

**Speech delivered by Ambassador Musa Kulaklıkaya, Director General of SESRIC**

**At the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit**

**Employment of Syrians under Temporary Protection Status in Turkey and Their Access to Labour Market**

**Istanbul, 23-24 May 2016**

**Distinguished participants,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is a great pleasure for me to be a part of this august gathering in terms of extracting solutions for the Syrians under Temporary Protection Status in Turkey and Their Access to Labour Market that is on the sideline of the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. I would like to thank the Turkish Ministry of Labour and Social Security for giving me this opportunity to brief the distinguished participants on Syrian refugee crisis and also to share the outcomes of the recent SESRIC report on “Syrian Refugees in the Neighbouring Countries” and the workshop on “The Syrian Refugees: Prospects and Challenges” that was held in February 2016 in Ankara, Turkey.

The world is indeed experiencing great challenging times for humanity. The nature of geopolitical affairs and steadiness is changing at an unusual speed while economic, social and environmental trends magnify the living conditions of many. Turkey, on the junction of these imbalances, has been safeguarding the status of international solidarity and also increasing its capacity for a higher level of risk preparation. International solidarity and preparation have been key elements of Turkey’s increasingly active role in the humanitarian field within the last decade. Today, as the largest donor country in proportion to its Gross National Product (GNP), Turkey is accompanying humanitarian operations in numerous countries in cooperation with national and international partners.

**Distinguished Representatives of the Global Humanitarian Community,**

In our comprehensive humanitarian efforts, Syria is a unique case. The Syrian crisis has caused the world's largest humanitarian crisis since the World War II. Humanitarian needs continue to climb up, population displacements are snowballing, and an entire generation of children is being exposed to war and violence, increasingly deprived of basic services, education and protection. According to the UNHCR, the total number of people in need of humanitarian assistance in Syria has reached 13.5 million, approximately 7 million of whom are internally displaced. Around 4.8 million of Syrian people fled to other countries that they became refugees due to the war in Syria. Women and children make up three-quarters of the

refugee population. Naturally, majority of the Syrian refugees went to the neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. During the ongoing internal war in Syria, three major reasons motivated Syrian people to leave from their home: safety, violence and collapsed infrastructure. Consequently, countries particularly have borders with Syria are reaching a dangerous saturation point, particularly Lebanon, which hosts almost 1.1 million Syria refugees and has, along with Jordan, the largest per capita refugee population in the world. Turkey is currently hosting more than 2.7 million Syrian refugees, the largest number of Syrian refugees hosted in one country in the world. Accordingly, providing the basic humanitarian services to such a significant number of refugees is not easy task for any country in the world. In this regard, millions of Syrian refugees still are in need of food and safe drinking water, non-food items, shelter, emergency medical treatments and protection in order to survive.

Syrians arrived in neighbouring countries with little to no economic resources. Without formal residency rights and access to work permits, whatever resources they had quickly exhausted. They are forced to generate income through the informal labour market to meet their family's survival needs. Ever since the beginning of the internal conflicts in Syria, Turkey has accepted the Syrians to enter from its borders. According to the international laws and practices, Turkey offers temporary protection to Syrians.

In spite of the huge efforts of host countries to alleviate the deprivation of Syrian refugees, the pressure on government services, labour markets and society in general is escalating. Threatened by falling humanitarian assistance, the neighbouring countries are stressed to find an appropriate response to the massive refugee influx without leaving local communities adversely affected. On the other hand, as humanitarian assistance decreases, Syrian refugees with no or limited legal access to work find no other option than looking for work to support their families. This unavoidable upshot nurtures the informal economies and causes further deterioration of working conditions and wages in already vulnerable local labour markets. It also allows for exploitation, child labour and unacceptable working conditions and heightens tensions between local communities and refugees.

As per the policy options in employment, revealed by the recent report of SESRIC, one of the major problems faced by Syrian refugees is their legal status and permission to work. Turkey is the only country that has introduced specific legislation to address the needs of Syrian refugees. Given the current workforce challenges, Jordan could take only limited steps to allow Syrian refugees to work. According to a study conducted by Kattaa in 2015, there are only about 10% of employed Syrians who obtained formal work permits mostly in camps and practically all Syrian refugees working outside camps do not have work permits. Refugees with a residency permit in northern Iraq have the legal right to work, but it is difficult to obtain residency permit without legal documentation. Even with permission to work, it is not easy to find other than low-paid work. The majority of refugees in Egypt rely on work as their primary source of income. However, they take up less skilled jobs in the informal sector due

to an inability to find suitable jobs or obtain a work permit. Therefore, it is critical to facilitate administrative processes for entry into the labour market for the refugees.

According to a study published by ILO and FAFO (2015), Syrians are willing to accept lower wages and harsher working conditions than local workers. Majority of Syrian refugees are young people stemming from rural areas and have considerably lower education compared to Jordanians. Syrian workers in the informal sector are generally being paid less, have to work more, and have poorer contracts compared to Jordanians in the same sector. According to a report revealed by the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development in 2014, the majority of Syrians in Lebanon reported that too few job opportunities (86%) and too little salary (76%) were the main challenges faced by their community, while only one in five Lebanese believed that there were few job opportunities for the Syrian community, or that salary received by Syrians was not sufficient to meet basic needs.

Low economic growth in some hosting countries limits the prospects for new job opportunities. However, host country economies can be boosted with active participation of Syrians to the local economies. Supporting Syrian capital owners to invest their capital in productive areas will contribute to hosting economies. There will be a potential of creating new markets for new products through new businesses. Noting that a big number of Syrian were small farmers / land-owners in their country, idle agricultural lands can be rehabilitated for utilization and investment by skilled Syrian labour force, which can increase the production of food and animal farming and decrease the needs for agricultural import. A holding company could be set up for agriculture to facilitate agricultural production by Syrians.

The host countries will also benefit in terms of the language skills of the refugees in research, education and trade, but it is important to address the language barriers, particularly in Turkey. People working in informal economy could be targeted to enhance their employability in the formal economy through vocational training courses. This is also important for self-employment and entrepreneurship. Special mechanisms can be developed to facilitate remote services provided by Syrian refugees, particularly in the area of information and technology services.

Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

The workshop on “Syrian Refugees: Prospects and Challenges” organised by SESRIC in Ankara, Turkey in February 2016 made several recommendations pertaining to the labour force participation. I will briefly touch upon some of those recommendations:

- ✓ Facilitating administrative processes and solving work permit issues and attracting international donors and businessmen for investing through incentive regulations,

- ✓ Supporting Syrian capital owners to invest their capital in productive areas and facilitating easy travel of Syrian businessmen,
- ✓ Conducting a comprehensive assessment on Syrian refugees' skills base in order to ensure effective utilization of their skills for the host economies,
- ✓ Providing support for micro projects to encourage youth to open their small businesses and enhancing the negotiation power of Syrian refugees to increase the employment opportunities,
- ✓ Targeting informal employees and providing them training courses to enhance their employability in the formal economy and offering training programs for self-employment and entrepreneurship,
- ✓ Supporting start-ups by Syrian entrepreneurs through various modalities, including microfinance and developing special incentives to attract Syrian investors, such as free zones,
- ✓ Rehabilitating idle agricultural lands for utilization and investment by skilled Syrian labour force, which can increase the production of food and animal farming and decrease the needs for agricultural import in Turkey,
- ✓ Enhancing collaboration with universities and research centres in understanding the needs of the refugees and offering new solutions and developing special strategies to effectively benefit from the qualified workforce of the Syrian refugees.

Last but not least, we at SESRIC stand ready to work with partners to identify how the labour market can address the Syrian refugee crisis in a sustainable manner and collaboratively build new programs to sustain, such as job and vocational counselling and profiling, vocational training courses, on-the-job trainings, entrepreneurship programs and access to financial resources and grant support. As we all look forward to the successful outcome of this meeting, I wish you all the success.

**Thank you for your kind attention.**