



UPINION / 11.11.11

# Syrian refugees in Türkiye

## *Community Perspectives on Basic Rights and Support*

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January 2024

# 1. Introduction

This policy brief presents the results of a conversation held from 17 October till 26 October 2023, with Upinion's online community in Türkiye. The conversation revolved around Syrian individuals' basic rights and perceptions on the support they need.

The conversation specifically captures 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 are discussed.

It is essential to interpret the results while considering the sample characteristics unique to this conversation.<sup>1</sup> The research sample 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%**).

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<sup>1</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.

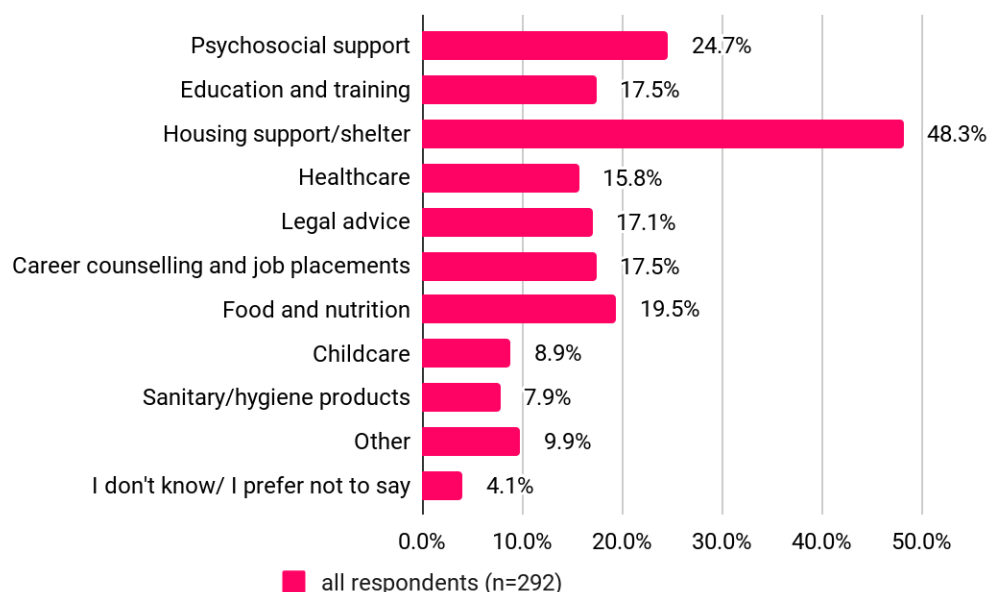
## 2. Key findings

### 2.1. Access to support services

At the start of the online conversation, 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 have sufficient access to aid and support services (**20%**) or they did not know or preferred not to answer this question (**18%**).

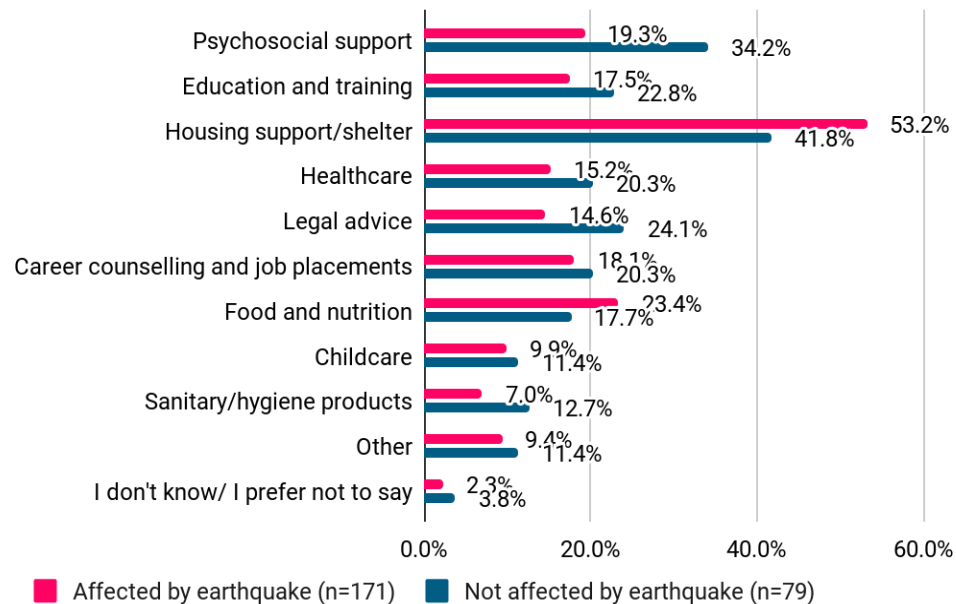
As a follow-up question, those who indicated that they lacked sufficient access to support services were asked what type of services and/or necessities they were in need of the most, using a multiple answer format. Almost half of the respondents (**48%**, n=292) reported they needed housing support or 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



Those 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.

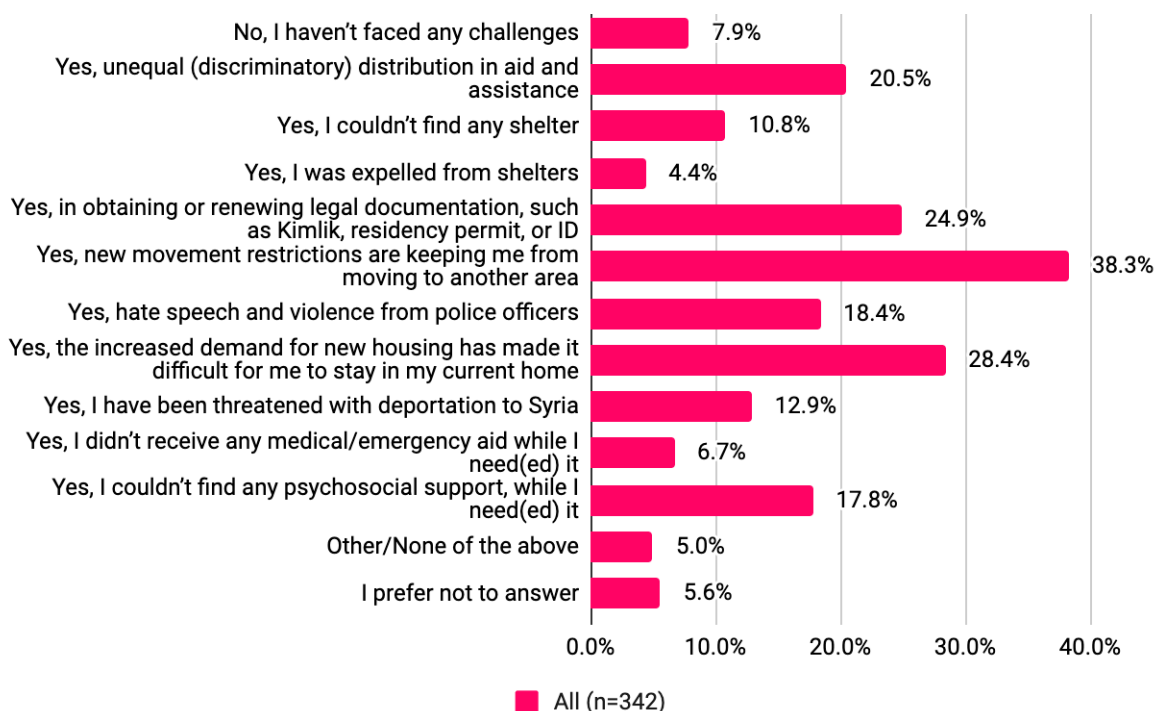
## 2.2. Main challenges experienced by respondents

All respondents were subsequently asked about the challenges they have 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>2</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 3. "Have you been facing any of the following challenges the past six months, since March 2023?" - multiple answer - all respondents



<sup>2</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.

### 2.3. Unequal distribution in aid

All respondents who 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."

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

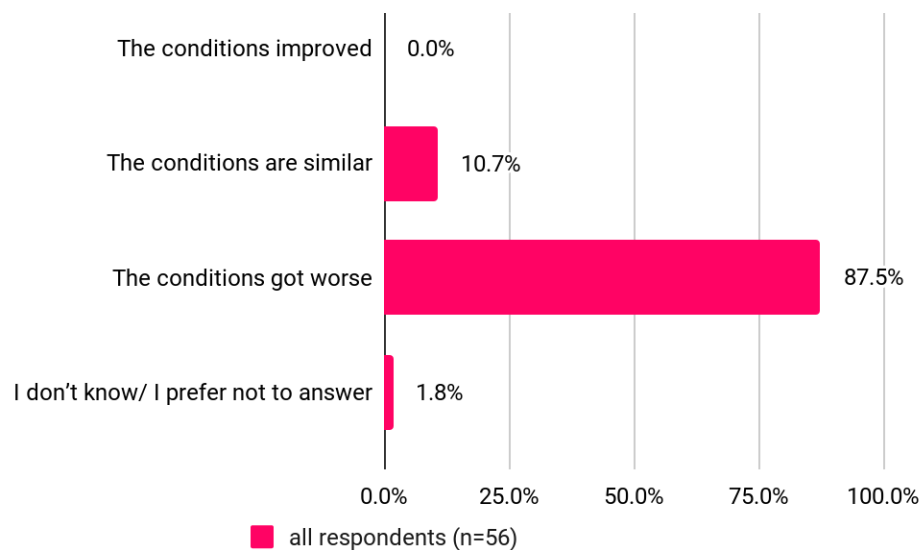
To gain a better understanding of the housing issues that were mentioned by the participants and their associated displacement, all respondents who reported being affected by the earthquake were asked whether they had to relocate within Türkiye following the 6 February 2023 earthquakes. The majority, 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.

### 2.4.1. Return after displacement

Those who had returned to their pre-earthquake residence were asked 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 4. 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."

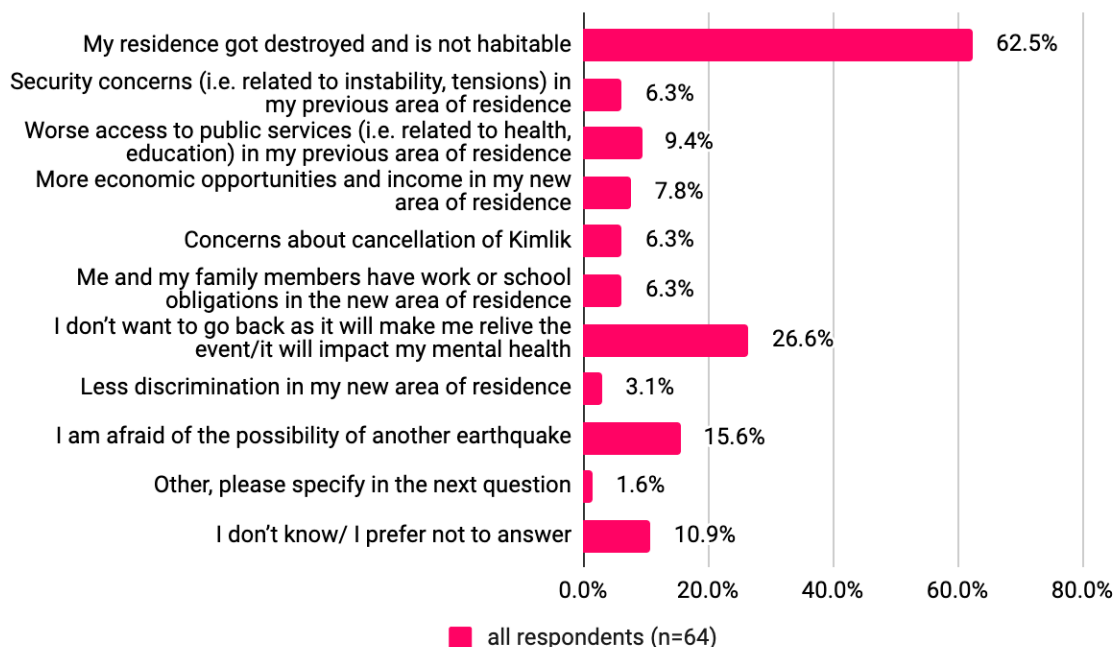
"All legal procedures have been hampered by the government, and racism has intensified among Turkish citizens."

### 2.4.2. Reasons for not returning

Those who reported 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.

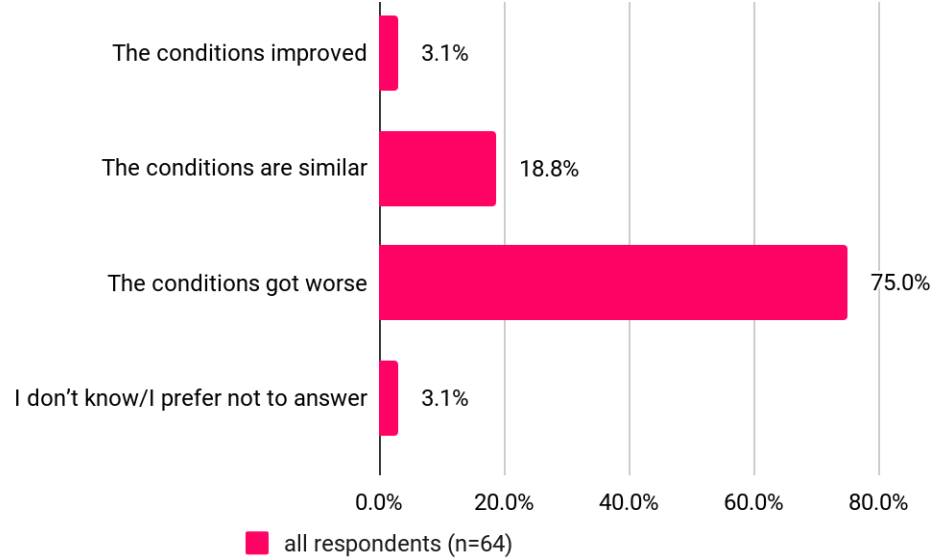
Figure 5. "What are the reasons for which you did not return (yet)?" - multiple answer - all respondents



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

Respondents were also asked 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%**).

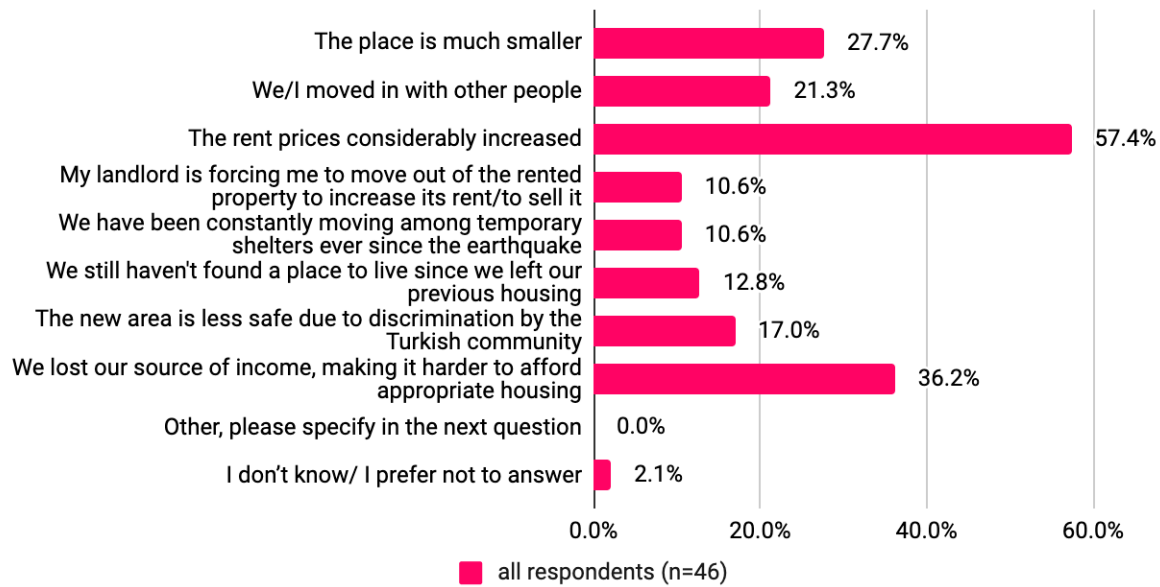
Figure 6. How did your housing conditions change compared to the place where you and your family were living before the earthquake? - all respondents



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

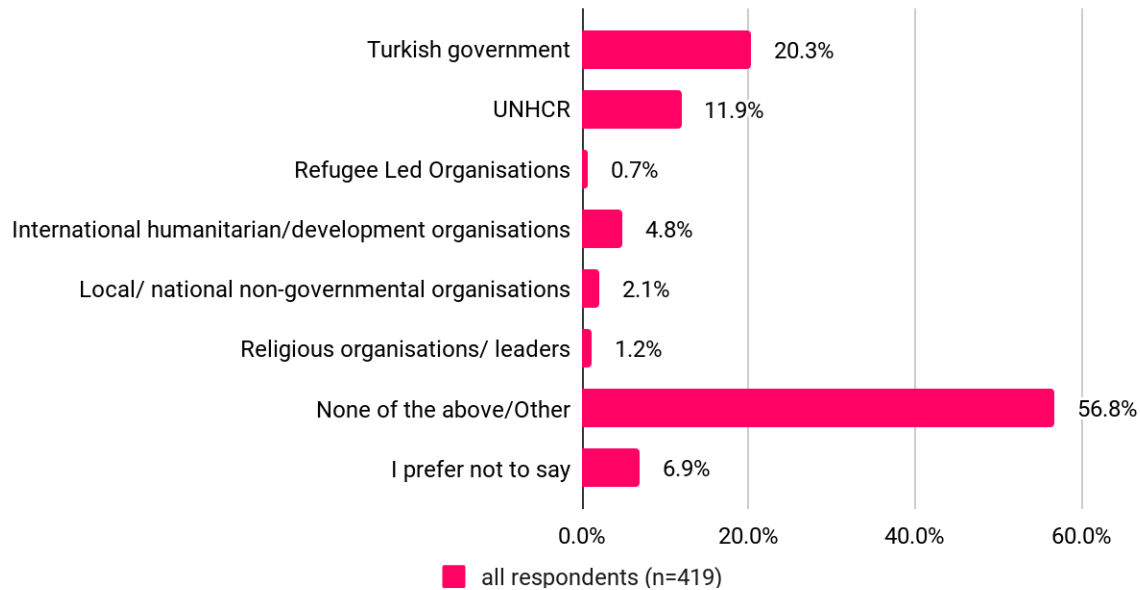


## 2.5. Appreciation of aid providers

Respondents were also questioned 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.

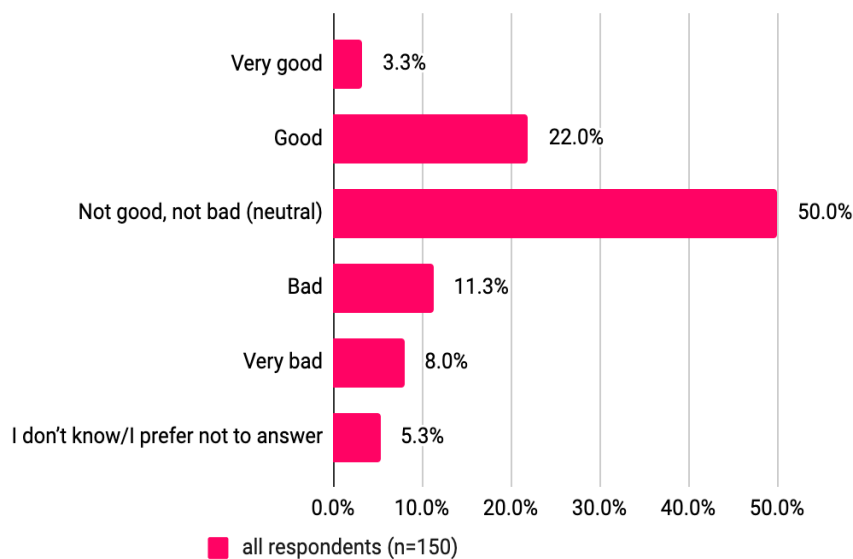
Figure 9. "From which actor did you get any social/humanitarian assistance the past six months (since March 2023)?" - multiple answers - all respondents



### 2.5.1. Satisfaction with aid

When inquiring 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.

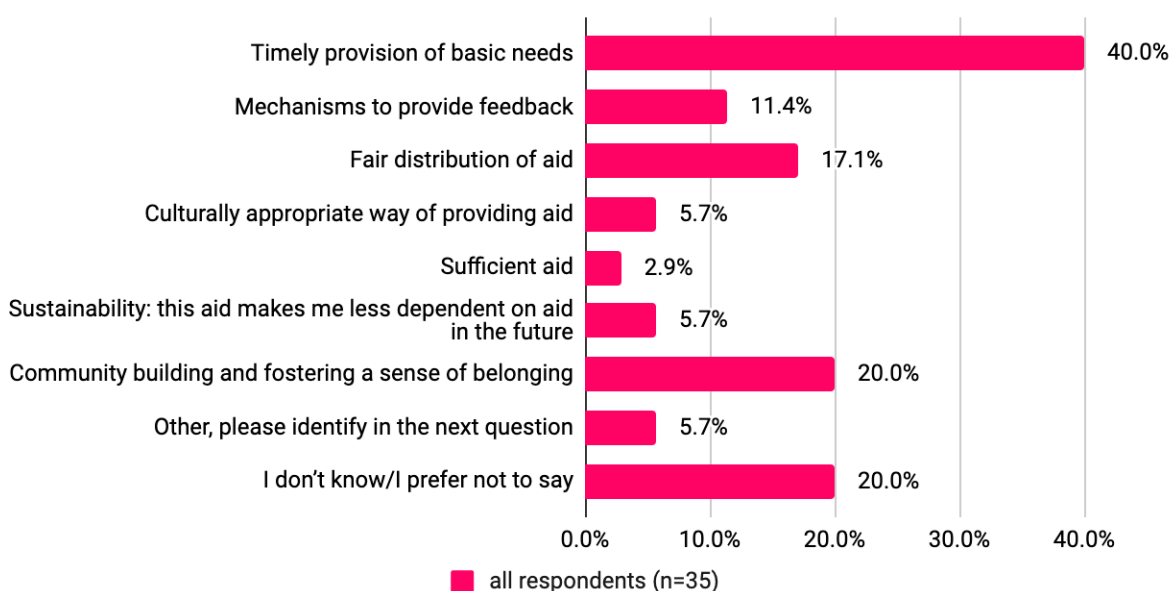
Figure 10. "Can you rate your satisfaction with the aid you received by these actors?" - all respondents



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>3</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.

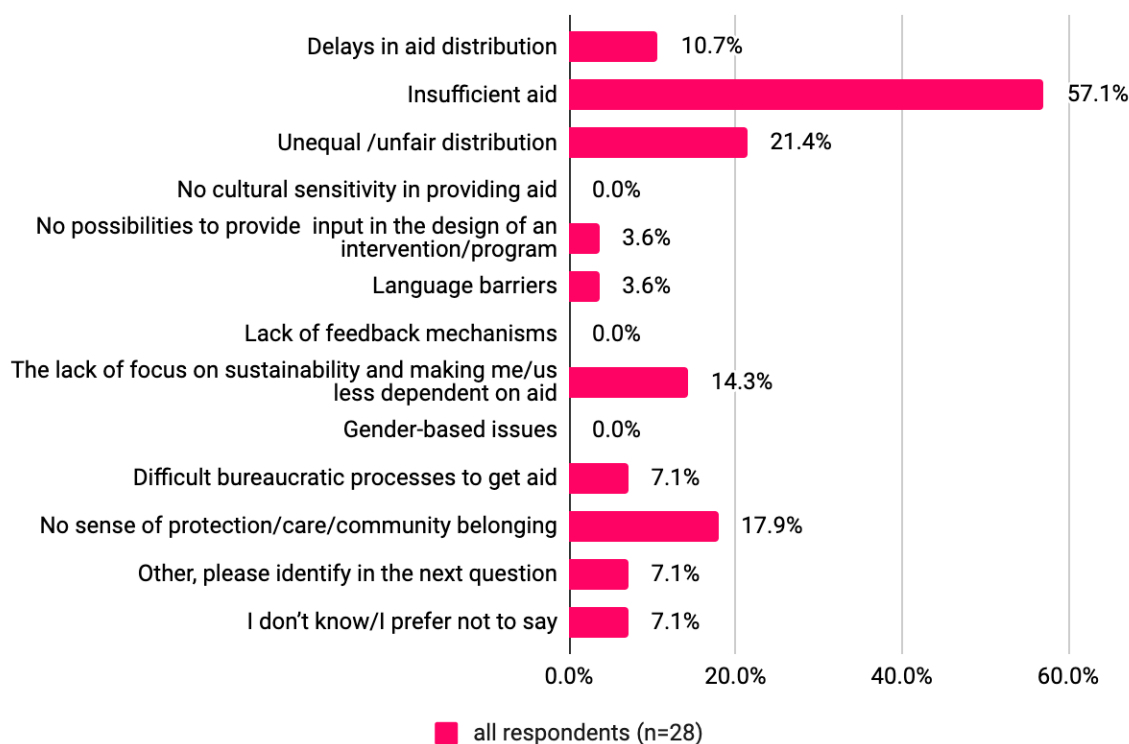
Figure 11. "What positive aspects have you observed or experienced regarding the humanitarian assistance provided by the actors you have indicated?" - multiple answer - all respondents



<sup>3</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.

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>4</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%**).

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



<sup>4</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.