

Syrian refugees in Türkiye

A State of Limbo

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

The research findings outlined in this report shed light on the concerning “state of limbo” experienced by Syrian refugees in Türkiye, who reported a perceived sense of absence of legal safeguards and of insecurity. The study reveals that the escalating anti-refugee sentiment in Türkiye, coupled with political promises to return Syrian refugees and normalise relations with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, significantly contributes to the deterioration of safety feelings, fear of deportation, and concerns about losing legal protection, particularly among Syrian men.

While the May 2023 Turkish General Elections did not have a clear and direct impact on the situation of Syrians in Türkiye, the evolving anti-refugee rhetoric in both offline and online environments (happening in parallel with high inflation levels and the burden of the February 2023 earthquake), has exacerbated fears amongst Syrian refugees regarding their legal protection in Türkiye. These circumstances inevitably fuel Syrians' future plans, of which a considerable number plan to go to an EU country, alongside the desire of some to become a Turkish citizen and have more legal protection in Türkiye.

Key findings of the research, which are based on two rounds of online conversations with 395 (March-April 2023) and 688 (June-July 2023) Syrian respondents respectively, include:

- **Structural challenges related to legal status:** During the second online conversation (June-July 2023), 79% (n=688) of all respondents reported facing structural challenges with their current legal status, 13% did not face any challenges, and 7% preferred to not answer the question. Fear of forced return/deportation to Syria (75%, n=545) and limited freedom of movement (62%) were cited as the primary challenges faced by the largest share of respondents.
- **Fear of losing legal documentation:** In the first online conversation in March-April 2023, respondents with Temporary Identification Cards or residency permits were asked about their concerns regarding the potential cancellation of their legal documents. The findings revealed that out of the respondents surveyed (n=347), a considerable majority of 72% expressed fear of losing their legal documentation. Among this group, a substantial number (77%, n=248) reported being extremely worried.

In the second conversation in June-July 2023, the respondents who indicated to have such fears were asked to indicate the reasons behind it. The largest groups indicated an increase in hate speech online (46%, n=135) and discrimination against refugees in the Turkish host community (45%) as main reasons. Important to note is that the latter is especially reported by men (49%, n=84) compared to women (34%, n=44). In addition, a considerable group of respondents also mentioned a lack of clear and consistent information on their rights (36%, n=135) and having faith in existing legislation being correctly implemented (30%) as contributing to their fear of losing documentation.

In order to assess temporal changes, in March-April 2023 respondents were also asked whether their fears of losing legal documentation had changed since the beginning of 2022. A majority of 54% (n=247) reported that their fears of losing their legal documentation have increased since 2022, followed by 32% (n=247) who said their fears had increased since the earthquakes of February 2023. 10% mentioned that their fears remained the same, and only 1 respondent indicated that such fears had decreased.

Respondents who, in the first conversation in March-April 2023, indicated a fear of losing their legal documentation were also specifically asked, in the second conversation in June-July 2023, whether the results of the May 2023 General Elections had had any influence on their fears. The largest share of respondents (45%, n=125) indicated that their fears remained the same. 21% reported that their fears have decreased since the outcome of the elections, 16% indicated their fears increased and 16% did not know.

- **Increased feelings of unsafety:** In the first conversation, held five to seven weeks before the 2023 Turkish General Elections in May 2023, respondents were asked to what extent their legal status makes them feel generally safe from being forced to leave Türkiye, sudden loss of state protection, or other things such as house eviction. A combined total of 44% (n=375) only feels somewhat, very little, or not generally safe, while 42% of respondents reported to generally feel safe.

In addition, in the second conversation (held four to six weeks after the May 2023 elections) a similar question was posed to see whether contextual changes have influenced people's perceptions on feelings of safety. In contrast to findings of the first conversation (March-April 2023), the largest share of respondents (62%, n=667) reported to not or only somehow feel safe. 26% indicated to feel safe, which is a significant reduction compared to the 42% in the March-April 2023 conversation.

- **Fear for forced deportation:** In the March-April 2023 conversation 66% (n=305) of participants identified the fear of forced return or deportation to Syria as a notable structural challenge, among other concerns. Similarly, in the second conversation held three months later, 75% of respondents (n=688) identified this as a structural challenge.

In the June-July 2023 conversation, those who indicated fear of deportation were asked what factors are contributing to this fear. The findings highlight how Syrian respondents have heard of cases of deportation (49%, n=158); have experienced an increase in hate speech against refugees in the media (42%) or an increase in discrimination in the Turkish host community (41%); or indicated a lack of clear and consistent information (37%).

In addition to assessing respondents' general *fear* of deportation in the first conversation, the second conversation aimed to determine whether Syrian respondents also perceive a high *risk* of being deported or forced to return to Syria. Overall, 48% of respondents (n=596) reported such risk, with more male respondents reporting this (52%, n=345) than female respondents (42%, n=142). Among those who perceived a high risk, 43% (n=286) mentioned that the risk had significantly increased over the past five years. Additionally, 23% noted that the risk had considerably increased since the year 2022, 19% stated it had risen since the 2023 General Elections, and 14% linked the increase to the 2023 February earthquakes.

- **Legal support and awareness:** When being asked, in March-April 2023, whether they were facing any barriers in applying for the legal status or documents they desired, 38% (n=199) of Syrian respondents indicated that it is not clear for them how to apply. To better understand their specific needs, in the second conversation (June- July 2023) these respondents were asked what would help them in making the application process more clear. The largest group reported that a list of required documents with clear explanations on what each legal document should contain would help them, followed by a step-by-step guide on how to complete the application and instructions on where to submit an application.

When asked, in a separate question, how the Turkish government could ensure that there is more awareness about such procedures as well as about refugees' rights in general, 43% of respondents (n=604) reported that the government should use the media by publishing in (local) news outlets and using social media platforms. This was followed by one-third that did not know or preferred not to answer this question, as well as considerable groups who suggested sharing information in multiple languages, hosting town-hall meetings, simplifying language of protocols, updating government websites and organising online campaigns.

- **Prospects for the future:** In the first conversation (March- April 2023) respondents were asked about their plans for the upcoming six months. The largest share of respondents (46%, n=358) reported they plan to move to an EU country through legal means (i.e. UN resettlement program or a student visa), followed by one-fifth of respondents who plan to stay in Türkiye. Only 2% indicated they plan to return to Syria. Disaggregation by gender shows that there are relatively more men who reported the option of moving to an EU country through a legal pathway (51%, n=200), compared to women (37%, n=139). In turn, relatively more women reported to plan to stay in Türkiye (28%), compared to men (19%).

In the second conversation held in June-July 2023, respondents were also asked whether their intentions to move from or stay in Türkiye changed following the results of the 2023 General Elections. The majority of 53% (n=286) reported their plans stayed the same, followed by 29% that indicated they did not know. Only 12% indicated that their plans have changed.

Against this background, this report issues the following **policy recommendations**:

EU and Donor States:

- Commit to and accelerate the provision of sufficient, predictable, flexible and multi-annual humanitarian, development cooperation and peacebuilding funding, taking into account the 2019 OECD DAC recommendation regarding the “triple nexus”¹, to refugees from Syria and host communities, through dedicated funding mechanisms, and with a particular focus on the gender dimension. Particular attention should be given to projects aimed at providing legal education and assistance to Syrian refugees in Türkiye, initiatives around Turkish language training, and public campaigns towards Turkish citizens that counters prejudices about Syrian refugees, xenophobia and discrimination (including cultural exchange and awareness programs designed to reduce discrimination and promote integration).
- Support the work of local rights groups to document and report on the developments affecting the rights of refugees and host communities, and support interventions that could increase the protection of these groups.
- Ensure full respect for the principle of non-refoulement, both in internal and external discussions on refugee policies.
- Support the mandate of UNHCR to structurally monitor return movements, including through an enhanced UNHCR monitoring presence at main Turkish border crossings with Syria (Tell Abyad, Bab al-Hawa, Bab al Salaam) and in Turkish detention and removal centres.
- Increase resettlement numbers and other safe and formal routes to Europe for Syrian refugees; increase the effectiveness of relocation programs by developing a fair and equitable sharing mechanism among EU member states; and engage in public awareness campaigns that increase understanding and empathy among European public opinion about the importance of refugee resettlement.
- Accelerate efforts to put in place an objective assessment, including a human rights impact assessment, of the EU-Turkey Statement and of cooperation on refugees, asylum seekers and migration (as already requested by the European Parliament in May 2021).
- Put in place an independent investigation into allegations that EU-funded “removal centres” across Türkiye have been used to force Syrian refugees to sign forms stating that they are doing so willingly, before being deported to Syria.

¹ See <https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/public/doc/643/643.en.pdf>

Turkish authorities (national level):

- Reinststate the waiver that allows Syrian refugees to travel to another province without seeking prior permission by the authorities, as well as the waiver that allows Syrian refugees who temporarily returned to Syria to move back to Türkiye.
- Streamline and centralise information updates that are relevant for refugees, by systematically publishing them in the “Official Gazette”.
- Provide Syrian refugees in Türkiye with a step-by-step guide on how to complete legal applications, clear instructions on where to submit a legal application, a point of contact or authority to address any questions throughout the application process and a list of eligibility requirements for the desired legal status.
- Re-activate and strengthen the role of the Human Rights Institute of Türkiye.
- Ensure that the legal framework for return procedures provides for due process rights for refugees, such as access to legal representation and the right to appeal.
- Facilitate and strengthen refugees' access to humanitarian assistance, including food, clean water, shelter and medical care. Enhance coordination with humanitarian organisations and NGOs to ensure the delivery of these services.

Turkish authorities (provincial level):

- Enhance outreach efforts to provide refugees with accurate and accessible information on their rights and available legal support, taking into consideration language barriers. Adopt communication strategies that ensure that refugees with lower educational levels have access to information updates.
- Step up efforts to ensure that public servants, specifically those working in Migration Management Offices, are well-informed and proficient in the application of all legal frameworks related to Syrian refugees.
- Offer anti-discrimination training to local authorities, police, and public servants to ensure fair treatment of refugees and to reduce instances of discrimination; and put in place complaint, feedback and accountability mechanisms to counter violations.
- Collaborate with local organisations, schools, and businesses to create opportunities for cultural exchange and integration.

Local and international NGOs:

- Increase efforts to raise legal awareness among Syrians in Türkiye on existing legal frameworks and the rights that refugees are entitled to in Türkiye. More specifically, NGOs should prioritise legal aid interventions (facilitating access to lawyers) and work together with Turkish lawyers to develop accessible and understandable legal briefings for refugees living in Türkiye.
- Offer cultural sensitivity training to public servants, in order to ensure they understand the unique challenges faced by refugees and can provide more effective support.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings from the first two conversations conducted as part of an EU-funded project implemented by a consortium consisting of 11.11.11, Upinion and local CSO partners. It delves into the “state of limbo” experienced by Syrian individuals in Türkiye. The report focuses on Syrian refugees’ current and desired legal status, the challenges associated with their legal status, their concerns and feelings regarding these matters, their legal knowledge and available support, as well as their future plans and prospects.

These topics were explored through two online conversations in March-April 2023 and June-July 2023. The second conversation included follow-up inquiries based on respondents’ previous responses and introduced new questions to monitor the legal protection and related concerns of Syrian individuals during that period.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Continuous conversations with Syrian refugees in Türkiye

Upinion has developed a digital engagement platform that allows it to securely stay in touch with people in crisis and displacement-affected countries. This platform makes it possible to have real-time conversations² with communities in the same way they connect with their friends and families, using messaging apps like Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. By making use of this methodology Upinion has been able to create a digital panel consisting of individuals from Syria residing in Türkiye with whom they can frequently engage. While recruitment happens through social media or by offline outreach, the actual conversations take place in a secure environment, beyond Facebook’s or WhatsApp’s reach. Through regular online conversations, the panel can self-report issues and, subsequently, insights can be gathered about the needs and concerns of Syrian refugees in Türkiye.

Upinion’s conversations are always an information exchange, and hence respondents receive information about relevant (NGO) services and hotlines in their area, awareness messages, data findings, and other potentially useful information after finishing a conversation. Important to note is that Upinion has the ISO/IEC 27001 Certification, which is the international best practice standard for Information Security Management Systems (ISMSs), and follows GDPR regulations.

Although the same group of Syrian respondents was invited to participate in both conversations, there were different subsets of groups of respondents involved in each one of them, along with

² A conversation refers to an information exchange, in survey style, between Upinion and a panel of respondents.

new members who joined for the second conversation in June-July 2023. Hence, it is essential to interpret the results while considering the specific sample characteristics unique to each conversation.

Additionally, it is important to note that the sample of this study is limited to individuals who have the ability to read and write, have access to the internet and an electronic device (phone, tablet, computer), and have a Facebook or WhatsApp account. As a result, the findings may not reflect the views of those who are illiterate, have limited technological access, or do not use Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp. The sample is not proportional to the refugee populations across Türkiye's regions, despite that individuals from each region were invited to participate. This needs to be considered when interpreting the report's findings.

2.2. Conversation 1: demographic information

A total of **395 respondents** started the first conversation, while **357** of them completed the entire conversation. The data collection took place from 27 March 2023 to 10 April 2023. In this period, the areas affected by the earthquakes that struck Southern Türkiye in February 2023 were still in a state of emergency.

Amongst those who filled in their demographic information, 58% (n=373) indicated to be male and 42% reported to be female, leaving a male: female ratio of 1 : 0.72.

The majority of the respondents (66%, n=256) fell within the age range of 26 to 45, with smaller groups of people aged 18-25 (14%), 46-55 (13%), and 56-65 (5%). Only 9 people were older than 65. Regarding respondents' area of residency, most individuals in this sample were residing in the South-eastern Anatolia Region (34%, n=395), the Mediterranean Region (27%), and Marmara Region (capital: Istanbul) (25%). These regions are known to host relatively the largest numbers of Syrian refugees.

Finally, the highest level of education completed by the largest share of our sample was secondary school (42%, n=381). This was followed by individuals who completed primary school (26%) and those with a Bachelor's Degree (15%). There were few respondents with lower or higher education levels.

2.3. Conversation 2: demographic information

A total of **688 respondents** started the second conversation, while 604 of them completed the entire conversation. The data collection took place between 14 June and 2 August 2023.

Amongst those who filled in their demographic information, there were more male respondents (71%, n=557) than female respondents (29%), leaving a male:female ratio of 1:0.42. This differs from the first conversation, where the distribution amongst gender was relatively more balanced.

Similar to the first conversation, most respondents were between 26 and 45 years old (66%, n=564), with equal groups of people aged between 18-25 (13%), 46-55 (12%), and 55-65 (8%).

Most respondents were residing in the South-eastern Anatolia Region (33%, n=549), the Marmara Region (31%) and the Mediterranean Region (24%), which is roughly in line with the earlier conversation. Also in this conversation, the largest share of the sample obtained secondary school (44%, n=523) as their highest level of education. This was followed by individuals who have completed primary school (22%) or have a Bachelor's Degree (19%).

3. SETTING THE SCENE

3.1. How many Syrian refugees are living in Türkiye?

Thirteen years into a revolution that evolved into a war, Syria remains the world's largest refugee crisis. In mid-2023, about 6.5 million Syrian officially-registered refugees were living outside Syria's borders. Syrian refugees make up one-fifth of the global refugee population. Additionally, another 6.8 million people are internally displaced within Syria. More than half of the Syrian population is still fleeing war and persecution.³

According to UNHCR data, as of 5 October 2023 there are 3,274 million registered Syrian refugees in Türkiye, in addition to more than 300.000 other refugees and migrants from other nationalities. This means that Türkiye is the country hosting the largest number of refugees worldwide.⁴ Syrian refugees living in Türkiye constitute two thirds of the overall Syrian refugee population.⁵

It should be noticed, however, that the number of Syrians who are registered with the Turkish Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) has been rapidly declining since 2021, at a much higher rate than the number of refugee returns.⁶

| Date | Number of registered Syrian refugees in Türkiye | Returned refugees |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| 2023 (as of 5 October) | 3.274.059 | 7.636 |
| 2022 | 3.535.898 | 33.953 |
| 2021 | 3.737.369 | 22.275 |
| 2020 | 3.641.370 | 16.805 |
| 2019 | 3.576.370 | 34.303 |

3.2. Türkiye's response since 2011

Türkiye's refugee response is based on the 2013 Law on Foreigners and International Protection and the 2014 Temporary Protection Regulation.⁷ The country is the second largest humanitarian donor in the world, after the United States of America (USA). In 2022 Türkiye's humanitarian

³ See <https://www.unhcr.org/mid-year-trends-report-2023>

⁴ See <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2023/10/UNHCR-Lebanon-FactSheet-August-2023.pdf>

⁵ See https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria_durable_solutions

⁶ <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/download/>

⁷ See <https://11.be/sites/default/files/2022-03/202203-11paper-Upinion-Syrian-Refugees-in-Turkey.pdf>, p 16-17.

assistance (largely consisting of spending on hosting Syrian refugees within Türkiye) reached \$7.2 billion. Türkiye gave the most humanitarian assistance as a percentage of gross national income (0.65 percent), followed by Luxembourg (0.22%) and Sweden (0.17%) percent.⁸

In the first years after 2011, the Turkish Government implemented an open-door policy for refugees, who were granted temporary protection and free access to healthcare, education and other social services. However, as previously outlined in a research report by Upinion and 11.11.11 (March 2022), in recent years the political and economic situation in Türkiye has undergone drastic changes, which has resulted in an increasingly negative public opinion against refugees.⁹ Since 2018, the Turkish economy has been characterised by high levels of inflation, a rapid depreciation of the Turkish lira and an economic crisis that severely affected both the Turkish and refugee communities. Whereas Turkish people initially had a very welcoming attitude towards Syrian refugees, since 2019 public opinion surveys have documented a notable deterioration in the level of social cohesion between Syrian refugees and Turkish communities. This change in attitude is influenced, among other things, by the increased competition for limited informal employment opportunities, rising costs of living, and the increasingly hostile political discourse that emerged in the run-up to, and after, the March 2019 local elections.

Another indication of Türkiye's stricter refugee policy is the 20 percent quota that was introduced in 2022. As a result of this new policy, the Directorate of Migration Management closes new foreigner registrations in neighbourhoods where the number of foreigners exceeds 20 percent of the number of Turkish citizens, in order to reduce congestion. The 20 percent limit is not stipulated in any law but was introduced through an announcement by the Ministry of Interior's Directorate of Migration Management. The migration administration also monitors whether the number of foreigners exceeds the 20 percent limit compared to the number of Turkish citizens. If the limit is exceeded, the relevant neighbourhood is closed for the residence of more foreigners. According to the latest announcement by the Directorate of Migration Management, the number of closed neighbourhoods has been increased to 1169 (as of 1 July 2022).¹⁰

The devastating earthquakes that hit Southern Türkiye and Northern Syria in February 2023 impacted over 15.6 million people in 11 provinces, including 1.75 million Syrian refugees living in Türkiye.¹¹ Interviews that 11.11.11 conducted in Southern Türkiye in March 2023 highlighted cases of unequal aid distribution, verbal and physical harassment during aid distributions (resulting in a tendency among many Syrians to not queue and thus forego distributions), cases in which Syrian refugees were pressured to leave their shelters or houses to make place for Turkish citizens, and a further increase in anti-Syrian rhetoric and hate speech on Turkish social media. Cases of aid discrimination, physical abuse, verbal harassment, hate speech and evictions from emergency

⁸ See https://devinit-prod-static.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/media/documents/GHA2023_Digital_v9.pdf

⁹ See <https://11.be/sites/default/files/2022-03/202203-11paper-Upinion-Syrian-Refugees-in-Turkey.pdf>

¹⁰ See <https://www.goc.gov.tr/mahalle-kapatma-duyurusu-hk2>

¹¹ See <https://reporting.unhcr.org/syria-and-t%C3%BCrkiye-earthquake-emergency-supplementary-appeal>

camps have also been reported by Amnesty International¹² and the Syria Justice and Accountability Center (SJAC).¹³ Moreover, Syrian refugees in Türkiye continue to face issues around their freedom of movement. On 13 February 2023, the Turkish government announced that people who are under international or temporary protection and who are living in one of the five worst-hit provinces (Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Gaziantep, Adiyaman and Malatya) would be given a 60-day exemption on a pre-existing requirement to obtain prior travel permit to travel outside the province where they are residing. As such, Syrian refugees living in these provinces would be allowed, for a period of 60 days, to travel to another province without seeking prior permission by the authorities. Although a positive development in the short term, critics warned that this 60-day respite is largely insufficient and not realistic, given that no longer-term solutions will be in place after the expiration of this exemption. As of December 2023, this exemption is no longer in force, as a result of which foreigners, including Syrian refugees, can no longer travel to other provinces without a travel permit. According to UNHCR, as of 28 July 2023 over 226.500 Syrian refugees were reported to have left their province of residence after 6 February 2023, and around 41.950 refugees of them reportedly returned to their province of initial residence in the earthquake zone. UNHCR has also reported that at least 70.000 Syrian refugees temporarily returned to Syria after the 6 February earthquake, of which an estimated 62.700 had returned back to Türkiye by 17 August 2023.¹⁴

In the aftermath of the 6 February earthquakes, which coincided with the electoral campaign for the May 2023 general elections, the public sentiment against Syrian refugees further deteriorated. Syrian refugees in Türkiye have faced strong xenophobic and anti-refugee propaganda by some of the political parties, driven largely by escalating electoral rhetoric and scapegoating, competition for post-earthquake aid and services, and the ongoing economic and financial crisis in Türkiye.¹⁵ After winning the second round of the Presidential Elections, on 28 May 2023, and in a context of an acceleration in the normalisation process between the Syrian government and Arab states,¹⁶ Turkish President Erdogan promised that Türkiye “*will ensure the return of another 1 million people within a year*” to the Northern areas of Syria that are under Turkish control.¹⁷ Immediately after the elections, Turkish authorities increased checks on Syrian refugees in many Turkish provinces, in particular Istanbul. According to Syrian human rights organisations, in June-July 2023 alone hundreds of Syrian refugees have been sent to removal centres where many cases of deportation were recorded. This campaign targeted Syrians who had failed to obtain official legal documents, Syrians who failed to renew their residency or update their personal data (for temporary protection document (“kimlik”) holders) as well as Syrians who were residing in provinces other than those for which their kimlik was issued.¹⁸

¹² See <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/campaigns/2023/02/turkiye-syria-earthquakes-a-human-rights-approach-to-crisis-response/>

¹³ See <https://syriaaccountability.org/as-rescue-efforts-wind-down-syrian-survivors-face-discrimination-amidst-desolation-in-turkey/>

¹⁴ See <https://reporting.unhcr.org/t%C3%BCrkiye-emergency-response-earthquake-5524>

¹⁵ See <https://d3jwam0i5codb7.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Syria-Report-October-2023.pdf>, p 16-17.

¹⁶ See also <https://d3jwam0i5codb7.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Syria-Report-October-2023.pdf>

¹⁷ See <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/147332/-every-single-one-of-our-85-million-citizens-has-won-today->

¹⁸ See <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkiye/violations-are-still-being-committed-all-parts-syria-including-northern-syria-refoulement-refugees-poses-serious-threat>

4.1. *Legal status and associated structural challenges*

4.1.1. Type of legal documents

In both conversations, Syrian respondents were asked to indicate what type of legal documents they currently have, using a multiple-answer format.

The large majority of respondents who answered this question (79%, n=925) indicated to have a **Temporary Protection Identification Card (Kimlik)**. This was followed by 6% who indicated that they do not have any legal documentation currently, and 5% reported to have Turkish citizenship. 15% held other legal statuses, including work permits, an International Protection Applicant ID Card (*Uluslararası Koruma Başvuru Sahibi Kimlik Kartı*), long-term residence permits, student or work visas, or chose not to answer the question.¹⁹

4.1.2. Desired legal status

While the overall majority of respondents in both conversations obtained a Temporary Protection Identification Card (Kimlik), respondents of the first conversation (who got the opportunity to identify their desired legal documentation) reported they aspire to have a different legal status.

Turkish citizenship was the most desired legal status for people to have (40%, n=372), especially for people holding a Bachelor's degree (51%, n=55) and for women (49%, n=143). In addition to this, there was a considerable desire for international protection, including resettlement to another country, with 29% of participants expressing this preference. The largest share of men (37%, n=210) reported this option, compared to only 19% of women. Moreover, the desire for international protection/resettlement was more pronounced among those with only primary education (35%, n=91) when compared to individuals with a Bachelor's degree (20%).

4.1.3. Structural challenges associated with legal status

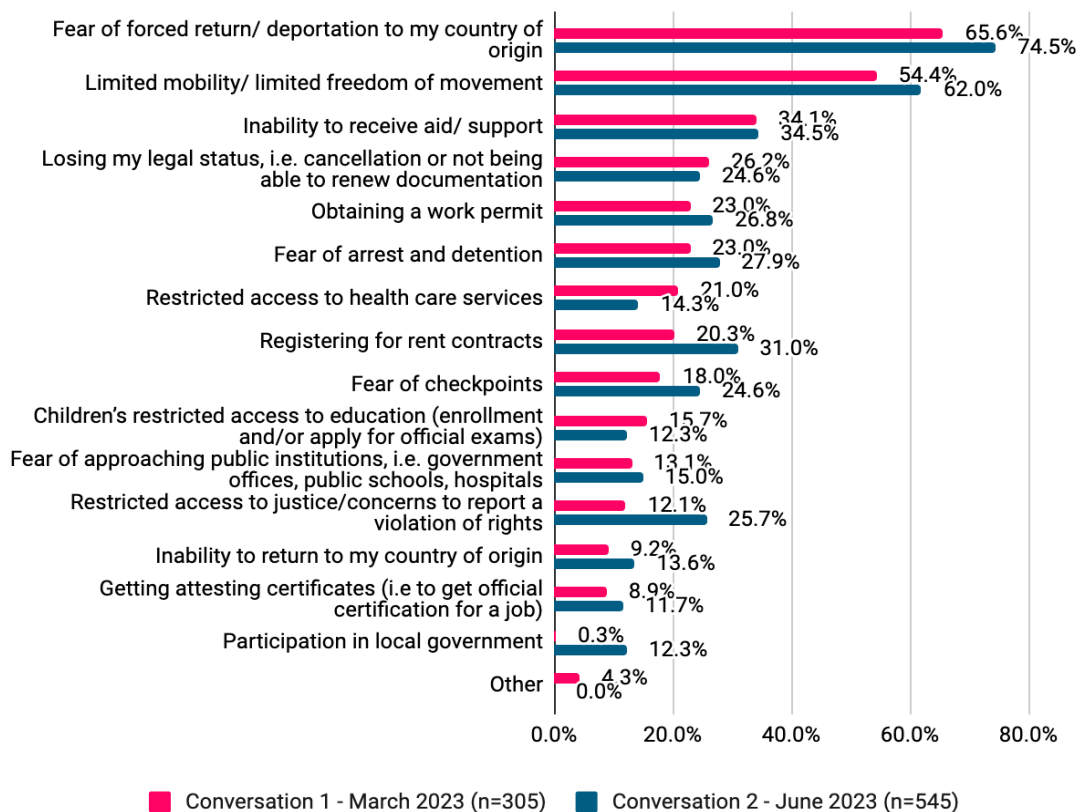
In both conversations, Syrian respondents were asked whether they were facing structural challenges associated with their current legal status, using a multiple answer format. During the first conversation in March 2023, a large majority of 81% (n=377) of respondents reported encountering structural challenges, followed by 12% who did not face any challenges and 7% who preferred to not answer this question. The primary concern amongst those who faced challenges (n=305) was the fear of forced return or deportation to Syria (66%), followed by limitations on their freedom of movement (54%).

¹⁹ The sum of all percentages exceeds 100%, since few individuals indicated to have more than one document. For most, this was a combination of the Temporary Protection ID Card with a work permit or the Temporary Protection ID Card with an International Protection Applicant ID Card (*Uluslararası Koruma Başvuru Sahibi Kimlik Kartı*).

The findings of the second conversation in June-July 2023 show similar trends. **79% (n=688) of all respondents reported facing structural challenges with their current legal status**, 13% did not face any challenges, and 7% preferred to not answer the question. Again, fear of forced return/deportation to Syria (75%, n=545) and limited freedom of movement (62%) remained the primary challenges faced by the largest share of respondents.

It is notable that, in June-July 2023, relatively more respondents indicated higher concerns regarding registering for rent contracts (31%) and the restricted access to justice to report human right violations (26%) as structural challenges, compared to the first conversation in March-April 2023 (20% and 12% respectively). These growing concerns are reflective of the huge spike in rent costs²⁰, as well as the increased difficulties in accessing property rights, personal belongings, getting documents from courts, and filing complaints in the aftermath of the 2023 February earthquakes.

Figure 1. "If applicable to your situation, what structural challenges or uncertainties do you face with the legal status that you currently hold?" - Multiple answers - Conversation 1 (March-April 2023) and conversation 2 (June-July 2023)



²⁰ Rents rose 47 percentage points in Gaziantep Province and 25 percentage points in Hatay Province between February and April 2023, see: <https://reliefweb.int/report/turkiye/turkiye-2023-earthquakes-situation-report-no-16-27-april-2023-entr>

BOX 1: Structural challenges: breakdown by education level

Breakdown of the data by level of education highlights that, during the first conversation in March-April 2023, respondents holding a Bachelor's degree (85%, n=46) or secondary education (68%, n=135) as the highest completed level of education reported a relatively higher level of fear of deportation compared to those with primary education (54%, n=70). This trend was also observed in other challenges, such as limited mobility, obtaining attested certificates, acquiring a work permit, and fear of arrest and detention, and was confirmed in the second conversation held in June-July 2023.

Another notable finding is that, despite the overall rise in concern related to reporting rights violations, only 14% (n=93) of individuals with a primary educational background reported it in the second conversation, compared to 30% (n=183) of people with secondary education and 33% (n=86) of people with a Bachelor's degree.

These findings may reflect that individuals with higher educational levels may exhibit a greater awareness of and engagement in current political and legal developments, such as deportation and the associated risks. Along with their relatively active participation in the formal labour market and high aspirations regarding work, this may contribute to them facing more issues related to mobility, certification, permits, and fear of being deported. Finally, it is worth noting that individuals with lower educational levels may have less awareness of their rights, leading them to perceive fewer challenges in reporting violations to accessible authorities.

During both the first and second conversation, male respondents expressed higher levels of concern regarding the fear of deportation (68% and 83%, respectively) as well as restricted mobility (61% and 69%), compared to female respondents (63% and 61%, and 44% and 48%, respectively). Disaggregating the data for gender also reveals a noteworthy shift in the fear of deportation, which was primarily observed amongst males. In March-April 2023, 68% (n=182) of male respondents expressed this fear as a structural challenge, but by June-July 2023, this figure had considerably increased to 83% (n=321).

It is also worth highlighting that while in March-April 2023 roughly a quarter of both males and females highlighted obtaining a work permit as a challenge, this issue became more notable amongst male respondents (31%) compared to their female counterparts (17%) in June-July 2023. This shift may indicate a growing financial burden, often placed on men due to the societal gender roles, which requires them to shoulder these responsibilities.

To elaborate on gender differences, the second conversation (June-July 2023) asked all female respondents about their perception of challenges specifically related to being a woman. Out of the valid responses (n=134), most female respondents (59%) stated they don't think there is a difference between men and women. Notably, some female respondents also reported to be better-off than men, as men are expected to work while they cannot find a job, or they face issues regarding being forced to return to Syria more easily.

A group of 34% (n= 134) of female respondents, however, did report to face specific issues related to their gender. Most importantly, issues in accessing the labour market were highlighted, primarily due to caregiving responsibilities or discriminative perspectives in Turkish society. Additionally, some respondents also brought attention to the problem of harassment and violence against women, as well as the challenges surrounding seeking or asking for support.

The same question on challenges specifically related to their gender was asked to male respondents. In contrast to female respondents, a considerable group of male respondents (roughly 56%, n=288) reported differences in legal challenges faced by men rather than by women. Amongst those that provided a more elaborative explanation on why these challenges differ (n=43), the following themes were found:

- Males' responsibilities and societal expectations related to livelihoods and work;
- More checkpoints and interrogation by authorities;
- Existing support for women.

The finding that most female respondents perceive no differences between men and women when it comes to legal challenges, might be well explained by their position in society. Although Syrian women in Türkiye may have experienced improvements in civil rights compared to their situation in their home country²¹, their limited participation in various aspects of society, particularly the labour market²², might be a reason why they do not face challenges that men are facing. Travelling for work, obtaining a work permit and getting the right certificate are therefore challenges more frequently encountered by men.

4.2. Fears of losing legal documentation

4.2.1. General findings

In the first conversation in March-April 2023, respondents with Temporary Identification Cards or residency permits were asked about their concerns regarding the potential cancellation of their legal documents. The findings revealed that out of the respondents surveyed (n=347), a considerable majority of **72% expressed fear of losing their legal documentation**. Among this group, a substantial number (77%, n=248) reported being extremely worried.

In the second conversation in June-July 2023, the respondents who indicated to have such fears were asked to indicate the reasons behind it. **The largest groups indicated an increase in hate speech online (46%, n=135) and discrimination against refugees in the Turkish host community (45%) as main reasons**. Important to note is that the latter is especially reported by men (49%, n=84) compared to women (34%, n=44).

²¹ See p. 16, https://huksam.hacettepe.edu.tr/English/suriyedenturkiyeye_ENG210519.pdf

²² In 2020, the labour force participation of Syrian women (aged 15-65) was 18.6 percent compared with 66.9 percent of men, see https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---europe/---ro-geneva/---ilo-ankara/documents/publication/wcms_831509.pdf

Disaggregation by region shows that considerably more people in the Marmara Region (66%, n=129) report an increase in hate speech, compared to the South-eastern Anatolia Region (41%, n=145) or the Mediterranean Region (32%, n=108). Moreover, discrimination in the Turkish host community seems more of a concern in the South-eastern Anatolia Region (57%), when compared to the other two regions (around 43%).

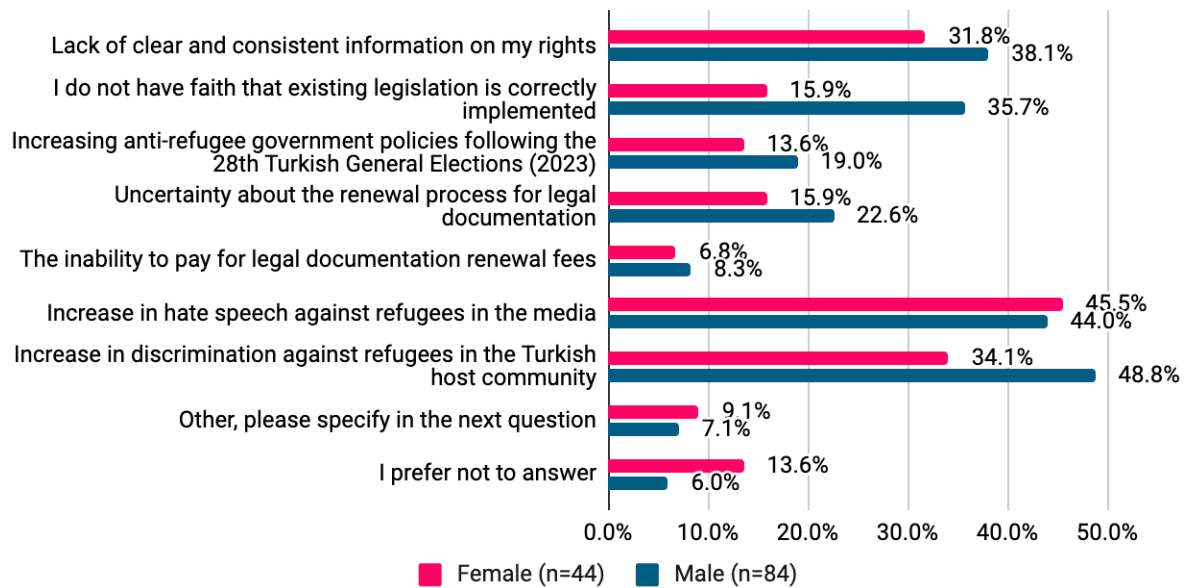
Interestingly, also more than one-third of the respondents in the Marmara Region mentioned that certain government policies following the 2023 Turkish General Elections are contributing to their fear of losing documentation, while only 15% of respondents in the South-eastern Anatolia Region and 8% of respondents in the Mediterranean Region have reported this. This discrepancy could be attributed to the rise in deportations and raids, particularly in Istanbul.²³ Additionally, the exemption of Syrian individuals residing in Istanbul from the 60-day waiver on a pre-existing prohibition to travel outside their province of residence may have also influenced these perceptions.

In addition to hate speech and discrimination, a considerable group of respondents also mentioned **a lack of clear and consistent information on their rights (36%, n=135) and having faith in existing legislation being correctly implemented (30%)** as contributing to their fear of losing documentation.

Gender analysis reveals the lack of faith in the correct implementation of legislation is more of a concern to men (36%, n=84) than to women (16%, n=44). Thus, while for both male and female respondents limited legal awareness seems to influence their fear, male respondents are particularly fearful of incorrect implementation of the law.

²³ See: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/10/24/turkey-hundreds-refugees-deported-syria>

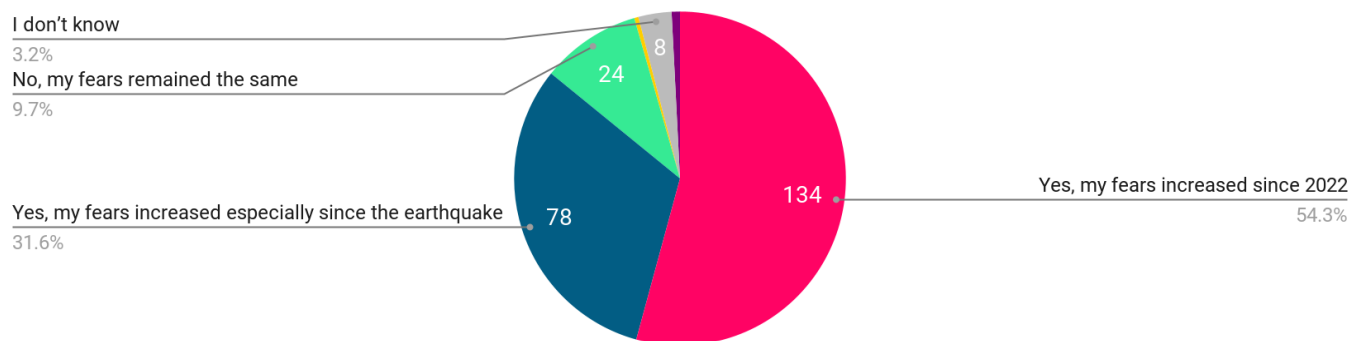
Figure 2. "Could you indicate why you have fear of losing your legal documentation?" - all respondents (n=128)



4.2.2. Evolution of fears 2022- 2023

In the first conversation (March- April 2023), all respondents were asked whether their fears of losing legal documentation had changed since the beginning of 2022. A majority of **54% (n=247)** reported that their fears of losing their legal documentation increased since 2022, followed by **32% (n=247)** who said their fears had increased since the earthquakes of February 2023. 10% mentioned that their fears remained the same, and only 1 respondent indicated that their fears got reduced.

Figure 3. "Did this fear change (increase/decrease) since the beginning of last year (2022)?" - all respondents (n=247)



As a follow-up question, those who also participated in the second conversation (June-July 2023) were asked to describe how and why their fear of losing legal documentation had increased since the beginning of 2022. Valid open-ended answers (n=78) highlighted three main reasons, outlined below in order of significance:

The lack of respect for refugees' rights and increased restrictions

"The high prevalence of hate speech, incitement, and demands for the deportation of Syrian individuals back to Syria, despite the current circumstances and lack of security and safety in Syria, is evident in official government statements." - Male, 36 - 45, Mersin

"Essentially, the document granted by the government is based on temporary protection, which means it can be revoked at any time, leaving individuals without protection." - Male, 36 - 45, Istanbul

"Due to current laws, temporary protection becomes useless in many cases. For instance, refugees are now being forcibly sent to deportation centres and forced to stay there for a year." - Female, 46 - 55, Istanbul

Negative political climate following the 2023 February earthquakes and the May 2023 election period

"Due to the high frequency of racist speeches from Turkish opposition politicians and their use of refugees in papers and electoral advertising, the perception of refugees has been negatively affected over time." - Male, 26 - 35, Hatay

"The start of the election phase was taken advantage of by the opposition to denounce the presence of refugees as a burden, as well as the introduction of a new approach by the international community in dealing with the Syrian issue, including acknowledging the existence of the Syrian regime (normalisation)." - Female, 46 - 55, Mersin

The impact of international relations and interests/ lack of international protection

"International policy towards the Syrian issue is unclear due to conflicting international interests. And the Syrian people in general no longer seem important to anyone... We have become tools for local and international issues." - Male, 56 - 65, Istanbul

"The host countries have been using refugees as bargaining cards in their internal political struggles from 2020 to the present day. Thousands of Syrians residing in Türkiye have been illegally deported. They are subject to violations of their international protection status, due to the hate speech and racist escalation in some segments of society." - Male, 26 - 35, Istanbul

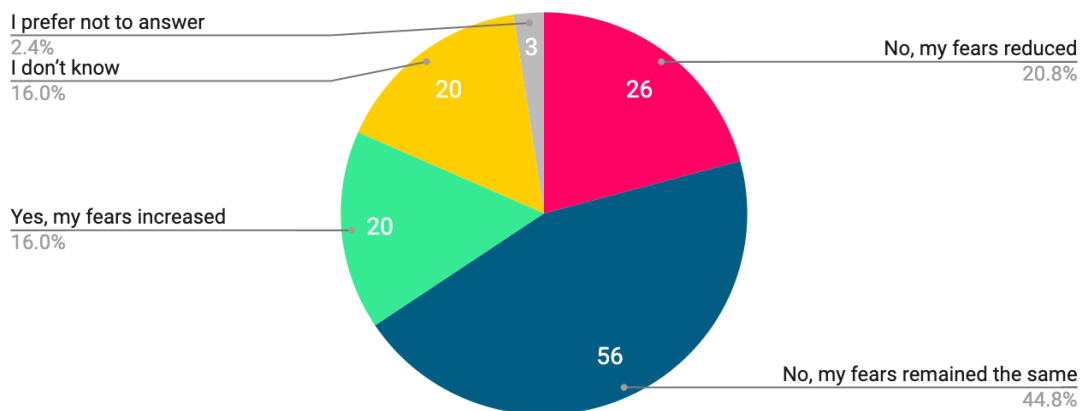
4.2.3. Evolution of fears after 2023 General Elections

Respondents who, in the first conversation in March- April 2023, indicated a fear of losing their legal documentation were also specifically asked, in the second conversation in June-July 2023, whether the results of the May 2023 General Elections had had any influence on their fears.

The largest share of respondents (45%, n=125) indicated that their fears remained the same, however, this was indicated considerably more by men (51%, n=79) than women (28%, n=39). For women, answers were more equally spread across the different answer options.

Overall, a considerable group of 21% reported that their fears decreased since the outcome of the elections. This can be explained by the fact that the Turkish opposition bloc, known for its more extreme anti-refugee rhetoric and plans for deportation, did not win the elections. A total group of 16% indicated that their fears increased and 16% did not know.

Figure 4. "Are there any changes in your fear of losing legal documentation following the results of the 28th Turkish General Elections (2023)?" - all respondents (n=112)



Respondents who indicated that their fears increased after the May 2023 General Elections were asked to describe how and why this happened. Similar to the previous questions, anti-refugee rhetoric and related political promises on forced return and normalisation with the Syrian government were mentioned most frequently:

"There are severe pressures that are exerted against Syrians, and the government has made actual promises to deport a large number of Syrians, resulting in pressure and instability among the Syrian population." - Male, 18 - 25, Istanbul

"The rapprochement between Türkiye and the Syrian regime, along with all the conversations held by the Turkish government, revolve around the idea of returning Syrians to their country. However, this is NOT what I want, because the Syrian regime will seek revenge upon my return and they will not adhere to any agreements made." - Male, 26 -35, Gaziantep

“In his speech, the President of the Turkish Republic made a statement indicating that one million Syrian refugees would be voluntarily returned to their country within two years. But if the ruling party states it will return a million refugees, how will the return be voluntary?” - Male, 26 -35, Istanbul

“The official speech was about the deportation of refugees to Syria and it has intensified under the name of ‘voluntary’ return, but in reality, it constitutes forced deportation. This poses a threat to the lives of many people, considering the lack of the essentials for a decent life in Syria. Such deportations may push many individuals below the poverty line due to the absence of suitable job opportunities in Syria.” - Female, 36 - 45, Bilecik

4.3. Feelings of safety

4.3.1. Increased feelings of unsafety

In the first conversation, held five to seven weeks *before* the 2023 General Elections in May, respondents were asked to what extent their legal status makes them feel generally safe from being forced to leave Türkiye, sudden loss of state protection, or other things such as house eviction. **A combined total of 44% (n=375) only feels somewhat, very little, or not generally safe, while 42% of respondents reported to generally feel safe.**

In addition, in the second conversation (held four to six weeks *after* the May 2023 elections) a similar question was posed to see whether contextual changes have influenced people’s perceptions on feelings of safety.²⁴ **In contrast to findings of the first conversation (March-April 2023), the largest share of respondents (62%, n=667) reported to not or only somehow feel safe. 26% indicated to feel safe, which is a significant reduction compared to 42% in conversation in March.**

The increase in feelings of unsafety can be explained by a number of contextual factors, including the escalating anti-refugee sentiment across the country and globally, along with President Erdogan’s promises to return Syrian refugees²⁵, further increase in the opposition’s anti-Syrian discourse in the run-up and during the two presidential election rounds²⁶, as well as the plans on normalisation with Syrian president Bashar al-Assad after Erdogan’s win.²⁷

²⁴ It is important to note that this question, posed in June 2023 as part of the second conversation, was more focused on general feelings of safety (in relation to politics, society, and legal protection), rather than formulated specifically related to respondents’ legal status.

²⁵ See: <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/Erdoans-third-term-Strengthening-EU-support-for-Syrian-refugees-in~517778>

²⁶ See: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/18/turkeys-kilicdaroglu-promises-to-kick-out-refugees-post-election>

²⁷ See: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/8/future-unknown-but-syrians-in-turkey-relieved-after-erdogan-win>

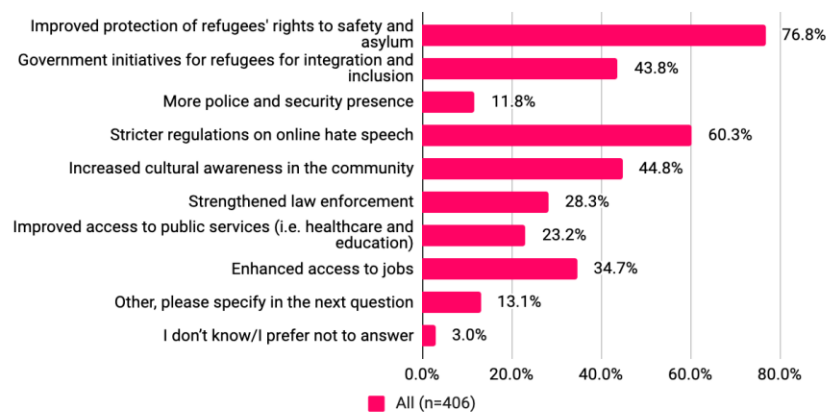
4.3.2. Ways to improve feelings of safety

To come up with solutions and to support Syrian individuals in getting a greater sense of safety, respondents who expressed feeling either unsafe or only somewhat safe were further asked, in the June-July 2023 conversation: “What would make you feel more secure while living with the Turkish host community?”

The findings show that a considerable majority (77%, n=406) feels that improved protection of their rights to safety and asylum would make them more secure while living with the Turkish host community. This was closely followed by imposing stricter regulations on online hate speech (60%), an intervention that was more reported by males (66% = n=245), than by females (49%, n=100).

Respondents additionally mentioned the need for government initiatives for refugee integration and inclusion (44%) and increased cultural awareness in the host community (45%). Only 12% reported the presence of more police and security, while 28% indicated the need for strengthened law enforcement. This seems to highlight how, from the perspective of Syrian individuals, the focus should be rather on preventative, long-term solutions of integration and awareness, rather than hard, often top-down, security interventions that only treat the symptoms.

Figure 5. “What would make you feel more secure while living with the Turkish host community?” - Multiple answers - all respondents (n=406)



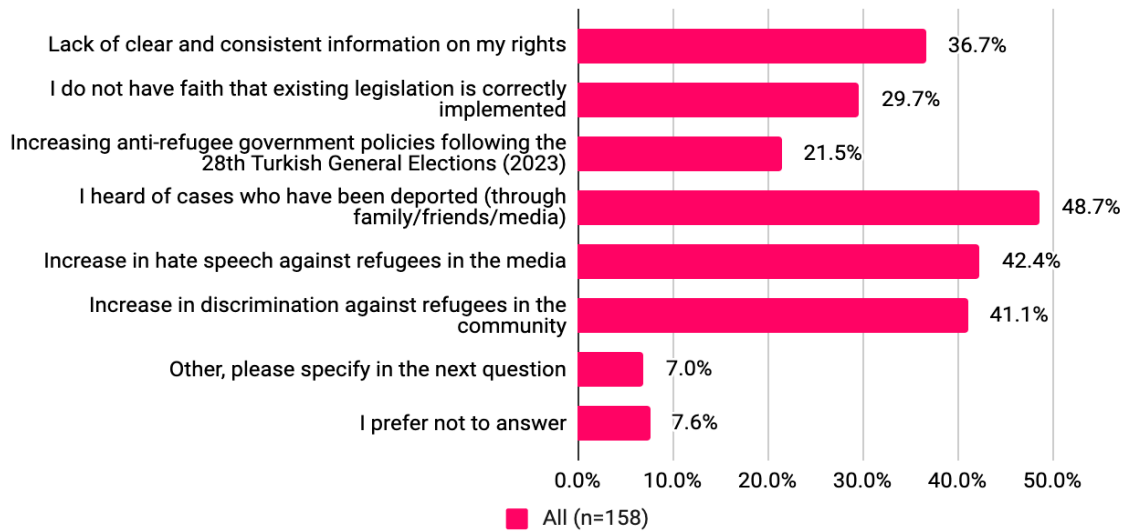
Notably, when examining the responses based on region, a larger proportion of respondents in the Marmara Region (44%, n=115) expressed the need for law enforcement, in contrast to the other two regions (22% and 27%, respectively).

4.4. Deportation and forced returns

As previously mentioned, in the first conversation in March-April 2023 66% (n=305) of participants identified the fear of forced return or deportation to Syria as a notable structural challenge, among other concerns. Similarly, in the second conversation held three months later, 75% of respondents (n=688) identified this as a structural challenge.

In the second conversation, those who indicated fear of deportation were asked what factors are contributing to this fear, using a multiple answer format. The findings highlight how Syrian respondents have heard of cases of deportation (49%, n=158); have experienced an increase in hate speech against refugees in the media (42%) or an increase in discrimination in the Turkish host community (41%); or indicated a lack of access to clear and consistent information (37%).

Figure 6. "Which of these factors are present in your situation and contribute to this fear of deportation?" - all respondents (n=152)

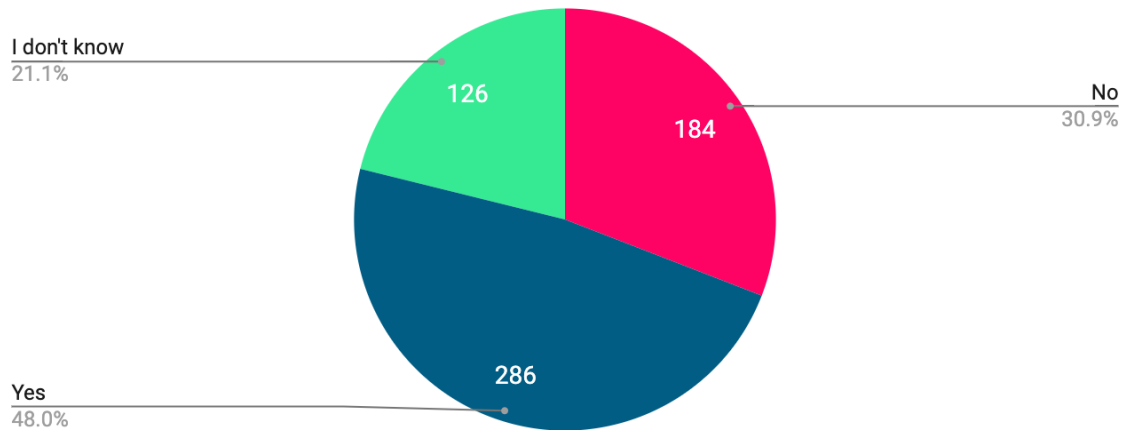


Interestingly, relatively more males reported that their fear of deportation is very much impacted by hate speech in the media (47%) and discrimination in the community (47%), compared to female respondents (30% and 32%, respectively). Similar to this, a considerable group of male respondents (36%, n=99) mentioned that their lack of faith in the implementation of existing legislation is impacting their fear of being deported, compared to females (19%, n=52).

In addition to assessing respondents' *fear* of deportation in the first conversation, the second conversation aimed to determine whether they also perceive a *high risk* of being deported. Overall, **the largest share of respondents (48%, n=596) reported they perceive a high risk of being deported and/or forced to return to Syria**, with more male respondents reporting this (52%, n=345) than female respondents (42%, n=142).

Almost one-third of overall respondents reported they do not perceive such risk, as well as one-fifth of respondents who mentioned they do not know whether this risk exists. The latter is more indicated by women (30%) than by men (19%), as well as by those with only primary education (33%, n=101) rather than secondary education (18%, n=200) or a Bachelor's degree (20%, n=92).

Figure 7. - "Do you believe there is a high risk of being deported and/or forced to return to Syria?" - all respondents (n=596), excluding 'I prefer not to answer'



To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing this perceived risk, participants were asked to specify the time frame during which they believed this risk had either decreased or increased. **Among those who perceived a high risk, 43% (n=286) mentioned that the risk had significantly increased over the past five years. Additionally, 23% noted that the risk had considerably increased since 2022, 19% stated it had risen since the 2023 General Elections, and 14% linked the increase to the 2023 February earthquakes.**

Amongst those who reported there was not a high risk of being deported/and or forced to return to Syria, 61% (n=184) initially believed there was a high risk, but no longer thinks this is the case after the 2023 General Elections. The remaining 39% simply indicated that there was no risk.

4.5. Legal support and awareness

4.5.1. General findings

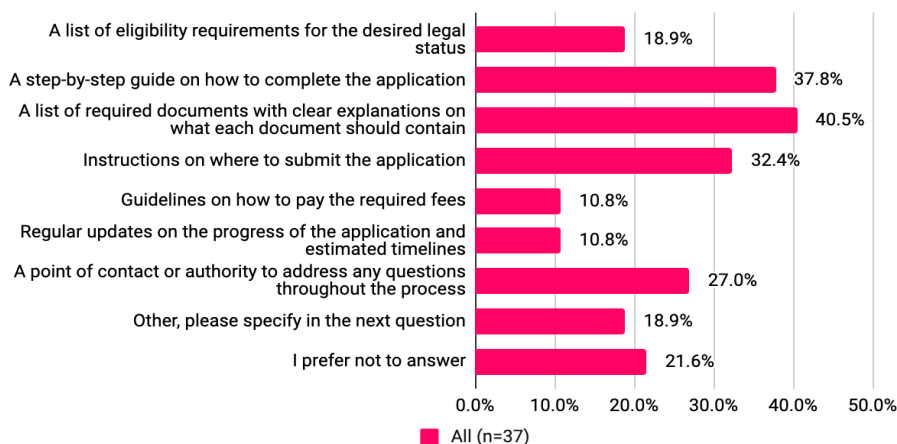
When being asked, during the first conversation (March-April 2023), whether they were facing any barriers in applying for the legal status or documents they desired, 38% (n=199) of the respondents indicated that it is not clear for them how to apply.

To better understand their need for support, in the second conversation (June- July 2023) these respondents were asked what would help them in making the application process more clear. **The largest group (44%, n=37) reported that a list of required documents with clear explanations on what each legal document should contain would help them, followed by a step-by-step guide on how to complete the application (38%), and instructions on where to submit the application (32%).**

Considerable groups also indicated a point of contact or authority to address any questions throughout the process (27%) or a list of eligibility requirements for the desired status (19%) to be

helpful. Only a smaller percentage of respondents indicated the need for guidelines on how to pay the required fees (11%) and regular updates on the progress and timelines (11%).

Figure 8. "What would help you in making the application procedure for your desired status more clear?" - Multiple answers - all respondents (n=37)



4.5.2.

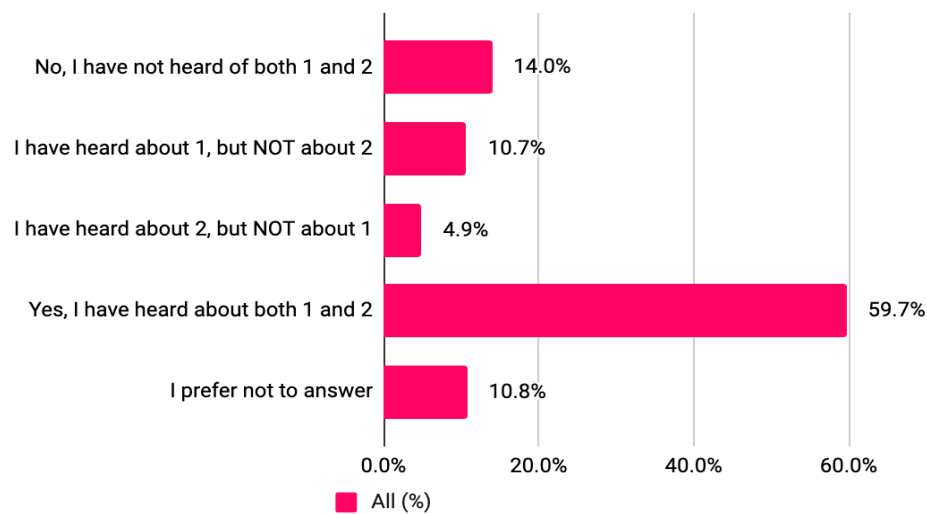
Awareness of post-earthquake waivers

To better understand if community members know about their own rights, especially the ones following the 2023 February earthquakes, respondents were also asked whether they had heard about the following two waivers:

- The 60-day exemption to ask for prior permission before travelling to another province, and/or;
- The 6-months period to go back to Syria, while still having Kimlik in Türkiye and being allowed to come back to Türkiye.

60% of respondents (n=633) indicated to have heard about both of these waivers and an additional 16% said they heard only about one of these waivers. Disaggregation by level of education shows that more people with a Bachelor's degree (76%, n=99) than people with secondary education (66%, n=211) or primary education (61%, n=110) have heard about either one or both waivers.

Figure 9. "We were wondering if you have heard about the following post-earthquake procedures/ waivers that the Turkish government specifically implemented following the 6 February earthquakes. Please indicate what is applicable to you." - all respondents (n=637)



Regional analysis additionally highlights the relatively low number of people residing in the Marmara Region who reported being aware of both waivers (53%, n=165), compared to those in the Mediterranean (71%, n=121) or South-eastern Anatolia Region (64%, n=169). This difference can be attributed to the fact that the first waiver was exclusively provided to Syrian refugees living in the five worst-hit provinces of Kahramanmaraş, Hatay, Gaziantep, Adıyaman, and Malatya.

When examining the responses of individuals in the Marmara Region, they reported not being aware of both waivers (18%), preferring not to answer (13%), or only knowing about the 60-day exemption (13%) more compared to being informed about the 6-month period to return to Syria (3%). This particularly underlines respondents' lack of knowledge regarding the second waiver, which allows travel back to Syria and return to Türkiye and which was also applicable to them.

As a follow-up question to those indicating they had heard about at least one of these post-earthquake measures, respondents were asked whether they think they have enough information about these waivers to fully understand what they entail and to make decisions accordingly.

Overall, 46% (n= 478) mentioned having sufficient information to fully understand what the waivers entail. 28 % of respondents reported to not have sufficient information, while 23% did not know. Interestingly, whereas 51% (n=285) of male respondents indicated they have enough information, only 35% (n=114) of female respondents reported this. A considerable group of female respondents mentioned they do not know if they have enough information (31%).

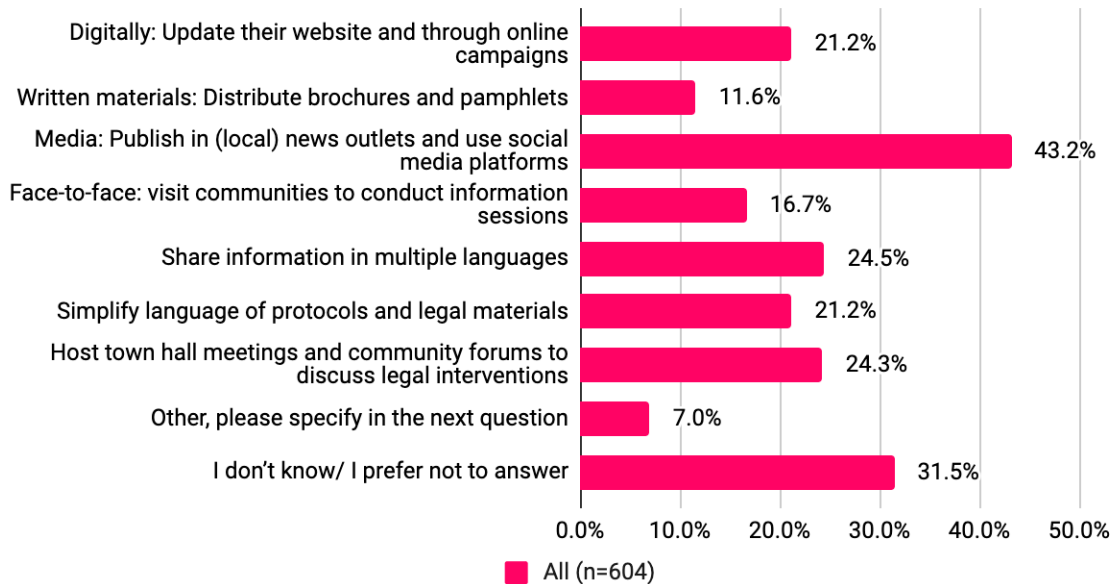
Disaggregation by age also shows that less people aged 46 - 55 (32%, n=50) perceived to have enough information, compared to younger age groups (around 46%). Significant groups of people aged 46-55 did not know (38%) or indicated they did not have access to enough information (30%).

4.5.3. Ways to improve legal awareness

In a separate question, respondents were also asked how the Turkish government could ensure that there is more awareness about such procedures as well as about refugees' rights in general, using a multiple answer format.

The largest share of respondents (43%, n=604) reported that the government should use the media by publishing in (local) news outlets and using social media platforms. This was followed by one-third that did not know or preferred not to answer this question, as well as considerable groups who suggested sharing information in multiple languages, hosting town-hall meetings, simplifying language of protocols, and updating government websites and through online campaigns.

Figure 10. "How could the government ensure more awareness about such procedures/ waivers and refugees' rights in general?"- multiple answers - all respondents (n=604)



4.6. Prospects for the future

4.6.1. Moving to the EU

In the first conversation (March- April 2023) respondents were asked about their plans for the upcoming six months. **The largest share of respondents (46%, n=358) reported they plan to move to an EU country through legal means (i.e. UN resettlement program or a student visa), followed by one-fifth of respondents who plan to stay in Türkiye. Only 2% indicated they plan to return to Syria.** Disaggregation by gender shows that there are relatively more men who reported the option of moving to an EU country through a legal pathway (51%, n=200), compared to women (37%, n=139). In turn, relatively more women reported to plan to stay in Türkiye (28%), compared to men (19%).

In the second conversation held in June-July 2023, respondents were also asked whether their intentions to move from or stay in Türkiye changed following the results of the 2023 General Elections. **The majority of 53% (n=286) reported their plans stayed the same, followed by 29% that indicated they did not know.** Only 12% indicated that their plans have changed.

When asked how they changed, 46% of those respondents (n=35) highlighted that they are now planning to move to a third country, while 40% are planning to stay in Türkiye. Hence, there is no clear pattern in how the results of the 2023 General Elections have affected the future plans of Syrian individuals in Türkiye.

Furthermore, in the second conversation respondents who indicated they plan to move to a third country were asked to outline their main reasons for planning to move. Valid open-ended answers (n=162) were mostly covering the following themes, in order of significance:

- Lack of legal protection, restrictions, and fear of deportation (26%)

"The main reason is that I do not feel stable in Türkiye and that the temporary protection that I hold cannot protect me and might cause me to be deported to Syria. Note that I have an injury and I'm in need of treatment. I do not want to return to Syria in the presence of the current Syrian regime." - Male, 36 - 45, Gaziantep

"I feel a sense of instability and fear for my family and children because when I leave for work there is no guarantee that I will return home safely, even though I have legal documentation". - Male, 36 - 45, Istanbul

"The most important reason is the restriction of our movement within Turkish territory, which has a negative impact on our psychological well-being." - Female, 46 - 55, Ankara

- Desire for a better future and being recognized as a human being (24%)

"I want to go to the Netherlands to work. I dream of living in a country that gives me human rights." - Male, 18 - 25, Gaziantep

"Türkiye does not consider the Syrians as refugees, but only for temporary protection. We want our rights to be recognised and addressed as refugees." - Male, 18 - 25, Hatay

- Discrimination, racism, and social integration issues (21%)

"There is an absence of a future for me and my family. We have fear of racists. For example, my 11-year-old girl left school because of the hate speech from her teacher." - Male, 36 - 45, Şanlıurfa

- Economic difficulties and lack of stability (18%)

"After the earthquake, most people are unemployed and without a place to live." - Male, 56 - 65, Hatay

"Due to the urgent need for resources, there is no time to vacate rental housing of which the prices have risen like crazy." - Female, 46 - 55, Şanlıurfa

"Because of the living situation and the lack of opportunities for us in general. Also, when work opportunities are available, no full wages are provided." - Male, 36 - 45, Karaman

- Education and healthcare needs, often for children (12%)

"Because I have a three-year-old girl in need of surgical action and a cochlear cultivation in the head." - Male, 36 - 45, Balıkesir

"Fear of the future of my children and the follow-up of their studies and their education." - Female, 46 - 55, Konya

4.6.2. Seeking Turkish citizenship

As previously mentioned, in the first conversation (March-April 2023) 40% (n=372) of respondents indicated a desire to seek Turkish citizenship. In the second conversation (June-July 2023), respondents who aspired to obtain Turkish citizenship were asked how they thought this would be beneficial to their situation. The valid responses (n=73) revolved around several themes that focused on improved rights and equal opportunities, outlined below in order of significance:

- Freedom of movement and legal travel to other destinations

"Owning a Turkish passport opens the doors for legal immigration." - Male, 26 - 35, Ankara

"I will possess official papers acknowledging my status as a citizen, enabling me to foster hope and make plans for a better future, rather than being seen solely as a refugee without the freedom to even move from my current location." - Female, 36 - 45, Istanbul

- Better future for themselves and their families, including improved education and healthcare for their children

"For the sake of my children, my daughters, who can go to schools and universities." - Female, 46 -55, Hatay

"It means I can secure a suitable income as well as give my children the possibility to study. In Türkiye, if you have graduated from the university you have a greater chance of employment, I want to give this to them." - Male, 56 -65, Şanlıurfa

- Better access to job opportunities

"Obtaining Turkish nationality would provide stability for my family, particularly in terms of work it would offer more stability." - Male, 36 -45, Şanlıurfa

"There are numerous job opportunities where employers do not accept people who don't have Turkish citizenship, only those who do. Additionally, having equal standing before the law in case of any conflicts or disputes with others is crucial and possible with Turkish citizenship." - Male, 36 -45, Istanbul

- Security and stability

"I will not be afraid of deportation and I will have a better opportunity to get a job." - Male, 36 - 45, Gaziantep

"Turkish nationality significantly contributes and improves the legal status, in terms of stability and eliminating the fear of deportation. It also opens up various employment opportunities." - Female, 18 - 25, Gaziantep

4.7. Final remarks

As a final question, respondents were also asked whether they had any final remarks. Besides reiterating their strong desire to obtain either Turkish citizenship or resettle to a third country, these remarks expressed significant criticism and frustration regarding the legal processes and documentation, concerns about racism and discrimination, and calls for better integration and treatment.

- Frustrations regarding legal processes and documentation

"Syrians applying for Turkish citizenship experience long processing times, sometimes up to 3 years or more, which hinders us from accessing work and various facilities." - no demographic data

"Please improve the legal conditions and abolish the regulations that restrict us from travelling between regions. Facilitate obtaining appointments from the Immigration Administration." - no demographic data

"I have been living in this country for 10 years, and there is nothing that protects me from deportation, despite not having committed any crime or faced any issues." - no demographic data

- Racism, discrimination, and calls for better integration

"I would work towards creating a safe environment for integration and putting an end to racism, holding racists accountable." - Male, 26 - 35, Istanbul

"I hope to facilitate the naturalisation of a significant number of Syrians, especially those who are employed and can contribute to the benefit of Türkiye and its people." - Male, 56 - 65, Ankara

"I hope racism against Syrians will be addressed and their integration into Turkish society will be promoted, aiming to harness their skills and expertise to bolster and enhance the Turkish economy." - Female, 36 - 45, Istanbul

- Appeals for international organisations and human rights bodies²⁸

"Since I came to Türkiye, I have not received any financial or in-kind assistance from any organisation despite my financial situation. I also didn't get protection against racism towards my nationality". - Female, 26 - 35, Şanlıurfa

"Human rights and humanitarian organisations, especially the United Nations, must pay attention and move seriously when we ask them for legal assistance. Frankly, they do not work seriously. This talk is based on a personal experience with them." - Female, 46 - 55, Istanbul

"I hope that humanitarian organisations will stand alongside those in need of working more on the ground. This work needs support, cooperation and more communication with the refugees". - no demographic data

"The role of UNHCR should improve: why is it not possible to register as a refugee through this organisation in Turkey, why is it not possible to register anywhere except through the Turkish government?" - Male, 26 - 35, Istanbul

²⁸ To receive financial assistance from the Turkish Red Crescent, refugees need to meet certain criteria, such as being registered with the Turkish authorities and having their temporary protection status recognized. Additionally, the assistance provided by the Red Crescent is generally targeted at the most vulnerable refugees, such as those living in camps or facing particular hardships. The criteria and procedures for receiving assistance may vary depending on the type of assistance and the location of the refugee. In addition to the Turkish Red Crescent cash assistance programme, there are numerous international and local CSOs providing cash assistance, often through cash vouchers redeemable at grocery shops.