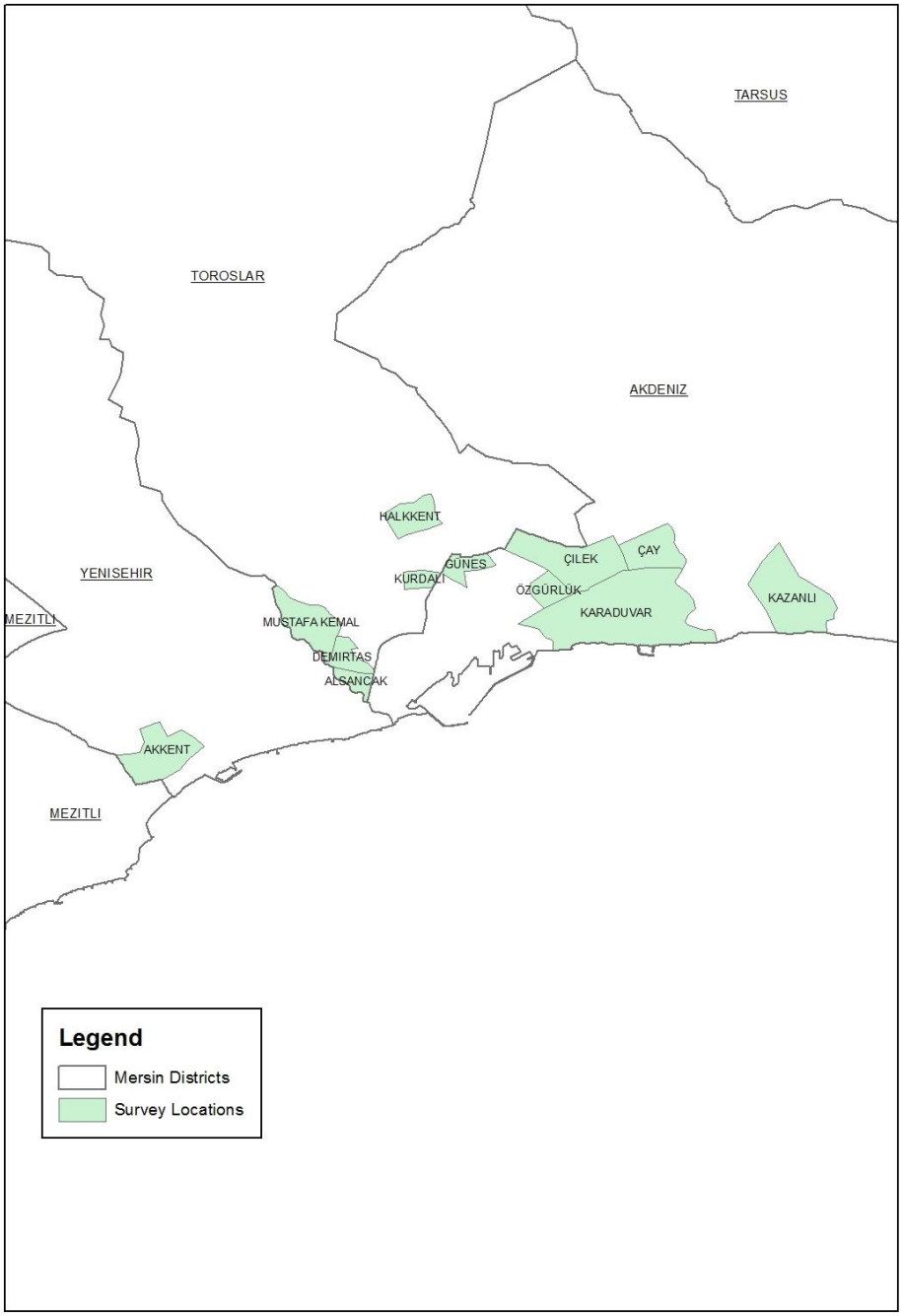
18-29	25	11	38	30	**104**
30-59	30	15	47	35	**127**
TOTAL	**55**	**26**	**85**	**65**	**231**

The sample for this study aimed to represent the refugee population living in Mersin, but due to the lack of a proper sampling frame, some subjective assessments were made when selecting the sample. During the sampling design, the neighbourhoods with refugee populations were listed and this list was used as a sampling frame. Use was made of the DGMM statistics for the Syrian population, disaggregated by gender and age, in order to set quotas for each subgroup.

In the first stage of the sampling process, ten neighbourhoods (*mahalle*) in Mersin were randomly selected through GIS software. Then in the second stage, in line with the quotas, households were visited to see if they included any eligible members to interview.

The refugees and employers surveyed were selected from the neighbourhoods of Mersin with the highest populations of such individuals in order to provide the most accurate overview possible.

Figure 3. The Locations in Mersin Where Interviews were Conducted



With regard to the survey of employers, since there is no list of all employers in Mersin, a snowball sampling method was adopted. A total of 77 employers were interviewed. The table below shows the planned distribution of the interviews.

Table 2. Interviewed Employers

Employers	Number of Interviews
Syrian employers	26
Turkish employers with refugee workers	25
Turkish employers without refugee workers	26

2.2. Qualitative Data Collection

2.2.1. In-depth Interviews

In order to obtain a better insight into the features of the labour market and the livelihoods of Syrian refugees in Mersin, in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants from relevant institutions, making use of an open-ended questionnaire. The institutions in question were:

- Mersin Chamber of Commerce and Industry (2 in-depth interviews);
- Mersin Metropolitan Municipality;
- Turkish Labour Agency (İŞKUR) Mersin Office;
- University of Mersin;
- Ministry of National Education – Mersin (2 in-depth interviews);
- Mersin Chamber of Artisans and Craftsmen (ESOB);
- Department for the Development and Support of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (KOSGEB) – Mersin;
- Çukurova Development Agency[18];
- IMPR - Mersin[19];
- Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay)[20] (2 in-depth interviews).

2.3. Desk Review

In addition to the field research, a comprehensive desk review was conducted. The aim of conducting a desk review was to produce a research report that would also be informed and enriched by the findings of previously-conducted reports and analyses. The desk review was not only useful for understanding the background of the project and the general situation in Turkey and in Mersin; it also served to inform the discussion of the findings obtained from the field research.

As part of the desk review, the most recent scientific literature on the labour market in Turkey was reviewed, including such titles as Ela's *An Assessment on the Relationship between Informal Economy and Educational level in Turkey*, *Tackling undeclared work in Turkey* by Baric, Renooy and Williams, *The impact*

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[18] In line with EU demands, development agency model is a special implementation in Turkey that aims at revealing the regional economic and social potential; making an international advertisement of the region; supporting the activities that promote production and employment in the region; and developing the human sources in the region by considering the migrations. (http://www.cka.org.tr/main.aspx?id=165)

[19] International Middle East Peace Research Center (IMPR) is a non-governmental and humanitarian aid organization which actively works in the national and international levels. (http://imprhumanitarian.org/en/about-impr-humanitarian/)

[20] Turkish Red Crescent is an organisation that aims at helping all people in need of health-related interventions. It shares the same principles with İnternational RedCrescent-RedCross. The General centres and branches in all provinces in Turkey also provide supports to refugees. (http://www.kizilay.org.tr/kurumsal/tarihcemiz)

of refugee crises on host labor markets: The case of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Turkey by Akgündüz et al and I*mmigration and Prices: Quasi-experimental Evidence from Syrian Refugee in Turkey* by Balkan, Konuk and Tumen. The most recent reports of humanitarian stakeholders working for the refugees in Turkey were also reviewed, such as the *Rapid Livelihoods Assessment for Syrians in Gaziantep* by CARE Turkey and the *The market assessment report* of the UNHCR. Also analysed during the desk review were the most recent reports studying the issues of the integration of refugees and the impact of the refugee influx on Turkey. Examples of such literature include the World Bank's *The impact of Syrians refugees on the Turkish labor market*, *Labour Market Integration and Social Inclusion of Refugees* for the European Parliament, and the *Needs assessment report for the preparation of an enhanced EU support to Turkey on the refugee crisis* for the European Commission.

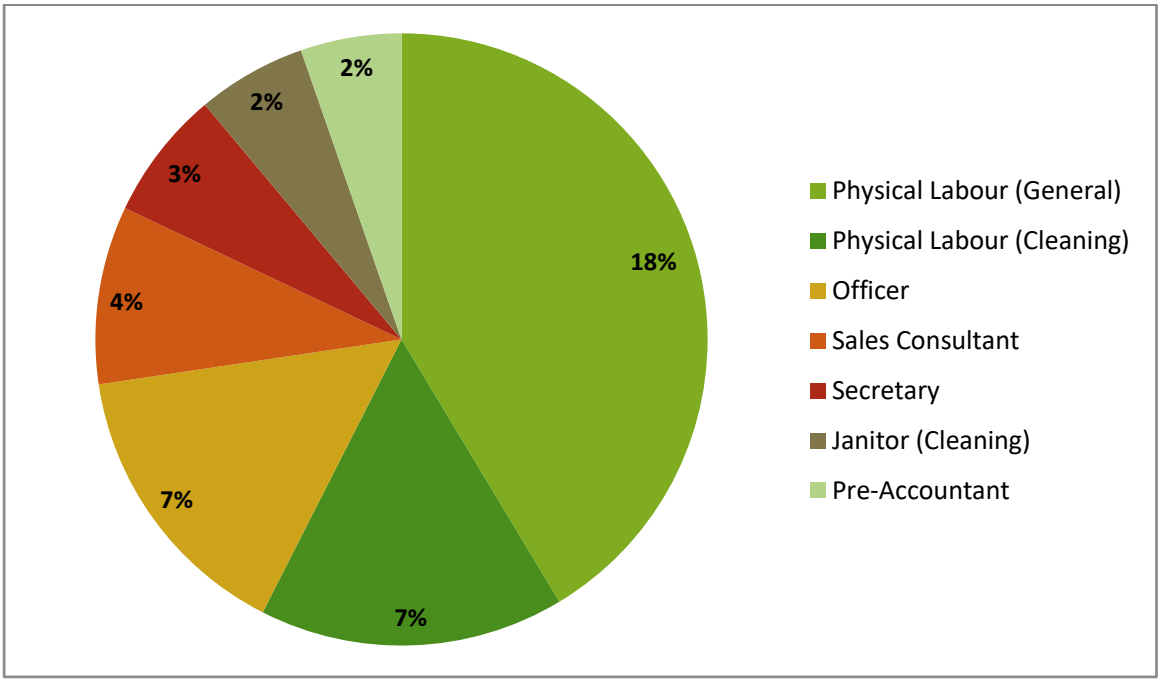
3. Key Findings

3.1. Mersin's Labour Market Overview

A general overview of the labour market in Mersin reveals some specific features which distinguish it from the labour market in the country as a whole. First of all, as indicated in the report of Turkish Employment Agency (İŞKUR)[21], unemployment rates show significant fluctuations. Time series analysis indicates that the unemployment rate was the lowest in 2011, which was also the year when participation in the labour force was at its highest. Subsequently, employment rates in Mersin started to decrease although they increased in Turkey in general. Consequently, as reported by the Regional Observation Implementation Research Centre (BIAMER) at Mersin University[22], the unemployment rate in Mersin has come to exceed the national average.

According to the İŞKUR report[23], the occupations for which the highest numbers of unemployed people were registered in 2015 included Physical Labour (General), Physical Labour (Cleaning), Office Clerk (General), Sales Consultant, Secretary, Janitor and Pre-Accountant.

Figure 4. Registered Unemployment by Occupation (İŞKUR, 2016)

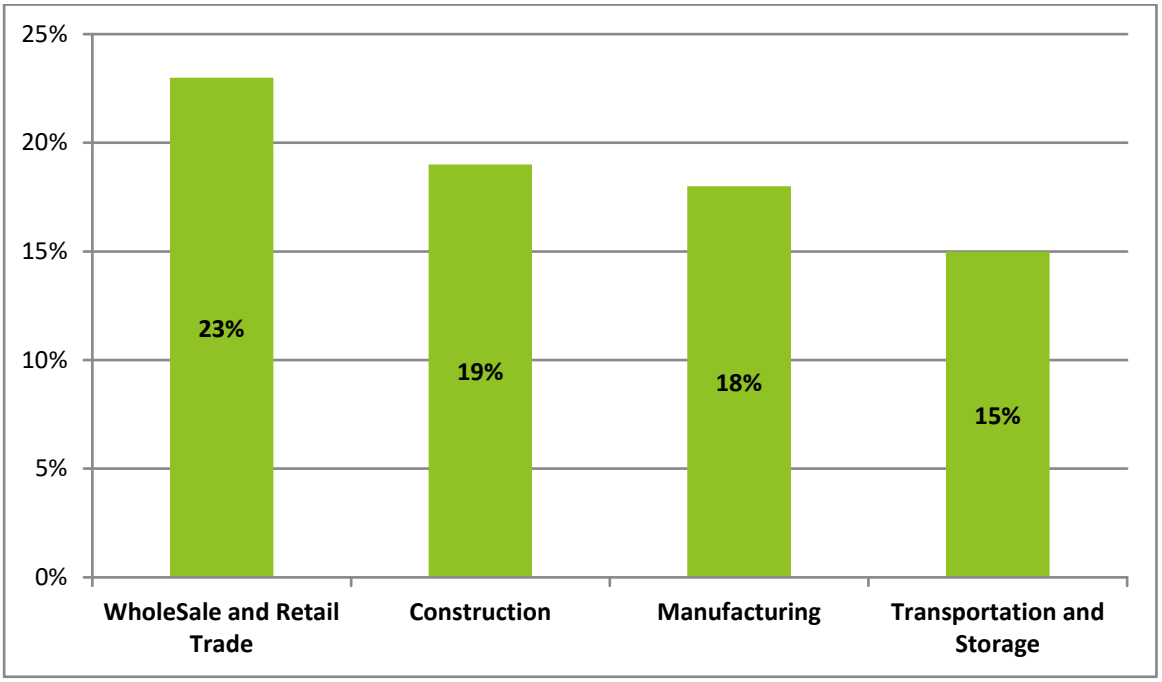


[21] İŞKUR. 2016. *Mersin İşgücü Piyasası Araştırma Raporu* (Mersin Labour Market Research Report).
[22] BIAMER. 2014. *Suriyeli Göçmenlerin Sorunları Çalıştayı Sonuç Raporu* (Final Report of the Workshop for the Problems of Syrian Immigrants).
[23] İŞKUR. 2016. *Mersin İşgücü Piyasası Araştırma Raporu* (Mersin Labour Market Research Report).

By and large these are occupations which require few qualifications or skills. A possible explanation might be that increasing levels of education and changes in living conditions have led people to seek higher-level jobs and decreased the supply of labour for unskilled or low-skilled work.

As İŞKUR's sectoral analysis[24] reveals, the highest number of workplaces are engaged in Wholesale and Retail Trade, followed by Construction, Manufacturing, and Transportation and Storage, in that order. These four sectors are considered locomotive sectors by İŞKUR as they are the most prominent sectors in Mersin. Meanwhile, almost half of the workplaces included in the analysis were understood to have been active for less than 10 years. The high number of young workplaces implies that there is a continuous stream of entrepreneurship and investment activity.

Figure 5. Distribution of Workplaces by Sector (İŞKUR, 2016)



While part-time employment is not found to be very prevalent in the labour market in Mersin, the sectors which employ the highest numbers of part-time employees are Human Health and Social Service Activities, Education, and Accommodation and Food Services Activities, in that order. As the İŞKUR report[25] shows, those sectors which employ the highest numbers of part-time employees are also those in which the highest percentages of women are employed. Overall, the number of men employed in Mersin is four times greater than the number of women employed.

The labour market in Mersin has been shaped by the presence of Syrians for a long time. During the in-depth interviews, it was pointed out that Syrians had had economic and touristic ties with Mersin for many years. It was reported that there were Syrians in Mersin long before the Syrian crisis started in 2011,

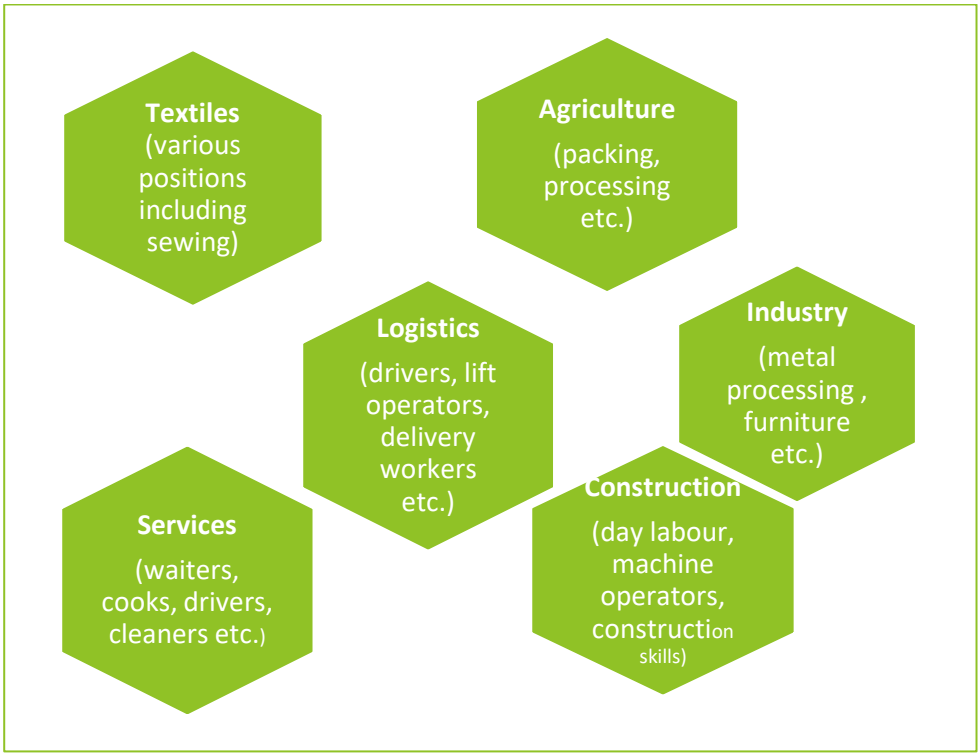
[24] İŞKUR. 2016. *Mersin İşgücü Piyasası Araştırma Raporu* (Mersin Labour Market Research Report).
[25] *ibid*.

sparking a huge influx of Syrian refugees. Before the crisis, relatively wealthy Syrian families owned summer houses in Mersin, Syrian businessmen had companies, partners or trade relationships with the city, and tours would be organised from Latakia to Mersin, all contributing to the social and economic life of the province. From 2011 onwards, Mersin also started to host Syrian refugees who had fled their country. While there are varying unofficial estimates of their number, it is known that there were 147,497 Syrian refugees in Mersin as of April 13, 2017[26]. The prolonged conflict in Syria has put increasing pressure both on the Syrian refugees and on people in the countries hosting them. Those fleeing the fighting have had to find means to make a living, and this has paved the way for economic and social problems considering the high rate of unemployment in Mersin[27].

3.1.1. Sectors with the Highest Demand

The experts from relevant organisations and foundations who took part in the in-depth interviews made broadly similar assessments concerning the sectors generating the highest demand for labour in Mersin. These are shown in the accompanying diagram.

Figure 6 . Sectors of Highest Demand in Mersin



[26] http://mersin.goc.gov.tr/tr/page/goc_gecici-koruma-4713

[27] BIAMER. 2014. *Suriyeli Göçmenlerin Sorunları Çalıştayı Sonuç Raporu* (Final Report of the Workshop for the Problems of Syrian Immigrants).

İŞKUR reports[28] that the highest proportions of vacancies are to be found in occupational groups such as Service and Sales Staff, and Artisans. Specifically, the greatest numbers of unfilled posts are were for packaging workers, security officers, garment workers, hand and machine sewers, manual workers, marketing staff, gas shielded welders, sales consultants, assistant waiters and pre-accountants.

The İŞKUR survey indicates that employers mostly use channels like İŞKUR, family, friends and acquaintances, internet and social media, and newspapers in order to advertise and fill the vacant positions in their workplaces. There are not many private employment agencies in Mersin, and consequently they do not figure among the employers' preferences.

3.1.2. Skills Gaps

The İŞKUR report[29] states that high skills are required for the vacant positions in some sectors, whereas positions in some other sectors do not require any education or skills at all. For instance, candidates with higher education were required for all the vacant positions in Finance and Insurance Activities and in Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities, whereas it was sufficient to have a high school diploma or a lower level of education for the vacant positions in Mining and Quarrying, and in Culture, Arts, Entertainment, Recreation and Sport.

The skill most commonly required for the vacant positions was reported[30] to be Physical and Bodily Competence, followed by Sufficient Occupational/Technical Knowledge and Experience, Team Work, Communication Skills, Problem Solving and Initiative Taking, Analytical Thinking, Computer Literacy, Sales and Marketing Skills, Project-Based Working and Foreign Language Skills. Nevertheless, the highest number of vacant positions in Mersin was found to be in those occupational groups for which no skills or qualifications are required.

The same İŞKUR report[31] reveals that employees are most difficult to find in sectors like Information and Communications, Finance and Insurance Activities, Accommodation and Catering Services, and Manufacturing. The reasons given for the difficulties experienced in filling positions in these sectors include: lack of employees with sufficient occupational skills; lack of employees with sufficient work experience, and receiving no job applications. In fact, lack of employees with sufficient occupational skills and lack of employees with sufficient work experience are the two major issues that are frequently highlighted in various sectors in Mersin.

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[28] İŞKUR. 2016. *Mersin İşgücü Piyasası Araştırma Raporu* (Mersin Labour Market Research Report). Pp.56.
[29] İŞKUR. 2016. *Mersin İşgücü Piyasası Araştırma Raporu* (Mersin Labour Market Research Report).
[30] *ibid*.
[31] İŞKUR. 2016. *Mersin İşgücü Piyasası Araştırma Raporu* (Mersin Labour Market Research Report).

Similarly, the in-depth interviews conducted with experts from relevant organisations and foundations indicated that there is a need for craftsmen in various sectors. Many interviewees noted that employers commonly complain about a lack of craftsmen, skilled intermediate workers and qualified operational staff with the necessary vocational training and experiences. Indeed, lack of craftsmen was identified by several interviewees as one of the most significant problems of the labour market in Mersin. For example, it was stated that skilled persons could no longer be found for harvesting in agriculture, furniture making or metal work. Thus the interviewees underlined that there is a big gap in Mersin's labour market in terms of craftsmen trained through the apprenticeship system.

3.1.3. Sectors Expected to Grow in the Future

According to the research report[32], İŞKUR expects employment to increase to some extent in certain sectors including Managerial and Support Services Activities, Construction, and Manufacturing. The particular occupations for which the highest increases in employment are likely to be witnessed are security officer, janitor, manual worker (Construction) and garment worker. On the other hand, İŞKUR expects a decrease in employment in occupations like manual worker (Cleaning), packaging worker, plastic injection production worker and customs business staff. It is anticipated that employment rates will be stable in workplaces that export goods. Meanwhile, when employers taking part in the same İŞKUR research were asked about the sectors with the greatest growth potential, more than half of them said that they do not expect any change in the period ahead.

During the in-depth interviews, certain sectors were reported to have growth potential in Mersin. The sectors which the interviewees expected to grow in the near future can be summed up as follows:

- Mersin has a warm climate, with a high average temperature, and a high number of sunny days. Solar power, which is a major, clean source of energy, could therefore be used in various areas. The interviewees expect the energy sector in Mersin to grow and develop in the future, and to employ more people including refugees.
- The port of Mersin is reported to be developing continuously. Many commercial goods are exported from the port.
- The in-depth interview participants expect to see accelerated growth in innovative and information technologies (IT) in Mersin in the years ahead. Manufacturing firms in particular are expected to conduct activities to increase their potentials for innovation.
- The construction sector is expected to grow continuously in view of the high rate of growth of the population, stemming both from high natural population growth and from immigration. As long

[32] İŞKUR. 2016. *Mersin İşgücü Piyasası Araştırma Raporu* (Mersin Labour Market Research Report).

as the population goes on increasing, there will always be a need for new houses, workplaces and all other types of building.

- The population is not only growing but also aging day by day. In other words, the existing population of Mersin is getting old. Consequently, services for the aging population might well become more developed in Mersin in the years ahead.
- The chemical industry in Mersin is also expected to grow steadily in view of the demand of the agricultural sector for fertilizer and the fact that the Ceyhan pipeline terminal is located nearby.

3.2. Employment Situation of Refugees in Mersin

It is essential to analyse the situation of Syrian refugees in Mersin in the light of the fact that there are two distinct groups of Syrians[33]. The first of these groups is made up of those who have to use their labour to earn money and make a living. These Syrians have only limited resources and are experiencing low socio-economic conditions. At the same time, Mersin is also host to a second group of Syrians who arrived with a certain amount of capital and have opened their own businesses. According to the information received during the in-depth interviews, most of these Syrians had connections with Mersin before the Syrian crisis started. Thus there is a duality among the Syrian refugees in Mersin, and it is of prime importance to take both groups, and their specific situations, into account during the development of any programmes or projects.

3.2.1. Employment of Refugees: Challenges

The in-depth interviews also highlighted a variety of problems confronted by refugees in the labour market. The first of these problems is the language barrier. This affects all spheres of life, but it is reported to be particularly important in working life. A knowledge of Turkish is a great asset for refugees in the labour market, opening up more job opportunities and increased prospects for social integration. Indeed, Turkish employers are reported to make Turkish language skills their first requirement whenever they come across a refugee job applicant. Secondly, in line with the research findings of BIAMER, the in-depth interviews made clear that refugee employees in Mersin face social discrimination. In particular, the interviewees underlined the conflicts that arise due to the decrease in wages that occurs when refugees agree to work for low rates. Thirdly, the interviewees emphasised the trust problem that tends to deter employers from hiring refugees. This problem of trust is said to be based on the fact that refugee job applicants do not usually come with a reference. Nor do they have a fixed place of residence, as they change address frequently. According to the information obtained through the in-depth interviews, employers cannot therefore trust refugee job applicants. Among the risks they take, the refugee workers

[33] BIAMER. 2014. *Suriyeli Göçmenlerin Sorunları Çalıştayı Sonuç Raporu* (Final Report of the Workshop for the Problems of Syrian Immigrants).

might not turn out to be sufficiently qualified for the job, or they might leave their job at any time. Fourthly, the interviewees noted that Syrians are perceived to be careless workers. In other words, members of the local community believe that refugees do not pay sufficient attention to their work. According to the interviewees, this may be due to the uncertainty surrounding their future, which leads them to adopt a save-the-day attitude. The refugees are not believed to be thinking of working in their current jobs for very long, and this is seen as a reason why they do not take enough care. Moreover, many interviewees emphasised the perceived differences between the work culture and habits of the refugees and those that prevail in Turkey. In particular, the work schedules and working hours of Syrians are reported to be quite different from those of the local population. It was stated during the in-depth interviews that Syrians are not used to working for eight hours a day, yet currently they have to work for even longer periods of time, particularly when they are employed in low-skilled jobs. These differences of working habits and timing were said to lead to adaptation problems and to conflicts between employers and Syrian employees. Fifthly, most of the refugees are unable to do the same jobs that they used to do in their home country. For reasons such as lack of a work permit, the language barrier, lack of financial resources or legal obstacles, many doctors, teachers, engineers, lawyers and others are obliged to work in other jobs in order to generate income.

In addition to all these factors, it is very important to note that informal employment is widespread among the refugees in Mersin. All the experts interviewed underlined that most of the refugees working in various sectors have not obtained work permits from the Government of Turkey. This makes their employment even more precarious, as they may be fired at any time, and cannot seek legal support when needed. The problem of informal employment appears to persist as a consequence of the existing legal arrangements which require employers to apply for work permits on behalf of the refugees. The legal situation is that Syrians under temporary protection may be given work permits, but that the employer of the workplace where they are to work must apply[34]. In practice, due to their economic circumstances, refugees agree to work for very low rates and without any social security. However, if an employer applies for a work permit for her/his Syrian employee, s/he will have to pay the minimum wage and make social security and health insurance contributions as the laws command. Employers looking for a cheap labour force cannot be expected to seek work permits of their own accord. As a result, many refugees will continue to work without a permit. Workplaces employing refugee workers without work permits and refugee workers working without a permit both liable to be fined TRY 6,000 by İŞKUR, but the interviewees have stated that this does not act as a deterrent.

[34] Ministry of Labour and Social Security. (http://www.calismaizni.gov.tr/media/1035/gkkuygulama.pdf)

Figure 7 . Refugee Employment : Challenges

3.2.2. Refugee Entrepreneurs and Businesspeople

The situation of the wealthier Syrians belonging to the second group mentioned above is in stark contrast with that of the economically disadvantaged refugees. The number of Syrian firms opened since the Syrian crisis began in 2011 had reached 256 by 2014[35] and was over 700 by 2016[36]. These firms are mostly operating in sectors like food, cereals, construction and trade. Indeed, in contrast to other cities, Mersin has increased its exports of goods to Syria due to the presence of those Syrian firms. Mersin is reported to be the second-ranking province in Turkey in terms of Syrian investments because the Syrian entrepreneurs who previously had connections in Mersin came directly to the city after the Syrian crisis. However, these Syrian firms cannot necessarily be regarded as a source of employment opportunities for Syrian refugees, because most of the refugees do not have an official work permit. Just like Turkish firms, the Syrian firms either employ Syrians illegally, or employ Turkish workers.

There are many Syrian-owned small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) in Mersin. These are active in various sectors. the in-depth interviews also pointed to the existence of some large-scale Syrian enterprises. According to the interviewees, the Syrian enterprises are concentrated in food, construction and textiles. Most of the entrepreneurs are trying to pursue the same businesses that they used to carry out when they were in Syria. Aside from this, the interviewees stated during the in-depth interviews that some of the Syrian SMEs have been established on a basis of trial and error. In other words, Syrian

[35] BIAMER. 2014. *Suriyeli Göçmenlerin Sorunları Çalıştayı Sonuç Raporu* (Final Report of the Workshop for the Problems of Syrian Immigrants).
[36] Mersin Chamber of Artisans and Craftsmen.

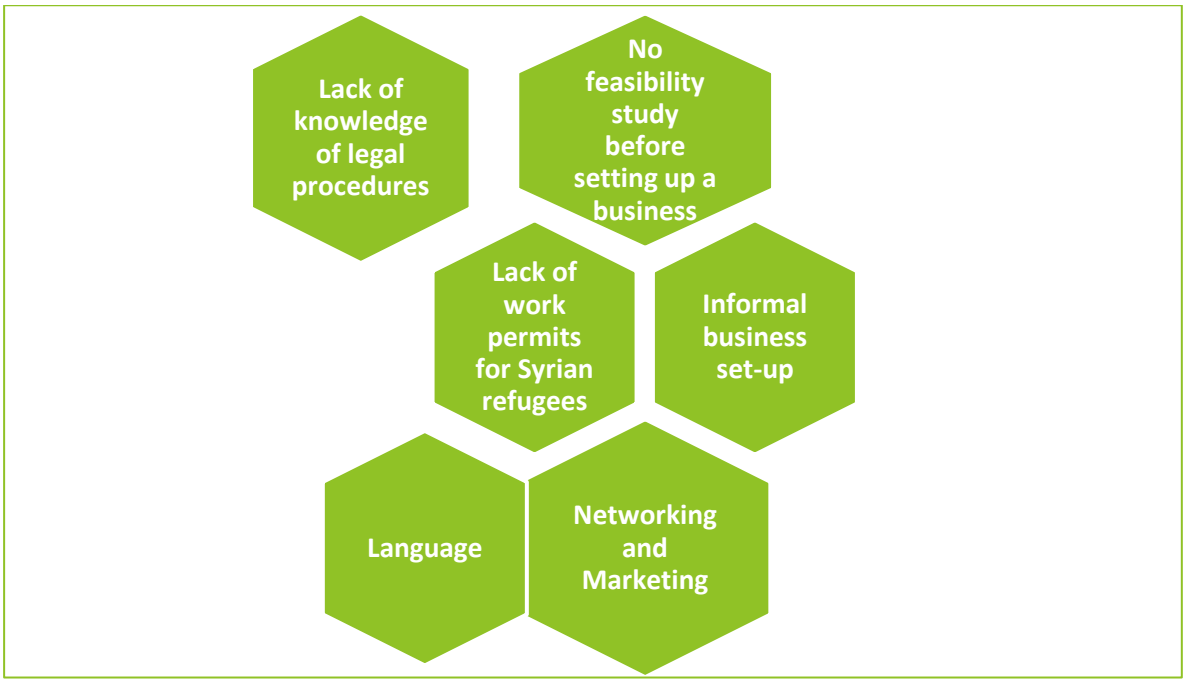
entrepreneurs start up a business in a sector to see whether it will succeed or not. From this, it can be deducted that such refugee entrepreneurs are in need of feasibility research in order to comprehend the market needs and factors of success.

Another challenge experienced by refugee entrepreneurs and business people that was referred to in the in-depth interviews is that they are not familiar with legal processes and regulations. They are not well aware about the tax system, the operations of notaries, quotas, and various other issues. Their efforts may therefore end in failure unless they can find a trustable financial advisor. In order to overcome such problems faster and more easily, many refugee entrepreneurs were reported by the interviewees to take Turkish partners when starting up their businesses. As soon as their workplaces meet the requirements, they are able to get registered with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and enjoy all the benefits of membership just like Turkish enterprises. In addition, refugees who own officially-registered SMEs are able to apply for all the supports[37] provided by the Department for the Development and Support of Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (KOSGEB). For small traders and artisans, registration with the Chamber of Artisans and Craftsmen is mandatory. However, the majority of the small shops and similar establishments in Mersin are not registered, according to the information obtained from the in-depth interviews, nor do they have the necessary permissions to open a shop.

Finally, the in-depth interviews revealed that a lack of necessary networks poses a great obstacle to the success of refugee workplaces. For instance, Syrians may open a private school but be unable to find qualified teachers who can speak both Turkish and Arabic. Since they do not have the necessary connections, they cannot find the right people to employ or the right customers to serve. They need to know which people have skills that match the needs of their businesses, where those people are, who might help them establish useful connections, and so on.

[37] Logistics support, support to attend fairs, support for trade mark registration/advertising, support for business trips abroad, support for bank loan interest, support for workplaces which employ new graduates, etc.

Figure 8. Challenges for Syrian Firms



3.3. Field Survey Results

3.3.1. Data Obtained from Refugees

The field survey was implemented to gather up-to-date data with the aim of understanding the employment situation of refugees better. In total, 231 refugees were interviewed in the various neighbourhoods around Mersin with the highest density of the refugee populations (see Table 4):

Table 3. Distribution of Interviewed Refugees in Neighbourhoods

Neighbourhoods	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Akkent	32	13.9%
Alsancak	22	9.5%
Çay	16	6.9%
Çiflikköy	2	0.9%
Çilek	14	6.1%
Demirtaş	25	10.8%
Fatih	3	1.3%
Güneş	9	3.9%
Halkkent	3	1.3%
Karaduvar	9	3.9%
Kazanlı	15	6.5%
Kurdali	12	5.2%

Mezitli	20	8.7%
Mustafa Kemal	23	10.0%
Özgürlük	23	10.0%
Üniversite Caddesi	2	0.9%
Viran Şehir	1	0.4%
TOTAL	**231**	**100%**

As Figure 4 shows, 35.1% of the 231 respondents were female, whereas 64.9% were male.

Figure 9. Gender of Interviewed Refugees (Percentage)

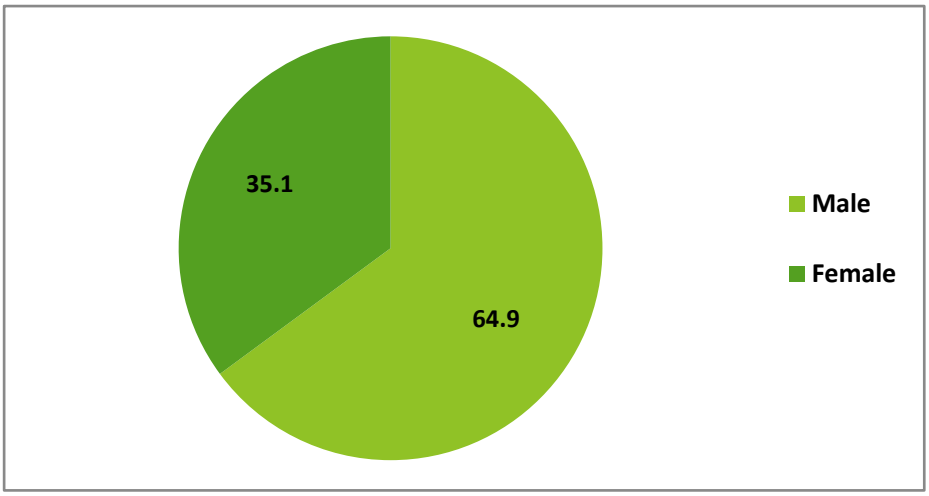
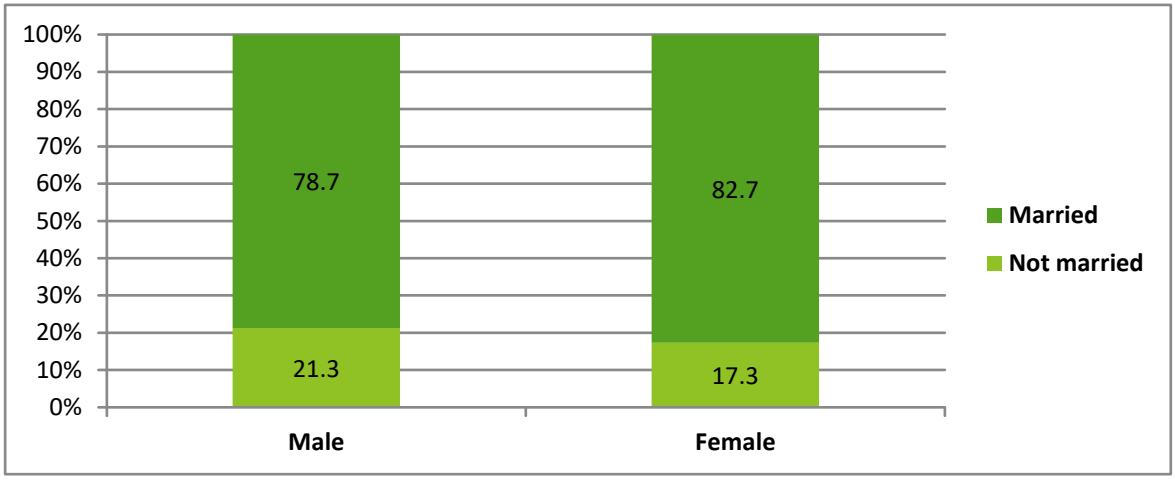


Table 4. Gender of Interviewed Refugees by Age Groups (Frequency)

Age / Gender	Male	Female	TOTAL
18-29	68	36	104
30-59	82	45	127
TOTAL	**150**	**81**	**231**

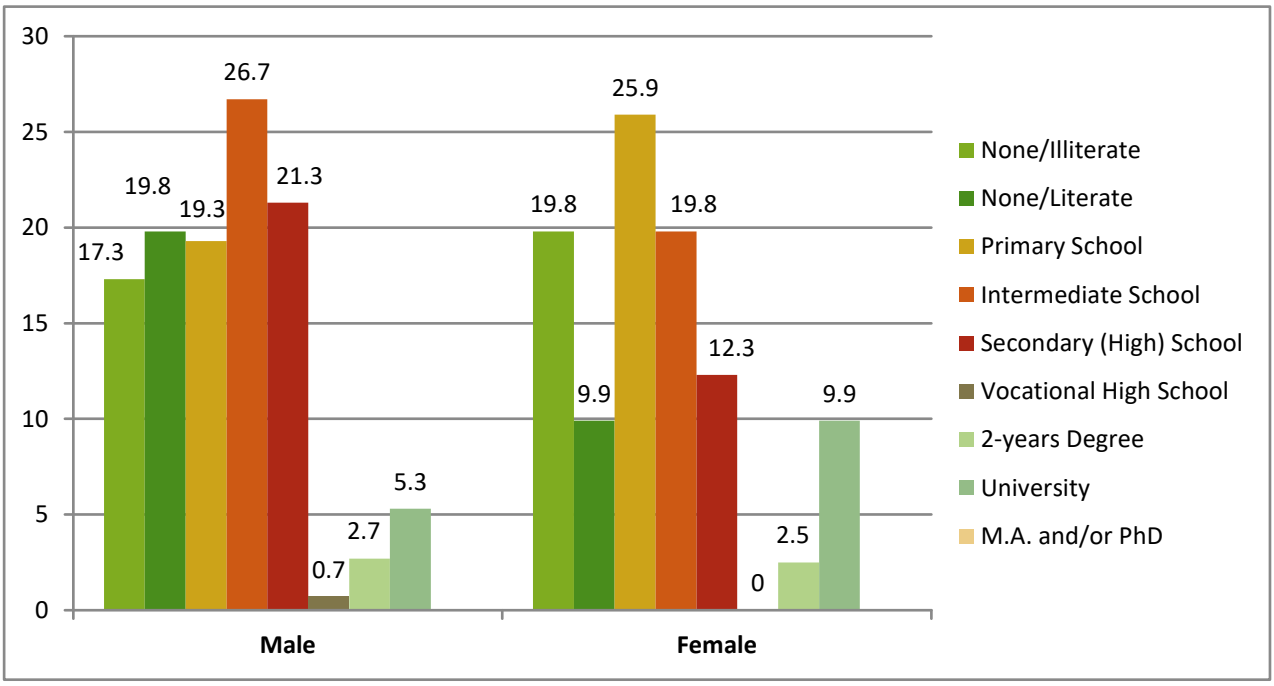
Of the 231 refugees interviewed, 104 were aged between 18 and 29, and the remaining 127 between 30 and 59. There were 68 men in the first age group and 82 in the second age group, whereas 36 women in the first age group and 45 women in the second age group were interviewed.

Figure 10. Marital Status of Interviewed Refugees by Gender (Percentage)



The majority of both the male and female refugees interviewed were married. Among the men, married respondents accounted for 78.7%. The percentage of married respondents was higher for female respondents at 82.7%.

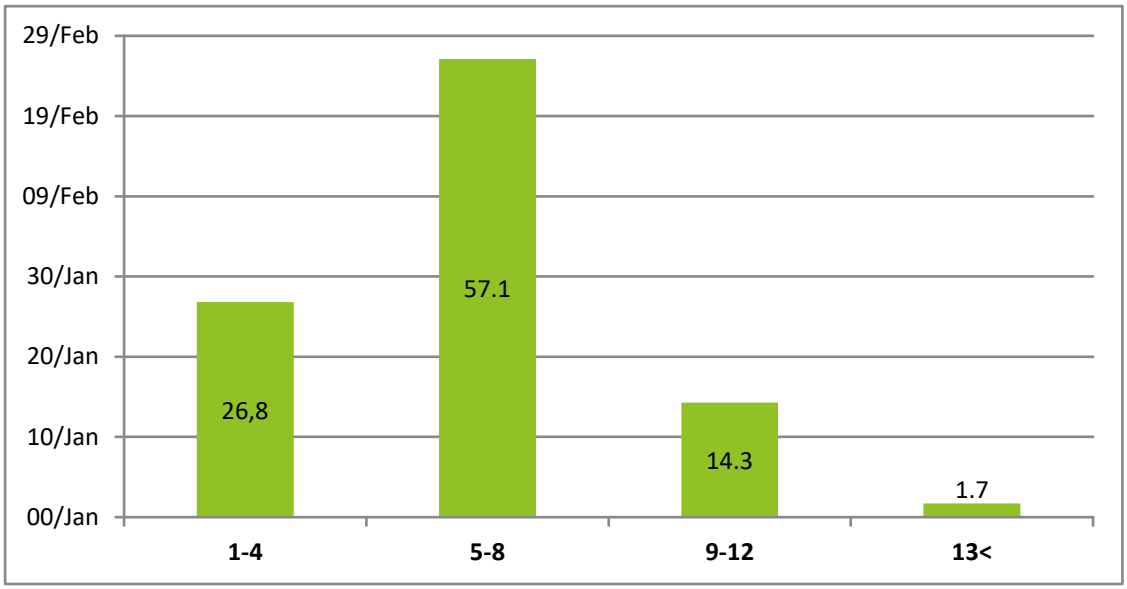
Figure 11. Last Level of Education Completed by Gender (Percentage)



As shown in the accompanying figure, the levels of education of the men and women interviewed were somewhat different. The proportion of those interviewed who reported that they had not completed primary school and that they were unable to read and write was 19.8% among the women and 17.3% among the men. Another 19.8% of the men and 9.9% of the women turned out not to have completed any level of education but to be literate. Thus in total, 37.1% of the male refugees and 29.7% of the female refugees who participated in this study stated that they had not completed primary school.

Overall, the majority of the men were found to have completed a lower secondary or upper secondary education, whereas the majority of the women had completed either a primary or a lower secondary education. Among the refugees interviewed, none of the women and only 0.7% of the men reported that they had completed vocational high school.

Figure 12. Number of Household Members of Interviewed Refugees (Percentage)



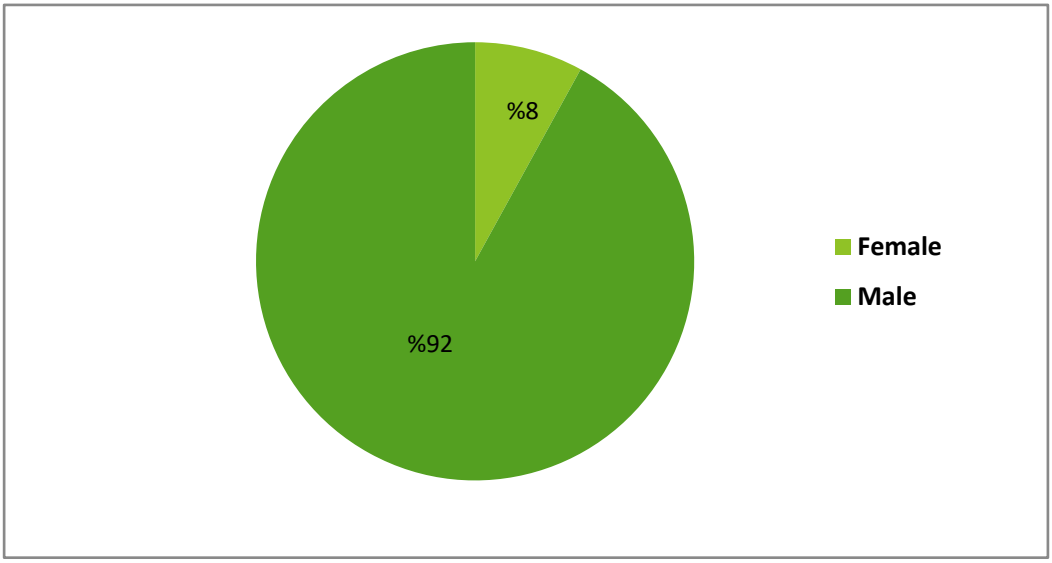
The average number of people living in the households of the refugees interviewed was found to be 6.1. On average, in other words, more than 6 refugees live in one household. The majority (57.1%) of the respondents were found to live in households with 5-8 members. As many as 16% reported living in households with more than 8 members.

Table 5. Relation of Interviewed Refugees to Their Head of Household (HH)

Relation to the HH Head	Frequency	Percentage (%)
I am the HH Head	129	55.8%
Spouse	49	21.2%
Daughter/Son	24	10.4%
Mother/Father	19	8.2%
Sister/Brother	6	2.6%
Aunt/Uncle	3	1.3%
Niece/Nephew	1	0.4%
Total	**231**	**100%**

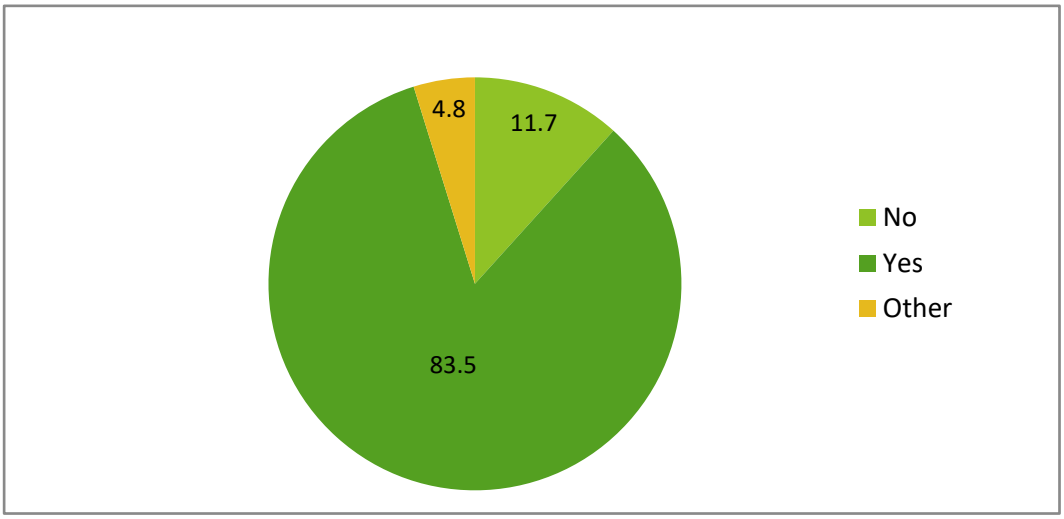
Of the 231 respondents, more than half (55.8%) reported that they were the heads of their households. Another 21.2% of the refugees interviewed were the spouses of the head of the household.

Figure 13. Gender of the Heads of Household (Percentage)



As shown in the figure above, the vast majority of the respondents stated that the head of their household was a man. Only 8% were living in female-headed households.

Figure 14. Percentage of Interviewed Refugees With an ID Card with a Number beginning with 99

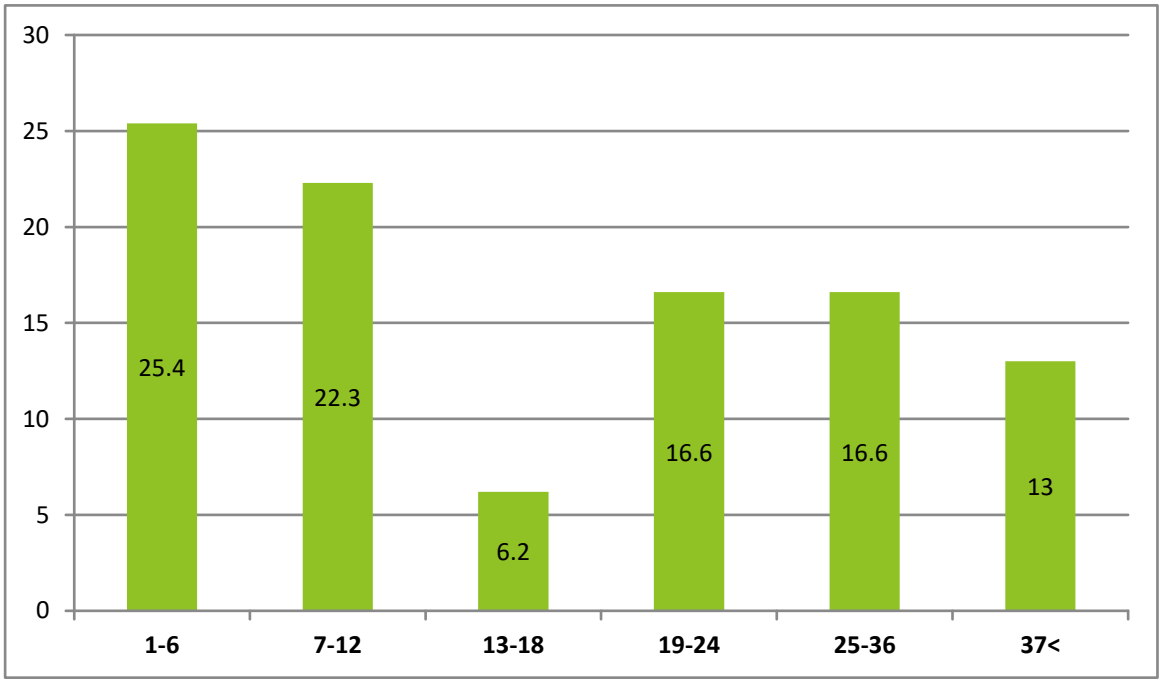


The majority of the respondents were found to possess an ID card with a registration number beginning with 99. Possession of such a card provides refugees with free access to education and health services as well as with access to the labour market after fulfilling certain conditions. Thus, 83.5% of the refugees interviewed had access to the services in question.

However, 16.5% of the respondents did not possess ID cards with a number beginning in 99. Among these, 11.7% gave the answer 'No' when asked if they possessed such a card. The 4.8% of the interviewed refugees who gave the answer 'Other' explained either that they had cards with (old) numbers beginning

in 98 (4 respondents), or that they had applied for a new card but had not received one yet (7 respondents).

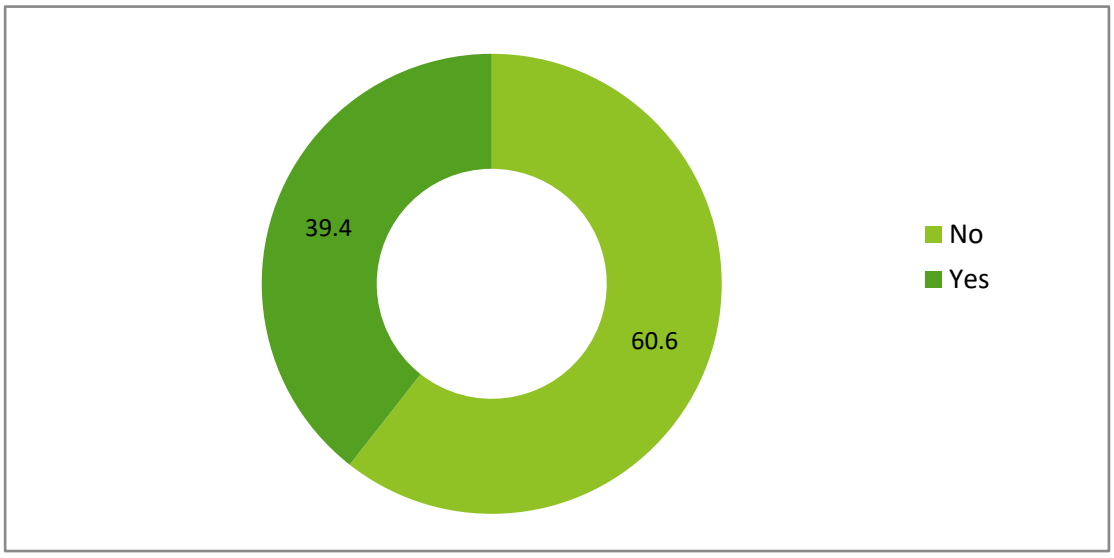
Figure 15. Number of Months for Which the Refugees Have Possessed ID Cards with a Number beginning with 99 (Percentage)



Out of the 231 refugees interviewed, 193 respondents reported that they possessed ID cards with a number beginning with 99. More than half (53.9%) of the respondents were found to have possessed such a card for less than 19 months, whereas 29.6% stated that they had held their cards for more than 2 years.

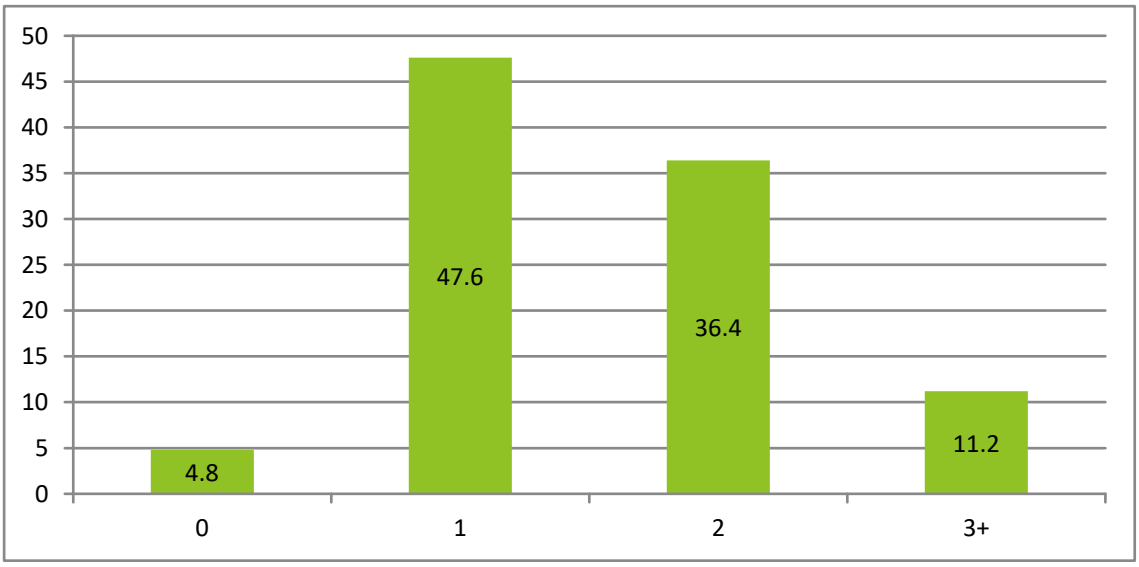
The most important point to note from Figure 10 is that slightly more than a quarter (25.4%) of the 193 people with ID cards with a number beginning with 99 reported that they had possesses these cards for 6 months or less. Syrians who have possessed their ID card for less than 6 months are not yet entitled to obtain work permits.

Figure 16. Whether the Respondents or Members of Their Households have a Regular Monthly Income (Percentage)



The majority (60.6%) of the respondents stated that neither they nor any other member of their households had a regular monthly income. Only 39.4% of the 231 respondents reported having a regular monthly income.

Figure 17. Number of Household Members engaged in Income Generating Activities (Percentage)



Although the average household size was 6.1, it was found that in almost half (47.6%) of the respondents' households there was only one person engaged in income generating activities. Another 36.4% stated that two people in their households were involved in such activities. It should be underlined that 11 interviewed refugees –accounting for 4.8% of the 231 respondents – said that nobody in their household was engaged in activities to bring in income.

Table 6. Total Monthly Income of Household (HH)

Monthly Income of HH (TRY)	Percentage (%)
0 – 750	17.7%
751 – 1050	31.2%
1051 – 1400	18.6%
1401 – 1900	15.6%
1901 – 2500	13.9%
2501 – 4500	3%
Total	**100%**

As can be seen in Table 6, the total monthly household income of the majority (67.5%) of the respondents was less than TRY 1,401. Although the average household size is 6.1, the total monthly income in 97% of the respondents' households was less than TRY 2,501. The average monthly income of the households of all respondents was TRY 1,236.

An analysis was made of the statistical correlation between household size and monthly household income. Normally, as the size of the household increases, one would expect the total household income to increase too. However, the statistical correlation test showed that there was no significant correlation in this case ($p>.005$).

Table 7. Sources of Income of Household (HH) Members

Income Sources of HH	Percentage (%)
Full-Time Employment	43.7%
Part-Time Employment	14.7%
Temporary Employment	45.9%
Cash Support of Governmental Institutions	1.3%
Family Members/Acquaintances/Friends	3.4%

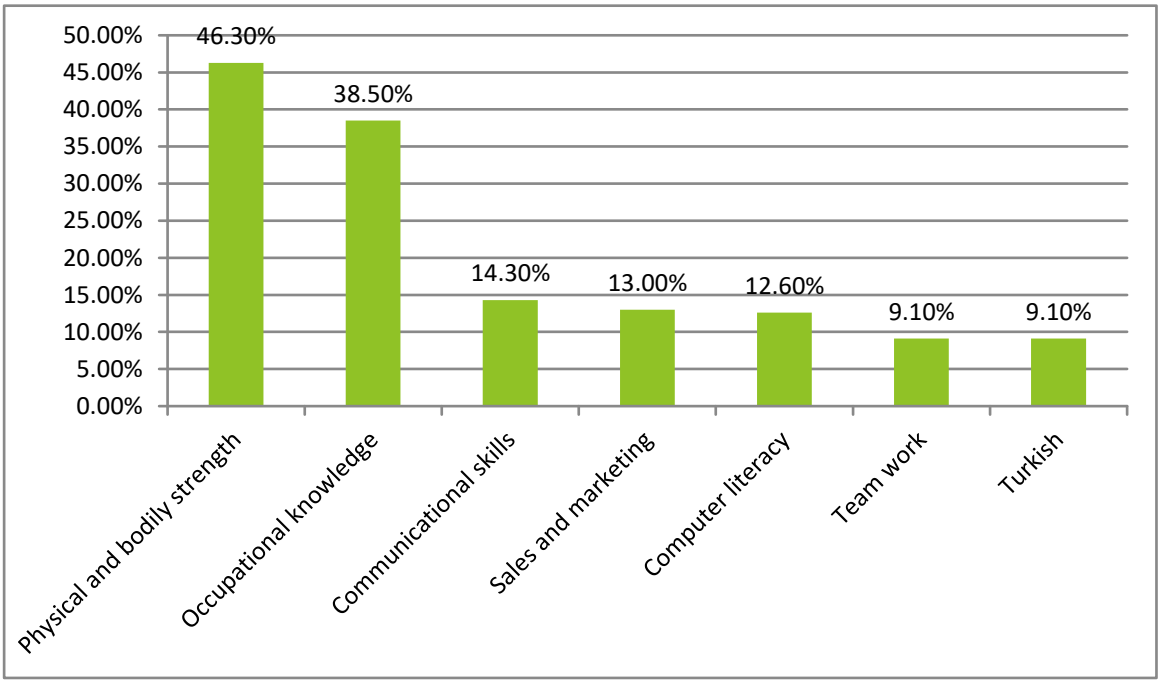
Other	2.1%

Table 7 shows that temporary employment was the most common source of income in the households of the refugees interviewed, with 45.9%. This was followed by full-time employment (43.7%). Part-time employment was also found to be quite common.

Among the respondents who stated that they or another member of their household had a regular monthly income, 70.3% reported that their household received income from full-time employment, 22.0% that it obtained income from temporary employment, and 18.7% that there was income from part-time employment.

Of the 231 refugees interviewed, 63.2% stated that they planned to live and work in Turkey permanently, whereas the remaining 36.8% did not. Moreover, 42.2% of all respondents reported that they cannot speak Turkish and 39% that they can speak only a little Turkish. Only 18.6% of the refugees interviewed were found to be proficient in Turkish. Of the respondents who cannot speak Turkish or can speak only a little, only 34% stated that they were planning to learn or improve their Turkish, whereas 66% had no such plans. The majority (63.7%) of those respondents who had plans to learn or improve their Turkish were found to favour learning from their neighbours/friends/acquaintances, while 46.8% were interested in learning from state schools or language classes.

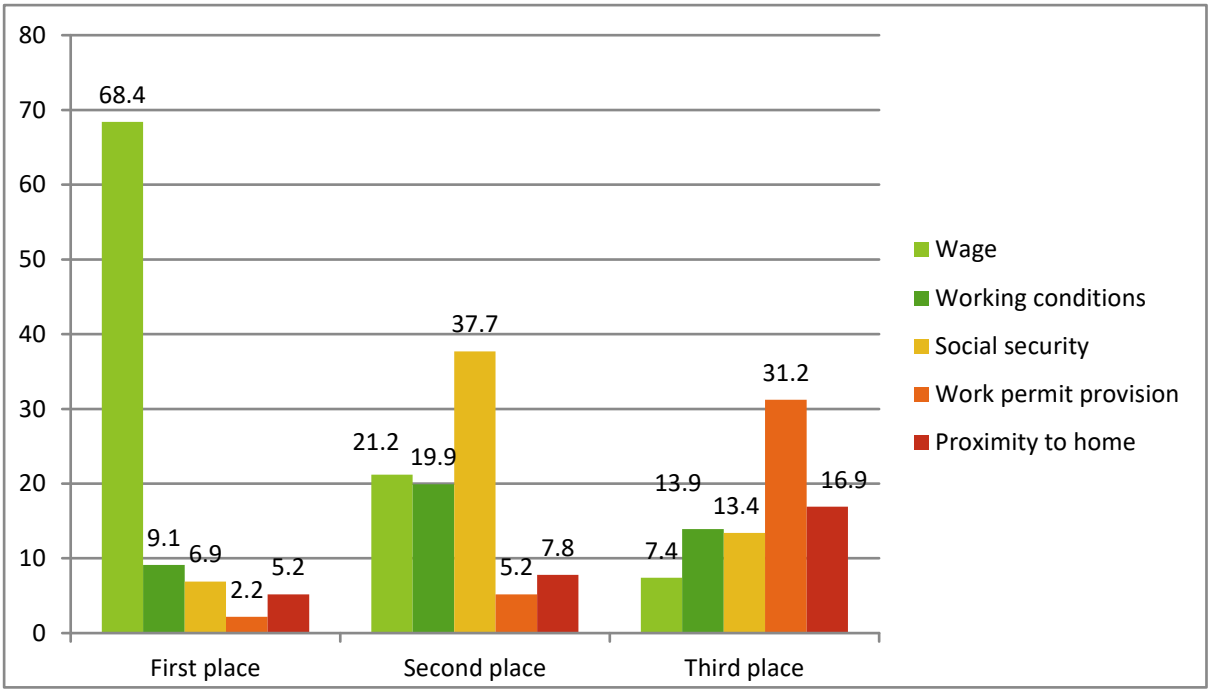
Figure 18. Skills of Interviewed Refugees (Percentage)



As can be seen in the accompanying figure, almost half (46.3%) of the 231 respondents stated that they had necessary physical and bodily strength. Moreover, 38.5% were found to have knowledge of an

occupation. What is interesting is that only 21 persons out of 231 – i.e., 9.1% - stated that they speak Turkish while speaking of their skills. Among the other skills mentioned were foreign languages (English, etc.), analytical skills, artistic skills, project-based work experience, problem solving and decision-making.

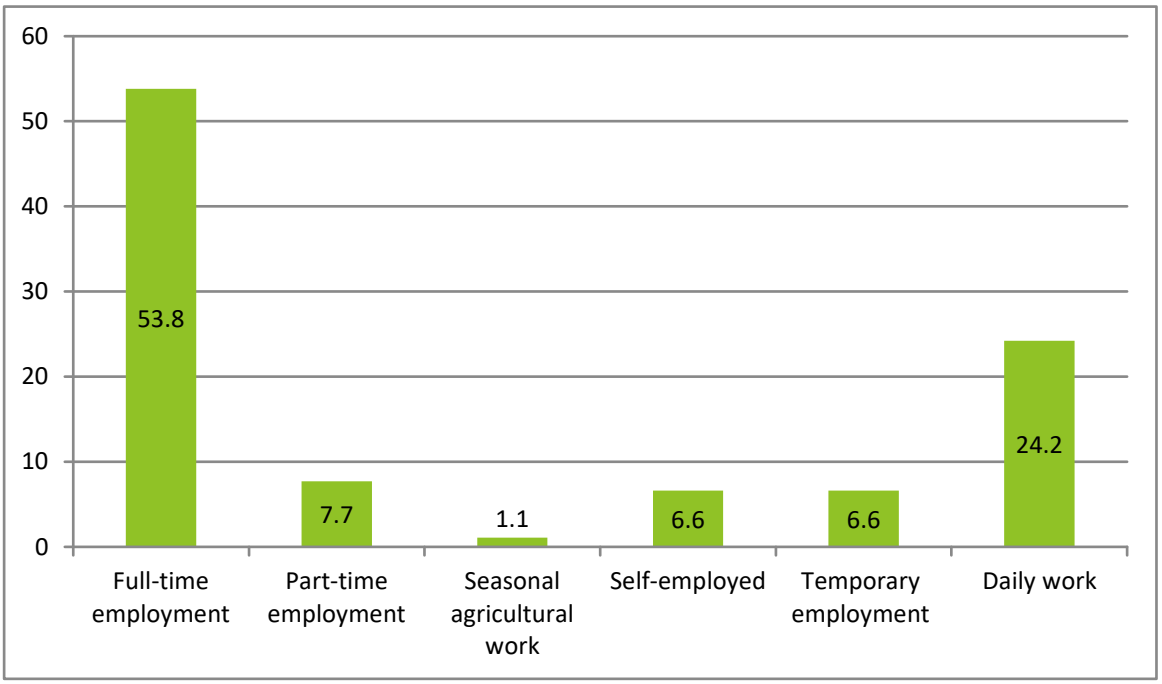
Figure 19. Respondents' Opinions concerning the Most Important Three Factors in a Job



When the refugees interviewed were asked about the most important three factors in a job, 68.4% put wages first. In other words, for 68.4% of the respondents, the wages are the most important factor when it comes to taking a job. Another 9.1% stated that working conditions were the most important factor in a job. With respect to the second most important factor, the most frequent response was social security (37.7%), followed again by wages (21.2%) and working conditions (19.9%). For the third most important factor, the most frequent answers were provision of a work permit (31.2%) and proximity to home (16.9%).

In accordance with the sample design (see Methodology section), and including the additional interviews, 60.6% of the respondents were unemployed (140 refugees), whereas the remaining 39.4% were employed (91 refugees).

Figure 20. Type of Job (Income Generating Activity) Carried Out by Interviewed Refugees (Percentage)



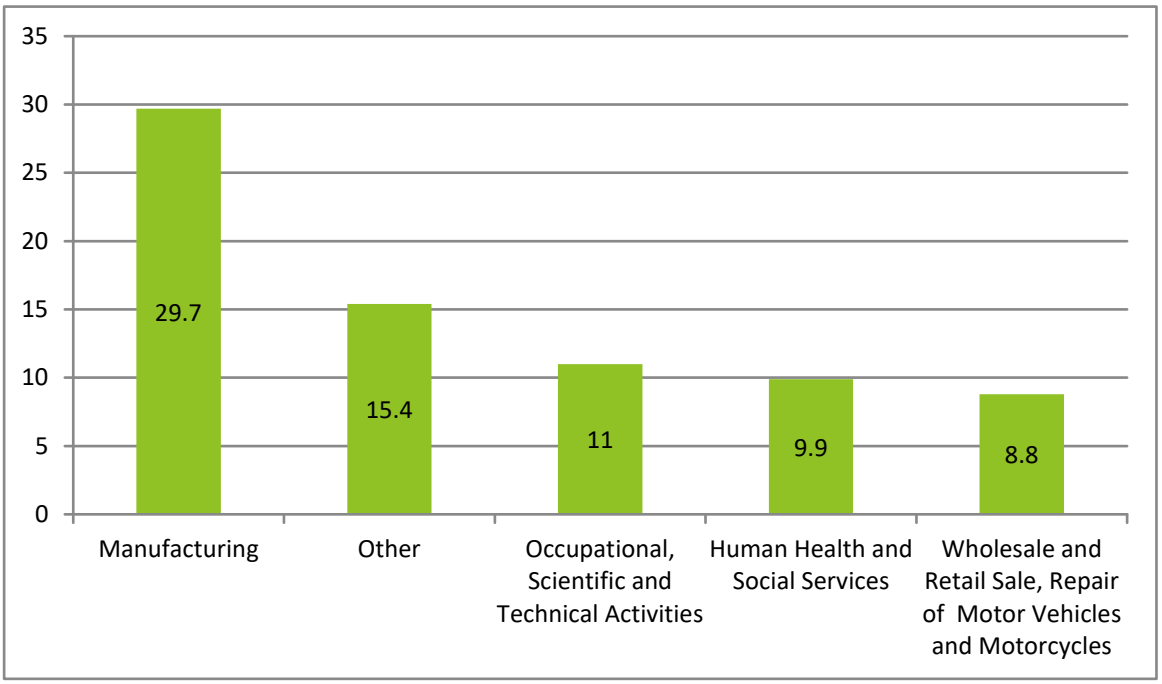
Of the 91 respondents who were employed, 53.8% reported having a full-time job. Another 24.2% stated that they were engaged in daily labour. There was no significant difference in the answers given by men and women.

Those respondents who were employed also gave information about how they had found their jobs. More than half of them (54.9%) reported that they had found their jobs through neighbours, friends or relatives. The proportion who said that they had applied directly to the employer or responded to a vacancy announcement was 29.7%. Meanwhile, 13.2% of the 91 respondents stated that they had set up their own business.

More importantly, the vast majority (90.1%) of the refugees interviewed who were employed stated that they did not have a contract. Moreover, 87.9% reported that they did not benefit from social security. To summarise these two findings, the majority of the employed refugees who took part in the study were working informally.

The data shows that 64.8% of the 91 employed refugees had Turkish employers, whereas the employers of 29.7% were Syrian.

Figure 21. Sectors in Which Interviewed Refugees were Employed (Percentage)

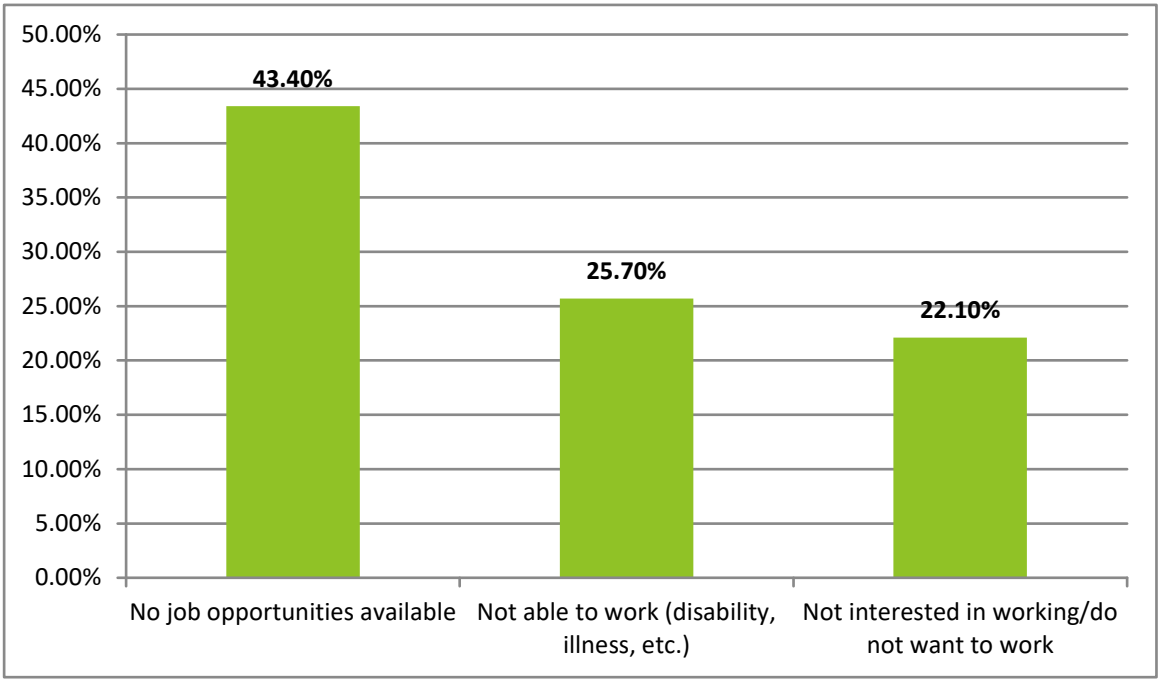


As shown in the accompanying figure, many of the employed respondents (29.7%) were employed in the manufacturing sector. Another 15.4% were employed in "other" sectors. Respondents selecting the "other" option were in some cases working in service sector establishments like hairdressers, beauty salons or shops. In other cases, they said they were working as tailors or carpenters or in the textiles sector. Some were also found to be working in agriculture, forestry and fisheries (7.7%), in electricity, gas, steam, water and sewerage (7.7%); or in accommodation and catering services (7.7%).

Among the employed respondents, 63.7% reported that their job was appropriate to their skills. However, the remaining 36.3% did not think that their job matched their skills.

Of the 231 refugees interviewed, 140 – or 60.6% – stated that they were not employed for the moment. Among these unemployed respondents, 85% reported that neither they nor any of the other members of their households had left a job within the last 30 days. The 21 respondents who said that they or another member of their household had left a job within this period gave the reasons for quitting as low wages, inappropriate working conditions, cancellation of the work contract and lack of a work permit.

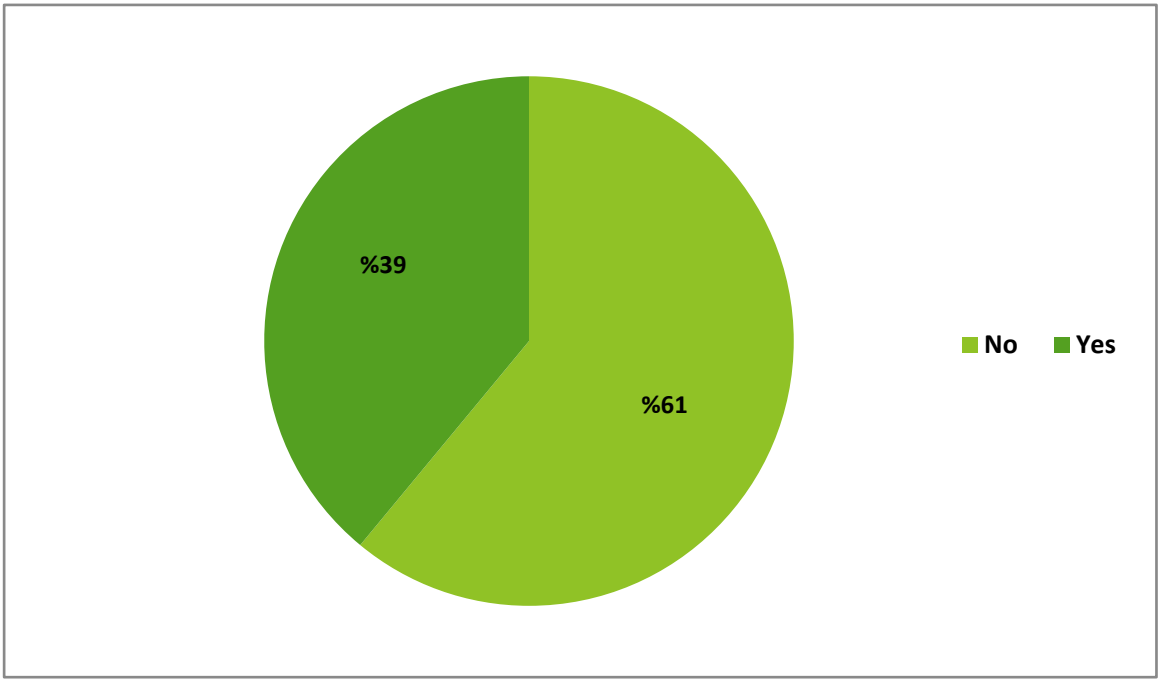
Figure 22. Reasons for Unemployment among Interviewed Refugees (Percentage)



Among the 140 respondents who are not employed for the moment, 43.7% think that there are no job opportunities available for them in Mersin. Another 25.7% stated that they were not able to work for reasons such as disability or illness, while 22.1% said that they were not interested in working. Other reasons which refugees gave for not working included:: study (7.9%), lack of a work permit (7.1%), mismatch of skills with available jobs (7.1%), language barriers (5.7%), social discrimination (3.6%), the need for vocational training (2.1%) and lack of any means to find a job (2.1%).

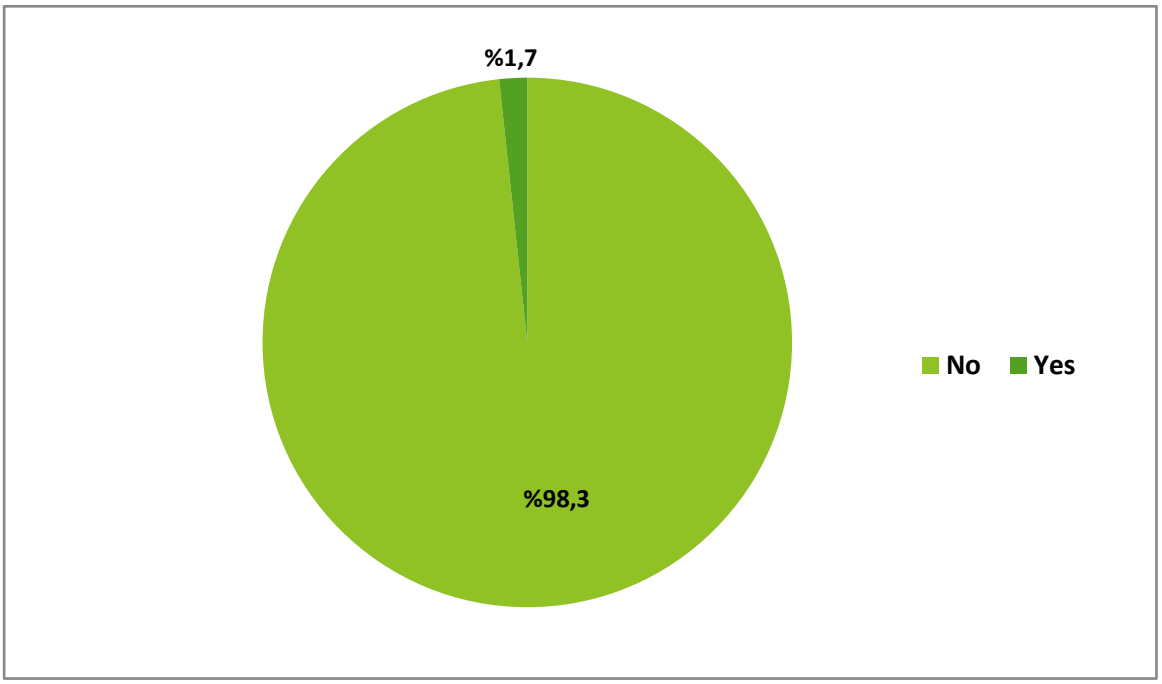
The respondents who were not employed were also asked about the ways in which they were looking for work. Nearly half of them (49.3%) responded that they were not looking for a job. This may be because they do not think there are any job opportunities in Mersin. In other words, they may not be seeking a job because they think there are no jobs available for them. The data indicates that 38.6% of the refugees in question were looking for work through their Syrian neighbours, friends and/or relatives, while 30.7% were seeking work through Turkish neighbours, friends and/or relatives, and 10% through the social media, the Internet and/or newspapers.

Figure 23. Interviewed Refugees' Awareness of Their Entitlement to Apply for a Work Permit (Percentage)



The majority (61%) of the 231 refugees who participated in this study were not aware that they could apply for a work permit. Of the respondents who were not aware of this, 31.9% reported that they were employed for the moment.

Figure 24. Percentage of Interviewed Refugees with and without Work Permits

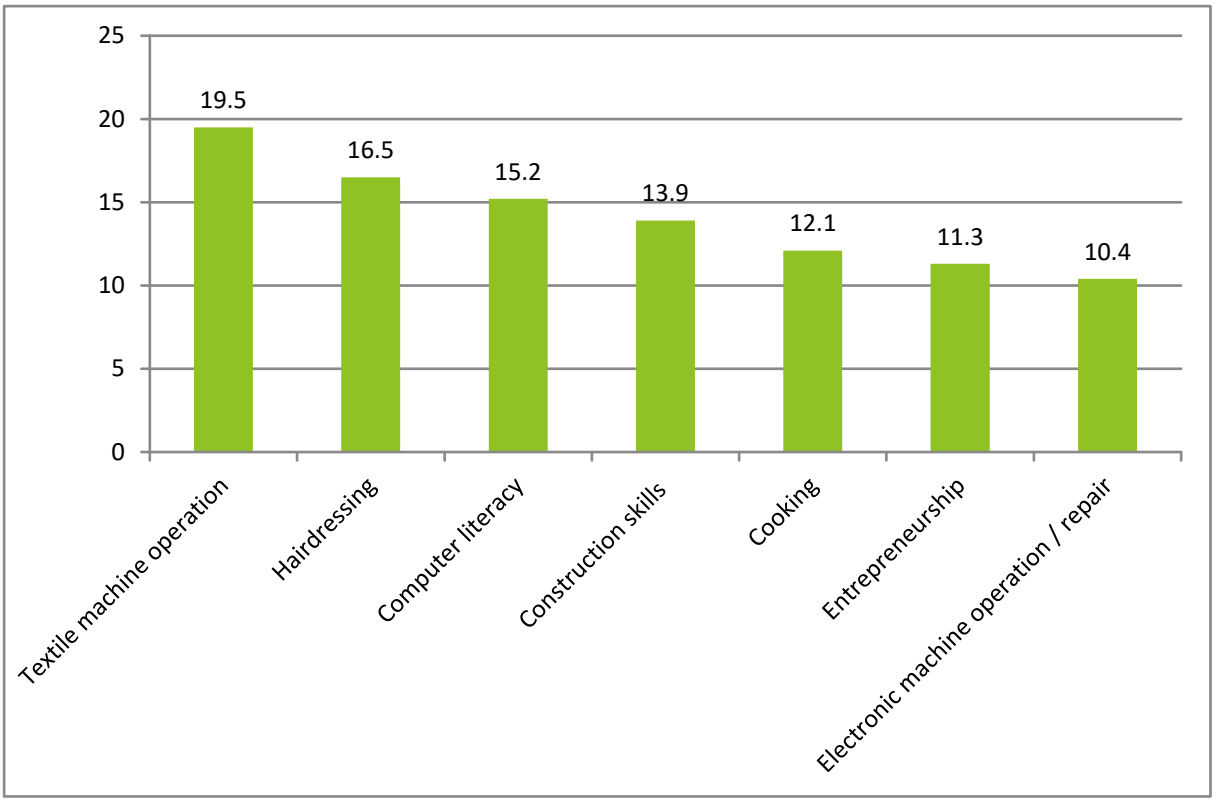


Regardless of whether or not they were aware that they could apply for a work permit, nearly all (98.3%) of the 231 refugees interviewed said that they did not have one. Of the respondents without work permits, 38.8% reported that they were currently employed. Indeed, 96.7% of the 91 employed

respondents indicated that they did not have a work permit from the Government of Turkey. It is worth reiterating that most of the refugees who participated in this study and who were in any form of employment were working informally.

Meamwhile, the data obtained from the survey showed that 66.7% of the respondents had worked when they were in Syria. To put it another way, 66.7% of the refugees interviewed had a certain amount of work experience as a result of having worked in Syria. Of those refugees with work experience from Syria, 29.9% said that they had worked in manufacturing, 13.6% in agriculture, 13% in health and social services, and 11% in construction.

Figure 25. Types of Vocational Training that would be Useful for Interviewed Refugees (Percentage)



When respondents were asked what type of training would be useful for them, 19.5% - the highest proportion - said that they would benefit from training in how to operate textiles machinery. Next came courses in hairdressing (16%), computer literacy (15.2%) and construction skills (13.9%). Other responses given, in addition to those mentioned in the accompanying figure, included courses in the Turkish language, in handiwork in textiles, in health services and in trade.

The vast majority (96.1%) of the respondents were found never to have attended any vocational training courses. Only 3.9% stated that they had received vocational training. These reported that they had received training in metalwork, electronic machine operation, hairdressing, computer literacy, business management, entrepreneurship, financial management, paramedicine, nursing and office tasks, and

stated that they had been happy with the training they received. Very few of these respondents said that the training they received had actually helped them to find a job. However, as the numbers are not statistically representative, it is not possible to draw any definite conclusions from this.

Most (52.7%) of the respondents stated that they were not aware of the courses available, and 49.5% indicated that they were not interested in receiving vocational training.

3.3.2. Employers' Opinions on Refugee Labour Force in Mersin

In total, 77 employers were interviewed - 26 Syrian employers, 25 Turkish employers with refugee employees, and 26 Turkish employers without refugee employees.

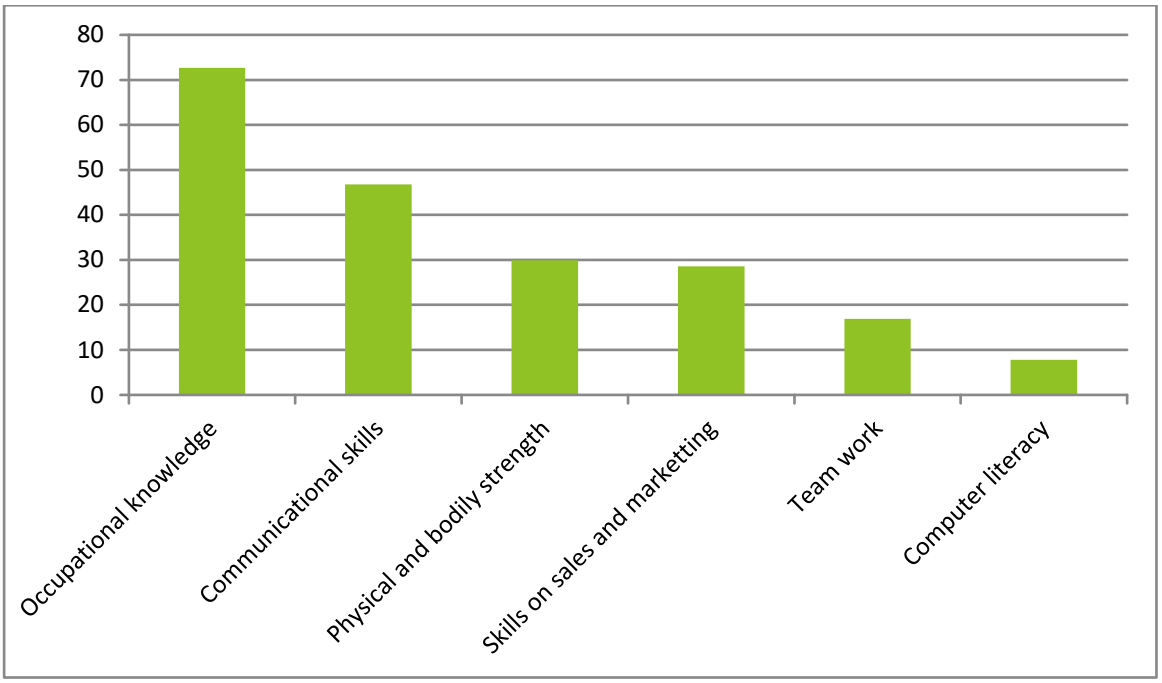
Table 8. Age Groups of Interviewed Employers

Age groups	Percentage (%)
19 – 29	14.3%
30 – 39	39.0%
40 – 49	32.5%
50+	14.3%
Total	**100%**

The majority (88.3%) of the employers interviewed were men. As Table 12 shows, the employers interviewed were mostly aged between 30 and 49. In fact, the average age of the 77 employers was 37.6.

Looking at the sectors in which the employers interviewed do business, 40.3% were in the food sector (butchers, greengrocers, etc.), 15.6% in manufacturing, and 7.8% in wholesale and retail trade. Among all the employers, 26% reported having 1 employee, 32,5% had 2 employees, 13% had 3 employees and 26% had 4 or more employees.

Figure 26. Skills Required to Be Employed in Employers' Sectors (Percentage)



As can be seen from the accompanying figure, the majority (72.7%) of the employers said that it was important to have knowledge of an occupation in order to be employed in their sector. The proportion who stated that communications skills are required was 46.8%. For physical and bodily strength and sales and marketing skills, these proportions were 28.6% and 29.9% respectively. Other skills which the employers mentioned as being necessary for employment in their sectors were team work and computer literacy.

More than half (56%) of the employers interviewed were found to be expecting an increase in employment in at least some of the occupations in their workplaces. On average, they said that 4 additional employees might be hired. Nevertheless, the data obtained shows that 82% of the respondent employers did not have vacant positions at the time of the interviews.

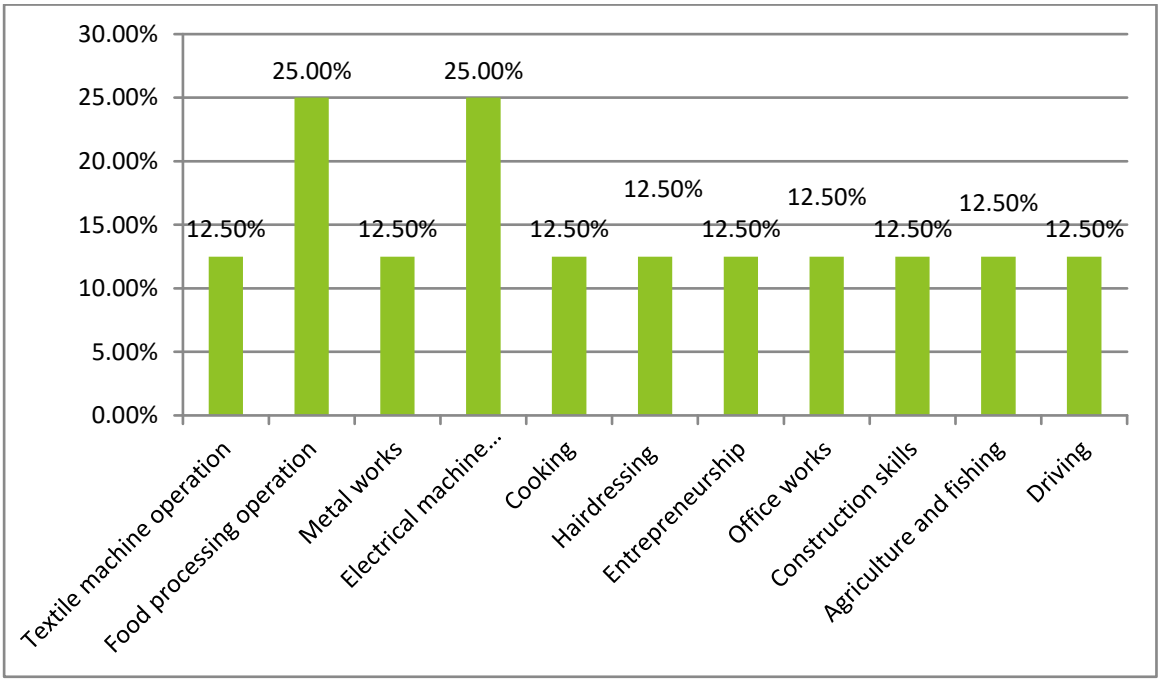
Those employers who did have current vacant positions in their workplaces reported that they were looking for machine operators (3 vacant positions), tailors (8 vacant positions), an agricultural engineer (1 vacant position), a member of technical staff (1 vacant position), salespersons (4 vacant positions), a cleaner (1 vacant position), waiters (2 vacant positions), a packer (1 vacant position), mechanical engineers (2 vacant positions), a dishwasher (1 vacant position), and a member of service staff (1 vacant position). The employers stated a preference for female employees for the positions of machine operator, cleaning person, waitress and dishwasher, whereas they preferred male employees for the jobs of tailor, technical staff member, packer and mechanical engineer. For the remaining positions, the gender of the employee did not matter. The skills required for employment in the current vacant positions were a knowledge of food processing operations (30.8%), ability to use textiles machinery (23.1%), ability to operate and repair electronic machinery (15.4%) and business management skills (15.4%).

Among the 77 employers who were interviewed, 54.5% currently had refugee employees. Among these, 15 employers said that they had female refugee employees, whereas 18 had male refugee employees. According to the employers, male refugees were working in the jobs of machine operator, tailor, apprentice, waitress, cleaner, salesperson, assistant, office worker, service worker, and education consultant, while female refugees were working as tailors, dishwashers, salespersons, bakers and waitresses.

About 90% of the employers who were employing refugees – the vast majority - reported that they were satisfied with their performance. They said that they found the refugees hard-working and disciplined, and that they were knowledgeable about their jobs and experienced. A few of the respondent employers stated they were not satisfied with refugee employees due to problems such as language barriers and insufficient knowledge of the occupation.

The survey results indicate that almost 60% of the employers who do not currently have any refugees working for them do not want to recruit any. The main reasons given for this are language barriers, legal procedures, not needing them, and cultural problems.

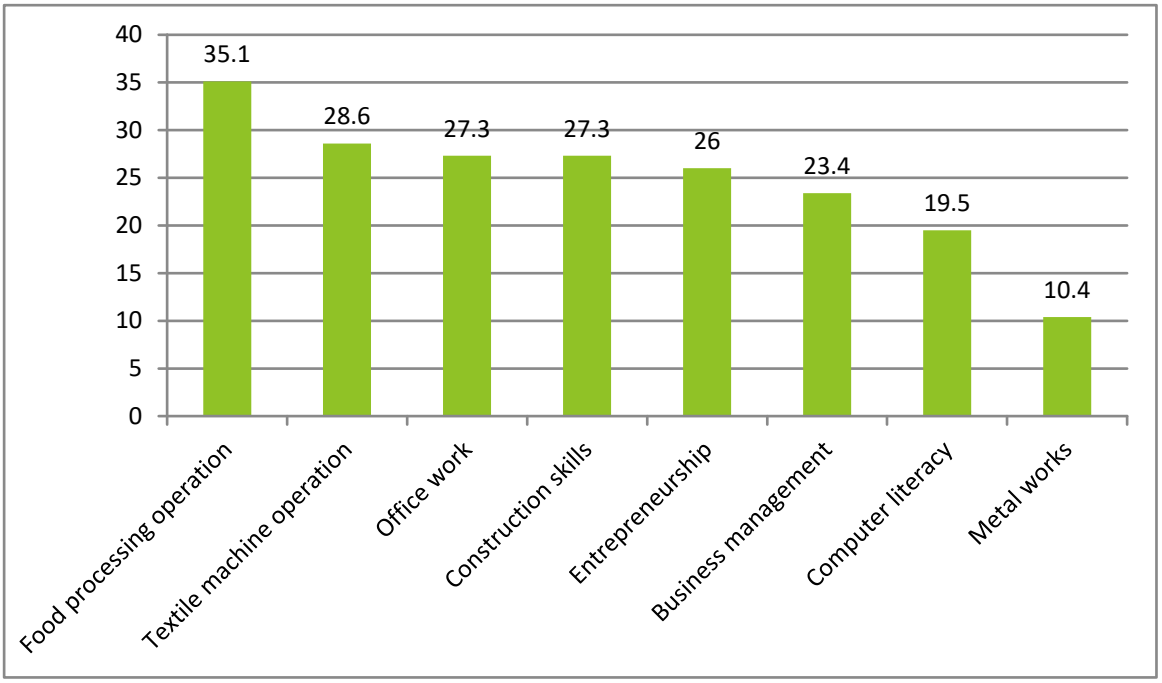
Figure 27. Skills Sought by Employers (Percentage)



The employers interviewed in Mersin expect refugees to have such skills as the ability to operate textiles machinery, a knowledge of food processing operation, metal working skills, knowledge of how to operate and repair electrical machinery, ability to cook, hairdressing skills, entrepreneurship skills, office skills, construction skills, skills for agriculture and fishing, and the ability to drive.

Whereas some employers were of the opinion that it was easy to hire refugees on account of their Arabic language skills, some other employers found the hiring process difficult because of language problems, low skills and legal processes. However, it should be noted that the numbers are quite low and the results are not representative.

Figure 28. Vocational Courses to be Organised



The subjects which the employers most commonly identified as those on which vocational training courses should be organised for refugees were food processing operations (35,1%), operation of textiles machinery (28.6%), office tasks (27.3%), construction skills (27.3%), entrepreneurship (26%) and business management (23.4%).

4. Conclusions and Main Findings

Overall, the data collected indicates that there are serious challenges to be faced in reducing the unemployment rate among the refugee population in Mersin. The rate of unemployment within the Turkish population has been increasing for some time, not only in Mersin but in Turkey as a whole. This has a direct impact on Syrian refugees and creates tensions between the refugee and host populations. In addition, the level of informal employment has also been increasing. Informal employment does not provide any job security or social security benefits and salaries are low.

One important finding of this study is that the vast majority of the firms which are employing refugee workers are satisfied with their performance. However, most of those which do not have any refugee workers are not thinking of employing any either. This situation might well point to a need for further

work on the social inclusion of refugees into local host communities. Indeed, the existence of cultural problems and a lack of trust towards refugee workers were referred to during the in-depth interviews.

The analysis of earlier research and of the in-depth interviews reveals that there is a need in Mersin for craftsmen or skilled workers with sufficient knowledge of their occupations and work experience, notably in agriculture, textiles, logistics, services, construction, metal processing and furniture The in-depth interviews suggest that the local population in Mersin is unable to fill positions in these sectors which require specific skills and work experience. If this is the case, then locating refugee workers in such occupations, left vacant by the host community, would be useful both for the refugee population and the labour market. In this way, not only would a gap in the labour market be filled, but the need of refugees for integration into the labour market could be met without creating tensions with the local population.

As some of the experts pointed out during the in-depth interviews, a number of organisations are providing various courses and in-kind support for the employment of the refugees in Mersin. UNICEF, ILO, UNHCR, KOSGEB, İŞKUR, IMPR, ASAM and the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) public education centres are among the organisations that were mentioned in this context. However, none were considered to have had a great impact on the labour market situation of the refugees. A significant increase in the level of employment could not be observed as a result of the courses and other kinds of support provided.

According to information obtained from the provincial directorate of MoNE, there are currently 17 temporary education centres (TECs) for refugees in Mersin. 11,000 refugee students are receiving education in these TECs. Meanwhile, 7,800 refugee children are studying in state schools. MoNE is about to end its two-year protocol with the TECs. There are two vocational education centres, in the districts of Akdeniz and Mut, but refugees are only attending the one in Akdeniz. These centres provide certificates that enable course participants to apply for jobs or open their own workplaces. There are also public education centres in all districts providing courses in subjects like literacy, the Turkish language, embroidery, sewing and beauty care. However, they do not provide official professional certification, and course participants cannot open their own workplaces. Although refugees are free to attend all these courses and education centres, most are not well informed about them. In other words, as the in-depth interviews revealed, the refugees do not know that there are public or vocational education centres which they too can attend. The refugees are also either unaware that they have the right to attend state vocational high schools, or uninterested. Activities to increase the refugees' awareness of the various centres and courses and provide them with information about them would help them to benefit from existing opportunities.

Another way to increase labour market opportunities for refugees would be to support them in doing what they are best at. With the help of legal and financial support, refugee entrepreneurs might be

oriented towards the sectors in which they were working successfully in their home countries. By way of an illustration, the sweets industry is highly developed in Syria, and if Syrian entrepreneurs could open sweet shops in Turkey they might be successful. As their sweets are different from those produced in Turkey they would not be competing with the Turkish shops. Furniture production is different in Syria too. If Syrians produce their own furniture, their customers will be different from the customers for the products currently produced locally. Furthermore, the cars that have come from Syria are different from those in Turkey, and when they need to be repaired, the local repairmen cannot always do the job satisfactorily. Syrians could therefore open their own car repair shops without getting into conflict with the locals.

Since there is a need for qualified staff who are able to work at the operational level in various sectors, it would be relevant to provide training on the operation of industrial equipment (textiles machinery, cranes, trucks, lifters etc.) so as to train potential employees for sectors such as logistics, construction, metalworking, food and textiles, depending on the duration of the project and the resources available.

Some firms in the agricultural sector provide their workers on the best ways of harvesting fruit. The way in which the fruit are cut from the trees is of great importance for the health of the trees and the sustainability of production. In other words, it is important to remove the fruit from the trees without harming them. According to Turkey's Union of Exporters of Fresh Fruit and Vegetables, there are 353 companies engaged in citrus fruit production[38]. It might therefore be useful to provide courses in fruit harvesting for refugees who would like to work in agriculture.

During the in-depth interviews, it was also suggested that refugees could be provided with certified vocational training in the fields of metal working and construction. Regardless of whether or not they have received training or acquired work experience in Syria, refugees need to have a certificate in order to be able to work in these sectors. The provision of the necessary training courses and of an officially recognised certificate of proficiency would help them find job in these two sectors.

As the participants in the in-depth interviews explained, the different working hours and work culture in Syria can cause problems for Syrians in their current workplaces in Mersin. These differences in work habits and the duration of work are reported to lead to problems of adaptation and to conflicts between employers and their Syrian employees. It would therefore be useful if ACTED considers providing training on the working conditions and work ethics which refugees may meet with in Turkey, in order to accelerate their adaptation.

As a port city, Mersin is known to have a highly active logistics (transportation and storage) sector. Consequently, there is always a need for employees who can work in the logistics sector. The provision of

[38] http://www.yms.org.tr/tr/members.html?q=&sc=&u=&i=MERSIN&p=0

courses in skills such as truck driving or storage management might therefore help refugees to find employment in those sectors.

Since the population is aging day by day, there will be a growing need for services for the elderly in the near future. Since refugees might be able to fill a gap in services for the aging population, consideration might be given to providing them with relevant courses in care for the elderly.

In order for refugees to be employed in the textiles sector, which employs many people in the Mersin Free Trade Zone, courses might be provided in skills such as sewing, cutting and pressing.

Further suggestions for vocational training can be made on the basis of the information obtained from the employers. For instance, many of the employers who took part in the study reported that knowledge of an occupation, communications skills, and marketing skills are the skills that are required in order to be employed in their sectors. The skills which employers most frequently stated that they would expect refugees to have are a knowledge of food processing operations and the ability to operate/repair electrical machinery. Employers also suggested organising vocational training on food processing operations, the use of textiles machinery, office tasks, construction skills, entrepreneurship and business management. All in all, vocational courses might focus on the kinds of training which were mentioned by the employers interviewed.

The refugees who were interviewed were asked what kind of training would be useful for them. The subjects in which they most commonly called for training were machinery operation, hairdressing, computer literacy and construction skills. They also expressed a need for Turkish language education, for training in handicrafts for the textiles industry, and for courses in health services and trade. Accordingly, ACTED might also consider providing vocational courses of the kinds called for by the refugees.

Refugee entrepreneurs are not very well informed about the markets which they are entering. Rather, they tend to start their businesses on a trial-and-error basis. SMEs founded by refugee entrepreneurs need to be better prepared. The provision of courses on tax management, office management, legal regulations, market research and other topics relevant to entrepreneurship would encourage refugee entrepreneurs and increase their chances of success.

The in-depth interviews showed that refugee entrepreneurs do not have the connections that are necessary to find either customers to serve or employees with the required qualifications. A networking activity, to help them establish useful connections, would contribute greatly to their success.

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