EXPLORING THE LIVELIHOODS OF WOMEN REFUGEES IN TURKEY:

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE EMERGENCY SOCIAL SAFETY NET (ESSN) APPLICANTS

A REMOTE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION REPORT

APRIL 2021

Funded by
the European Union

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IFRC

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

COVID-19	CORONAVIRUS DISEASE OF 2019
ESSN	EMERGENCY SOCIAL SAFETY NET
FGD	FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION
IFRC	INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT SOCIETIES
IGAM	İLTICA VE GÖÇ ARAŞTIRMALARI MERKEZİ (THE RESEARCH CENTRE ON ASYLUM AND MIGRATION)
ILO	INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION
ISKUR	TÜRKİYE İŞ KURUMU (TURKISH EMPLOYMENT AGENCY)
M&E	MONITORING AND EVALUATION
NGO	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION
RFGD	REMOTE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION
TRC	TURKISH RED CRESCENT
UN	UNITED NATIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) series conducted under the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) programme, this study aimed at exploring the understanding of refugee[1] women under temporary and international protection about participating in the labour market, the opportunities available for them, and the challenges faced from the perspectives of the ESSN applicants. The study is based on ten remote FGDs conducted in September 2020 with 35 ineligible and 24 eligible women from five provinces, namely Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Gaziantep, and Hatay. Data collection was undertaken by the Turkish Red Crescent (TRC), adhering to the COVID-19 measures and in a way that minimized physical contact. Participants were able to access group discussions via mobile devices provided by the field teams. Data analysis was done jointly by the TRC and IFRC Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) teams and supported with a desk-based literature review. The key findings and main recommendations of this report are presented below.

KEY FINDINGS

- According to the participants, women refugees often work in blue-collar jobs, such as in textile and food industries, and they also work as house cleaner. The available job opportunities for them are irregular and limited. When education levels and employment status were considered, it is found that the employed participants had low levels of education, but the ones with higher education levels were not employed. Generally, the educational attainment of women participants was mainly at the primary education level or below, reflecting the limited skills that women had before entering the labour market. Marriage, child baring duties, cultural norms coupled with limited skills and work experiences restrict many refugee women from participating in the labour market. These factors combined potentially translate into unwillingness among some women to seek employment or participate in income-generating activities.

- Improved Turkish language skills were generally thought to increase the likelihood of women accessing employment opportunities. Knowing the language would also help improve their knowledge about work rights such as social security insurance or work permits and placing them in a better position to seek these rights from their employers. While most participants believed that the inability to speak Turkish was a deterrent factor for women to find jobs, there were also others who thought that work experience and skills are more of a determinant. Although some refugee women thought that there are jobs in the market that do not necessarily require proficiency in Turkish, they often considered these not suitable for women (long working hours and low pay or necessity to travel long distances). A few participants also thought that knowledge of Turkish would help them attain sustainable and qualified jobs.

- Only a few women participated in technical and vocational education and training and found relevant work in the field of training upon completion. A few had applied to participate in language training and did not hear back from the organizers, or others have not heard about available training opportunities at all. Reasons for not participating in programmes were given as the long distance to the training center, unavailability of the types of courses preferable to women, childbearing duties, looking after the needy or missing the application dates.

- Gender norms play a distinct role in keeping women out of the labour force. Discussions highlight that husbands are often against refugee women's employment; they do not allow them to work outside of the home or together with other men. Refugee women also find working hours in Turkey too long and state they cannot care for their children if they worked. Other aspects highlighted include the insufficiency or inequality of the payor employer's preference for younger people where older age becomes a hurdle. For the more educated, both refugee men and women, the challenge was identified as validation of their education level and getting certification. Only one participant claimed

[1]Refugee is referring to foreigners who are under international protection or temporary protection according to the Law on Foreigners and International Protection. Herein the term is used to refer to their legal status.

that her Turkish skills improved through worklife. Other participants stated that most people spoke Arabic in the sectors they work in, and they faced no communication problem as there is always someone who knows Turkish when needed.

Based on the above findings from the participants, this report highlighted the following to improve the economic participation and empowerment of refugee women.

- **There is a strong need for improving opportunities for refugee women to attain Turkish language skills** so they could have a better chance to access the labour market, and seek their rights.

- **General skills building and human capital development are essential for refugee women** under temporary or international protection in high-demand sectors/occupations with more flexible work arrangements (including part-time employment opportunities). It is important to make training courses more readily available for them through advocacy, referrals, and counseling that helps to match their interests with the available courses. Realizing opportunities for refugee women in the new economy also requires accelerated interventions to close the digital gap and redress the digital divide through improving access to quality education and skills-building for younger generations.[2]

- **It is important to advocate for and provide innovative solutions** to accommodate refugee women's childbearing duties through childcare services or flexible work arrangements. Equally important is to enable a more culturally appropriate work environment to encourage their participation in skills-building and employment initiatives by also capitalizing on digital opportunities.

- **The importance and value of women's participation in income-generating activities and young girls' inclusion in skills-building initiatives should be promoted** for both refugee men and women under temporary and international protection through communication/advocacy campaigns in line with the "do no harm approach", without undermining the cultural values and exposing them to additional protection risks. It would be valuable to consider the participation of host community members in such campaigns as role models for promoting the state of women in the society and the economy and voicing the barriers that need overcoming for women's empowerment.

- **Further support may be needed to strengthen mechanisms to validate qualifications received in countries of origin** to help enable skilled refugee women to put their skills to use in relevant professions.

- **Sustained and longer-term donor funding is needed for livelihoods programmes,** particularly for those targeting refugee women's skills development and empowerment, to improve their participation in the economy.

[2]OECD, Bridging the Digital Gender Divide: Include, Upskill and Innovate, 2018.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Access to national systems such as health, education, employment opportunities, and social services, as well as the right to access work permits and formal employment, has been granted to the refugees living in Turkey by the Turkish authorities.[3] In 2019, 55% of the Syrian adult population was reported to work, 30% were housewives, 2% were students, and 8% were unemployed.[4] Prior to coming to Turkey, most people under temporary protection were regularly working, including 30% who were self-employed.[5] Among those employed currently, 47% work regularly, 28% do daily casual work, 20% is self-employed, and 2% is seasonal worker.[6] Some 20% of them in Turkey work in unskilled services, mainly in textile (19%), construction (12%), and artisanship (10%) industries. Other sectors where refugees are employed include shoemaking (6%), commercial services (5%), and handymen (5%).

Syrians living under temporary protection can register with and benefit from services of ISKUR, the Turkish Employment Agency, after six months of residence in Turkey. Such services include counseling, job matching, skills training, entrepreneurship support, on-the-job training, and job placement support. Refugees under temporary protection can also enroll in technical and vocational education training and apprenticeship schemes offered by the Ministry of National Education.[7] In addition, they also can start and develop their own businesses.

Despite the positive policy environment that allows people under temporary protection to access vocational training opportunities and work, still the refugee women's engagement in the job market is extremely limited. A study conducted in 2020 found that there is a high unemployment rate of women refugees across all ages between 15 and 39 years[8], with women mostly engaged as housekeepers in their households. In light of the above trends, it is important to have more understanding on what opportunities currently exist especially for the women refugees, what is preventing them from accessing these opportunities and how refugees can have improved participation in the job market from the ESSN applicants' perspectives.

3 - Atlantic Council. (2020). "Turkey's Refugee Resilience: Expanding and Improving Solutions for the Economic Inclusion of Syrians in Turkey", July, pg. 3-4
4 - Erdogan, M. (2019). "Syrian Barometer: A framework for Achieving Social Cohesion with Syrians in Turkey. Orion Kitabevi".
5 - TRC and WFP.(2019). "Refugees in Turkey. Livelihoods Survey Findings."
6 - Ibid., pg. 5
7 - TRC and WFP.(2019). "Refugees in Turkey. Livelihoods Survey Findings."pg. 5
8 - ILO. (2020). 'Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labor Market"

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This report explores the dynamics related to the economic participation of women refugees living in Turkey by focusing on the ESSN applicants' experiences. The specific objectives of the FGDs were to identify the opportunities and challenges perceived by the refugee women in the labour market and assess the understanding and willingness of women to participate in the economy.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN AND STUDY AREA

The study adopted a qualitative approach using focus group discussions (FGDs). These were designed to elicit group interaction and obtain perceptions in a permissive, nonthreatening environment.[9] The respondents were sampled from five provinces of Turkey including Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, Gaziantep, and Hatay.

Figure 1:
Sample Study Area

Figure 1: Sample Study Area

9 - Plummer-D'Amato, Prudence. (2008)."Focus group methodology Part 1: Considerations for design." International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation 15, no. 2: 69-73.

SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The participants of the study included 35 ineligible and 24 eligible female ESSN applicants. A simple random sampling technique was used to select the respondents. The respondents were organized into ten groups, six groups of non-recipients, and four groups of recipients.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROCESS

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, regular FGDs were not possible because of the potential associated health risks and the physical distancing measures. To ensure the safety of participants and programme staff, TRC and IFRC field teams conducted rFGD's by distributing phones and tablets to participants' homes. Data analysis was done jointly by the TRC and IFRC, and a desk-based literature review was conducted to support the analysis.

FINDINGS

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Most respondents in the study were aged between 26 and 45 (around 59% of the total), an age group that is typically economically active. However, only 25% of eligible and 14% of ineligible women were working at the time of the discussions.

The majority of the participants, with 44 percent, had primary level education[10] while 15 percent had no formal education. Participants who had secondary level education were 14 percent, followed by high school level with 7 percent.[11] University graduates (both 2-year and 4-year degrees combined) composed 15 percent, while the rest did not share their education levels.

10 - Based on the Syrian education system, Grade 1-6 is considered primary level, Grades 7-9 is categorized as secondary and Grade 10-12 as high school. University level education is also divided as 2-4 years depending on the specialty.
11 - If participant had only 7 years of formal education, this individual is categorized as having primary level education, not secondary.

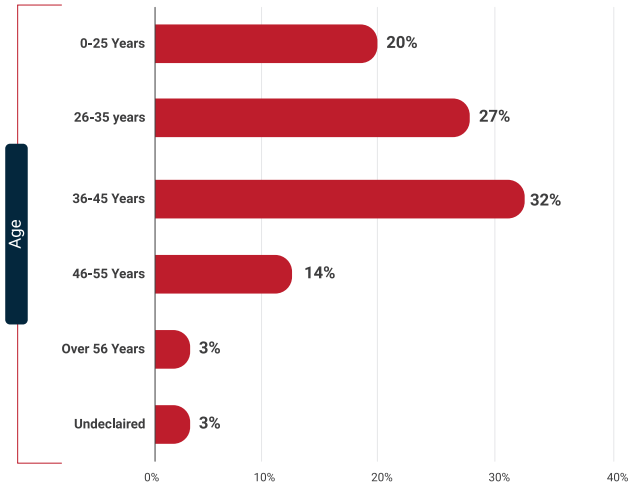


Figure 2: Participant's Age Distribution

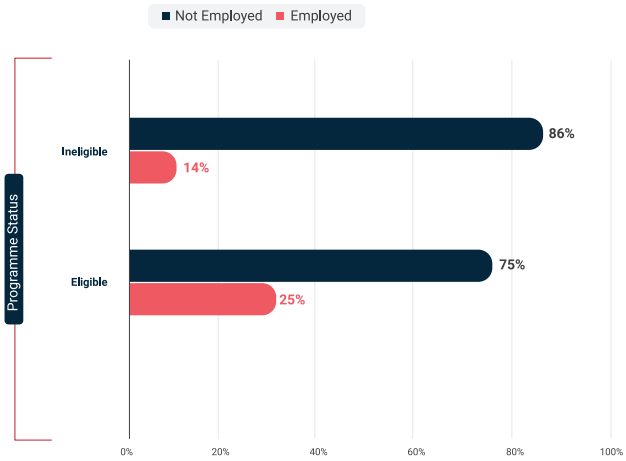


Figure 3: Participants' Employment status in Turkey

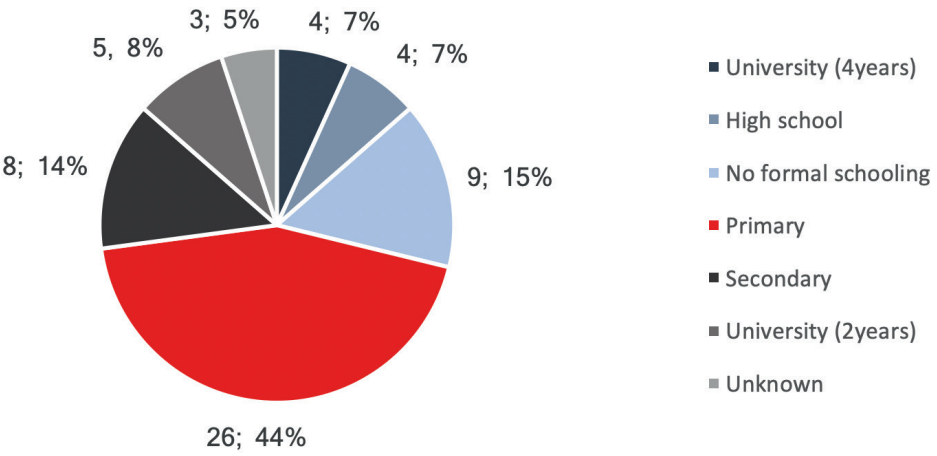


Figure 4: Participants' Education Level – Highest Level Acquired in Syria

OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE FOR WOMEN REFUGEES UNDER TEMPORARY PROTECTION

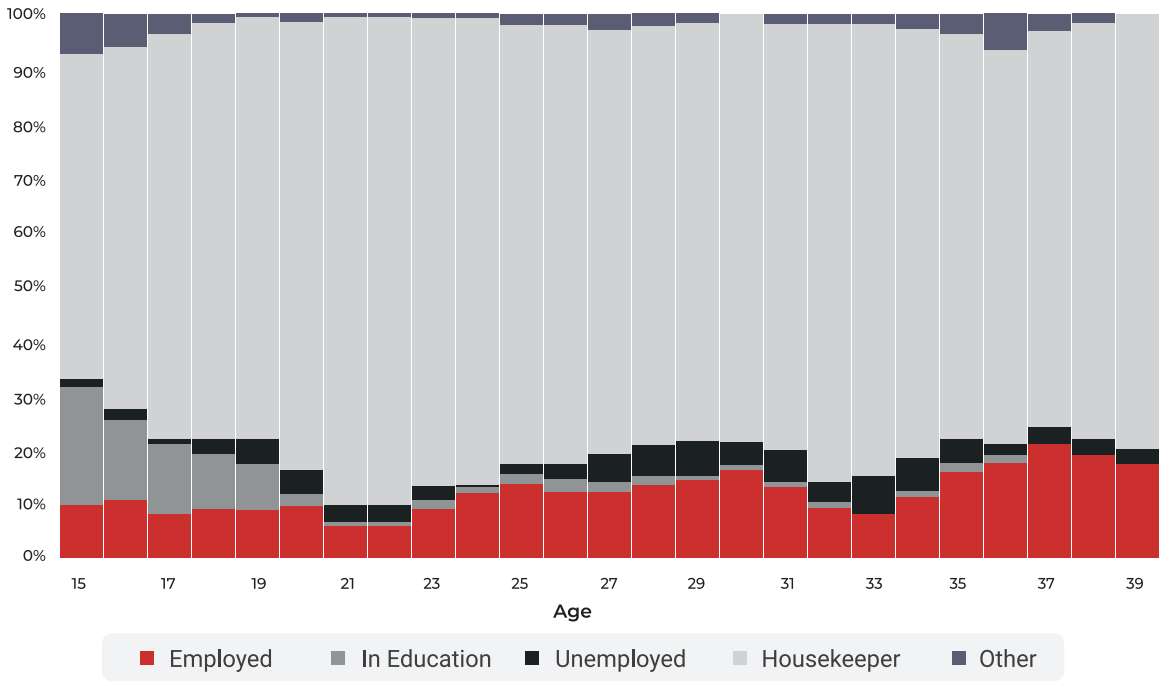
The study's first objective was to explore the opportunities available and participation of women refugees under temporary protection in the labour market. Discussions from the rFGD's revealed that there were very limited opportunities in the labour market; the majority of the participants have not worked formally, informally, or seasonally during their time in Turkey. The few who were engaged in livelihood activities were working in blue-collar sectors in the areas such as textile and food industries. Some were tailoring from home, working daily as home cleaners, or assisted furniture making. Jobs were generally identified as few and irregular.

> **Here jobs are generally daily work. Mostly men work but also some women do. In Hatay there are not many job opportunities. Women mostly work in restaurants washing dishes. For both women and men, it is hard to find a job.**
>
> – Eligible, Hatay

> **I am a mother, and I am trying to work as a translator and as a teacher. My field of study is actually petrol engineering. In Syria, it is very difficult to be in this field, and it takes a long time, do you understand? The working hours of the petrol sector are very long so because of these conditions. I will work as a teacher and translator until my children grow up.**
>
> – Ineligible, İstanbul

A review of literature validates that the challenge of limited opportunities for women refugees in Turkey is eminent. Syrian women had insufficient access to the labour market, with only 15% of Syrian women having employment, either formally or informally[12]. As illustrated in Figure 5, most Syrian women are engaged in domestic work while a small percentage of young Syrian refugees (aged above 15) are in education. Domestic roles also start at a very young age and are taken on board by a significantly large portion of Syrian women. While this may be partially due to difficulties in accessing education, lacking language or work-related skills, and work experience, it is linked mainly with socio-cultural norms and assumed childbearing duties. These dynamics are further elaborated in the sections below.

Figure 5: Employment Status of Syrian Refugee Women, 2017



Source: ILO, 2020

The rFGD revealed that job opportunities did not increase with higher levels of education for the refugees. Out of the eleven participants who were categorized as working at the time of the discussions, nine of them were either illiterate or had primary level education. Only one woman who had a university degree and another one who was a high school graduate were working. University graduate was, for instance, working from home on an irregular basis. This reflects that women refugees who had higher levels of education were not necessarily employed.

12 - ILO. (2020). 'Syrian Refugees in the Turkish Labor Market'

FACTORS INFLUENCING WOMEN REFUGEES UNDER TEMPORARY PROTECTION PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

A survey of 1,235 Syrian refugees found that being men, being younger, having a diploma higher than secondary school, having had higher income levels before migrating to Turkey, and having better Turkish skills increased the likelihood of being employed[13]. In light of these findings, this study assessed women participants' level of education, work experience, Turkish language skills, and attendance to vocational education and training to understand their participation in the economy.

LEVELS OF EDUCATION

As presented earlier, majority of participants in the focus group discussions had primary level of education or had no formal education, which is also in line with other studies. The Syrian Barometer survey reported that 33% of Syrians living in Turkey were illiterate, 13% were literate with no formal education, 17% had primary education.[14] Low levels of education among women refugees means that women often lack skills that are demanded by various sectors of the economy that require skilled labour. Skills mismatch is indeed one of the factors that hinder women's participation in the economy and landing on a skilled job that provides better prospects of earning a sustainable and decent income. While low levels of education reflect limited opportunity for women refugees to access skilled jobs in Turkey, it does not necessarily prohibit women to benefit from the existing unskilled work opportunities. Hence support need to be provided not only to eliminate educational and skills gap for women and young girls but also to promote the value of women's active participation in the economy through advocacy and communication campaigns.

WORK EXPERIENCE

A key component that determines one's employability is the work experience. The rFGDs have highlighted that women refugees have extremely limited or no work experience. Of the total 18 participants who stated that they were employed back in Syria, 13 of them were unemployed in Turkey at the time of discussion. The reasons behind were often linked with getting married or having kids, an area which is further explored in this report. This suggests that even for the

> **When we came to Turkey I worked for a short while in Gaziantep but then I got married, so I had to stop.**
> – Ineligible, Gazİantep

> **I could not continue my sewing job. I was struggling. I have young children and my husband is not with me. I tried to stand on my feet in Turkey and was leaving my kids to an old lady but could not continue this way, always worrying about them.**
> – Ineligible, Gazİantep

13 - Kayaoglu, Aysegul, (2019) Labor Market Activities of Syrian Refugees in Turkey.
14 - Prof. Dr. M. Murat Erdogan (2019) Syrian Barometer: A framework for Achieving Social Cohesion with Syrians in Turkey, Orion Kİtabevİ

more educated Syrian refugee women who were once employed in Syria, majority got overburdened by domestic and childbaring duties and hence could not remain employed in Turkey, even if they had temporary exposure to work life in Turkey. Other reasons raised included age and challenges around accreditation of their qualifications.

TURKISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

During the rFGDs, inability to speak Turkish language was frequently raised as an obstacle to employment. According to the preliminary findings of the ESSN Satisfaction Survey conducted in November 2020, 32% of the ESSN applicants lived in households where nobody who could speak Turkish.[15] The rFGD participants had different levels of Turkish language skills. Some were fluent, while others learned Turkish from their children. Some participants shared that they took Turkish language courses. Among those who did not speak Turkish or had very little knowledge, shared their willingness to learn.

> **If I knew Turkish very well, I would like to work in the education sector. I would like to work in the religious high school but since I do not know Turkish I cannot work.**
> – Ineligible, Ankara

> **I learned how to speak Turkish. I learned different measurement terms in Turkish, for example. I went to a course in Antakya and paid a monthly fee of 200 TL and learned Turkish that way. I can write and read in Turkish now, I learned speaking at work.**
> – Ineligible, Hatay

> **I want to learn Turkish to be able to work at the hospitals as a translator. Most women do not know Turkish, so they struggle. I would like to help them that way.**
> – Ineligible, Ankara

Some suggested that improved language skills would help increase their ability to get job opportunities. Others said the ability to speak Turkish is not a significant determinant in accessing job opportunities, rather they believed in factors such as experience and expertise having a more effect on employability.

> **My husband does not know Turkish like I do, but he still found a job and he is respected in that job because of his experience. He works there for 5 years. If language was an issue, he would not be able to hold this job for this long. Even though I think language makes a difference, it is not the only factor.**
> – Ineligible, Gaziantep

> **I believe what matters most is to be good in your area of expertise. I learned Turkish, came to level 3 and applied but they still did not hire me.**
> – Eligible, Gaziantep

15 - IFRC and TRC (2021), "Beneficiary Satisfaction and Feedback Report".

PARTICIPATION IN VOCATIONAL TRAININGS

During rFGDs, only a few participants shared that they participated in vocational trainings in Turkey while majority did not participate in any. Only two participants who participated in the trainings reported that they were working in the area of completed training. Most participants have not heard about vocational or language courses, some had applied but were awaiting for a response.

> **Here there are not many courses, I heard some exist but not many. I registered a training offered by a 'vakif' but they did not get back to me even though they told me they would call me.**
> – Eligible, Hatay

> **We were at Kızılay's Community Center. My daughter went there to register for a course. I went with her. I saw that they register people for tailoring, I also registered. Later, they sent me a message, I went there to interview. They enrolled me. After completing the training, I trained almost for a year. Then, I worked in the centre to make masks.**
> – Ineligible, İzmir

Unavailability of technical and vocational education training courses near where the women live was given as a reason for not attending the vocational trainings. Other reasons mentioned were health issues or existing courses not being the preferred choices for women. Childcare and domestic work were also discussed repeatedly.

> **My spouse and I, were ill, my daughter goes to school, hence I could not participate (in vocational trainings). I mean, there is only me to take care of the house.**
> – Ineligible, Ankara

CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN REFUGEES UNDER TEMPORARY PROTECTION IN TURKEY THAT AFFECT THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

This section looks into challenges faced by women in participation the labour market from gender and cultural lens. The rFGD's highlighted that the main issues that limit women's participation in the economy are around childcare responsibilities, gender norms, challenging work conditions, language barrier, and obstacles around getting accreditation for the education received outside of Turkey. These are discussed in more details below.

HOUSEHOLD LABOUR DISTRIBUTION

In all groups, participants raised childcare as the main difficulty that women face when considering a job. A typical distribution of labour in the household, assigns women the sole responsibility of childcare and domestic work, while men earn an income working outside. Participants of rFGDs shared that the need to look after children is a reason for not working or leaving their jobs. Some participants with children however said that they would consider working again once their children are older.

> **For me it is not about the language. Even if you receive education, in my case, women stay at home and take care of the household while men go for work.**
> – Eligible, Gaziantep

> **My child is too young, my husband goes to work so I stay at home to take care of him.**
> – Eligible, Hatay

> **I have 4 sons and 2 daughters. I take care of their needs, take them to school and prepare them to attend school. Two of our family members also need my constant help as they are sick. I may be able to work from home but otherwise I cannot leave my house. The kids are little, they seek attention, I do need a job, but their wellbeing is my priority.**
> – Eligible, Ankara

> **Women cannot go out to look for a job like men can. Even if you do, your mind is always with the children you leave back home. Men at least have their minds at ease when they are out looking for job'**
> – Eligible, Ankara

GENDER NORMS

In six out of the ten groups, participants underlined that even if women are willing to work, especially outside their homes, their husbands may not allow them to work. These results are supported by the IGAM (2019) study on integrating Syrian refugees into the labour market. According to this study, Syrian women generally felt positive about seeking employment, while Syrian men felt strongly against this idea.[16]

> **Some women work in the textile factories. Yet, depends on their situation, if they have young children or if their husbands allow them. According to our customs, sometimes women are allowed [to work], sometimes not. In general, working women is not a very common phenomenon in our culture (...) In Syria, 70% of Syrian women do not work.**
> – Ineligible, İstanbul

> **I would work on my own from home but I would not be able to work outside as my husband does not let me out.**
> – Eligible, İzmir

Since the workplaces are generally of mixed gender in Turkey, some participants mention that working outside of their home is not acceptable because they have to work together with men and this is not allowed by their husbands or not acceptable culturally.

> **Right now, in Gaziantep there are workshops where women and men work together. It is difficult for women to work with men, they have husbands. My husband would not want this for me, he does not even let me work from my home. In my opinion, this is one of the biggest problems, mixed gender work environment prevents Syrian women to work in Turkey.**
> – Ineligible, Gaziantep

16 - IGAM Asylum Camp Migration Center, (2019)., "Economy Integrating Syrian Refugees into The Turkish Market". March.

WORKING CONDITIONS AND AVAILABILITY OF WORK

Discussions suggest that working conditions have an impact on refugee women's employment. Long working hours for example was given as a reason as to why participants preferred not to work. Due to long working hours, some participants said that they would not be able to care for their children or look after their house.

> **The working hours are from 8 in the morning till 6 in the evening. Okay, but woman leaves the home at 8 in the morning and cannot come back until 6 in the evening and then who takes care of housework? This is one of the main issues. For example, if the working hours were shorter, it would be possible to work from 8 in the morning till 2 in the afternoon. As I said, the issue is looking after house and children'**
> – Ineligible, İstanbul

> **The working hours should be shorter for women so that they can also manage the work at home and the needs of the children.**
> – Eligible, Gaziantep

> **I can work and I can look for a job, but if we were to look at Syrian women, mothers in particular, either Turkish or Syrian, then we see that work hours are quite long here in Turkey and this affects us. We would like to work but our children need us.**
> – Ineligible, İstanbul

Low earning of refugees was also shown as a reason for not working or a barrier whilst looking for a job. Most refugees in Turkey receive lower wages than Turkish citizens, despite working longer hours.[17] Below are some quotes related to women experiencing or observing situations where refugees received lower pays than their colleagues for the similar work accomplished.

> **First of all, I know no Turkish. In our HH there are 6 children, 3 of whom are my daughters, the other 3 are mine. They give 300 lira per week, 12 hours are wasted, they do not pay you 900 TRY but max. 300-350 TRY. It is not worth it.**
> – Eligible, Hatay

> **Payments to Turks and Syrians are different. I worked, they paid 30 TRY. One Turkish citizen worked, they received 60-70 TRY. While working, they leave earlier than me (his/her shift ends early). That is why I am angry about the situation.**
> – Ineligible, Gaziantep

Participants also had agreement over the difficulty around finding a job in general. Compared to men, who have relatively more opportunities to find jobs, majority said that finding employment is much harder for women.

17 - Knappert, Kornau and Figengül. (2018)."Refugees' exclusion at work and the intersection with gender: Insights from the Turkish-Syrian border". pg. 70.

> **Payments are not well. We work for too cheap, I mean, 3 - 5 TRY for making 100 pairs of shoes.**
> – Ineligible, Ankara

> **I heard from a friend who was working somewhere, she was getting paid 2000 or 3000 lira, when the payment day came, she was paid half of this money. The same thing happened next month. She went to talk about it they said they will pay her that much**
> – Ineligible, İstanbul

> **For example, because I am a woman, they assume I do not know as much as they do and even though we make the same job they pay less for my work, we all come at 8:00 in the morning work will 6-6:30 in the evening, we all do the same job, I even work harder and longer than them, but I end up being paid less. They go to different places during working hours or they give smoking breaks, while I sit in front of the machine and work the whole time.**
> – Ineligible, Hatay

> **Men can hardly find jobs, how can women find employment? Most of the men look for jobs but cannot find any. How can women find?**
> – Ineligible, Ankara

LANGUAGE BARRIER

As presented in the previous sections, some participants stated that their ability to speak Turkish is impacting their willingness and potential to participate in the job market. The language problem also surfaces at workplace as it is closely linked to women's knowledge of their work rights and claiming these from their employers.

> **I worked with a Turkish tailor for a while but due to my language barrier it only lasted 3 days, they said it would be hard for me to work without knowing Turkish. Otherwise, I think working is nice**
> – Eligible, İstanbul

> **Those who don't speak the language don't get their rights..... Syrians are just beginning to hear about what work permits are, what insurance is, and how their rights can be protected.**
> – Ineligible, İstanbul

> **Language is an issue, I see my sisters having problems with language at workplace, the expectations are a lot language-wise.**
> – Eigible, Gaziantep

> **We still have the language barrier in front of us that needs to be dealt with, it is always there wherever we go.**
> – Eligible, Ankara

ACCREDITATION

According to participants, accreditation for qualifications received outside of Turkey is a challenge for the skilled refugee women and this hinders their ability to seek employment in the fields of their study. IGAM (2019) points out that higher education certificates from Syria are not accepted as valid until re-validation/verification is issued in Turkey, a process which most refugess under temporary protection do not know about. Along with the low numbers of highly educated women in rFGD's, the knowledge and awareness of what processes needed to be followed to validate education certificates was generally low among participants.

> **"Women cannot go out to look for a job like men can. Even if you do, your mind is always with the children you leave back home. Men at least have their minds at ease when they are out looking for job'**
> – Eligible, Ankara

OTHER REASONS

Age and health issues were also among reasons that were mentioned as challenges affecting refugee women's access to job opportunities. Participants who were over 50 years of age indicated that even if they had the ability and willingness to work, employers were reluctant to hire them because of the demanding working conditions.

> **"Due to my health condition and my 14 years old daughter, who I cannot leave alone at home I do not look for a job. In addition, I am too old for it, they would prefer young and active people for jobs.**
> – Eligible, Ankara

In response to the above challenges, childcare support was expressed frequently as a pathway to help women participate in the job market. Training in Turkish language was another area that participants mentioned in addition to possibilities of working from home and transport arrangements to work, if catered for, would help them participate in the job market.

Other mentioned reasons included the lack of transportation services to potential workplaces, restrictions to some professions where refugees under temporary protection aren't allowed to work or general lack of interest in gaining employment.

> **"Citizenship issue has been a problem for me wherever I wanted to work. If I work like a handyman (tailor or a packaging assistant) then these jobs would be fine because they don't need a citizenship, but the jobs I would like to do require a citizenship.**
> – Ineligible, Ankara

> **I have children, they cannot see their father, I want them to at least see their mother. But I do not have problems of trust, if I had a place to leave the kids and necessary skills to work, I would want to work.**
> – Ineigible, Ankara

Although it may be possible to overcome challenges related to childcare and language skills as well as transportation issues, overcoming social and cultural norms and assumed gender roles are a lot harder. In that respect, it is important that new modalities of work and digital opportunities are considered to offer refugee women the opportunities to work from home or work with flexible arrangements that are culturally acceptable.

CONCLUSION

The rFGD's revealed that with limited opportunities, only a few women were able to participate in the labour market. The ones employed were working in textile and food industry or as home cleaners. Most women had little or no work experience, only a few women were able to speak the Turkish language or attended vocational training. Most had the sole responsibility of taking care of children and general domestic work. Language barriers, unequal and insufficient pay, long working hours, accreditation hurdles and socio-cultural differences were all mentioned as barriers for refugee women to seek or gain employment in Turkey. Women identified childcare and Turkish language support as well as flexible work arrangements as avenues to increase their participation in the economy.

Considering the above findings, this report draws attention to the following:

- **The need for improving opportunities for women to attain Turkish language skills** so that they are better placed to enter the labour market, benefit from available work opportunities and seek their work rights.
- **The essentiality of general skills building and human capital development for women** in high demand sectors/occupations that have more flexible work arrangements (including part time employment opportunities). It is important to make technical and vocational education and training courses more readily available for women through advocacy, referrals and counselling that helps matching women's interests with the available course. Realizing opportunities for women in the new economy also requires accelerated interventions to close the digital gap and redress digital divide through improving access to quality education and skills building opportunities for younger generations.
- **The importance of advocating for and providing innovative solutions** to accommodate or ease childbearing duties of women through flexible work arrangements and offering a generally more enabling environment for women's participation in skills building and employment initiatives also by capitalizing on digital opportunities.
- **The essentiality of advocacy and communication campaigns as complementary interventions to promote the importance and value of refugee women's participation in income generating activities, and young girls inclusion in skills building initiatives** to boost their willingness to take steps towards gaining work. It would be valuable to consider the participation of host community members in such campaigns as role models for promoting the state of women in the society and the economy and voicing the barriers that need overcoming for women's empowerment.
- **The need to strengthen mechanisms to validate qualifications received in other countries** to help enable skilled refugee women to put their skills in use in relevant professions.
- **The essentiality of sustained and longer-term donor funding for sustainable livelihoods programmes** that aims to empower women in the socio-economic life with consideration for their challenges, priorities and preferences.

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Funded by the European Union