



UPINION & 11.11.11

## **Syrian Refugees in Türkiye** ***One Year After the Earthquakes***

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February 2024

# 1. Introduction

This policy brief by 11.11.11 and Upinion presents the results of two online conversations conducted with Syrian refugees in Türkiye, in October 2023 and January 2024. It aims to highlight key concerns and needs that Syrians in Türkiye are dealing with, one year after the devastating earthquakes that struck Southern Türkiye and Northern Syria on 6 February 2023:

- In the **first conversation**, held from 17 October till 26 October 2023, the research sample consisted of 494 Syrian nationals who started the conversation, and 419 respondents who completed it. The conversation revolved around Syrian individuals' basic rights and perceptions on the support they need. The conversation specifically captured individuals' access to support services and aid and the challenges faced following the 2023 February earthquakes, in particular regarding food security and housing conditions. Additionally, individuals' experiences on (unequal) aid distribution, trust in aid actors, and satisfaction with receiving aid were discussed.
- In the **second conversation**, held between 11 January and 1 February 2024, 273 Syrian individuals living in Türkiye responded to questions about their situation nearly one year after the February 2023 earthquakes.

After outlining the methodological choices that underpin the data collection efforts in Türkiye, the policy brief presents the resulting key findings, which are centered around five key topics: 1) access to support services, 2) main challenges experienced by Syrian refugees in the past twelve months, 3) issues around unequal distribution in aid, 4) housing challenges in the aftermath of the earthquake and 5) level of appreciation towards the different actors providing aid in Türkiye.

The final section also provides a number of key recommendations for European and international policymakers.

## 2. Methodology

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 conversations<sup>1</sup> with communities, in the same way they connect with their friends and families, using messaging apps like Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp. Upinion uses a two-way approach that allows it to send tailored information to respondents about relevant services or initiatives in their area, thereby turning the conversation into an information exchange. The respondents join the panel by clicking on targeted advertisements on Facebook, after which they received an explanation of the project to which they need to consent, and are taken to a private chat mode outside the reach of Facebook, so that their privacy is ensured.<sup>2</sup> Answers are immediately deleted from respondents' phones and no party other than Upinion can collect the answers provided. It is essential to interpret the results while considering the sample characteristics unique to different conversations<sup>3</sup>:

- The research sample in the **first conversation** consisted of **494** Syrian nationals who started the conversation, and **419** respondents who completed it. The data collection took place from 17 October till 26 October 2023. Of those who provided their demographic information, **70%** (n=473) identified as male and **30%** identified as female, resulting in a male-to-female ratio of 1:0.42. The majority of the respondents (**62%**, n=479) were aged between 26 and 45, with smaller groups in the 18-25 (**14%**), 46-55 (**12%**), and 56-65 (**9%**) age ranges. Only 11 respondents were older than 65. Regarding respondents' areas of residency, individuals in this sample were living in the Southeastern Anatolia Region (**39%**, n=416), the Marmara Region (**31%**), the Mediterranean Region (**23%**), and the Central Anatolia Region (**7%**).
- The research sample in the **second conversation** consisted of 273 Syrian nationals. The data collection took place between 11 January and 1 February 2024. 26% of this group were females, 69% male, and the remaining 5% preferred not to share their gender. The largest share of respondents were between 26 and 45 years old (63%), while 10% of the sample was between 18 and 25 years old, 14% between 46 and 55, 9% between 56 and 65, and 3% above 65. Only 1% of respondents did not want to disclose their age. All respondents were Syrian, with differences in civil status, but with the majority enjoying the Temporary Protection (kimlek). The majority of respondents (86%) were living in the Marmara Region, the Mediterranean Region, and Southeastern Anatolia Region, regions that host large concentrations of Syrian refugees.

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<sup>1</sup> A conversation refers to an information exchange, in survey style, between Upinion and a panel of respondents.

<sup>2</sup> Upinion has the ISO/IEC 27001 Certification, which is the international best practice standard for Information Security Management Systems (ISMSs), and follows GDPR regulations.

<sup>3</sup> 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. Additionally, 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.

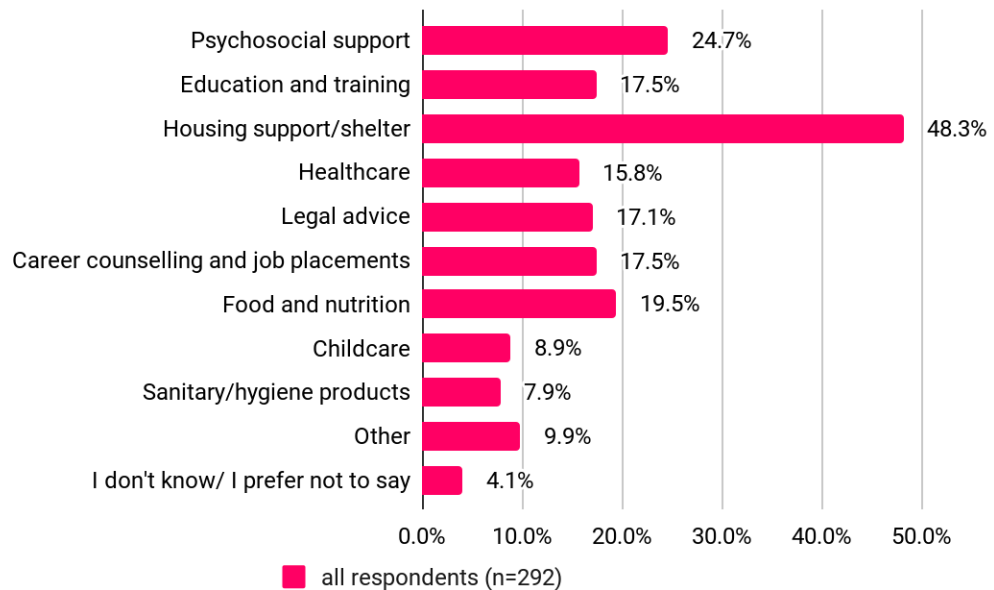
### 3. Key findings

#### 3.1. Access to support services

At the start of the first conversation (October 2023), community members were asked whether they feel like they have sufficient access to aid and support services. A large majority of **61%** (n=494) reported 'No'. Next to this, equal groups indicated they had sufficient access to aid and support services (**20%**) or they did not know or preferred not to answer this question (**18%**).

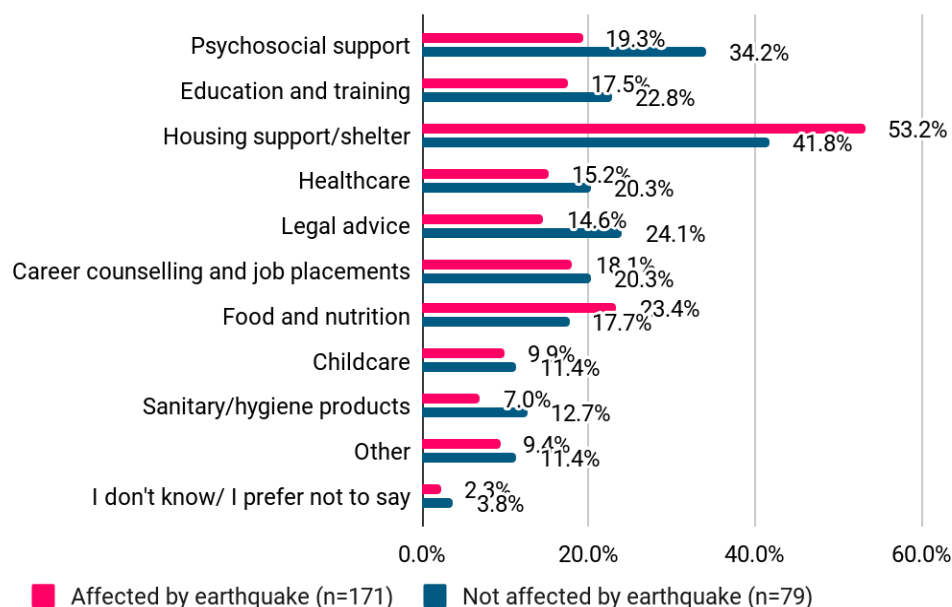
As a follow-up question, those who indicated that they lacked sufficient access to support services were asked what type of services and/or necessities they were in need of the most, using a multiple answer format. Almost half of the respondents (**48%**, n=292) reported they needed housing support or shelter. This was followed by almost a quarter (**24,7%**) of the respondents who mentioned being in need of psychosocial support, while a fifth (**19,5%**) expressed a need for more food and nutrition support.

Figure 1. "At this moment in time, for which of the following services and/or necessities do you need support the most?" - multiple answer - all respondents



There are considerable differences when examining the data between individuals who reported being directly affected by the 2023 earthquakes and those who were not affected. Individuals impacted by the earthquake events primarily need housing support or shelter, while those who were unaffected showed a relatively greater demand for psychosocial support and legal advice, in addition to housing support.

Figure 2. "At this moment in time, for which of the following services and/or necessities do you need support the most?" - multiple answer - affected and non-affected individuals



### BOX 1: Specific impact on children

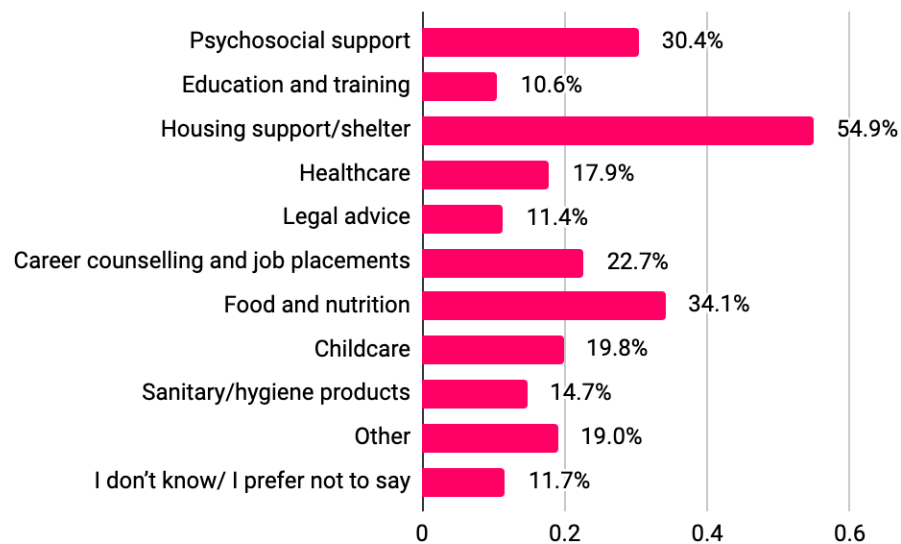
Syrian respondents who reported to be mostly in need of food and nutrition were then asked whether they were able to provide children, if they had any, with the appropriate nutrition they needed for their age. Concerningly, amongst those who have children, **50%** (n=46) mentioned that their children often do not have sufficient access to nutritious food. This was followed by a group of **40%** who mentioned they sometimes lacked access to this. Only **7%** said they had full access.

When asked, in a multiple-answer format, what would help in improving their children's sufficient access to nutritious food, the large majority of **73%** (n=40) reported financial assistance to their household, followed by **48%** that reported in-kind assistance (i.e. food vouchers or coupons). The reduction of food prices (**40%**) and employment opportunities to increase the household income (**35%**) were also reported by many.

Quite clearly, the focus is on having the direct financial ability to afford nutritious food, as other reasons such as the provision of childcare (**16%**), education on how to cook nutritious food with available resources (**11%**), improved access to community gardens (**3%**), or improved transportation access to grocery stores (**3%**) were mentioned less often.

When this question (“For which of the following services and/or necessities do you at this moment need support the most?”) was repeated during the follow-up conversation, in January 2024, similar answer patterns emerged. Housing support or shelter was again ranked as the main priority (55%) (n=273), followed by food and nutrition support (34%) and psychosocial support (30%). Apart from the drastic increase in respondents who indicated food and nutrition support as a top priority (from 19.5% in October 2023 to 34% three months later), the percentage of respondents who indicated childcare as a main priority more than doubled, from 9% in October 2023 to 20% in January 2024.

Figure 3. “For which of the following services and/or necessities do you at this moment need support the most?” - multiple answer - all respondents



When disaggregating the data by region, it should be noted that the need for psychosocial support is much higher in the Marmara region (43%) than in the Mediterranean Region and Southeastern Anatolia Region (around 24%). The need for housing support is the highest in the Mediterranean Region, compared to 51% and 48% respectively in the Marmara region and the Southeastern Anatolia Region.

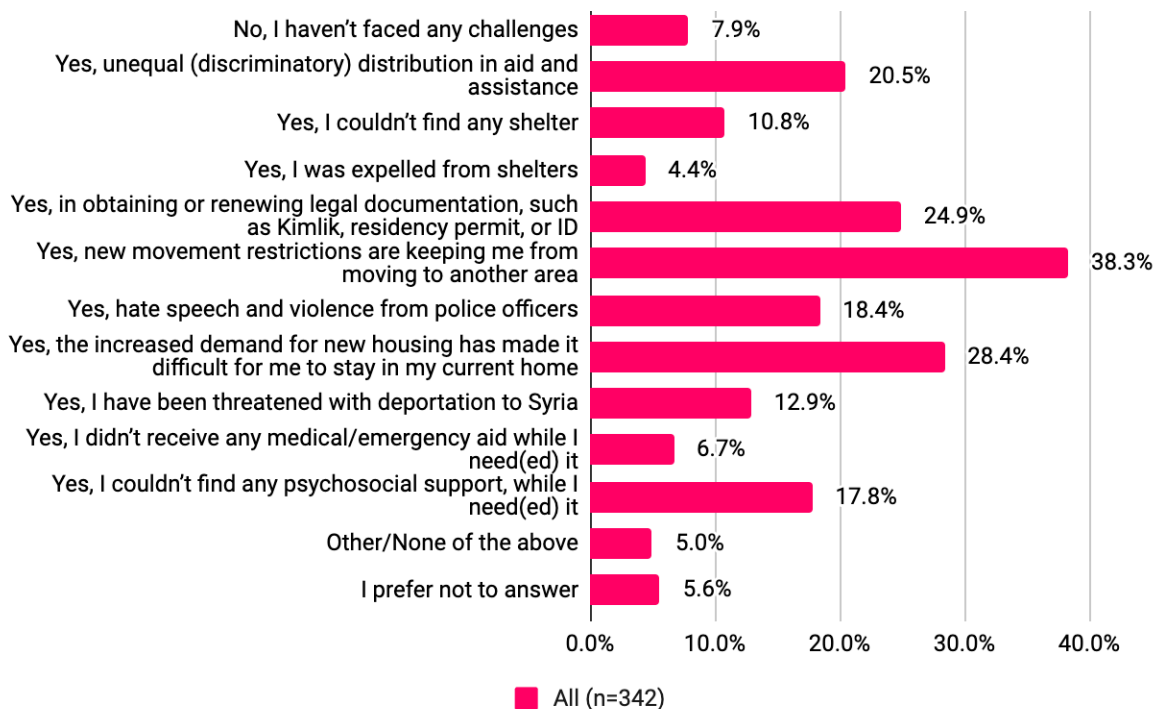
### 3.2. Main challenges experienced by respondents

In the first conversation (October 2023), respondents were also asked about the challenges they had encountered in the past six months (since March 2023).

A mere **8%** of respondents reported having faced no challenges. Among the respondents, the most substantial group (**38%**, n=342) stated they were dealing with movement restrictions, preventing them from relocating within Türkiye.<sup>4</sup> **28%** of respondents mentioned that the increased demand for new housing made it difficult to continue residing in their current homes. Additional challenges included obtaining or renewing legal documentation (**25%**), disparities in aid distribution (**21%**), experiencing hate speech and violence from police officers (**18%**), and searching for psychosocial support (**18%**).

In contrast to the aforementioned findings regarding the need for housing support and shelter, only **11%** of all respondents reported issues with finding shelter, and a mere **4%** reported being expelled from their shelters. This suggests that the need for housing support is no longer mainly focused on finding and staying in temporary shelters, but relates more to other issues such as high rent costs and the individuals' financial insecurity.

Figure 4. "Have you been facing any of the following challenges the past six months, since March 2023?" - multiple answer - all respondents



<sup>4</sup>Following the 2023 February earthquakes, the Turkish Directorate of Migration Management lifted movement restrictions for Syrian individuals in the affected regions. This allowed individuals under Temporary Protection and/or international protection to travel to other provinces in Türkiye (except for Istanbul) upon obtaining a travel permit. However, approximately 65 days after the earthquake events, the waiver had already expired, and previous restrictions on movement between different provinces have been reinstated.

When this question (“For which of the following services and/or necessities do you at this moment need support the most?”) was repeated during the follow-up conversation, in January 2024, similar answer patterns emerged. Both movement restrictions (43%) (n=263) and the increased demand for new housing (40%) remained the two most important challenges cited by respondents. Remarkably, the percentage of respondents who mentioned unequal distribution in aid and assistance as a key challenge jumped from 20.5% in October 2023 to 35% in January 2024; while lack of psychosocial support or the lack of/being expelled from shelter was also cited by approximately a quarter of respondents. Only 8% of respondents indicated to not face any challenges.

### 3.3. Unequal distribution in aid

All respondents who, in October 2023, indicated to be affected by the 2023 earthquakes were additionally asked, in a separate question, whether they were currently facing discrimination in the distribution of earthquake-related support. More than half of the respondents (**54%**, n=197) reported ‘Yes’. A **quarter** of the total number of respondents preferred not to answer the question, while **one-fifth** of respondents said they have not faced discrimination in aid.

All respondents who reported ‘Yes’ were followed-up by an open-answer question asking whether they would like to elaborate on what this discrimination looks like. Analysis shows the following recurring themes:

#### - Lack of access to sufficient aid based on Syrian nationality

“During the first earthquake, we went to ask for help, but they said it was only for the Turks.”

“Where do I go for aid? They told me it is for the Turks only. I’m currently at my home in Hatay.”

#### - Housing and shelter issues based on Syrian nationality

“I encountered numerous problems due to the fact that my residence was not registered before the earthquake. This resulted in my deprivation of all material, in-kind, and psychological aid. This while I lost all my family members due to the earthquake.”

“When I tried to find a house in the Hatay region, I encountered difficulties. Even when I found a house, the landlord refused to rent to me because I am Syrian. They additionally demanded exorbitant rental prices, refused to provide travel permits, and did not allow my children to attend school.”

“I was searching for a rental house, but when they learned that I was Syrian, they refused to rent it to me. Moreover, whenever I inquired about any assistance, they mentioned that the impact of the earthquake was large and that priority was given to Turks.”



### 3.4. Housing challenges in the aftermath of the earthquake

To gain a better understanding of the housing issues that were mentioned by the participants and their associated displacement, all respondents who reported being affected by the earthquake were asked in the October 2023 conversation whether they had to relocate within Türkiye following the 6 February 2023 earthquakes. The majority, constituting **57%** (n=244), responded with 'Yes,' followed by **38%** who did not need to move, and **5%** who declined to answer this question.

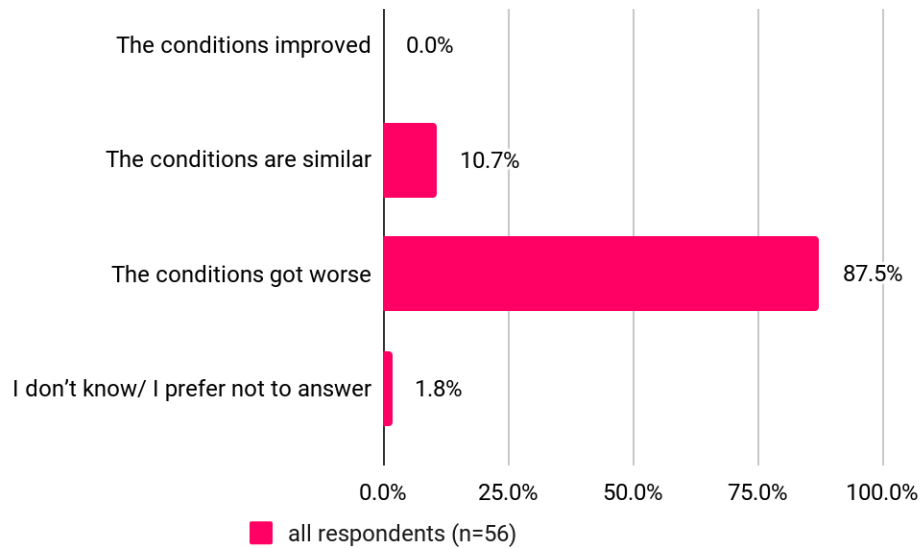
Subsequently, those who responded 'Yes' were further asked whether they had attempted to return to their pre-earthquake residence during the past six months. Of this group, **56%** (n=138) stated they had not yet done so, while **41%** indicated that they had returned. A small percentage, **4%**, chose not to answer the question.

In January 2024, respondents that were displaced after the earthquake were asked again whether they had been able to return home, and **63%** (n=93) of the remaining displaced population had still not been able to do so.

#### 3.4.1. Return after displacement

Those who had returned to their pre-earthquake residence were asked in October 2023 about the changes in their housing conditions compared to the situation before the February 2023 earthquakes. Almost all respondents (**88%**, n=56) reported that the conditions had worsened, while **11%** indicated that the conditions had remained the same. A small percentage, **2%**, expressed uncertainty about assessing whether their conditions had actually changed.

*Figure 5. Compared to before the earthquake, how did your housing conditions change? - all respondents*



When asked to elaborate on how the conditions got worse in an open-answer question, respondents reported rising housing costs and rent increases, physical damage to their housing, general economic and financial challenges, and discrimination and racism as reasons for why their housing conditions had worsened:

**- Housing costs and rent increases**

"The house owner is exploiting us because of the lack of homes now. He asked me to increase the house rent by 120% or leave the house."

"The rent increased by 500%, and I faced great pressure from the house owner."

**- Physical damage to houses**

"The house is damaged, and I can't find another one."

"The house is damaged a lot, and it's not yet repaired."

**- General economic and financial challenges**

"I lost my work and capital due to the earthquake, and now cannot find housing."

"There is a lack of work and there is a tax increase on houses after the earthquake."

### - Discrimination and racism

"The high prices together with the lack of a desire to rent housing to Syrians and the prohibition of housing Syrians in some areas."

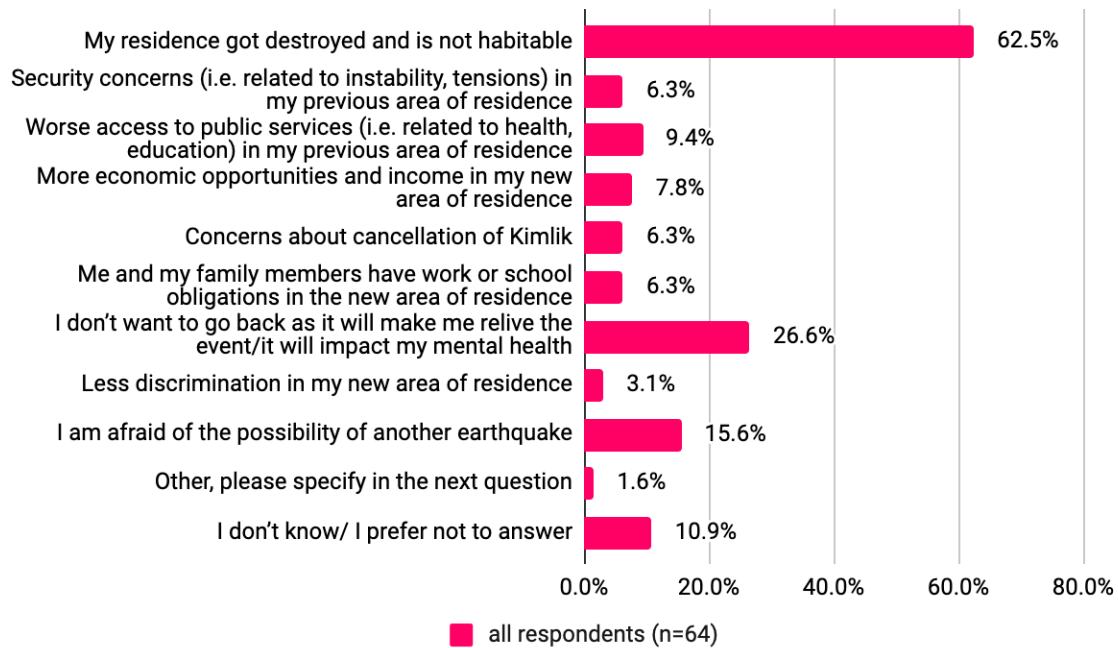
"All legal procedures have been hampered by the government, and racism has intensified among Turkish citizens."

### 3.4.2. Reasons for not returning

Those who reported (October 2023) that they had not returned (yet) were asked for their reasons. Among several pre-listed answer options, a clear majority of **63%** (n=64) mentioned that their residence had been destroyed and was no longer habitable.

**27%** did not want to return as it would force them to relive the traumatic earthquake events, and **16%** expressed fear of another earthquake. These reasons were more commonly cited than concerns about security (**6%**), decreased access to public services (**9%**), worries about the cancellation of their Kimlik (**6%**), or potential benefits like experiencing less discrimination (**3%**) or having more economic opportunities and income (**8%**) in their new area of residency.

Figure 6. "What are the reasons for which you did not return (yet)?" - multiple answer - all respondents

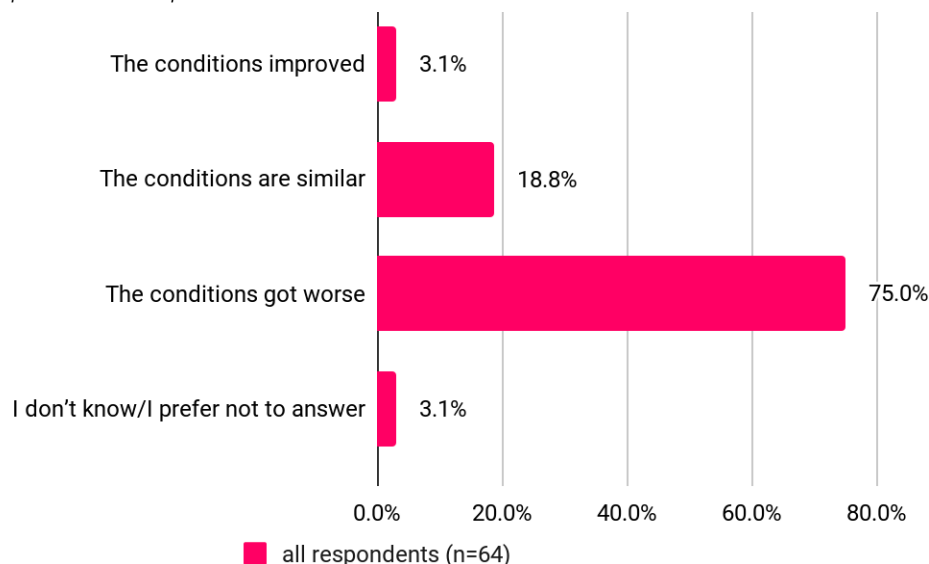


In January 2024, the main reason for displaced individuals to not have returned yet was still the fact that their houses were inhabitable (**71%**), yet fear of another earthquake in the area had also increased (**36%**) compared to the previous conversation.

### 3.4.3. Worsening of housing conditions in new place of residence

Respondents were also asked, in October 2023, to rate their new housing conditions in comparison to the place they were living before the earthquakes. Concerningly, a large majority of **75%** (n=64) reported that the conditions in their new area of residence are worse compared to the place where they were residing before the earthquakes. Almost one-fifth mentioned that the housing conditions remain the same, next to small groups that reported that their conditions improved (**3%**) or that they were unsure how to assess the change in housing conditions (**3%**).

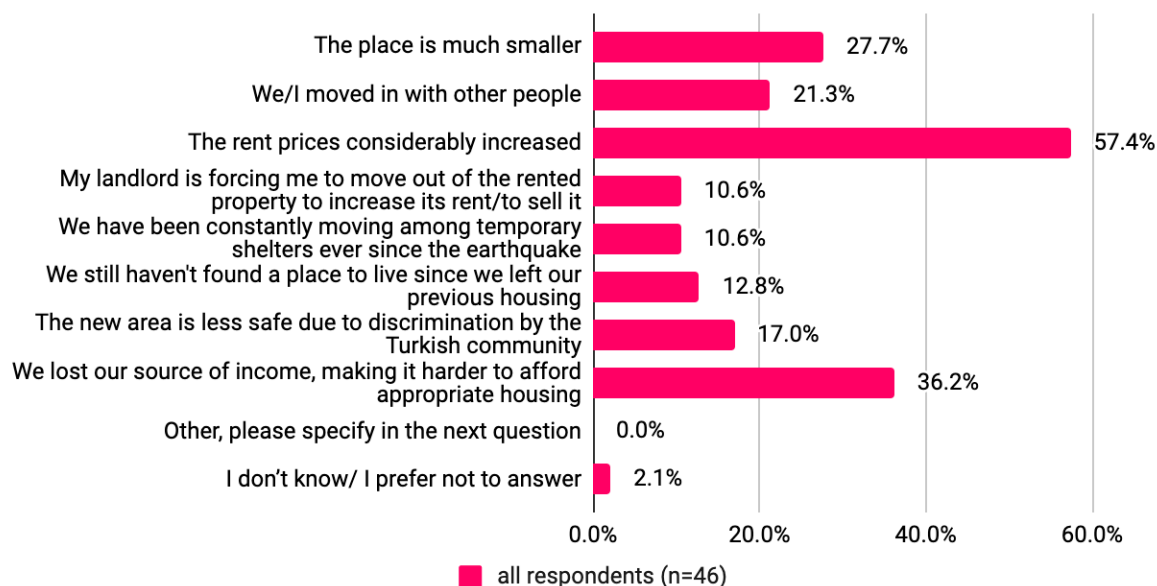
Figure 7. How did your housing conditions change compared to the place where you and your family were living before the earthquake? - all respondents



Those who reported their housing conditions got worse, were followed-up with the question if they could elaborate on why, using a multiple answer format. In line with previous findings, most respondents (**57%**, n=46) indicated the rent prices considerably increased, followed by **36%** that mentioned they had lost their source of income, which made it harder to afford appropriate housing.

Considerable groups also indicated that their place is much smaller now (**28%**), that they had to move in with other people (**21%**), or that the new area feels less safe due to discrimination by the Turkish host community (**17%**). **13%** of respondents also reported that they didn't yet find a new place to live, **11%** said that their landlords are forcing them to move out of their current place of residence, and another **11%** reported that they are constantly moving around between temporary shelters.

Figure 8. "Could you indicate why your housing conditions got worse?" - multiple answer - all respondents

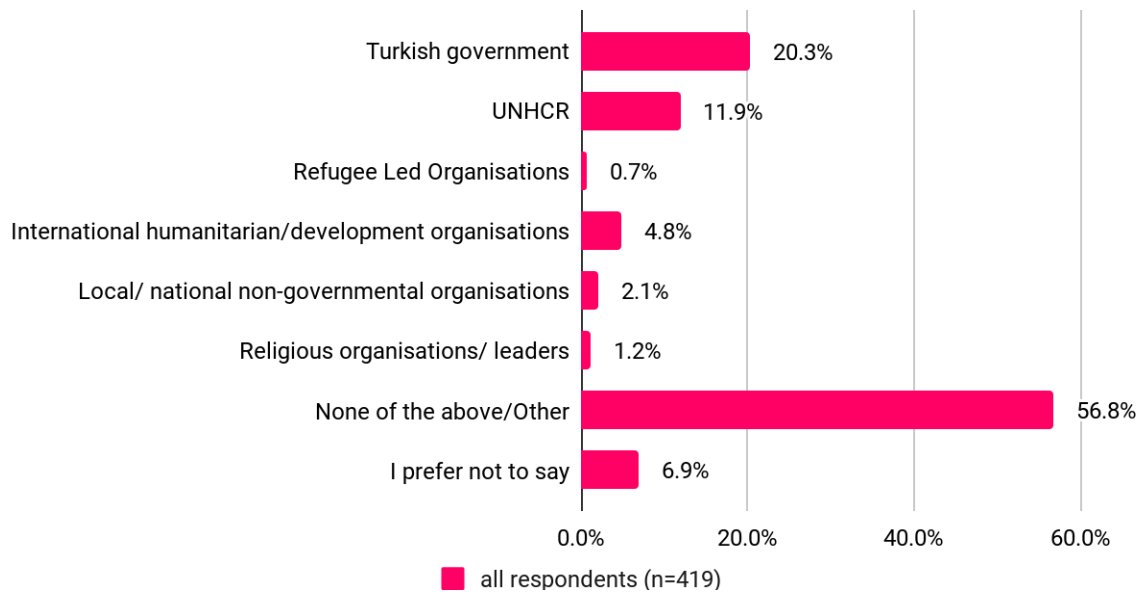


### 3.5. Appreciation of aid providers

Respondents were also questioned, in October 2023, about which actors had provided them with aid over the past six months, since March 2023. The majority of **57%** (n=419), reported that they had not received aid from any of these actors.

Among those who had received aid from these actors, most had obtained it from the Turkish government (**20%**) or UNHCR (**11%**). Only a small number of respondents reported receiving aid from refugee-led organizations, international humanitarian or development organizations, local or national NGOs, or religious organizations.

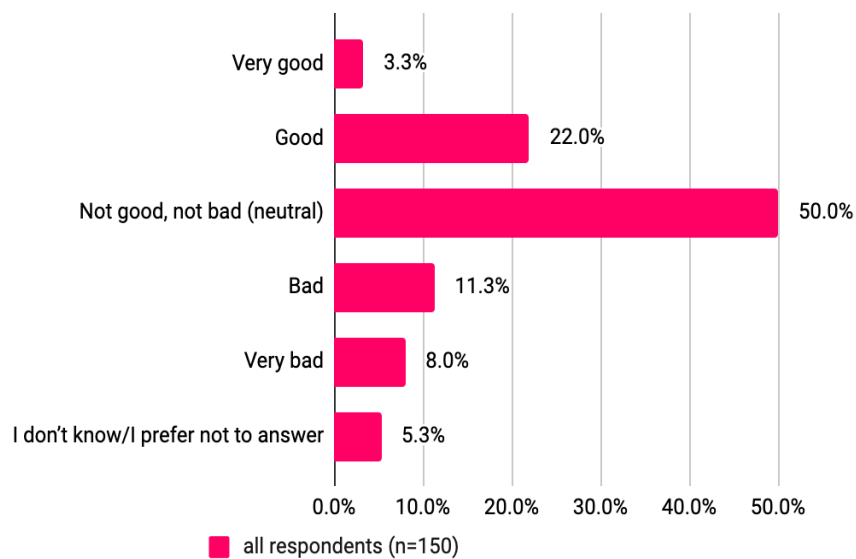
Figure 9. "From which actor did you get any social/humanitarian assistance the past six months (since March 2023)?" - multiple answers - all respondents



### 3.5.1. Satisfaction with aid

When inquiring (October 2023) about the satisfaction of individuals who had received aid, **50%** of respondents (n=150) indicated they found it neither good nor bad. Subsequently, a higher number of people rated it as good (**22%**) compared to those who rated it as bad (**11%**). Smaller groups regarded it as very good (**3%**) or very bad (**8%**). There were no significant differences between those who had received assistance from the Turkish government and those who had received aid from UNHCR.

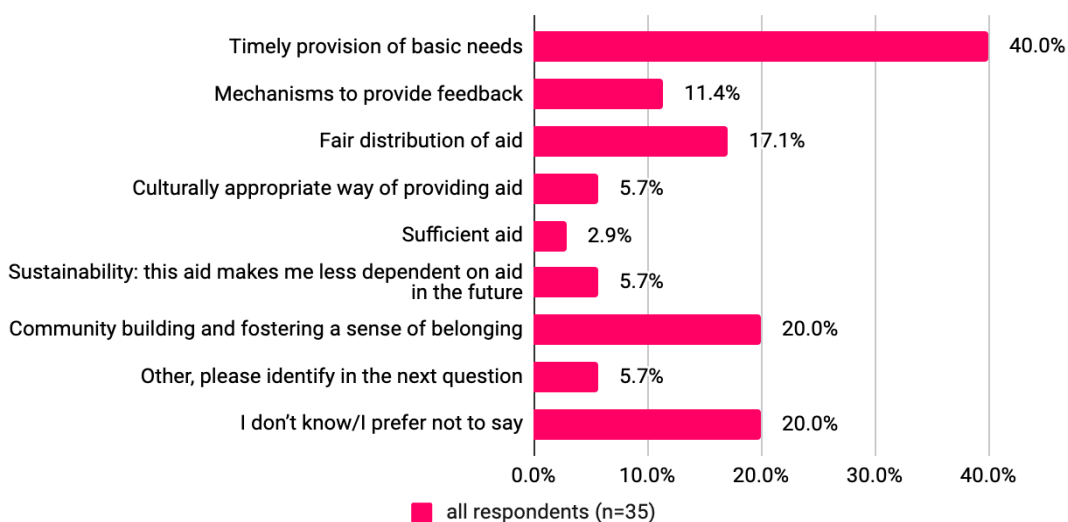
Figure 10. "Can you rate your satisfaction with the aid you received by these actors?" - all respondents



Respondents who expressed their satisfaction as 'Good' or 'Very good' were further questioned about the positive aspects they perceived in the aid they had received.<sup>5</sup> The majority (**40%**, n=35) highlighted that basic needs were timely provided. In addition, noteworthy proportions of respondents mentioned that the aid fostered community building and a sense of belonging (**20%**), ensured the fair distribution of aid (**17%**), or included mechanisms for providing feedback (**11%**).

It is important to note that smaller groups pointed out the sufficiency of aid (**3%**), the sustainability of aid (**6%**), or the culturally appropriate ways in which aid was provided (**6%**), as positive aspects.

Figure 11. "What positive aspects have you observed or experienced regarding the humanitarian assistance provided by the actors you have indicated?" - multiple answer - all respondents

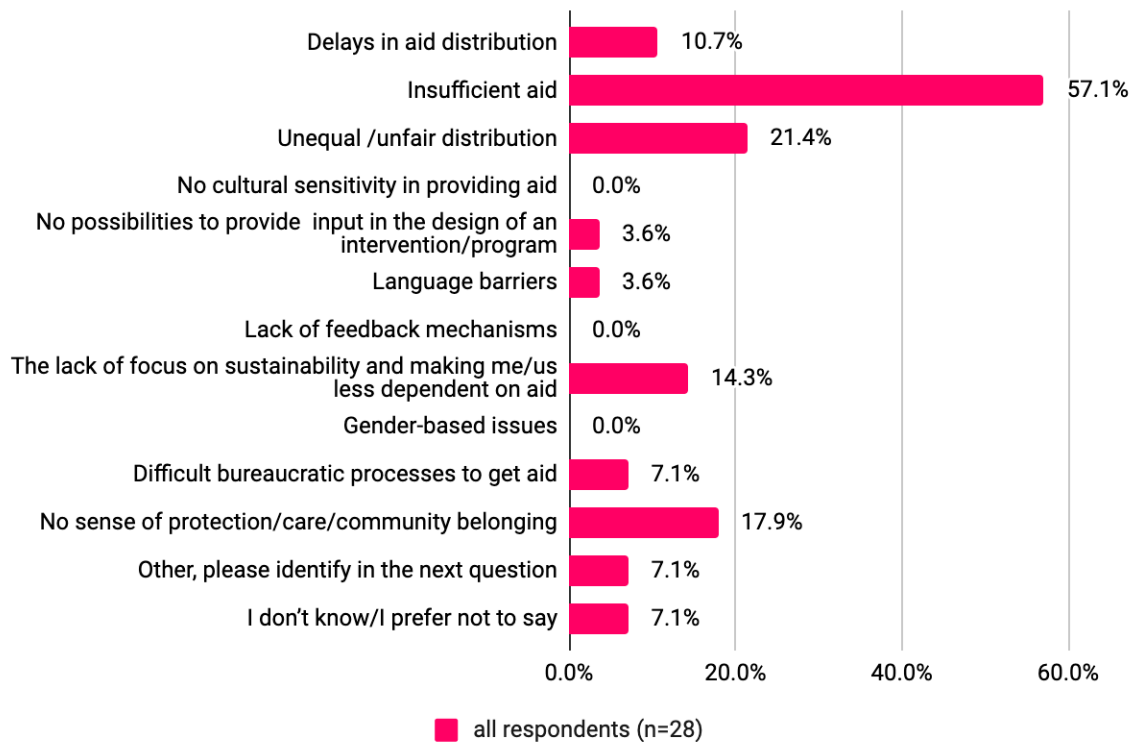


Respondents who expressed lower satisfaction with the aid they had received primarily cited the insufficiency of the aid as a negative aspect (**57%**, n=28).<sup>6</sup> This was followed by concerns about unequal or unfair distribution (**21%**), a lack of feelings of protection, care, or community belonging (**18%**), a perceived deficiency in focusing on sustainability and reducing dependency on aid (**14%**), and delays in aid distribution (**11%**).

<sup>5</sup> Amongst these respondents, 23 had received aid from the Turkish government, 9 from UNHCR, and 8 from other organisations. Several respondents had received aid from multiple sources.

<sup>6</sup> Amongst these respondents, 13 had received aid from the Turkish government, 13 from UNHCR, and 5 from other organisations. Several respondents had received aid from multiple sources.

Figure 12. "What negative aspects have you observed or experienced regarding the humanitarian assistance provided by the actors you have indicated?" - multiple answers - all respondents





## 4. Recommendations for EU member 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”, to refugees from Syria and host communities, through dedicated funding mechanisms, and with a particular focus on the needs of female refugees. Particular attention should be given to projects aimed at providing psychosocial support 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.
- Develop and implement a human-rights based relief and recovery response that takes into account the particular needs of displaced persons. European donors should also put in place the necessary mechanisms to closely monitor that all people in need have equal access to the earthquake aid response and are not discriminated against on the basis of their nationality or status.
- Urge the Turkish authorities to reinstate 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.
- Support Syrian refugees' access to verified and accurate information regarding civil documentation, special procedures following the February 6 earthquakes and other relevant issues, rights, and duties governing their stay in Türkiye, by widely disseminating unambiguous and up-to-date communication materials across all sectors of the community. This information should be made available in Arabic and be disseminated using a variety of communication channels to ensure broad coverage.
- 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.