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SYRIANS IN THE LABOR MARKET



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SUPPLY AND DEMAND SIDE ANALYSIS

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Executive Summary

“Mahir Eller” Project, a joint attempt of The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB) and The Economic Policy Research Foundation of Turkey (TEPAV), began in December 2017. The primary objective of the Project, which is funded by the European Union (EU), is to increase the employability of Turkish citizens and Syrians under Temporary Protection (SUTP) by certifying their existing vocational skills. Local project activities are being implemented in cooperation with the Chambers of Commerce and/or Industry in the provinces of Adana, Bursa, Gaziantep, Hatay, İstanbul, İzmir, Kayseri, Kilis, Konya, Mardin, Mersin, and Şanlıurfa, where more than 83% of the Syrian population live.

The project aims at identifying the existing vocational skills of 30 thousand people, enabling 20 thousand beneficiaries to take the vocational qualification certification exams implemented by the Authorized Certification Bodies (ACBs) within the National Qualifications framework prepared by the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) and ensuring vocational qualification certification of 15 thousand beneficiaries. Finally, 3 thousand certified beneficiaries will gain formal employment or maintain their current formal employment status within the scope of employment incentives.

The project began with a comprehensive research phase to determine a strategy to achieve above-stated quantitative targets and get to know the target groups. Once the data required to form a strategy was gathered, the research process continued with certification and employment activities that were carried-out simultaneously.

Within the scope of the project’s research component, a survey was conducted among three different groups consisting of 15,617 Syrians, 4,169 Turkish citizens and 1,537 employers in 12 implementing provinces of the Project. Although the surveys included questions specific to each target group, in general, data on subjects such as *educational background, work experience, competencies, employment status, informality, barriers to formal employment, social cohesion benefits, awareness of vocational certification, and opinions of businesses on Syrian employment* were collected from survey participants.

In addition to the surveys, in-depth interviews were conducted with many individuals, institutions and organizations in all 12 provinces. In this context, by interviewing provincial and/or district municipalities, mukhtars, vocational training centers, İŞKUR Provincial Directorates, Provincial Directorates of Migration Management, RIZK Professional Development Offices, non-governmental organizations (SGDD-ASAM – Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants, Concern, DRC – Danish Refugee Council, Maharet, Support to Life Association, Yuva Association, etc.) and opinion leaders, relevant information regarding their activities toward Syrians and their perspectives on the adaptation process was obtained. Prospects of cooperation were also assessed during these interviews.

This report has been prepared based on the findings of the supply and demand-side researches carried-out as part of Mahir Eller Project to reveal the problems in the adaptation process of Syrians to the Turkish economy and to share policy recommendations developed to contribute to the elimination of these problems. This study differs from others in that it includes analyses that will allow us to evaluate the labor market from both the supply and demand sides.

Highlights from the surveys on Syrians

As a result of the wave of mass migration that began in 2011, Syrians, who were primarily sheltered in refugee camps, were allowed to settle in Turkish cities in 2012, albeit informally and without a specific resettlement plan. This situation has led to numerous undesirable results in terms of SuTPs' adaptation / integration process such as mass unemployment, informality in the labor market, provinces with population that exceed their absorption capacity and, accordingly, the inadequacy of the capacity of local governments in the face of population increases and difficulties in ensuring social peace.

Although approximately 30% of Syrians participating in the survey moved away from their first province of registration, primarily because they were unable to earn a living, they were not always able to find what they were looking for in these secondary provinces. According to the survey results, while 93% of Syrians have a profession, only 55.8% work in a job, and almost all of these people are employed informally. These figures appear as the direct outcome of a lack of planning in migration management.

The research conducted within the project's scope indicates that Syrians' experiences with the integration process vary by city. Accordingly, while Adana lags far behind other provinces regarding Syrians' adaptation to daily and work life, Gaziantep outperforms other provinces in terms of the proportion of Syrians who state that they do not encounter any problems. In Adana, the number of Syrians who said they did not encounter any problems is 9 per thousand, while in Gaziantep, the same rate is 19.3%. On top of these, when the difficulties faced by Syrians in daily and work life are examined on a provincial level, "low wages," "having to work informally/without social security," and "language barrier" emerge as the most frequently expressed issues in all provinces.

Analyses have once again reveal the significance of language competency and education for a successful adaptation process. The majority of Syrians who stated that they have not encountered any problems in their professional and social lives could speak Turkish. Similarly, Syrians' exposure to bad working conditions decreased as their education level increased. Although these findings highlight the importance of language courses and vocational training for Syrians to adapt to economic and social life in Turkey, only 15% of Syrians surveyed stated that they have attended a vocational training course since coming to Turkey. When language courses are excluded, the rate of those who attended a vocational training course decreases by

almost half. However, only 6 out of 10 Syrians who had attended at least one vocational training course stated that they had gained the competence to work in the profession they were taught. When these figures are evaluated together with the finding that 79% of Syrians express that they would like to stay / think of staying in Turkey despite the difficulties they face, improving relevant courses and strengthening these courses' connection to the labor market becomes an even more pressing issue.

The determination and documentation of the competencies of Syrians who did not have the opportunity to bring their diplomas, certificates or any other documentation that would prove their educational attainment and previous work experiences while fleeing the Syrian war and seeking refuge in Turkey is highly critical. In this context, while MYK Vocational Qualification Certificates will make it easier for Syrians to work in jobs that match their qualifications if they stay in Turkey, these certificates will also enable them to contribute more to the rebuilding process of their country if they return to Syria after a peaceful environment is established. Raising awareness on certification, both among individuals and employers, and harmonizing the content of vocational courses with the MYK certification process will thus facilitate a more sustainable integration of Syrians into the labor market.

Highlights from the surveys on Turkish citizens

Almost all Turkish citizens surveyed have a profession, and nearly half of them have 10 years or more of experience in their profession. Yet, the fact that the problems faced by Turkish citizens in their working lives are similar to those of Syrians indicate the existence of structural problems in the labor market. While 1 out of every 5 Turkish citizens emphasizes the lack of social security in their work lives, some others who underline that they have to work for low wages and the challenges they experience due to not being paid on time were also encountered.

Similar to Syrians, it has been observed that the social and work life experiences of Turkish citizens also vary by city. As opposed to Syrians, the number of Turkish citizens who stated that they have had negative experiences was higher in Gaziantep, Mersin, and Konya than in other provinces. When examined more closely, Turkish citizens who complain about having to work in heavy manual labor jobs are primarily found in Konya and Mersin, while those who complain about a lack of social security, low wages and irregular salary payments are mostly found in Gaziantep. The fact that Gaziantep has the highest number of Turkish citizens who state they encounter challenges in their work lives and the lowest number of Syrians who state they do not face any difficulties at the same time is thought to reflect a shift in the city's labor market in favor of refugee labor.

The data obtained from the survey implemented to Turkish citizens show that 6 out of 10 Turkish citizens believe Syrians will not return to their home-country. Another remarkable finding is that almost half of the respondents (43.8%) do not have a Syrian acquaintance. Accordingly, the interview findings suggest that the perception of Turkish citizens toward Syrians may be related to whether or not they have a Syrian

acquaintance. Nearly half of the Turkish citizens stated that the presence of Syrians in Turkey made no difference to them or made them feel anything. 1 out of every 10 Turkish citizens who has a Syrian acquaintance said that the presence of Syrians in Turkey makes them happy.

When asked about the effects of Syrians on the labor market, more than half (55.3%) of the Turkish citizens stated that Syrians cause them to lose their jobs and make it difficult for them to find a job. In parallel, 2 out of every 3 Turkish citizens believe that their employment prospects will improve if Syrians were to return to their country.

Highlights from the employer surveys

It was found that only a very small portion (13.3%) of surveyed Turkish employers has current or previous experience in employing Syrians. Considering that more than 70% of all surveyed employers hire through referrals from acquaintances, Syrians' employment prospects in these businesses are thought to be very limited. Furthermore, half of the employers with vacant positions asserted that they do not consider employing Syrians for these positions for reasons such as potential difficulties in adapting to the workplace and cultural differences, which, in turn, indicates important insights regarding the barriers to the labor market integration process of refugees.

Our recommendations based on the findings of the survey and the data obtained from the in-depth interviews are as follows:

- Employers should be regularly updated on the laws and procedures regarding the employment of Syrians by the chambers they are a member of.
- A comprehensive study measuring the effects of the Emergency Social Safety Net Programme (ESSN) should be conducted to eliminate the adverse effects of KIZILAYKART on formal employment, and the conditions for benefiting from the program should be made difficult or revised based on the results.
- Limitation on the freedom of movement for Syrians looking for or who have found a job in a province other than their province of registration should be lifted, and the obligation to work in the province where they are registered should be relieved to support formal employment.
- Chambers of industry and/or commerce as well as chambers of tradesmen and craftsmen whose members include businesses owned by Syrians, should establish a Syria Desk to inform these businesses about the current legislation and future legislative changes.
- The awareness of employers and employees regarding vocational qualification certifications should be raised, and the scope of vocational qualifications that are suitable to certification should be expanded. The existing skills of Syrians

should be considered while determining the new qualifications to be included within the scope of the certification.

- The capacity of Authorized Certification Bodies to conduct examinations in Arabic language for Syrians should be increased. Although host-country language proficiency is at the heart of a successful integration process, under current conditions, giving people the right to take an exam in their mother tongue is considered necessary to provide equal opportunity and prevent their exclusion from the labor market.
- Theoretical and performance-based exams designed and administered by ACBs to qualify for a VQA Vocational Qualification Certificate should be periodically reviewed and updated to reflect changes in the ways these corresponding work is carried-out.
- Employers should encourage their Syrian employees to learn Turkish language, and provide them with in-house trainings to teach them vocational terminology in Turkish language.
- It should be ensured that Syrians benefit from İŞKUR career counseling services more effectively and widely to make it easier for Syrians to find jobs most suitable to their qualifications and increase their awareness of formal employment. As a first step, provincial directorate of İŞKUR's in provinces with large Syrian populations should employ Arabic-speaking personnel.
- Syrians should be trained in CV preparation and interview techniques. Projects with an incentive component for new employment should be strengthened to include such complementary activities.
- Vocational training-oriented projects should include supporting activities such as certification and internship in a way that facilitates the transition of project beneficiaries to work life, or there projects should cooperate with other projects that include such activities.
- A minimum of B1 level Turkish language proficiency requirement should be introduced as a prerequisite for participation in vocational training courses so as to improve these courses' effectiveness.
- Coordination between projects designed and implemented with the ultimate aim of providing a livelihood for Syrians should be ensured, and this task should be undertaken by funding institutions.
- The number of vocational training courses that Syrians can attend with a stipend payment should be limited to avoid "professional traineeship".

- Awareness of gender-equal society should be promoted to increase the participation of Syrian women in the workforce.
- The capacity of provincial/district municipalities to receive international funds to produce and implement projects focus on integration of refugees should be increased.
- After nearly a decade, it should be accepted that Syrians are no longer “temporary” or “guests” in Turkey, and policies for harmonization should be based on this premise. Turkey needs a migration policy that addresses the multi-layered issue of migration with.