



Turkey: active labour market policies for Syrian refugees are also supporting the local population affected by the refugee influx

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Various internationally-funded programmes for Syrian refugees have been operational mainly after 2017. These aim to foster employment through micro-loans, education, training and job counselling, as well as registration and screening services. Some of the programmes are also open to Turkish nationals, and up to half their capacity is reserved for this group.

Description

There are 3.6 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR). One pressing issue is employment. According to a survey by the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD, 2017), 77% of respondents living outside the refugee camps have been looking for a job. Yet, the survey shows, the educational level is low among refugees and language is a barrier to finding jobs. The gender dimension also needs to be mentioned, as only 10% of women have an occupation. A law was enacted in 2016 to allow refugees to obtain formal work permits, but only 20,970 permits were issued in 2017, while an estimated 1.5 million Syrians are in informal employment (Del Carpio et al., 2018; Kirişçi et al., 2018).

Starting from 2017, a number of social assistance and vocational education programmes were launched for Syrian refugees, with support from international organisations and institutions (especially the EU). Some of these programmes are of particular interest in that they provide benefits not only for refugees but also for the local population. They include the following three projects:

1) The “Employment Support Project for Syrians Under Temporary Protection and Host Communities”, which is run by the World Bank and the Turkey Employment Agency (İŞKUR). It has received financing from the EU (FRIT-

IPA) since June 2017. In addition to vocational and on-the-job training, language training and job search support, the project aims to put a long-term effective job training and placement programme in place. As is clear from the name of the programme, both refugees and the local population are expected to benefit.

2) The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) “Employment and Skills Development Project”, which is implemented by İŞKUR and is partially financed by the German “Kreditanstalt Für Wiederaufbau” (KfW). The project aims to improve İŞKUR’s capacity in provinces with a large Syrian population, and to provide education, job counselling, registration and screening services. It started in late 2017, and provides counselling to 3,500 refugees and 3,500 local people, as well as a registration and screening service for 4,500 individuals from each group. Furthermore, the Ministry of Industry and Technology and UNDP will use KfW funds to increase the capacity of the Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SME) Capability Centre in Ankara, and to establish new centres in two other provinces to help firms increase their productivity and export potential. This is expected to provide employment to 2,000 refugees and local people.

3) The “Job Creation and Entrepreneurship Opportunities Project”, which is led by the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services and supported by the International

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Organisation for Migration and International Labour Organisation. The project aims to create jobs and encourage entrepreneurship by providing vocational education and support to SMEs. It is funded by the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis. It started in May 2018 and is expected to last for two years. As a part of the SME phase, 50 firms will be supported with a year's consulting services, business analysis, and micro credits up to 50,000 TL (€8,834, at the annual average exchange rate of 5.66 TL/€).

Outlook & commentary

A major issue with social assistance and employment support to the Syrian population has been the local response to these programmes. With consistent unemployment above 10% and relative poverty at around 20%, Turkey has a problematic social assistance system, and employment services are not adequate (Buğra and Candaş, 2011). In this situation, assistance to Syrian refugees, often falsely reported in social media, has resulted in outcry (International Crisis Group, 2018).

Alp (2018) provides examples from local media outlets in which the amount of social assistance to Syrians is greatly exaggerated, and is compared to the minimum wage or to social assistance for other groups such as veterans. Also cited are news reports criticising access by Syrians to free healthcare, university and employment. The above-mentioned programmes/ projects appear to have addressed this problem by providing assistance not only to Syrian refugees but also to the local population.

Another reason to provide assistance to the local population is that, in regions with a high influx of refugees, local people have to compete with refugees for employment, especially informal jobs, and assistance (Ceritoğlu et al., 2017). On the other hand, around 10,000 businesses have been set up by Syrians, creating job opportunities for approximately 100 thousand Turkish people (Sputnik, 2018). All being said, the number of potential beneficiaries is quite small compared to the number of refugees. However, capacity building is likely to have ongoing effects on the employment of both Syrians and local people.

Further reading

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