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**PAPER**

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# Türkiye-Syria earthquake's impact on Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi and Somali migrants and refugees in Türkiye

# Introduction

On 6 February 2023, two earthquakes hit Türkiye, displacing 3.3 million people from the southern and central regions.<sup>1</sup> While Adiyaman, Hatay, Kahramanmaraş, Gaziantep and Malatya provinces were most severely affected, and Adana, Diyarbakir, Elazığ, Kilis, Osmaniye, and Sanliurfa were also directly impacted, the effects reached across the country.<sup>2</sup> This paper explores its effects on the needs and migration decision-making of Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi and Somali migrants and refugees interviewed by MMC through the 4Mi programme in Türkiye.

## Key Findings

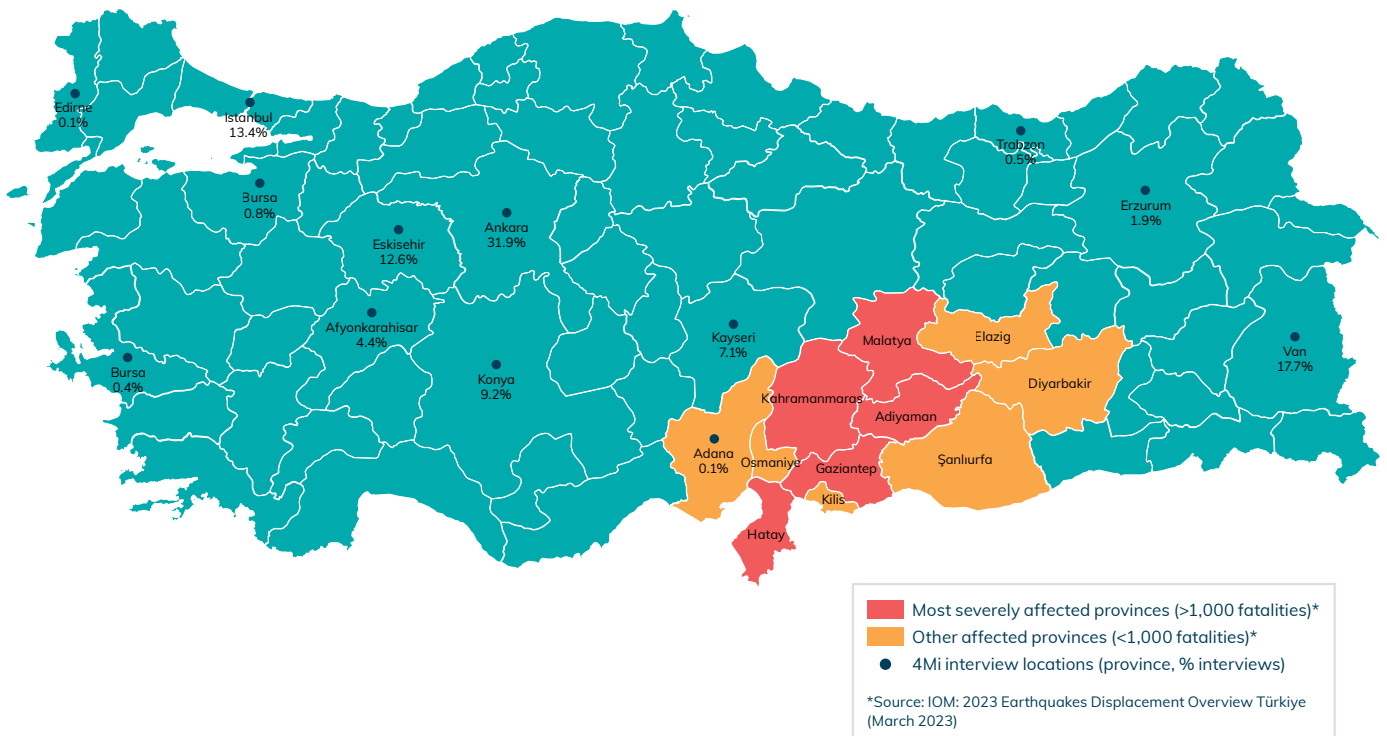
- Some respondents had been displaced by the earthquake, but this was a very low proportion (4%). A little more than half of respondents (56%) reported that their conditions in Türkiye were impacted by the earthquake, while 44% of respondents reported not being impacted by the earthquake.
- The most reported impact was an increase in tensions with the Turkish community in the period following the earthquake, reported by a quarter of respondents.

- Respondents reported difficulties in accessing housing post-earthquake (22%), possibly tied to forced evictions, rising rentals and inflation; and increased difficulties accessing work in Türkiye (18%) tied to loss of livelihood and infrastructure damage post-earthquake.
- The need for cash was higher than among those surveyed before the earthquake (by 11%), as was the need for medical assistance (by 17%).
- The earthquake did not have an implication on the respondents' journey plans – the majority of respondents did not change their plans post-earthquake, and none attributed change in plans to the earthquake.

## Methodology

Since January 2023, MMC has conducted 4Mi survey interviews among Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi and Somali migrants and refugees in Afyonkarahisar, Adana, Ankara, Bursa, Edirne, Eskisehir, Erzurum, Izmir, Istanbul, Kayseri, Konya, Van, and Trabzon provinces in Türkiye.

**Figure 1. Earthquake-affected provinces in Türkiye and 4Mi interview locations**



1 Government of Türkiye (2023) [Türkiye earthquakes recovery and reconstruction assessment](#).  
2 ACAPS (2023) [Beyond the rubble: A situation analysis 120 days after the earthquakes \(6 February to 31 May 2023\)](#).

This analysis is based on two datasets: 269 4Mi respondents interviewed between 10 January and 6 February 2023, then 398 4Mi respondents interviewed between 7 March and 30 April 2023, after the earthquake. An additional survey module was added post-earthquake to explore its impact on experiences, needs and movement intentions, and nine key-informant interviews were held to supplement the data.

## Profiles

While the target and data collection locations for each sample were the same, the sampling approach meant that each sample composition varied. The pre-earthquake sample has a much larger proportion of Afghans (64%), while the post-earthquake sample is more mixed (see Figure 2). The gender composition is similar, however. A larger proportion of respondents in the pre-earthquake sample had irregular status, while the post-earthquake sample comprised of more asylum seekers and temporary residents.

**Figure 2. Profiles of respondents**

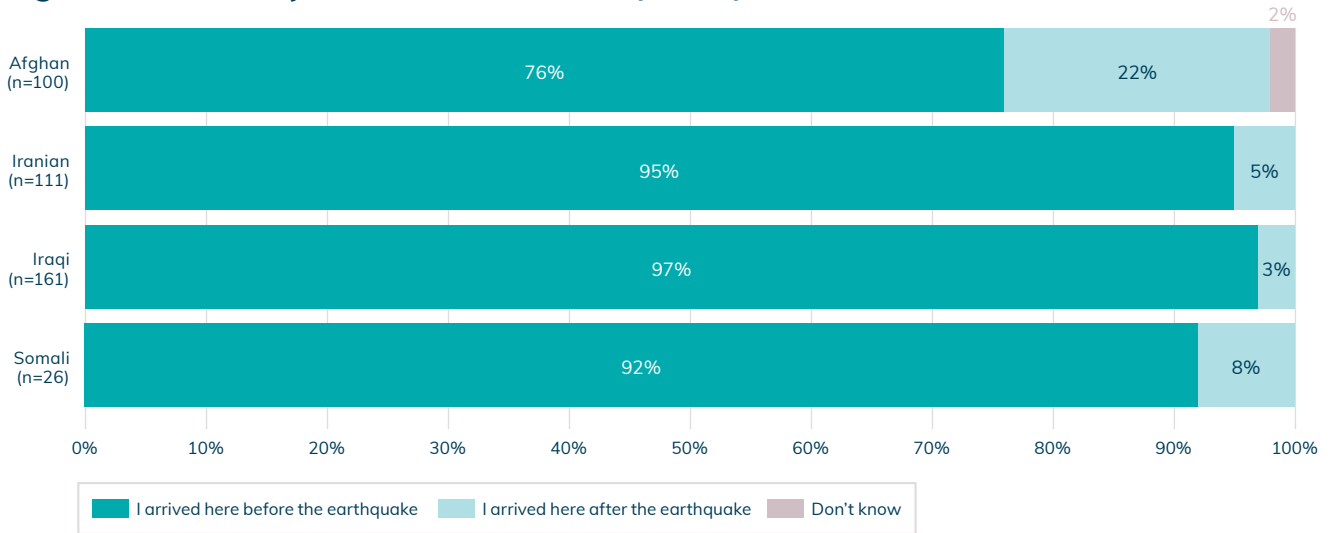
| Profile          |   | Pre-earthquake (n=269) |                     |                 |                   |               | Post-earthquake (n=398) |                      |                    |                   |               |
|------------------|---|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------|
|                  |   | Afghan (n=171, 64%)    | Iranian (n=77, 29%) | Iraqi (n=4, 1%) | Somali (n=17, 6%) | TOTAL (n=269) | Afghan (n=100, 25%)     | Iranian (n=111, 28%) | Iraqi (n=161, 40%) | Somali (n=26, 7%) | TOTAL (n=398) |
| Gender           | Male                                    | 77%                    | 57%                 | 75%             | 71%               | 71%           | 66%                     | 50%                  | 74%                | 73%               | 65%           |
|                  | Female                                  | 23%                    | 43%                 | 25%             | 29%               | 29%           | 34%                     | 50%                  | 26%                | 27%               | 35%           |
|                  | TOTAL                                   | 100%                   | 100%                | 100%            | 100%              | 100%          | 100%                    | 100%                 | 100%               | 100%              | 100%          |
| Age group        | 18-25                                   | 36%                    | 17%                 | 25%             | 29%               | 30%           | 36%                     | 17%                  | 17%                | 38%               | 23%           |
|                  | 26-35                                   | 39%                    | 56%                 | 75%             | 71%               | 46%           | 43%                     | 33%                  | 22%                | 58%               | 33%           |
|                  | 36-45                                   | 18%                    | 22%                 | 0%              | 0%                | 17%           | 17%                     | 23%                  | 37%                | 4%                | 26%           |
|                  | 46-55                                   | 5%                     | 5%                  | 0%              | 0%                | 4%            | 3%                      | 21%                  | 16%                | 0%                | 13%           |
|                  | 55+                                     | 3%                     | 0%                  | 0%              | 0%                | 2%            | 1%                      | 5%                   | 9%                 | 0%                | 5%            |
|                  | TOTAL                                   | 100%                   | 100%                | 100%            | 100%              | 100%          | 100%                    | 100%                 | 100%               | 100%              | 100%          |
| Migration status | Applied for permit/visa                 | 3%                     | 3%                  | 0%              | 0%                | 3%            | 0%                      | 5%                   | 2%                 | 0%                | 2%            |
|                  | Asylum seeker                           | 31%                    | 68%                 | 0%              | 0%                | 39%           | 63%                     | 72%                  | 39%                | 0%                | 52%           |
|                  | Irregular/no legal documents            | 49%                    | 10%                 | 0%              | 12%               | 35%           | 25%                     | 4%                   | 0%                 | 8%                | 8%            |
|                  | Permanent resident                      | 1%                     | 0%                  | 25%             | 0%                | 1%            | 1%                      | 0%                   | 1%                 | 4%                | 1%            |
|                  | Permit no longer valid/expired          | 1%                     | 4%                  | 0%              | 6%                | 2%            | 4%                      | 6%                   | 1%                 | 19%               | 4%            |
|                  | Refugee                                 | 8%                     | 6%                  | 0%              | 0%                | 7%            | 1%                      | 3%                   | 5%                 | 0%                | 3%            |
|                  | Regular migrant with no need for permit | 0%                     | 1%                  | 0%              | 0%                | 0%            | 0%                      | 0%                   | 1%                 | 4%                | 1%            |
|                  | Temporary protection                    | 1%                     | 0%                  | 0%              | 0%                | 0%            | 0%                      | 1%                   | 0%                 | 0%                | 0%            |
|                  | Temporary resident                      | 6%                     | 8%                  | 75%             | 82%               | 13%           | 6%                      | 10%                  | 52%                | 50%               | 28%           |
|                  | Other                                   | 0%                     | 0%                  | 0%              | 0%                | 0%            | 0%                      | 0%                   | 0%                 | 15%               | 1%            |
|                  | TOTAL                                   | 100%                   | 100%                | 100%            | 100%              | 100%          | 100%                    | 100%                 | 100%               | 100%              | 100%          |

## Findings

A majority of respondents (91%) interviewed after the earthquake had arrived at the interview location before the earthquake. 9% had arrived after the earthquake, most of these in Ankara (19/35), followed by Konya (11),

Van (3) and Istanbul (2). 49% of those who moved said they had been displaced by the earthquake's impacts: 11 Afghan respondents, 5 Iranians and 1 Iraqi (4% of the total sample).

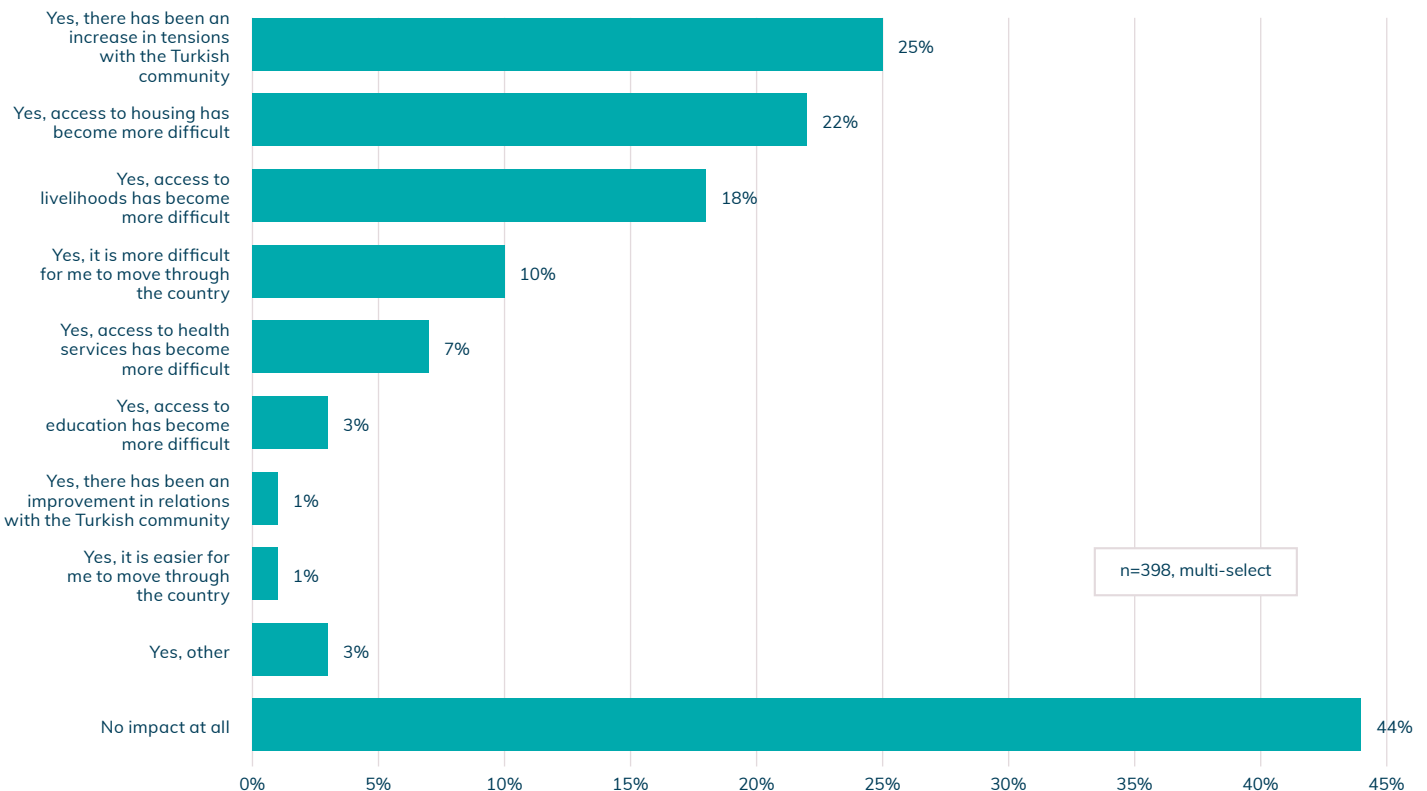
**Figure 3. When did you arrive in this town? (n=398)**



## A majority reported some kind of earthquake impact

44% reported that the earthquake did not have an impact on their lives in Türkiye (see Figure 4): 50% of whom were in Ankara and 24% in Keyseri city in central Türkiye at the time of interview.

**Figure 4. Has the recent earthquake impacted conditions for you in Türkiye?**



## Rise in tensions with local communities reported by a quarter of respondents

The majority reported some form of impact. **25% of respondents (98 respondents) reported experiencing an increase in tensions with the Turkish community.** This was more commonly reported by Iraqi respondents (30%), as compared to 25% among Iranian, and 21% among Afghan respondents. 56% of those who reported a rise in tensions were interviewed in Eskisehir city in the northwest, and 28% in Ankara.

A shortage of resources raised social tensions in the aftermath of the earthquake, but this was compounded by a rise in anti-immigrant sentiments relating to campaigning for the general election held in May 2023, worsening relations between the host communities and migrants and refugees in Türkiye.<sup>3</sup> While few reported an improvement in relations, assistance from the local community was acknowledged in qualitative data.

**“There was great support from locals and organisations who sent tons of food and clothes to displaced people including refugees. But in general, there is a lot of tension and it’s because of the elections. Many people in Türkiye are changing their view of migrants and refugees from good to bad. The politicians and media are always saying bad things about migrants and refugees.”**

**25-year-old male Iranian, interviewed in Izmir.**

## Housing woes in urban centres worsened amidst rising inflation post-earthquake

**22% of respondents reported experiencing more difficulties accessing affordable housing following the earthquake.** This was more often the case among Iranian respondents (53%). Most of the respondents who reported this issue were interviewed in Ankara (72/88) at the time of interview. Issues around access to housing included being displaced, often due to forced evictions, and an increase in rentals, compounded by rising inflation.

**“Inflation has increased. The earthquake increased the cost of living in cities like Adiyaman. In general, the economic situation throughout the country is very bad. The rent for my house in Adiyaman almost doubled after the earthquake and it is understandable because fewer houses are available, and many people are without homes. Also, the Turkish Lira lost its value. The money is worthless. So, everybody increased the prices for everything to save their businesses.”**

**32-year-old male Iranian interviewed in Ankara, Türkiye.**

One Afghan respondent reported being forcibly evicted with a week’s notice after the landlord’s primary home was destroyed in the earthquake.<sup>4</sup> Another Afghan respondent confirmed having to pay higher rent after the demand for housing increased as increasing number of displaced persons, including migrants and refugees, moved from affected provinces to Ankara, Konya or Istanbul.<sup>5</sup>

3 Michaelson, R. & Baris Narh, D. (2023) [Turkish opposition stirs up anti-immigrant feeling in attempt to win presidency](#) The Guardian.

4 25-year-old Afghan respondent, female, interviewed in Ankara, Türkiye.

5 28-year-old Afghan respondent, male, interviewed in Istanbul, Türkiye; INAS (2023) [Massive domestic migration in wake of deadly earthquakes in Türkiye](#) Business Standard.

## Infrastructural damage affected livelihoods in earthquake-impacted areas

**18% of respondents reported increased difficulties in accessing livelihoods post-earthquake** (see Figure 4), including 42% of Iranian and 21% of Afghan respondents. In Türkiye, refugees and asylum seekers are more commonly employed in the agricultural sector, where they are exempt from possessing a work permit.<sup>6</sup> The earthquake hit agricultural production and related livelihoods in affected provinces, potentially forcing migrants and refugees to move in search of alternative livelihoods.<sup>7</sup> Infrastructure damage and the overall drop in economic activity post-earthquake also impacted respondents who were business owners as well as those working in the textile manufacturing industries in affected provinces. An Iranian respondent, a trader in clothes and electronic devices, had left Adiyaman, one of the affected provinces, after shops in his neighbourhood were partially or completely destroyed during the earthquake. The respondent had stayed in Adiyaman province for two months, but found it difficult to continue trading and reported running into financial losses before moving to Ankara.<sup>8</sup> An Afghan respondent who previously worked as a tailor moved to Ankara to look for jobs in construction after the textile manufacturing industry in his province was affected by the earthquake.<sup>9</sup>

## Restrictions on movement within Türkiye reimposed post-earthquake

10% of respondents reported difficulties moving through Türkiye following the earthquake. This was more often reported among Iraqi respondents (15%). Under normal circumstances, refugees in Türkiye must obtain permission to travel between provinces,<sup>10</sup> but after the earthquake, Türkiye announced that refugees would be allowed to leave earthquake-affected provinces and move to other parts of the country to find alternate accommodation for a period of 60 days without seeking permission.<sup>11</sup> This momentarily eased internal movements of those registered as refugees.

“Usually, for traveling to other provinces we have to apply for permission. But after the earthquakes, we just travelled and no one asked us where we were going because they understand the situation is not normal.”

**28-year-old male Afghan interviewed in Istanbul, Türkiye.**

However, it did not apply to asylum seekers or undocumented respondents.

## The earthquake did not impact the respondents' decision to end their journey

Before the earthquake, a majority of respondents (95%) reported not having reached the end of their journey. Of the 4% who had ended their journey, 5 respondents said they had to because they could not reach their intended destination safely, 4 respondents could not afford to pay to reach their intended destination, 1 respondent could not cross borders, 1 respondent perceived difficulties in staying in their intended destination on account of policy changes, 2 respondents cited reasons related to marriage with a Turkish citizen, and 2 respondents reported Türkiye was their final destination.

Similar patterns were observed among respondents surveyed after the earthquake, suggesting that the earthquake has not impacted migration intentions and aspirations (either encouraging people to leave or to stay), and that Türkiye remains very much a transit country for these populations. 97% of respondents reported not having reached the end of their journey at the time of being interviewed, and 1% (n=4) said they had.

6 Ministry of Labour and Social Security (2016) [Regulation on work permit of international protection applicants and international protection status holders](#).

7 Yavuz, F. (2023) [How Türkiye's earthquake affected the agriculture and food security](#) Politics Today.

8 32-year-old male Iranian, interviewed in Ankara.

9 25-year-old female Afghan, interviewed in Ankara; 32-year-old male Iranian, interviewed in Ankara; Vera, S. & Caglayan, C. (2023) [Türkiye's southeast exodus after earthquake puts manufacturing at risk](#) Reuters; ILO (2023) [The effects of the February 2023 earthquake on the labour market in Türkiye](#).

10 Human Rights Watch (2022) [Türkiye: Hundreds of refugees deported to Syria](#).

11 Human Rights Watch (2023) [Türkiye: Suspend time limit on travel outside quake zone](#).

## None of the respondents reported changing plans during their journey on account of the earthquake

Before the earthquake, 78% of respondents reported not having changed their plans during the journey, while 22% had done so. The top three reasons for changing plans were concerns around safety and security (21/57), another opportunity coming their way (17/57) and lack of funds (10/57).

Little difference was observed among the group interviewed after the earthquake: 83% of respondents reported not having changed their plans during the journey, while 17% had done so. 6% of the total were no longer planning to return home, 6% had changed the route to the same destination, and 5% had changed destination. The two most cited reasons for changing plans remained the same - concerns around safety and security (22/66 who changed plans) and another opportunity coming their way (19/66). No respondents

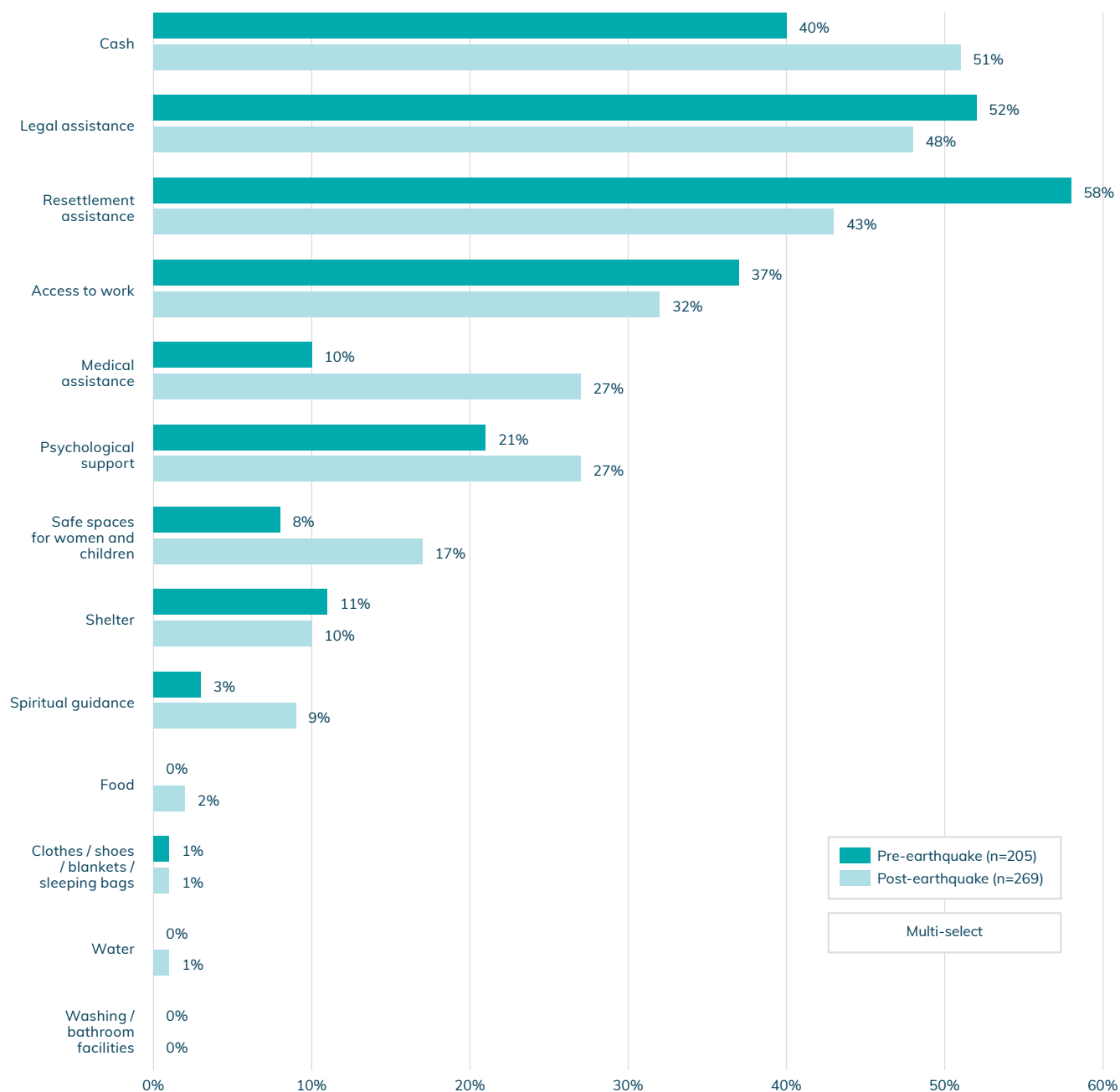
attributed their change of plan to the earthquake. There does not appear to have been a change in the number of people trying to leave Türkiye in the aftermath of the earthquake, although it is unclear whether this was affected by the rapid securitisation of the border between Greece and Türkiye.<sup>12</sup>

## Need for cash and medical assistance increased overall post-earthquake, while more Afghan respondents reported needing resettlement assistance

Before the earthquake occurred, 76% of 4Mi respondents reported needing assistance at the time of the interview. The five main areas of need were: resettlement (58%), legal aid (52%), cash (40%), access to work (37%) and psychological support (21%) (see Figure 5).

12 Smith, H. (2023) [Greece fortifies border to block refugees from Turkish-Syrian earthquakes](#) The Guardian; Stamatoukou, E (2023) [EU Agrees Stricter Migration Measures After Quakes in Turkey, Syria](#) Balkan Insight.

**Figure 5. What kind of assistance do you need?**



After the earthquake, a slightly smaller proportion reported needing assistance, dropping to 68%. However, types of needs changed. The most frequent need shifted to cash (51%), followed by legal assistance (48%), then resettlement assistance (43%), access to work (32%) and psychological support (27%). Additionally, 27% of respondents also reported needing medical assistance, as compared to 10% from the pre-earthquake sample.

Among Afghan respondents, the proportion reporting needing help with access to work increased from 37% prior to the earthquake to 60% post-earthquake. More Afghan respondents also reported needing safe spaces for women and children (increased from 7% pre-earthquake to 27% post-earthquake), cash assistance (increased from 51% to 62%) and resettlement assistance (increased from 55% to 66%).



## Conclusion

While Afghan, Iranian, Iraqi and Somali migrants and refugees in Türkiye were not the population most severely impacted by the earthquake, 4Mi results indicated that the population was affected, in terms of increasing tensions with the host community, and making access to housing and livelihoods more difficult than it was before the earthquake, including some displacement. Livelihood impacts are reflected in the increased need for cash assistance, in particular. However, the earthquake does not appear to have impacted on movement dynamics or aspirations: plans and destinations do not appear to have changed, nor did the earthquake impact the respondents' decision to end their journey. In cases where respondents changed their plan in the period following the earthquake, none of them attributed these changes to the earthquake.



MMC is a global network engaged in data collection, research, analysis, and policy and programmatic development on mixed migration, with regional hubs hosted in Danish Refugee Council regional offices in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and Latin America, and a global team based across Copenhagen, Geneva and Brussels.

MMC is a leading source for independent and high-quality data, research, analysis and expertise. MMC aims to increase understanding of mixed migration, to positively impact global and regional migration policies, to inform evidence-based protection responses for people on the move and to stimulate forward thinking in public and policy debates on mixed migration. MMC's overarching focus is on human rights and protection for all people on the move.

MMC is part of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC).

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