



# Turkey: Socio-economic Status of Kurdish Women Who Lack a Social Network and Return to Turkey

## Theme Paper

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## Table of contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>The triple stigma associated with single Kurdish women.....</b>	<b>1</b>
2.1	Social status of women .....	1
2.2	Violence against women.....	2
2.3	Discrimination against members of the Kurdish minority.....	3
2.4	Precarious socio-economic status of Kurdish women who lack a social network.....	5
<b>3</b>	<b>Access to employment.....</b>	<b>6</b>
3.1	General status of the labour market.....	6
3.2	Access to the labour market difficult for women .....	6
3.3	Access to the western Turkey labour market difficult for people of Kurdish origin .....	8
3.4	Government support for access to the labour market .....	8
3.5	Non-government support for access to the labour market.....	11
<b>4</b>	<b>Access to housing .....</b>	<b>12</b>
4.1	General status of the housing market .....	12
4.2	Access to housing for a Kurdish woman with no social network in a city in western Turkey.....	13
4.3	Government assistance for access to housing .....	13
<b>5</b>	<b>Access to social assistance and other government support to ensure means of subsistence and livelihood.....</b>	<b>15</b>

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# 1 Introduction

Situation: A Turkish female national of Kurdish ethnic origin left Turkey a few years ago and, in a religious marriage ceremony abroad, was married to a man chosen by her family. She left him some months later. She attended school in Turkey for eight years, but completed no vocational training. She has no family or friends who could help her start over in this country.

The following questions are excerpts of the Swiss Refugee Council country analysis application:

1. How accessible is the labour market for single women of Kurdish origin, with no vocational training, who return to Turkey?
2. How accessible is housing for single Kurdish women who return to Turkey?
3. What social assistance and other government support is available to single Kurdish women returning to Turkey so they can obtain the means of subsistence they need for their basic livelihood?

The Swiss Refugee Council has been observing developments in Turkey for several years.<sup>1</sup> Based on the information we have received from specialists<sup>2</sup> and on our own research, the following is our position on the aforementioned topics.

## 2 The triple stigma associated with single Kurdish women

### 2.1 Social status of women

**Patriarchal social structure.** As previously mentioned in the Swiss Refugee Council's theme paper of October 23, 2013, on violence against Kurdish women in south-eastern Turkey,<sup>3</sup> society in central and eastern Turkey traditionally follows a firmly patriarchal structure. Women do not have an equal role, especially in Turkey's rural, conservative regions. Due to the rural exodus, numerous families who live in the city follow patriarchal traditions.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, women's identity is often defined by a

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<sup>1</sup> [www.refugeecouncil.ch/countries-of-origin](http://www.refugeecouncil.ch/countries-of-origin).

<sup>2</sup> In compliance with COI standards, the Swiss Refugee Council uses publicly accessible sources. If it does not find any information during its limited research period, it calls on the services of experts. The Swiss Refugee Council cites its sources in a clear and transparent manner. For source confidentiality reasons, certain contact persons may be cited anonymously.

<sup>3</sup> Swiss Refugee Council, *Turquie: violences contre les femmes kurdes dans le sud-est de la Turquie* [Turkey: violence against women in southeastern Turkey], October 23, 2013, p. 17

<sup>4</sup> Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge (BAMF), *Geschlechtsspezifische Verfolgung in ausgewählten Herkunftsländern*, April 2010, p. 209: [https://www.ecoi.net/file\\_upload/4232\\_1412928833\\_deutschland-bundesamt-fuer-migration-und-fluechtlinge-geschlechtsspezifische-verfolgung-in-ausgewaehlten-herkunftslaendern-april-2010.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/4232_1412928833_deutschland-bundesamt-fuer-migration-und-fluechtlinge-geschlechtsspezifische-verfolgung-in-ausgewaehlten-herkunftslaendern-april-2010.pdf).

male-dominated political system. The female body and how women dress, wearing the veil, and what kind of education they must take are topics that are generally addressed in their absence. In fact, they are often excluded from such discussions.<sup>5</sup> Turkey is also facing a rise in religious conservatism, which calls into question the rights acquired by women.<sup>6</sup> Women continue to be portrayed negatively in the media, and discourse continues to be dominated by men.<sup>7</sup>

**No equality in opportunities or rights between men and women.** In Turkey, women are still subject to public and societal discrimination.<sup>8</sup> The country ranked 125th out of 142 countries examined in the *World Economic Forum's 2014 Global Gender Gap Index*. The rhetoric of prominent male politicians, including Turkish president *Recep Tayyip Erdogan*, who believes that gender equality is unnatural<sup>9</sup> and women should have at least three children, is another expression of the widely held conservative attitude on gender role division.<sup>10</sup> As previously mentioned in the Swiss Refugee Council's theme paper of October 23, 2013, on violence against Kurdish women in southeastern Turkey, equality before the law was introduced in Turkey by *Mustafa Kemal Atatürk* in 1926. Consequently, under article 10 of the Turkish Constitution, men and women, in principle, have equal rights. The 2011 Civil Code confirms this position. However, the social reality in terms of equal rights and opportunities for women is still lagging in most regions of Turkey against the backdrop of legal progress that has remained theoretical.<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2 Violence against women

**Violence against women remains a major issue.** Violence against women, including early and forced marriage, still remains a widespread problem, although there are no official statistics in this regard.<sup>12</sup> Honour crimes continue to be a serious problem, especially in the rural southeast regions of the country, and among migrant families from these regions living in large cities. Human rights organizations have drawn attention to the continued high number of unreported honour crimes and the inadequacy of police investigations.<sup>13</sup> According to *Mor Çati (Purple Roof)*, an organization working to end violence against women, three women are murdered by men in their immediate environment (husbands, friends, ex-partners or others)

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<sup>5</sup> Selma Acuner, Gender and Development in Turkey, in *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Winter 2013, Volume 11, Number 4, February 25, 2013, p. 78: [www.turkishpolicy.com/dosyalar/files/vol\\_11-no\\_4%20acuner.pdf](http://www.turkishpolicy.com/dosyalar/files/vol_11-no_4%20acuner.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>7</sup> European Commission (EC), Turkey 2012 Progress Report, October 10, 2012, p. 26: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2012/package/tr\\_rapport\\_2012\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2012/package/tr_rapport_2012_en.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> US Department of State (USDOS), 2014 Country Report on Human Rights Practices – Turkey, June 25, 2015, p. 47: [www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2014/eur/236586.htm](http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2014/eur/236586.htm).

<sup>9</sup> *Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ)*, Gleichberechtigung von Mann und Frau ist "unnatürlich," article of November 24, 2014: [www.nzz.ch/international/europa/gleichberechtigung-von-mann-und-frau-ist-unnatuerlich-1.18431210](http://www.nzz.ch/international/europa/gleichberechtigung-von-mann-und-frau-ist-unnatuerlich-1.18431210).

<sup>10</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2015 – Turkey*, January 28, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> BAMF, *Geschlechtsspezifische Verfolgung in ausgewählten Herkunftsländern*, April 2010, p. 208.

<sup>12</sup> EC, Turkey 2014 Progress Report, October 8, 2014, p. 55: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2014/20141008-turkey-progress-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2014/20141008-turkey-progress-report_en.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2014, June 25, 2015, p. 46

every day.<sup>14</sup> Societal acceptance of domestic abuse often contributes to underreporting of gender-based violence. Judges still use “consent,” “undue provocation” and “appearing older” to justify a reduction in sentences for sex crimes.<sup>15</sup> The Swiss Refugee Council’s theme paper of October 23, 2013, on violence against Kurdish women in southeastern Turkey refers to legal discrimination suffered by religiously married widows and divorced women, as well as the risk faced by divorced Kurdish women of being the victims of honour crimes.<sup>16</sup>

**Inadequate government measures to combat violence against women.** The implementation of the Law on Protection of Family and Prevention of Violence against Women, which was ratified in 2012, remains inadequate, and the corresponding protection is therefore still insufficient. According to certain reports, a number of women under legal protection have been killed. Furthermore, there are not enough women’s shelters for victims of domestic violence.<sup>17</sup> Current regulations call for all metropolitan municipalities with over 100,000 residents to have a shelter for women who are victims of domestic violence. However, in 2014, there were only 123 women’s shelters, with a total capacity of 2,190 places. The government operated 90 of these shelters, the municipalities operated 32, and only one shelter was operated by an NGO.<sup>18</sup> The NGOs for women that showed an interest in opening such shelters failed to do so because of insufficient funding.<sup>19</sup> In 2014, there were still no follow-up mechanisms for the municipalities that had failed to set up a women’s shelter, thus violating the legal provisions. Moreover, aside from the existing 12 violence prevention centres, only two additional cities constructed such centres.<sup>20</sup> Inadequacy of measures is discussed in detail in the Swiss Refugee Council’s theme paper of October 23, 2013, on violence against Kurdish women in southeastern Turkey.<sup>21</sup>

## 2.3 Discrimination against members of the Kurdish minority

**Restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly and social discrimination against people of Kurdish ethnic origin.** According to various sources, the only way for people of Kurdish ethnic origin to protect themselves against discrimination

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<sup>14</sup> morcati.org.tr, Long Live Women’s Solidarity for a World without Shelters, no date (consulted on November 2, 2015): [www.morcati.org.tr/en/publications/brochures/193-long-live-women-s-solidarity-for-a-world-without-shelters](http://www.morcati.org.tr/en/publications/brochures/193-long-live-women-s-solidarity-for-a-world-without-shelters).

<sup>15</sup> EC, Turkey 2014 Progress Report, October 8, 2014, p. 55.

<sup>16</sup> Swiss Refugee Council, *Turquie: violences contre les femmes kurdes dans le sud-est de la Turquie*, October 23, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Amnesty International (AI), *Amnesty International Report 2014/15 – The State of the World’s Human Rights – Turkey*, February 25, 2015: [www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/turkey/report-turkey](http://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/turkey/report-turkey).

<sup>18</sup> Between April 2012 and March 2013, two women’s shelters run by NGOs closed their doors due to insufficient funding. Source: USDOS, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2013 – Turkey*, June 19, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> EC, Turkey 2014 Progress Report, October 8, 2014, p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> USDOS, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2014*, June 25, 2015, p. 44; EC, Turkey 2014 Progress Report, October 8, 2014, p. 55.

<sup>21</sup> Swiss Refugee Council, *Turquie: violences contre les femmes kurdes dans le sud-est de la Turquie*, October 23, 2013, starting on p. 3.

is by hiding their identity.<sup>22</sup> If they openly assert their Kurdish language and culture, they will be subject to public discrimination.<sup>23</sup> According to the *US Department of State* (USDOS), restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly remain a major issue in Turkey, and the Kurdish population was particularly affected during the period in question.<sup>24</sup>

**Violence against Kurdish men and women in Turkey.** According to two of the *Kurdish Studies Network's* contacts,<sup>25</sup> Kurds who do not hide their identity are at risk of being arrested, or even killed in the worst-case scenario.<sup>26</sup> For example, on September 22, 2015, Amnesty International reported that, according to witnesses, a young 21-year-old man was stabbed by a nationalist group on September 6, 2015, when the group heard him speaking on the telephone in Kurdish.<sup>27</sup> An expert on the subject also noted the impunity for those who violently attack Kurds. Among such attackers are also Turkish paramilitary groups, trained and funded by the State, the *Gendarmerie Intelligence and Antiterrorism Unit* (JITEM) and «*Kontrgerilla*», which are allegedly responsible for the extrajudicial executions of thousands of male and female Kurdish citizens.<sup>28</sup>

**New repressions against Kurds since the recent surge in hostilities.** Since the terrorist attack perpetrated by the *Islamic State* (IS) group on July 20, 2015, in the town of Suruç, which killed more than 30 pro-Kurdish activists, the two-year cease-fire between the *Kurdistan Workers Party* (PKK) and the Turkish state came to a de facto end.<sup>29</sup> Reports of murders and arrests of PKK members and supporters,<sup>30</sup> waves of arrests against Kurdish activists and politicians,<sup>31</sup> and violent repressions against protesters<sup>32</sup> are the expression of new repressive measures against Kurds.

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<sup>22</sup> Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB), Turkey: Situation of Kurds in western cities such as Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Konya and Mersin; resettlement to these cities (2009 – May 2012) [TUR104096.E], June 14, 2012: [www.ecoi.net/local\\_link/220843/342285\\_de.html](http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/220843/342285_de.html).

<sup>23</sup> Expert opinion of Ethem Coban, Coordinator, Kurdish Studies Network Coordinator, at the Swiss Refugee Council on October 27, 2015; telephone interview with Welat Zeydanlioglu, Founder and Coordinator, Kurdish Studies Network, on October 23, 2015; IRB, Turkey: Situation of Kurds in western cities such as Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Konya and Mersin; resettlement to these cities, June 14, 2012.

<sup>24</sup> USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2014, June 25, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> The Kurdish Studies Network (KSN) is a global research network that was established in 2009 for researchers and scientists working in the field of Kurdish studies.

<sup>26</sup> Expert opinion of Ethem Coban, Coordinator, Kurdish Studies Network, at the Swiss Refugee Council on October 27, 2015; telephone interview with Welat Zeydanlioglu, Founder and Coordinator, Kurdish Studies Network, on October 23, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> AI, Turkey: Investigate recent nationalist attacks [EUR 44/2493/2015], September 25, 2015: [www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR4424932015ENGLISH.pdf](http://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR4424932015ENGLISH.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Expert opinion of Ethem Coban, Coordinator, Kurdish Studies Network, at the Swiss Refugee Council on October 27, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> *The New York Times*, "Why Turkey Is Fighting the Turks Who Are Fighting ISIS," article of August 12, 2015: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/08/12/world/middleeast/turkey-kurds-isis.html>.

<sup>30</sup> *Deutsche Welle*, "Turkey arrests dozens of suspected IS and Kurdish PKK militants," article of July 27, 2015: [www.dw.com/en/turkey-arrests-dozens-of-suspected-is-and-kurdish-pkk-militants/a-18609268](http://www.dw.com/en/turkey-arrests-dozens-of-suspected-is-and-kurdish-pkk-militants/a-18609268); Anadolu Agency, "Turkey: '771 PKK militants killed' since late July," article of August 21, 2015: [www.aa.com.tr/en/s/578663--turkey-771-pkk-militants-killed-since-late-july](http://www.aa.com.tr/en/s/578663--turkey-771-pkk-militants-killed-since-late-july).

<sup>31</sup> NZZ, Zerschellte Hoffnung auf Frieden. Erdogans kurdisches Pulverfass, article of August 19, 2015: <http://www.nzz.ch/international/naher-osten-und-nordafrika/erdogans-kurdisches-pulverfass-1.18598049>.

<sup>32</sup> Liberationnews.org, "AKP of Turkey wages war against the Kurdish people, bombs Iraq and Syria," article of July 30, 2015: [www.liberationnews.org/akp-of-turkey-wages-war-against-the-kurdish-bombs-iraq-and-syria/](http://www.liberationnews.org/akp-of-turkey-wages-war-against-the-kurdish-bombs-iraq-and-syria/).

Furthermore, since the parliamentary elections of June 2015, more than 500 *Peoples' Democratic Party* (HDP) offices were allegedly burned and bombarded, and the party's members and supporters have apparently been attacked.<sup>33</sup> *Amnesty International* also reported attacks against the HDP and multiple attacks against Kurds or those suspected to be Kurds throughout Turkey.<sup>34</sup>

**Violence against Kurds under the pretext of fighting terrorism.** In an article published on August 12, 2015, the *New York Times* mentions that since the Suruç suicide attack, Turkish authorities were more actively targeting Kurdish rebels than they were fighters with the IS terrorist group.<sup>35</sup> Data compiled by the *International Federation for Human Rights* (FIDH) and the *Human Rights Association* (İHD) demonstrate that between July 21 and August 28, 2015, 352 people were arrested, 33 of whom were allegedly members of the IS terrorist group, and 4 who were affiliated with a parallel group. All the others were presumably members of the *Kurdish Communities Union* (KCK) and the PKK.<sup>36</sup>

## 2.4 Precarious socio-economic status of Kurdish women who lack a social network

According to *Welat Zeydanlioglu* of the *Kurdish Studies Network*, it is very difficult for a single Kurdish woman to survive in western Turkey without the support of a family member or «*Hemsheris*» (people in her town or village).<sup>37</sup> During the telephone interview on October 23, 2015, he stressed the importance of a social network to a person's socio-economic situation, particularly for women. A single Kurdish woman would face a threefold stigmatization when she must manage without the help of friends or family and would find herself in a very complicated situation.<sup>38</sup> *Ethem Coban* of the *Kurdish Studies Network* also believes that it is difficult for Kurdish women to build a life for themselves in western Turkey when they are returning to the country and lack a social network.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Expert opinion of Ethem Coban at the Swiss Refugee Council on October 27, 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Al, Turkey: Investigate recent nationalist attacks, September 22, 2015; Welat Zeydanlioglu also confirmed that Kurds and other minorities and government opponents were in a particularly difficult situation.

<sup>35</sup> *The New York Times*, "Why Turkey Is Fighting the Turks Who Are Fighting ISIS," article of August 12 2015: [www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/08/12/world/middleeast/turkey-kurds-isis.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/08/12/world/middleeast/turkey-kurds-isis.html?_r=0).

<sup>36</sup> International Federation for Human Rights, Turkey: Rights groups strongly condemn escalating violence and human rights violations in counter-terrorism operations, September 22, 2015: [www.fidh.org/en/region/europe-central-asia/turkey/turkey-rights-groups-strongly-condemn-escalating-violence-and-human](http://www.fidh.org/en/region/europe-central-asia/turkey/turkey-rights-groups-strongly-condemn-escalating-violence-and-human).

<sup>37</sup> Email from Welat Zeydanlioglu to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated October 16, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Telephone interview with Welat Zeydanlioglu on October 23, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Expert opinion of Ethem Coban at the Swiss Refugee Council on October 27, 2015.

## 3 Access to employment

### 3.1 General status of the labour market

**Low employment rates.** The Turkish labour market is characterized by a relatively low employment rate, urbanization and a move away from farming. According to the *International Organization for Migration (IOM)*, the economy has a limited capacity for job creation.<sup>40</sup> Based on the recent *EC: Turkey 2015 Report*, released on November 10, 2015, Turkey's employment rate has stagnated and remains very low: 75 percent for men and 31.6 percent for women.<sup>41</sup> In June 2015, the unemployment rate was 0.5 percent higher than the previous year (at 9.6 percent). The unemployment rate in the non-farm sector increased slightly during the same period, from 11.1 to 11.7 percent.<sup>42</sup>

**Wide availability of cheap labour since the arrival of two million Syrian refugees.** Since the arrival of two million Syrian refugees in Turkey, the availability of cheap labour has increased suddenly and put pressure on low-skilled and poorly paid employees, in particular.<sup>43</sup>

### 3.2 Access to the labour market difficult for women

**Lowest employment rate among women in OECD countries.** In 2014, the employment rate<sup>44</sup> was at 30.7 percent for single women, 27.6 percent for married women, 39.7 percent for divorced women and 7.8 percent for widows.<sup>45</sup> According to a 2013 joint report by *Oxfam* and *TEPAV*, Turkey has the lowest female participation rate<sup>46</sup> of all OECD countries and the second lowest of the 20 leading industrialized and emerging countries (G20).<sup>47</sup>

**Gender-specific segmentation of the labour market.** The Turkish labour market is highly segmented by gender. Women form the majority of workers in the low-skill and low-pay sectors.<sup>48</sup> As mentioned earlier, competition in these sectors has risen sharply in Turkey, in connection with the current refugee crisis.<sup>49</sup> The inequalities and wage

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<sup>40</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), Turkey – Country Fact Sheet 2014, August 2014, p. 14: [www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/MILo-DB/EN/Rueckkehrfoerderung/Laenderinformationen/Informationsblaetter/cfs\\_tuerkei-dl\\_en.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](http://www.bamf.de/SharedDocs/MILo-DB/EN/Rueckkehrfoerderung/Laenderinformationen/Informationsblaetter/cfs_tuerkei-dl_en.pdf?__blob=publicationFile).

<sup>41</sup> EC: Turkey 2015 Report, November 10, 2015, p. 52: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key\\_documents/2015/20151110\\_report\\_turkey.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_turkey.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> Turkish Statistical Institute, Labour Force Statistics, June 2015, September 15, 2015: [www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt\\_id=1007](http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1007).

<sup>43</sup> Telephone interview with Welat Zeydanlioglu on October 23, 2015; Al-Monitor, Syrian refugees aggravate Turkey's unemployment problem, July 9, 2014: [www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/cetingulec-syrian-refugees-turkey-unemployment-illegal-work.html](http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/cetingulec-syrian-refugees-turkey-unemployment-illegal-work.html).

<sup>44</sup> Working-age women formally or informally employed.

<sup>45</sup> Turkish Statistical Institute, Labour Force Statistics: Employed rate by marital status, 2014: [www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreIstatistikTablo.do?istab\\_id=1145](http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreIstatistikTablo.do?istab_id=1145).

<sup>46</sup> Working-age women working or seeking employment.

<sup>47</sup> OXFAM; TEPAV, Making Economies Work for Women: Female Labour Force Participation in Turkey, 2013, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2014 – Turkey, June 25, 2015, p. 48.

<sup>49</sup> Telephone interview with Welat Zeydanlioglu on October 23, 2015.

gap between men and women are very high. Women are generally under-represented in leadership positions in businesses and government alike. Many women work without pay or social protection as they help out members of their family.<sup>50</sup> According to the European Commission, one third of women who appear in the statistics as active are actually working as unpaid family members in the agricultural sector.<sup>51</sup>

**Only 21 percent of all women with eight years of education are working, with a great number of them in the informal sector.** Level of education is the deciding factor<sup>52</sup> in whether women are actively employed.<sup>53</sup> For example, 69 percent of women with higher education are employed. However, barely 10 percent of women in Turkey had attained that level in 2012. On the other hand, only 21 percent of all women with only eight years of education are in the workforce. Moreover, women who completed a higher education program are more active in the formal sector than women with a lower level of education. According to the 2013 *Oxfam/TEPAV* report, women working in the informal sector mainly have a high school education (eight years), a primary school education (five years) or no education. Based on estimates by *Nebahat Akkoc*, founder of the women's advocacy organization *KAMER*, women returning to Turkey with no vocational training or social network often only find—with a great deal of luck—very poorly paid work such as cleaning.<sup>54</sup>

**Probable income is insufficient to ensure livelihood.** According to the *TurkStat Structure of Earnings Survey 2010*, working women with at best a primary education earned an average annual salary of 10,519 Turkish lira (5,059 euros). Those with up to eight years of schooling earned even less, 10,470 Turkish lira (5,072 euros).<sup>55</sup> An employee of *KADAV (Foundation for Women's Solidarity)*, a women's organization in Turkey, estimates that a woman with no occupational training would earn a maximum of 350 to 400 euros a month (722.5 to 825.6 Turkish lira), which is just enough to cover the average monthly rent of an apartment in a city in western Turkey.<sup>56</sup> *Nebahat Akkoc* of *KAMER* also points out that women with no occupational training cannot earn enough to assure a minimum standard of living.<sup>57</sup> By the estimates of the *Turkish Statistical Institute*, monthly expenses of Turkish households average 2,848 Turkish lira (929 euros)<sup>58, 59</sup>

<sup>50</sup> USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2014 – Turkey, June 25, 2015, p. 48.

<sup>51</sup> EC, Turkey 2014 Progress Report, October 8, 2014, p. 22.

<sup>52</sup> Job creation in recent years has mainly benefited graduates of institutions of higher learning. In addition, it is assumed that, in future, job postings in the service sector requiring higher education will increase. The smallest growth is expected in positions that only require a low level of education. Source: OXFAM; TEPAV, Making Economies Work for Women: Female Labour Force Participation in Turkey, 2013, p. 26.

<sup>53</sup> This was also confirmed by Welat Zeydanlioglu during the telephone interview on October 23, 2015.

<sup>54</sup> Email from Nebahat Akkoc to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated November 19, 2015.

<sup>55</sup> OXFAM; TEPAV, Making Economies Work for Women: Female Labour Force Participation in Turkey, 2013, pp. 26–29; [www.c20turkey.org/uploads/OXFAM%20TEPAV%20Report.pdf](http://www.c20turkey.org/uploads/OXFAM%20TEPAV%20Report.pdf).

<sup>56</sup> Email from an employee of KADAV (Women's Solidarity Foundation) to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated October 17, 2015.

<sup>57</sup> Email from Nebahat Akkoc to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated November 19, 2015.

<sup>58</sup> Based on the results of the 2014 household budget survey by the Turkish Statistical Institute, accommodation and rental expenses account for the largest share of total consumer spending in Turkey (24.8 percent), followed by expenses for food and non-alcoholic beverages (19.7 percent). The proportion of health spending was 2.1 percent, while 2.4 percent of total expenses went to training.

<sup>59</sup> Turkish Statistical Institute, Household Consumption Expenditures, 2014, August 5, 2015: [www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=18630](http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=18630).

**Labour market differs between west and east.** The proportion of women in the Turkish workforce differs sharply between regions as well as between urban and rural areas. The western regions are more industrialized and developed than the eastern part of the country, where farming activities and the corresponding employment rate for women are almost twice as high as the national average. In eastern Turkey, very few women are employed in the non-farming sector. By contrast, the highest employment rates for women in the non-farming sector are in the more industrialized regions surrounding Istanbul and the Aegean Sea.<sup>60</sup> According to *Nebahat Akkoc* of *KAMER*, it would be hard, nonetheless, for women with no occupational training to find a job anywhere in Turkey.<sup>61</sup>

### 3.3 Access to the western Turkey labour market difficult for people of Kurdish origin

**Discrimination against Kurds in western Turkey.** People of Kurdish ethnic origin regularly suffer from discrimination in terms of employment opportunities in the Turkish regions not dominated by Kurds.<sup>62</sup> Kurds living in Istanbul claimed that their accent marginalized them socially and culturally and made it hard for them to find work and build a life in Turkey.<sup>63</sup> Kurdish teachers who disclose their background are unable to get a management position in a school; Kurds also apparently face major obstacles in starting a business, unless they find people willing to rent space to them.<sup>64</sup>

**Deterioration of the situation since the recent outbreak of conflict.** Since the latest outbreak of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict in July 2015, the economic circumstance of Kurds has further deteriorated in western Turkey. *Welat Zeydanlioglu* of the *Kurdish Studies Network* pointed to the recent destruction of Kurdish grocery stores as an example. The current political climate is also deliberately used to accuse Kurds of supporting the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), to subject them to police investigations and to penalize them economically (and socially). As a result, Kurds increasingly need, at this time, to conceal their identity to secure a job.<sup>65</sup>

### 3.4 Government support for access to the labour market

**Inadequate government measures to improve the employment rate among women.** Turkey has signed *International Labour Organization* (ILO) conventions on improving women's equality and access to employment,<sup>66</sup> and on February 10, 2009,

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<sup>60</sup> OXFAM; TEPAV, *Making Economies Work for Women: Female Labour Force Participation in Turkey*, 2013, pp. 11-13.

<sup>61</sup> Email from *Nebahat Akkoc* to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated November 19, 2015.

<sup>62</sup> Email from *Welat Zeydanlioglu* to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated October 16, 2015.

<sup>63</sup> MRT-RRT – Australian Government – Migration Review Tribunal & Refugee Review Tribunal, *Country Advice Turkey – TUR39341 – Arranged Marriage – Honour Killings – Kurdish Community – Istanbul – Legal Provisions – Police Protection – Community Attitudes – Women's Organisations – Relocation*, October 17, 2011, p. 9: [www.ecoi.net/file\\_upload/1788\\_1339521232\\_tur39341.pdf](http://www.ecoi.net/file_upload/1788_1339521232_tur39341.pdf).

<sup>64</sup> IRB, Turkey: *Situation of Kurds in western cities such as Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Konya and Mersin; resettlement to these cities (2009 - May 2012)* [TUR104096.E], June 14, 2012.

<sup>65</sup> Telephone interview with *Welat Zeydanlioglu* on October 23, 2015.

<sup>66</sup> ILO Conventions 100, 111, 122 and 142.

it signed the memorandum of understanding on promoting decent work.<sup>67</sup> However, the *European Commission* has criticized a number of shortcomings in the implementation and regulatory follow-up of these conventions and the memorandum of understanding.<sup>68</sup> Various sources have reported that female access to the labour market is also mainly impeded by gender-based segregation of home responsibilities, as well as by inadequate childcare services and support services for the elderly.<sup>69</sup>

**Limited success of public placement services.** The *Işkur* employment office provides placement services.<sup>70</sup> Women are not a priority group, unlike people with disabilities and former inmates.<sup>71</sup> A group of organizations advocating for women, in a shadow report<sup>72</sup> issued in May 2011, criticized the fact that public employment agencies do not take any special measures to promote the employment of women.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, the success of placement measures seems to be rather low. According to *Nebahat Akkoc*, founder of the women's advocacy group KAMER, three million unemployed women were waiting to be placed by *Işkur*.<sup>74</sup> An article published on July 3, 2010, in *Today's Zaman* states that only one quarter of those registered with *Işkur* were hired the previous year.<sup>75</sup> In Istanbul, 5,013 women were hired in 2009 with the help of *Işkur* (out of a total of 20,741 new employees placed by *Işkur*). Only one woman in the eastern province of Ağrı was placed, while only six women in the provinces of Artvin and Tunceli benefited from placement.<sup>76</sup>

***Işkur* clearly gives vocational training courses for the unemployed, but the courses have no impact on the chances that participants will get hired.** The *World Bank* assessed *Işkur*'s training courses for the unemployed and found that the impact on the likelihood of employment for those who took the courses assessed between December 2010 and June 2011 was minimal. In addition, individuals with a low level of education seemed to be under-represented: 74 percent of *Işkur* trainees had completed high school as a minimum, which was the case for only 42 percent of all job seekers. This may be attributed to the fact that the participants were required to have a basic education,<sup>77</sup> that many courses are intended for individuals with an average

<sup>67</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), ILO-Ankara, Equality and discrimination: [www.ilo.org/ankara/areas-of-work/equality-discrimination/lang--en/index.html](http://www.ilo.org/ankara/areas-of-work/equality-discrimination/lang--en/index.html).

<sup>68</sup> EC, Turkey 2014 Progress Report, October 8, 2014, p. 55.

<sup>69</sup> USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2014 – Turkey, June 25, 2015; EC, Turkey Progress Report, October 2014, pp. 41–42.

<sup>70</sup> IOM, Turkey – Country Fact Sheet 2014, August 2014, p. 14.

<sup>71</sup> [iskur.gov.tr](http://iskur.gov.tr), Job Seeker Registration, accessed October 23, 2015: [www.iskur.gov.tr/en-us/jobseeker/registration.aspx](http://www.iskur.gov.tr/en-us/jobseeker/registration.aspx).

<sup>72</sup> Report by one or more NGOs on the process for implementing a United Nations Convention within a corresponding United Nations Committee.

<sup>73</sup> Executive Committee for NGO Forum on CEDAW and Women's Platform on the Turkish Penal Code, Shadow NGO Report on Turkey's Initial Periodic Report to the Committee on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for submission to the CESCR 46th Session, May 2011, p. 7: [www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/ngos/WforWHR\\_Turkey\\_CESCRWG46.doc](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/docs/ngos/WforWHR_Turkey_CESCRWG46.doc).

<sup>74</sup> Email from Nebahat Akkoc to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated November 19, 2015.

<sup>75</sup> The highest rates of success were recorded by Istanbul (20,741 job searches having ended), followed by Izmir (5,522), Antalya (4,733) and Ankara (4,445). The eastern province of Tunceli posted the lowest results, with 36 people newly employed.

<sup>76</sup> *Today's Zaman*, "One out of every four İŞKUR applicants employed," July 3, 2010: [www.todayszaman.com/business\\_one-out-of-every-four-i-skur-applicants-employed\\_214972.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/business_one-out-of-every-four-i-skur-applicants-employed_214972.html).

<sup>77</sup> Other conditions require participants to be over the age of 15, to have skills suited to the job they are seeking, to have the skills required by the employer, and to be registered as an unemployed person.

level of education and that an advantage is given—when demand is high—to those who already have a good education in the subject matter covered by the courses.<sup>78</sup>

**Government projects promoting women’s employment have had little success and have been criticized in a number of ways.** The government has launched various projects to promote female labour. However, the results remain quite modest. Up to 10,000 women attended vocational training courses under the «*Operation on Promoting Women Employment*» project between 2009 and 2013, but only 914 of them found work. Some became entrepreneurs (113) and others accepted a job as a homemaker (631).<sup>79</sup> In these courses, the women appeared to have been trained mainly for low-paying jobs. The *KEIG* Platform, a group of independent women’s advocacy organizations,<sup>80</sup> spoke out against this project and the various entrepreneurship training programs, employment-guaranteed training programs and temporary public employment services (TYÇPs) that have been put in place since 2008, arguing that the gender-based division of labour has not changed. Women are primarily trained as hairdressers, seamstresses and nurses. But above all, the training programs have not solved the high unemployment problem in any way. Not only have these programs failed to help graduates find employment,<sup>81</sup> but they have failed to produce more permanent positions.<sup>82</sup>

**Unclear impact of incentive bonuses.** Since 2008, the Turkish government has been trying to encourage the formal employment of women by using incentive bonuses, to the detriment of the widespread informal work sector.<sup>83</sup> Employers who hire unemployed women registered with *Işkur* do not have to make social insurance contributions for the new employees for a specified period. There is some uncertainty as to the effectiveness of these measures so far. According to *TEPAV*, they have significantly contributed to the increase in the employment rate for women in the non-farming

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Source: [iskur.gov.tr](http://iskur.gov.tr), Courses, no date (consulted November 13, 2015): [www.iskur.gov.tr/en-us/jobseeker/courses.aspx](http://www.iskur.gov.tr/en-us/jobseeker/courses.aspx).

<sup>78</sup> World Bank Human Development Sector Unit Europe and Central Asia Region, Turkey: Evaluating the Impact of *Işkur*’s Vocational Training Programs, August 2013, pp. ix–x: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2013/08/19151577/turkey-evaluating-impact-iskurs-vocational-training-programs-vol-1-2-final-report>.

<sup>79</sup> G20, Employment Plan 2014 – Turkey, 2014, p. 20: [www.g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/g20\\_employment\\_plan\\_turkey.pdf](http://www.g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/g20_employment_plan_turkey.pdf).

<sup>80</sup> The *KEIG* Platform was established in 2006. It brings together 32 independent women’s advocacy groups from 16 provinces. It publishes materials pertaining to female employment and labour and carries out various activities. Its main goal is to influence policymaking and create new policies in this field, so that women can obtain secure and permanent jobs with good working conditions. Source: [www.keig.org/eng/icerik.aspx?id=1#sthash.yUWJlJru.dpuf](http://www.keig.org/eng/icerik.aspx?id=1#sthash.yUWJlJru.dpuf).

<sup>81</sup> Significant regional differences were observed. Based on 2011 data from *Işkur*, 23 percent of women and 35 percent of men are employed in the Marmara region; meanwhile, only 8 percent of women and 20 percent of men are employed in the Southeastern Anatolia region. Source: *KEIG* Platform, A Survey On the General Conditions Of Women’s Employment in Turkey After the Prime Ministerial Circular No. 2010/14, p. 18: [www.keig.org/eng/raporlar.aspx?id=7#sthash.hGcsWNpE.dpuf](http://www.keig.org/eng/raporlar.aspx?id=7#sthash.hGcsWNpE.dpuf).

<sup>82</sup> *KEIG* Platform, Women’s Labour and Employment in Turkey: Problem Areas and Policy Suggestions II, May 2013, p. 24: [www.keig.org/content/english/keig%20policy%20report%202013.pdf](http://www.keig.org/content/english/keig%20policy%20report%202013.pdf).

<sup>83</sup> Called “Employment Package,” which came into effect in 2008 with Law No. 5763. Source: Council of Europe - European Committee of Social Rights: 4th National Report on the implementation of the European Social Charter submitted by the government of Turkey (Articles 1, 9, 15, 18, 20, 24 and 25 for the period 01/01/2007 to 31/12/2010) [RAP/RCha/TU/IV(2012)], February 16, 2012, p. 80.

sector.<sup>84</sup> Based on the 2013 *KEIG* report, only a small number of women benefited from these directives.<sup>85</sup>

**The policy of the ruling *Justice and Development Party (AKP)* has a negative effect on women's employment.** According to a *Bloomberg BNA* article published on July 23, 2015, the widely held conservative attitude on gender roles is also preventing the employment rate for women from rising.<sup>86</sup> Activist *Serap Güre Şenalp*, coordinator of the *Initiative for Women's Labor and Employment*, is of the view that President *Erdogan's* conservative *AKP* party is having a negative impact in terms of improving equality between the sexes. In addition to the many misogynistic statements by party leaders, the *AKP* policy is apparently contributing to the fact that an increasing number of women are engaged in precarious odd jobs and casual work («casualization of female labour»).<sup>87</sup> *KEIG* also points out, in its May 2013 and September 2014 reports, that the increase in the employment rate for women goes hand in hand with an increase in more flexible and precarious working conditions and relationships.<sup>88</sup> The promotion of temporary positions must mainly serve to reduce unemployment among women and youth, according to the government.<sup>89</sup> These measures fail to target the transformation of the traditional gender-based division of labour and basically focus on deregulating the labour market and making working conditions more flexible.<sup>90</sup>

### 3.5 Non-government support for access to the labour market

**Uncoordinated and often inefficient projects.** Many organizations<sup>91</sup> and cooperatives propose projects to women who want to be part of the workforce. Activities offered include courses on capacity and skills building and on business management. Women can also obtain assistance in selling their homemade products. In some provinces, women's advocacy groups work in conjunction with the municipalities, which provide venues such as the town hall for selling products. According to a study commissioned by the *International Labour Organization (ILO)* on the employment of women in Turkey, merchandise produced under these projects is often excess production purchased by the municipalities and then offered to project visi-

<sup>84</sup> OXFAM; TEPAV, *Making Economies Work for Women: Female Labour Force Participation in Turkey*, 2013, p. 38.

<sup>85</sup> *KEIG* Platform, *Women's Labour and Employment in Turkey: Problem Areas and Policy Suggestions II*, May 2013, p. 22.

<sup>86</sup> *Bloomberg BNA*, "Turkey: Traditional Gender Roles Keep Women at Home, Surveys Find," July 23, 2015: [www.bna.com/turkey-traditional-gender-n17179933866/](http://www.bna.com/turkey-traditional-gender-n17179933866/).

<sup>87</sup> *Today's Zaman*, "Turkish women still struggling to access employment market," article dated September 5, 2015: [www.todayszaman.com/anasayfa\\_turkish-women-still-struggling-to-access-employment-market\\_398272.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/anasayfa_turkish-women-still-struggling-to-access-employment-market_398272.html).

<sup>88</sup> *KEIG* Platform, *Women's Labour and Employment in Turkey, in the Snare of Flexibilization and Informalization: An Analysis within the Frame of Policy Documents*, September 2014, pp. 13-16: [www.keig.org/eng/raporlar.aspx?id=12#sthash.yGfViuO.dpuf](http://www.keig.org/eng/raporlar.aspx?id=12#sthash.yGfViuO.dpuf).

<sup>89</sup> *KEIG* Platform, *Women's Labour and Employment in Turkey, in the Snare of Flexibilization and Informalization: An Analysis within the Frame of Policy Documents*, September 2014, p. 14.

<sup>90</sup> *KEIG* Platform, *Women's Labour and Employment in Turkey: Problem Areas and Policy Suggestions II*, May 2013, p. 12.

<sup>91</sup> For example, the Association of Businesswomen – Adana (İŞKAD), the Foundation for Women's Solidarity (KADAV), the Association of Female Entrepreneurs (KAGİDER) and the Association for Support and Training of Women Candidates (KA-DER).

tors. Support goes primarily to female entrepreneurs, from civil society organizations, international organizations like the ILO and the *European Union* (EU).<sup>92</sup> According to the study mandated by the ILO, initiatives by the various players involved tend to be fragmented, piecemeal and, in most cases, inefficient.<sup>93</sup> *KEIG* also argues that 90 percent of all independent women, including entrepreneurs, work with no social security coverage. Women's entrepreneurial activities are supported, with the expectation that female entrepreneurs are better able than female employees to reconcile their professional and family lives. Once again, the tendency is toward a traditional distribution of roles.<sup>94</sup>

According to statements made on October 17, 2015, by a female employee of the women's advocacy organization *KADAV* (*Foundation for Women's Solidarity*), independent NGOs advocating for women are only able to offer limited and case-specific help to returning women.<sup>95</sup>

## 4 Access to housing

### 4.1 General status of the housing market

**Istanbul rents by far the highest.** Rents in Turkey vary from one city to the next. Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir currently have the highest rents. With rent prices of 18 Turkish lira (5.5 euros) per square metre, Istanbul is by far the most expensive, followed by Ankara and Izmir at 8 lira, Antalya at 7 and Bursa at 6 Turkish lira per square metre.<sup>96</sup>

**Pressure on the housing market in the country's western cities and eastern region is linked to the refugee crisis.** The arrival of two million refugees in Turkey has put immense pressure on the Turkish housing market. Many Syrian refugees have settled in Istanbul, contributing to a sharp rise in the demand for vacant accommodation.<sup>97</sup> In the country's eastern region, according to a March 5, 2014, *Daily News* article, rent for typically inexpensive stove-heated homes has jumped from 100 to 300 Turkish lira in Kilis, from 150 to 400 lira in Şanlıurfa, and from 150 to

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<sup>92</sup> The IOM Country Fact Sheet on Turkey, under the heading "Women Entrepreneurship Support Project," states "The European Union-funded Women Entrepreneurship Support Project aims at helping Turkish women to become an entrepreneur and supporting women entrepreneurs to grow their businesses" (source: IOM, Country Fact Sheet, Turkey, August 2014, p. 22). Between 2007 and 2009 (end of project), 11,571 women received a certificate in one of the proposed courses, 255 founded a business (source: Council of Europe – European Committee of Social Rights: 4th National Report on the implementation of the European Social Charter submitted by the Government of Turkey (Articles 1, 9, 15, 18, 20, 24 and 25 for the period 01/01/2007 – 31/12/2010) [RAP/RCha/TU/IV(2012)], February 16, 2012, pp. 81-82).

<sup>93</sup> Gülay Toksöz for the ILO–Ankara office, Women's Employment Situation in Turkey, 2007, pp. 97-103: [www.academia.edu/10202442/Womens\\_Employment\\_Situation\\_in\\_Turkey](http://www.academia.edu/10202442/Womens_Employment_Situation_in_Turkey).

<sup>94</sup> *KEIG Platform, Women's Labour and Employment in Turkey: Problem Areas and Policy Suggestions II*, May 2013, p. 23.

<sup>95</sup> Email from an employee of *KADAV* (Women's Solidarity Foundation) to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated October 17, 2015.

<sup>96</sup> IOM, Turkey – Country Fact Sheet, August 2014, p. 13.

<sup>97</sup> Telephone interview with Welat Zeydanlioglu on October 23, 2015.

400-500 lira in Gaziantep. Rent for centrally heated homes has doubled in these cities and now starts at 800 liras and climbs to over 1,000 Turkish lira.<sup>98</sup>

## 4.2 Access to housing for a Kurdish woman with no social network in a city in western Turkey

**A social network is important in seeking housing.** In addition to real estate agencies, which help locate housing the fastest, according to the *International Organization for Migration* (IOM), information shared by family and friends is also apparently extremely useful in finding housing, say various sources.<sup>99</sup> *Welat Zeydanlioglu* and *Ethem Coban* from the *Kurdish Studies Network* also stressed the importance of a social network to a person's socio-economic situation, particularly a single woman.<sup>100</sup>

**Locating housing is harder for Kurds in western cities.** Many sources report that people in western cities often do not rent out homes to Kurds even though many Kurds now live in this region, and it is possible to find housing in the suburbs and outlying areas.<sup>101</sup> With the current political climate, there is a high risk, according to *Welat Zeydanlioglu*, an expert on Kurdish matters, that Kurds will once again face more difficulties in finding housing.<sup>102</sup>

**Locating housing is more complicated for single women.** According to *Nebahat Akkoc* from *KAMER*, landlords prefer not to rent to single women, except in the most fashionable neighbourhoods, where monthly rents are typically 300 (Diyarbakir) to 500 euros (Istanbul).<sup>103</sup>

## 4.3 Government assistance for access to housing

**No help in locating housing for returning people.** According to the 2014 IOM *Country Fact Sheet*, there is no contact service or specific assistance provided to returning people who are looking for housing.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Daily News, "Syrian refugee inflow doubles house prices in Turkish border cities," article dated March 5, 2014: [www.hurriyetdailynews.com/syrian-refugee-inflow-doubles-house-prices-in-turkish-border-cities.aspx?pageID=238&nID=63204&NewsCatID=345](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/syrian-refugee-inflow-doubles-house-prices-in-turkish-border-cities.aspx?pageID=238&nID=63204&NewsCatID=345).

<sup>99</sup> Email from Nebahat Akkoc to the Swiss Refugee Council to the, dated November 19, 2015; IOM, Country Fact Sheet, Turkey, August 2014, p. 13.

<sup>100</sup> Email from Welat Zeydanlioglu to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated October 16, 2015; expert opinion of Ethem Coban to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated October 27, 2015.

<sup>101</sup> Telephone interview with Welat Zeydanlioglu on October 23, 2015; IRB, Turkey: Situation of Kurds in western cities such as Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Konya and Mersin; resettlement to these cities, June 14, 2012.

<sup>102</sup> Telephone interview with Welat Zeydanlioglu on October 23, 2015.

<sup>103</sup> Email from Nebahat Akkoc to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated November 19, 2015.

<sup>104</sup> IOM, Turkey – Country Fact Sheet, August 2014, p. 12.

**Shelters for women reserved for victims of violence only.** Women's shelters offer women victims of physical, sexual and psychological violence temporary housing for specific periods of time.<sup>105</sup> Women can reside in these facilities for a maximum of six months, and they receive no assistance upon their departure.<sup>106</sup>

**Not enough social housing and criticism of TOKİ property management.** The TOKİ public housing agency offers a social housing program for people in need and for low and middle income earners<sup>107</sup> who do not have the means to find housing under current rental market conditions. People making a request under this program must own no real property nor be insured under a social security plan. Construction of social housing for the indigent population is coordinated by TOKİ and the *Ministry of Family and Social Policies – General Directorate of Social Benefits (SYGM)*. TOKİ is responsible for construction; the SYGM selects the beneficiaries and establishes reimbursement terms. Due to the high demand, the selection process is, according to TOKİ, conducted based on a notary-supervised lottery.<sup>108</sup>

The ruling party, AKP, has been criticized for having privatized public buildings through the TOKİ public housing agency. A large portion of the homes built on once public land is apparently not being used for social housing, contrary to statements by TOKİ, and is instead being used by the wealthy for luxury homes or shopping centres for high income earners.<sup>109</sup> According to *Jean-François Pérouse*, Director of the *French Institute of Anatolian Studies in Istanbul*, only 15 percent of TOKİ-owned buildings are considered «actual social housing» with maximum rents of 200 Turkish lira per month.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>106</sup> Email from Nebahat Akkoc to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated November 19, 2015.

<sup>107</sup> Beneficiaries pay an initial deposit followed by monthly payments according to an indexed repayment schedule (for most projects, the public sector wage index is used). Beneficiaries deemed to be in need are not subject to paying a deposit; they are required to make monthly payments of approximately 100 Turkish lira, for an average period of 25 years, for a 45–65 square-metre dwelling.

<sup>108</sup> Toki.gov.tr, Housing Programs, no date (consulted November 4, 2015): [www.toki.gov.tr/en/hou-sing-programs.html](http://www.toki.gov.tr/en/hou-sing-programs.html).

<sup>109</sup> ReflectionsTurkey, "Turkey's Second Privatization Agency: TOKİ," article dated May 2012: [www.reflectionsturkey.com/?p=489](http://www.reflectionsturkey.com/?p=489).

<sup>110</sup> *Mena Post*, "Social housing in Turkey: focus on TOKİ administration," article dated April 6, 2015: [www.mena-post.com/2015/04/06/social-housing-in-turkey-focus-on-toki-administration/](http://www.mena-post.com/2015/04/06/social-housing-in-turkey-focus-on-toki-administration/).

## 5 Access to social assistance and other government support to ensure means of subsistence and livelihood

**Social protection not a priority for the Turkish government.** In 2012, 12.8 percent<sup>111</sup> of gross domestic product (GDP) was allocated to social protection in Turkey.<sup>112</sup> As a comparison, in 2009, Germany allocated 31.5 percent of its GDP to social protection.<sup>113</sup> In 2012, government spending and non-contributory social assistance benefits in Turkey amounted to 0.7 percent.<sup>114</sup> Countries in the *European Union* dedicate an average of 2.5 percent of their GDP to social assistance.<sup>115</sup>

**Only 24 percent of women are covered by social security.** Under article 60 of the *Turkish Constitution*, everyone has the right to social security.<sup>116</sup> In Turkey, social protection is based on two components: social insurance subject to contributions<sup>117</sup> and non-contributory social insurance.<sup>118</sup> Only 24 percent of all women are covered by social insurance, whereas 76 percent of men are covered.<sup>119</sup>

**Assistance for the unemployed is reserved for contributing parties.** Unemployment insurance falls under the jurisdiction of the government agency *İşkur*.<sup>120</sup> Under *Unemployment Insurance Law No. 4447*, only persons who have lost their job without any fault committed and who have paid unemployment insurance premiums for a prescribed period of time<sup>121</sup> may receive insurance benefits.<sup>122</sup> Only a small proportion of the unemployed receive unemployment insurance income.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Approximately 7.8 percent for social insurance, such as old age provision and unemployment insurance, 0.7 percent for social assistance and non-contributory benefits, and 4.3 percent for public health.

<sup>112</sup> Oguz Karadeniz on behalf of the European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Annual National Report 2012 – Pensions, Health Care and Long-term Care – Turkey, March 2012, p. 6: [http://socialprotection.eu/files\\_db/1298/asisp\\_ANR12\\_TURKEY.pdf](http://socialprotection.eu/files_db/1298/asisp_ANR12_TURKEY.pdf).

<sup>113</sup> Socialprotection.eu, Deutschland, consulted October 27, 2015: <http://socialprotection.eu/>.

<sup>114</sup> Oguz Karadeniz on behalf of the European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Annual National Report 2012 – Pensions, Health Care and Long-term Care – Turkey, March 2012, p. 6.

<sup>115</sup> *Daily News*, “Turkey increases social charity budget to over 20 billion liras,” article dated August 21, 2014: [www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-increases-social-charity-budget-to-over-20-billion-liras.aspx?pageID=238&nID=70704&NewsCatID=341](http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-increases-social-charity-budget-to-over-20-billion-liras.aspx?pageID=238&nID=70704&NewsCatID=341).

<sup>116</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, article 60: “Article No 60: Everyone has the right to social security. The state shall take the necessary measures and establish the organization for the provision of social security.” Source: EU and Foreign Relations Department, Social Security System in Turkey, consulted October 27, 2015: [www.coe.int/t/dg3/sscssr/Source/PensionSemZag/Pres\\_turkey.ppt](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/sscssr/Source/PensionSemZag/Pres_turkey.ppt).

<sup>117</sup> The social insurance system comprises two main elements: long-term insurance (old age and disability provision and survivor benefit) and short-term insurance (occupational injury, occupational disease or other, maternity leave).

<sup>118</sup> Council of Europe, Introduction of the Social Security System in Turkey, consulted October 27, 2015: [www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialsecurity/Source/MissceoIntroductions2013/TR-Introduction.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialsecurity/Source/MissceoIntroductions2013/TR-Introduction.pdf).

<sup>119</sup> Heinrich Böll Stiftung North America, A Commentary on Turkey’s Growth Strategy, February 2015, p. 7: [https://us.boell.org/sites/default/files/3-11-15-a\\_commentary\\_on\\_turkey\\_s\\_growth\\_strat-egy\\_2.pdf](https://us.boell.org/sites/default/files/3-11-15-a_commentary_on_turkey_s_growth_strat-egy_2.pdf).

<sup>120</sup> Council of Europe, Introduction of the Social Security System in Turkey, consulted October 27, 2015.

<sup>121</sup> Contributions for 120 days prior to termination of work contract, and for a minimum of 600 days during the previous three years.

<sup>122</sup> İşkur, Job Seeker – Insurance, consulted October 27, 2015: [www.iskur.gov.tr/en-us/jobseeker/insurance.aspx](http://www.iskur.gov.tr/en-us/jobseeker/insurance.aspx).

<sup>123</sup> Heinrich Böll Stiftung North America, A Commentary on Turkey’s Growth Strategy, February 2015, p. 7.

**Discrimination against Kurds and single women in the selection of social assistance beneficiaries.** Law 3294, the *Law on Social Assistance and Solidarity Fund* (SASF), is intended for poor and indigent citizens who receive no social insurance income.<sup>124</sup> The SASF was created in 1986 as a fund. All public social assistance institutions such as the *General Directorate of Social Assistance and Solidarity* (SYDGM) and the *Social Services and Childcare Organization* (SHÇEK) have, in principle, recourse to this fund.<sup>125</sup> According to *Aydin Apaydin*, author of the master's degree thesis *Social Assistance as a Poverty Alleviation Strategy; Case of Altındağ Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation*, only people not covered by social insurance and who are considered indigent may receive social assistance. There is no official definition of indigence.<sup>126</sup> According to *Erdem Yörük* (PhD, *Johns Hopkins University*), assistant professor in the sociology department of Koç University in Istanbul, only the poorest, with a monthly income of under 100 dollars, are entitled to social assistance. The SASF provisions are very vague, giving local bodies a great deal of latitude in selecting social assistance beneficiaries. These organizations are composed of local government representatives; and they render decisions based on political, ethnic and religious criteria. Being a Kurd is clearly a disadvantage, especially given the recent outbreak of conflict. Families are apparently well placed to receive social assistance, whereas single women would have few prospects. A person who has filed a refugee claim in Europe will apparently also be less likely to receive social assistance.<sup>127</sup>

**Government social assistance not enough to live on.** According to various sources, public social assistance is not sufficient to live on.<sup>128</sup> In addition, cash benefits are only provided on a temporary and irregular basis.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> EU and Foreign Relations Department, Social Security System in Turkey, consulted October 27, 2015: [www.coe.int/t/dg3/sscsr/Source/PensionSemZag/Pres\\_trukey.ppt](http://www.coe.int/t/dg3/sscsr/Source/PensionSemZag/Pres_trukey.ppt).

<sup>125</sup> According to Hakan Yılmaz, the SASF proposes various forms of social assistance: periodic social assistance aimed at covering the urgent day-to-day needs of the indigent population, including food, clothing, heating, health care, housing and education. Also available are Conditional Cash Transfer programs, assistance for health care and training, and support for families. Source: Yılmaz, Hakan; Emil, Ferhat, *Social Expenditures at Different Levels of Government: Turkey. A Background Study Prepared for World Bank Social Policy Work*, 2010, p. 14; in Aydin Apaydin, *Social Assistance as a Poverty Alleviation Strategy; Case of Altındağ Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation*, A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences of Middle East Technical University, September 2011, pp. 67-108.

<sup>126</sup> Aydin Apaydin, *Social Assistance as a Poverty Alleviation Strategy; Case of Altındağ Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation*, A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences of Middle East Technical University, September 2011, pp. 67-108.

<sup>127</sup> Email from Erdem Yörük to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated November 5, 2015.

<sup>128</sup> Email from Nebahat Akkoc to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated November 19, 2015; email from Erdem Yörük to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated November 5, 2015; Aydin Apaydin, *Social Assistance as a Poverty Alleviation Strategy; Case of Altındağ Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundation*, A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences of Middle East Technical University, September 2011, pp. 67-108.

<sup>129</sup> Email from Nebahat Akkoc to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated November 19, 2015; email from Erdem Yörük to the Swiss Refugee Council, dated November 5, 2015.

Swiss Refugee Council publications on Turkey and other countries are available at [www.refugeecouncil.ch/countries-of-origin.html](http://www.refugeecouncil.ch/countries-of-origin.html).

The Swiss Refugee Council undertakes to ensure that Switzerland respects the right to protection from persecution anchored in the Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Politically and denominationally neutral, the Swiss Refugee Council is the national umbrella association for refugee aid agencies. Its work is funded by Confederation mandates, individual volunteer support, and support from foundations, communes and cantons.

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