



**UNHCR**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

## **UNHCR TURKEY**

# **AGE, GENDER AND DIVERSITY 2015 REPORT**

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## **1. Summary**

As part of UNHCR's Global Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming Policy (AGDM), UNHCR Turkey conducts participatory assessments on annual basis. Policy recognizes women and men of all ages in the community as active participants in decision-making and motivates them to express their needs and decide their own future with a view to their empowerment. Participation of refugees and asylum seekers when defining the protection challenges as well as when designing the programs is crucial for serving, assisting, and protecting persons of concern. In line with UNHCR's community based approach and commitment to AGDM, participatory assessments were held by UNHCR Turkey in years 2010, 2012, 2013 and 2014.

In 2015, participatory assessments were held in 8 cities (Van, Erzurum, Konya, Kayseri, Istanbul, Hatay, Gaziantep and Sanliurfa) with urban refugee and asylum seekers between 9 - 19 March 2015. Assessments were conducted by multi-functional teams composed of protection and programme staff of UNHCR Turkey as well as UNHCR's implementing partners (ASAM, HRDF, STL and ). Focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and in-depth interviews were main participatory assessment tools utilized during the practice. Refugees and asylum seekers from different age and gender groups, different educational and professional backgrounds, different special needs and with different duration of stay in Turkey were selected to participate to the exercise to get a wider perspective on the protection risks faced and their coping mechanisms. This report aims to summarize and analyze the findings of the exercise held in 8 cities with policy and program recommendations.

## **2. Themes**

In line with UNHCR Turkey's AGDM strategy for 2015, three main themes were selected for the exercise; self-reliance, SGBV, harmful traditional practices such as early and forced marriages, and civil matters focusing on marriage and birth registration. These specific topics were selected in consideration of the increase in arrival numbers, legislative developments relating to access to rights and services by PoCs, and challenges faced by PoCs concerning access to livelihoods as the numbers increase and pressure on local resources grow.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Demography**

The exercise was conducted with urban refugees and asylum seekers in 8 provinces: namely Kayseri, Konya, Erzurum, Van, Sanliurfa, Hatay, Gaziantep and Istanbul - four regions of the country. The locations, where the focus groups discussions conducted, were selected in consideration of the profile and numbers of the caseload present, protection challenges identified, and the socio-economic and geographical specificities. Kayseri and Konya were selected as cities being a 'traditional' satellite city with diverse refugee population composed of different national and ethnic backgrounds. Van represents an important urban location, located at the border in the east of Turkey, which is an entry point for many PoCs. Erzurum is also assessed as an important example as it is located in the east mainly hosting Afghan PoCs. Hatay, Sanliurfa and Gaziantep were selected as the primary cities in the Southeast of Turkey hosting large numbers of Syrian refugee population since outset of the Syria crisis. Despite not being a satellite city, Istanbul as the key hub for migration movements, represents an important location with a diverse refugee and asylum seeker population.

As to their socio-economic features, while Istanbul, Kayseri and Gaziantep are industrial cities, both Hatay and Sanliurfa have more of a rural economy with different social dynamics. Istanbul especially constitutes an important attraction point for many PoCs as it provides wide range of job opportunities. Van and Erzurum offer limited economic opportunities due to several factors. Therefore, mentioned 8 urban locations represent important samples to understand and analyze the impacts of different socio-economic factors to refugees in the country.



Five biggest refugee populations in Turkey were selected during the exercise: Syrians, Iraqis, Afghans, Iranians and Somalis. In total 374 individuals were reached out during the exercise and 50.5% of the participants were females (189 females, 185 males).

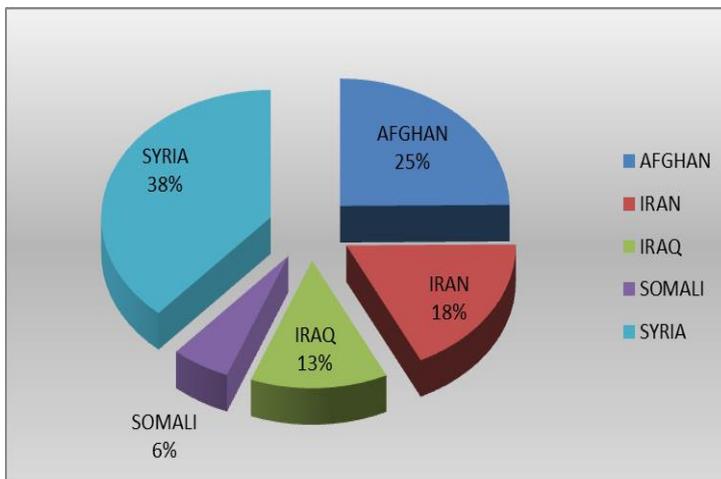


Figure 1: Percentage of participants per nationality

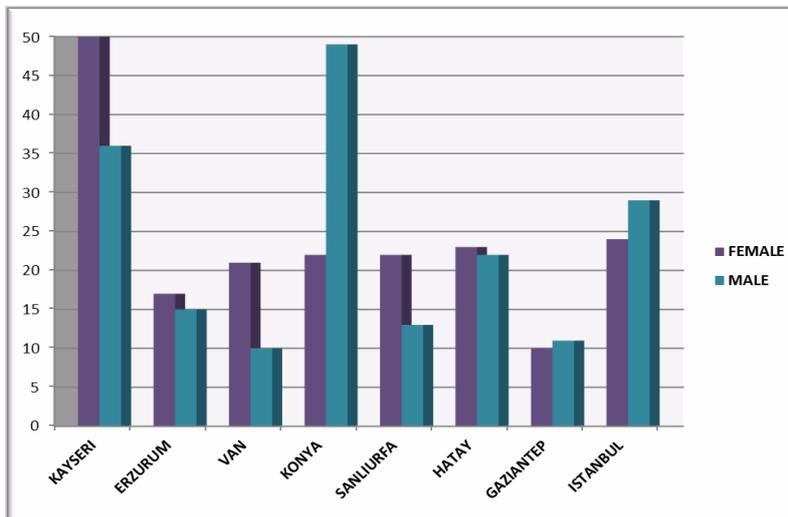


Figure 2. Number of participants per city with gender breakdown

While the persons reached out during the exercise is too limited to present a sample, in terms of numbers and ratios to overall population<sup>1</sup>, this challenge was overcome by ensuring equal

<sup>1</sup> 209.743 non-Syrians registered or pending registration with UNHCR, and 1.7 million Syrians registered by the GoT.

representation of males and females as well as through a sampling based on different educational, professional, religious and ethnic backgrounds, and special needs.

### **3.2 Preparation and Implementation Phase**

16 multifunctional teams were established to undertake the exercise. Multi-functional teams were composed of one facilitator, one co-facilitator, one note-taker and one interpreter.

Representative groups of minor and adult male and female groups from different socio-economic backgrounds and with distinct characteristics (religion, ethnic origin, disability...etc.) are factored in the exercise. Focus groups consisted of female children (14-18 years), male children (14-18 years old), female adults (19-40 and above 40 years old) and male adults (19-40 and above 40 years old). Persons with different educational, work and ethnic backgrounds were taken into consideration in the selection phase. Also attention was given to the participation of groups with special needs, such as single women, victims of SGBV, and LGBTI. Therefore the outcomes of the exercise not only reflect protection gaps and perception of persons from different nationalities, but also reflect the challenges specific to vulnerable groups.

Focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews and in-depth interviews were used as participatory assessment methods. In total 40 focus group discussions, 7 semi-structured interviews and 11 in-depth interviews were conducted during the exercise.

## **4. Summary of Findings by Themes**

### **4.1 Self-reliance**

#### **4.1.1 Livelihoods**

##### *Living Expenses and shelter*

Given the significant increase in number of refugees in urban areas, access to livelihoods constitutes a significant challenge for PoCs. As a common concern, refugees who participated at the exercise indicated that their living expenses increased considerably. It is reported that rent prices are very high, and they are asked much higher rents compared to Turkish nationals by landlords, sometimes in foreign currencies such as Euro or US dollars. Despite high rental prices asked, houses and apartments they rent are in poor conditions, sometimes even without doors and heating. Moreover, landlords are also hesitant to rent houses to refugees. Difficulty in finding accommodation and expensive rents results in overcrowded flats accommodated by more than one family in dire conditions. In addition to high rents, refugees are unable to pay for utility costs such as electricity and water costs.

##### *Social Assistance*

Major source of social assistance is reported to be government which is the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASF) under governorships. Some indicated that they also receive assistance from other external sources such as NGOs, which is not sufficient enough for them to sustain themselves. While some stated that they continue to receive financial support from their relatives or family members in the third countries, others expressed that external support ceased as the situation in their countries of origin deteriorated significantly. Also because of worsening of the security situation in the country of origin, their revenues from their assets, such as house rents, back home were cut.

Main concerns related to government assistance schemes are predominantly the inability to access assistance; shrinking assistance and assessments conducted by authorities while deciding on assistance:

- Participants reported that assistance provided by SASFs decreased considerably compared to past years due to increasing numbers.
- Some reported delays in issuance of documentation by local authorities as a reason of challenges in benefiting national assistance schemes.
- Assessments made by authorities on eligibility for assistance are also perceived as not to be based on objective criteria according to the participants. Some participants alleged discriminatory approach pursued by the authorities in provision of assistance, such as prioritizing one nationality or religion over other.
- Many indicated that they do not have sufficient information on assistance mechanisms in Turkey, on where and how to apply for assistance, and on procedures for assistance.

#### *Challenges in Access to Labor Market*

In order to meet their needs, majority of participants either have been working or have one of their family members working. In order to sustain their living and cope with difficulties, sometimes more than one family member have to work including children. Access to labor market is one of the most challenging issues identified during the exercise:

- Due to the increase in numbers of arrivals, job opportunities reported to be shrinking in general, thus turning the market in a more competitive area. Competition has caused further decrease in the wages.
- Those who accept lower wages reported to be preferred by employers, which led to 'domination' of certain nationalities in the labor market, especially Syrians mentioned to be preferred by employers in this context.
- Another challenge was mentioned as discrimination based on nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, gender and age. Certain profiles, ages, nationalities are reported to be preferred over others.
- Lack of Turkish language skills is reported to be one of the significant factors that impede access to labor market.
- None of the participants had obtained work permits; hence they were all working illegally. Application process for work permits is assessed to be too complicated by refugees, as well as by employers.
- Lack of knowledge on work permit procedures both on the side of refugees and more importantly on the side of employers in general is stated as one of the challenges.
- For persons with professions, inability to obtain work permission also results in being employed in low-skilled jobs despite having higher skills. Since employers perceive refugees as unskilled labor forces, they are employed in jobs much lower than their qualifications.
- Most of the participants indicate that they are unable to get accreditation of their education and professional certificates received in their countries of origin to be able to use them in the employment process.
- Some do not have professional skills to be employed in skilled jobs neither do they have time to gain necessary professional skills through courses or programs.

#### *Work conditions and exploitation at workplace*

Employment without official work permit brings in serious problems and allegations of exploitation at workplace. Below are the protection challenges reported by the participants during the exercise:

- While being paid lower wages than the labor market prices, refugees at times cannot get their wages despite working for long hours.
- Being engaged in informal market prevents refugees from complaining due to fear of receiving fines. Also fear of losing their jobs is another factor discouraging them from complaining against mistreatment and exploitation at workplace.
- Refugees are usually employed in manual labor and service jobs. While types of jobs change according to socio-economic structure of their residence city, one of the common findings is that in almost all locations both male and female refugees reported that they are being employed in heavy duty jobs.

- Workplaces do not comply with labor safety rules which expose refugees to serious health problems. One of the female participants indicated that her son works in a denim sandblasting workshop and already started experiencing breathing problems. Many reported that they experience work related accidents, and are unable to file official complaints due to their work status.
- They are forced to work long hours (more than 12 hours a day) without sufficient breaks and entitlement of leave. It is reported that they even risk losing their jobs due to the obligation to comply with weekly reporting duties with the local authorities.
- All persons of concern indicated that they have unstable jobs; working short periods of time in one job and changing jobs constantly. This also hampers them from earning a regular income.

Analysis by Nationality and Geography, Age, Gender, Special Needs

- Places of residence have an impact on the types of jobs they are involved in. In cities like Erzurum and Van, in which the climate is cold, finding jobs in the winter becomes more difficult, and they are employed in construction sector mostly. On the other hand, in cities like Gaziantep, Kayseri and Istanbul, majority of persons of concern were employed in industrial sector.
- Alongside other nationalities, majority of Syrians indicated that they have high professional and educational skills but they are unable to use those in the labour market due to perception concerning Syrians as being unskilled labor, hence stereotyping is reported towards Syrians in the job market. Same type of stereotyping is reported by Afghans as tailors.
- In cities where industrial sector has developed, specifically in Istanbul, refugees reported serious concerns about exploitation at workplace.
- Not only males, but females are also employed in heavy duty jobs causing serious health risks in general, including working in industrial areas and undertaking duties such as carrying and lifting goods, and working with heavy machinery.
- Female participants reported to have difficulty in accessing to labor market due to discrimination, and they are reported not to be preferred by employers. Especially women over 40 years-old mentioned challenges in finding jobs due to their age and gender perspective.
- Female participants also stated that they work in order to sustain their living; however there are also cultural dynamics in the communities that does not find women's participation to work life appropriate.
- Single females with children reported to have additional challenges in accessing labor market, as they don't have support in day care opportunities for their children. Therefore, domestic duties as well as care duties towards both children and elderly at home are common challenges before women in joining to labor force.
- It is observed that Syrians, Iraqis and Iranians have a variety of professionals in the community, such as teachers, lawyers and doctors, and frustration was reported by all regarding inability of utilizing these skills in Turkey.
- Women in general, especially single female heads of households are exposed to sexual harassment and violence at workplace. They stated that they are perceived as "vulnerable" by employers, therefore open to more exploitation and harassment. Working without work permit prevents them complaining against the perpetrators. Also not being informed about referral pathways and protection mechanisms is another factor on underreporting of SGBV incidences at workplace.

In terms of access to social assistance, while common concern of groups is the diminishing social assistance in general due to shrinking resources, Iraqis stated that with the increase in numbers of Syrians, state institutions as well as NGOs have directed their assistance towards Syrians more.

#### **4.1.2 Skills- building**

Interlinked with the findings on access to labor market, the need and willingness to enroll at vocational and Turkish language skills was one of the common findings of the exercise. Participants commonly share the opinion that vocational and language skills will be beneficial for them to find better jobs, however, they look for a link between these skill programs to market needs and employment opportunities. Some indicated that they are not willing to join existing vocational training programs since this link is not existent. Also a considerable number of refugees stated that they are not informed about vocational training programs in their cities.

Majority did not know about Public Education Centers and possibility of enrolling to language and vocational courses free of charge. Those who were informed, on the other hand, stated that they are unable to join such courses due to long work hours. Issues such as proximity of courses to their houses and to their work mentioned as another challenge. It is also indicated that available vocational courses are limited in variety and not sustainable.

## 4.2 Child labor

It became evident in all groups and locations that children work due to various reasons and in various sectors ranging from service sector to industry (hairdressing, tailors, in factories etc). Therefore, child labor emerged as a serious protection problem in all communities and in all geographical locations. Some specific root causes and protection challenges with respect to child labor are as below:

- The main root cause was stated as economic reasons by the participants. Due to increasing living costs, it is not enough anymore for only adults to work in the family so children also have to work to support the family. Especially in cases when adults cannot find jobs due to age related issues, young children in the family end up working. This is also the case when adults have health problems, or when single mothers have to fulfill care duties for the younger infants in the family.
- Lack of sufficient social assistance to families with children was stated as another reason pushing children to work.
- Deteriorating conditions and being unable to provide for the family reported to cause serious psychological problems in adult family members that also affect the well-being of children. Children reported that given the stressful family environment, they do not feel themselves psychologically fit to continue their education in Turkey; hence they work to support their families instead.
- Obstacles in access to education or family's inability to meet education expenses of their children are also factors that result in child labor.
- It is reported by both adults and children that child labor has started to rise in the labor market and employers prefer children instead of adults as children are more energetic, therefore more productive. In addition, it is stated that employers pay much less to children than to adults that makes them a source of cheap labor.
- Children are reported to work under difficult conditions, in heavy duty jobs and long hours. They are also exposed to work related accidents even resulting with death and health risks like adults. It is mentioned that age of children engaging in the labor market dropped to 7-8 years old.

### Analysis by Nationality, Geography, Age, Gender, Special Needs

- While in all communities it is stated that culturally it is not preferable for children to work, in particular girls, due to living conditions in Turkey many children work nowadays to support their families. Especially among the Iranian, Syrian and Afghan community it has become more widespread for children to work, particularly girls.
- It is reported that there are specific risks that involve girls at workplace like sexual harassment.

- Syrians mentioned that it is also a culturally accepted phenomenon for children (especially boys) to take up the role of adults in the family and to work to provide for the family. Therefore cultural dynamics are also a factor in some communities that contribute to child labor.
- For Syrians, their psychological state and impact of war trauma cause disruption in children's education. Children who do not feel mentally fit to go to school instead choose to work to support their families.
- It is also mentioned by Syrian participants that girls who cannot cope with tough work conditions seek to marry to avoid work.
- Children with special needs, in particular unaccompanied children under state protection, one of the important issues noted was the fact that child care institutions do not provide sufficient support and do not encourage children to continue their education. One specific participant stated that officials at the institutions encourage them to work rather.

### 4.3 Education

#### 4.3.1 Formal education

Three main protection challenges identified during the exercise; low enrollment rate, drop-out from school and bullying at school.

##### *Low enrollment*

- Administrative difficulties in enrollment at schools were mentioned as one of the common root causes of low enrollment. Some indicated that they are not admitted by school administrations due to lack of documents certifying their education level from country of origin, and others stated that some schools required knowledge of Turkish before registering children to school.
- Another common root cause for low enrollment was financial constraints. Families are unable to cover extra costs related to education including transportation costs, stationary costs, uniform and lunch for children at school. In addition, financial constraints also push children to work to support their family members.
- Placement procedures to classes also negatively impact children's willingness to go to school. Sometimes they are placed to lower grades than what they were studying back in their country of origin and this discourages them from continuing to school, as they are required to study with children younger than their age. In other instances, children are found to be over aged than class levels they are placed to and not admitted to school as a result. This also stems from losing education years as a result of displacement.
- Lack of knowledge on enrollment procedures including the right to continue higher education and the doubts on the validity of education certificates received in Turkish state schools were other root causes of low enrollment rate.

##### *Bullying at school*

- Bullying was identified as a serious problem at schools.
- Discriminatory attitudes of Turkish children towards refugee children due to nationality, race and physical features (like wearing headscarf) in the form of both verbal and physical abuse were reported, which discourages children from continuing to school.
- While children reported incidences of bullying to school administrations, they informed that necessary action is not taken, therefore bullying continues.
- Same type of discriminatory behavior was reported by teachers and school administrations.
- On the other side, experiences of other children concerning bullying have also reported to be impacting others in their decision to enroll at Turkish schools.

##### *Drop-out*

Drop-out was also identified as another serious protection challenge with respect to education. Some root causes of drop-outs are as follows:

- Bullying and lack of necessary support for language and other classes was reported to be the main reasons of drop-out.
- In particular, it was reported that teachers do not pay attention to the needs of foreign children in the class, and no additional and supportive Turkish classes are provided for children. As a result children reported that they cannot understand the classes, and they are not admitted to sit in exams either. Some “good intentioned” practices by school teachers, such as not including refugee children in exams due to lack of Turkish skills, turns out to be a discouraging factor for children and in return results in drop-out.
- While corporal punishment was not reported extensively, some children also reported corporal punishment at Turkish schools, which is another root cause for drop-out.
- Placement to lower grades with lower age groups, coupled with absence of catch up classes, are reported to discourage children from continuing education.
- Children affected by psychological trauma reported that they are not able to continue their education further as they are unable to receive adequate psychological and counseling support.
- In addition, children who need to support their families leave school in order to work. Especially it is reported that families cannot receive education assistance, and inability to cover education expenses of children pushes children to leave school.

#### Analysis by Nationality, Geography, Age, Gender, Special Needs

- It is observed that procedural challenges with respect to admittance to schools showed difference in some cities. It is stated by participants in Kayseri that schools do not admit children unless they can prove proficiency in Turkish language. Even if some schools admit children, they do not provide additional Turkish language classes to facilitate their integration. Therefore, there is no uniform implementation with respect to admittance procedures.
- While the highest enrollment rate was observed among Afghans, the reason of low enrollment showed difference among nationalities. The reason of low enrollment rate among Syrians, Somalis and Afghans was more related to financial constraints, bullying and discrimination, procedural barriers, and lack of knowledge on enrollment procedures at schools as well as language issues. Iranians and Iraqis expressed their unwillingness to enroll due to resettlement expectations. Some of the concerns mentioned by Iranians and Iraqis were the misinformation about validity of education certificates received in Turkey. Very few of the Iranian and Iraqi children who participated at the exercise were going to school or had attempted to enroll school in Turkey.
- As for Somalis, as some of them did not have any formal education in their countries of origin or in the former residence country, they were unable to start school in Turkey at all. Here, lack of catch-up classes for children who never attended school before or who lost education years as a result of displacement emerged as a reason of low enrollment rate. For Somalis also racial discrimination at school by Turkish children and teachers also mentioned as a reason for drop-out.
- None of the Syrians participations in four provinces were enrolled at Turkish schools. Either they did not know the procedures for enrollment to Turkish schools, or they were not admitted to Turkish schools.
- Syrian children were also concerned about the validity of education certificates issued by Syrian schools.
- For boys, the reason of non-enrollment to school or drop-out was more related to financial constraints and obligation to work. In addition to these reasons, girls get in early marriage, duty to care younger siblings or parents with health problems, duty to undertake domestic works or cultural barriers instead of continuing their education.
- Also cultural barriers were mentioned as a challenge for enrollment of girls.

- Also special education needs of children with disabilities were raised as a challenge by the participants. Administrative problems were reported in terms of admittance of children to special education institutions.

#### 4.3.2 Language training

Majority of participants were aware of importance of learning Turkish for their work life, as well as with respect to their daily interactions with Turkish community, and more importantly for access to rights and services in Turkey. It was indicated that children have a tendency to learn Turkish. As for adults a number of constraints were indicated in terms of access to Turkish language courses:

- Time constraints due to heavy work schedule. Majority of adults indicated that they do not have time to attend language courses as they are occupied during work days.
- Location of language courses was also restricting access as participants stated that they are unable to afford transportation costs involved.
- Another common finding was lack of information on available free language courses in languages that refugees understand. Most of them were not aware of Public Education Centers.

Still some of the participants had attended the available language courses organized by NGOs or UNHCR's implementing partners in the cities. Participants provided feedback about the content and organization of the courses and indicated that they do not meet their expectations and needs. They stated that the courses focus more on grammar, and does not help them to acquire practical knowledge of Turkish that they would use at work or in daily lives. They also indicated that courses provided are overcrowded and different age groups are mixed (children and adults together) that make the learning process difficult. As a result some of the participants had dropped out from classes.

#### 4.4 SGBV

Three main SGBV concerns were widely reported during the exercise: domestic violence, harassment and intimidation of women by local community, and sexual harassment at workplace.

##### ➤ *Harassment and Intimidation of Women by Local Community*

The most widely reported one was harassment and intimidation of refugee women by the local community in public places. Almost all participants including male groups reported this as a widely observed challenge for women. The main root cause indicated was the perception of refugee women by the community and discriminatory attitude towards refugees in general. When this is coupled with the previous experiences of violence in countries of origin, it is observed that it has created a sense of insecurity among women and girls.

While some participants were very well aware of the complaint mechanisms and referral pathways on SGBV in Turkey and they reported that police takes action when incidents brought to their attention, many reported that police does not take the necessary action which causes re-occurrence of such incidents.

##### ➤ *Domestic Violence*

Financial difficulties have an impact on the psychological well-being of family members and results in domestic violence. Also sharing the same house with in-laws and other refugees causes stress in the family environment. Some participants reported that police takes action when domestic violence occurs while others claimed that police is usually hesitant to take action when the incidents happen between two refugees. Economic problems, cultural issues and discriminatory attitude towards women in the community are underlined as another root cause of domestic violence. It is specifically mentioned that women are usually blamed in the community as the cause of violent behavior by husbands or partners. Some male participants also mentioned "women" as the reason of violence at

home. In addition, cultural barriers and pressures also restrict women's ability to report in cases of domestic violence, as it is not found culturally appropriate for women to report domestic violence.

Rumors and misleading information also impacts women's willingness to report violence. Some women indicated that they are afraid to report incidents of violence due to on fear that police will open a file against them which would negatively impact their stay in Turkey.

➤ *Sexual Harassment at Workplace*

Finally, sexual harassment at workplace is the third most widely reported SGBV incident among refugee community. It is reported that refugee women are mostly seen vulnerable by employers, and therefore open to more harassment and abuse at workplace. Working without work permit also prevents them from filing a complaint, as they are afraid to lose their jobs or to be penalized due to their work status.

*Analysis by Nationality, Geography, Age, Gender, Special Needs*

Especially single women without male family members were reported to be open for SGBV incidences, particularly in the public places, as well as at workplace. Syrian women specifically indicated that there is a negative perception amongst local community towards Syrian women; therefore they are subject to verbal and sexual harassment by the local community. These misperceptions also impacted the views of local women towards them which results in mistreatment by local women as well. While not being reported widely, Syrians also reported incidences of survival sex in order to access to social assistance. On the other hand, Somalis also indicated that they are subject to harassment in the street due to their skin color.

#### **4.4.1 Early & Forced Marriages**

Early and forced marriages were reported by all refugee groups who participated at the exercise. Three main root causes were indicated for early and forced marriages: economic, cultural and protection reasons.

➤ *Financial reasons resulting in early and forced marriages*

One of the main causes of early marriages was reported to be financial reasons. It is reported that many families are unable to provide for their children, and financial difficulties force them to marry their daughters. Girls being aware of the financial problems their parents experience, they rather see themselves as a burden to the family and agree to marry. Also it is stated that some girls marry in order to escape from difficult work environment when they need to work to support their families.

➤ *Cultural reasons resulting in early and forced marriages*

According to the participants, early and forced marriages are also pursued as a cultural practice in many communities. Early marriages, as a cultural practice, are specifically attributed to girls rather than boys in the communities. Coupled with cultural factors, religion also was reported as a reason for families to pressure their daughters to marry at an early age.

➤ *Protection reasons resulting in early and forced marriages*

Finally, alongside economic reasons, marriages are also pursued as a physical protection tool for girls so that girls would not be exposed to protection risks, including harassment and abuse. Therefore communities resort to early marriages in order to protect their girls from being exposed to sexual and gender based violence within the community and in public places.

➤ *Other underlying causes*

In addition, community members mentioned other underlying factors as the root cause of early marriages. Difficulties in access to education by girls were indicated as another root cause of early marriages. Besides, psychological factors also reported to impact girls' decision on marriage. Girls, who have experienced traumatic incidents, see early marriage as an escape route. Lack of necessary psycho-social support mechanisms therefore also result in girls to choose marriages instead.

Uneducated families and girls who are not aware of the harmful consequences of early marriages were also mentioned as another main reason of early marriages by the community members.

➤ *Negative consequences of early marriages*

Participants also indicated that early and forced marriages have negative impacts on girls. It is reported that girls disconnect from their family and social environments after marriage. Therefore, they are unable to get necessary social and family support following marriage. Also sometimes they are not allowed to leave the house by their husbands; hence they are unable to participate in cultural and social activities in the community, and they are unable to continue their education. On the other hand, it is reported that they face physical, verbal and sexual violence from their husbands.

*Analysis by Nationality, Geography, Age, Gender, Special Needs*

Among all participants early and forced marriages were mentioned as a cultural practice. On the one hand, Iranians and Iraqis indicated that the practice decreased considerably in Turkey which is regarded as a positive change. It is mentioned that the perspectives of Iranian and Iraqi families were impacted positively with the legal and social environment in Turkey. On the other hand, Syrians indicated that the practice increased considerably in Turkey due to hard living conditions. It is stated that many Syrian families marry their daughters with Turkish nationals thinking that their lives would be much better.

## 4.5 Civil Matters

### 4.5.1 Marriage and Birth Registration

➤ *Lack of knowledge*

One of major protection challenge with respect to birth registration is the lack of knowledge on the side of refugees on the procedures and legal requirements in Turkey. They were not aware of the importance of birth registration in general.

➤ *Procedural challenges*

Very few participants knew about the legal procedures for birth registration of their newborns. Those who attempted to register their newborn children to Population Departments stated that due to lack of documentation they were unable to register their children to Population Departments in their cities. On the other hand, international protection applicants did not experience problems while registering their newly born children.

With respect to marriage procedures in Turkey, procedural barriers were mentioned as the main challenge, especially with respect to obtaining celibacy documents. As a result participants indicated that they could not get married officially in Turkey. Lack of Turkish language skills is stated to be another challenge for marriage and birth registration procedures due to difficulty in communicating with officials and get information.

*Analysis by Nationality, Geography, Age, Gender, Special Needs*

- There were specific concerns raised by different nationalities regarding civil matters. Iranians register their newborn children only with UNHCR and local police departments for resettlement procedures.
- Iranians specifically mentioned about procedural barriers in marriage in Turkey due to requirement of presenting celibacy documents from diplomatic representations of Iran in Turkey.
- Most important of all, it is observed that majority of Syrians did not have any information on legal procedures in Turkey with respect to marriage and birth registration. Furthermore, rumors and misleading information among communities also result in marriages not being registered. This was specifically expressed by Afghans who stated that for the last couple of years community members refrain from official marriage in Turkey, as they are afraid that

this would impact their file status with UNHCR that would in turn effect their resettlement to a third country.

#### 4.6 Other Protection Concerns

Alongside aforementioned themes discussed with the groups, persons of concern also conveyed other protection challenges they encounter in Turkey that are worth underlying.

##### *Health services*

Access to health services was mentioned as one of the common challenges persons of concern face in Turkey. It can be derived from the discussions on access to health services that in general persons of concern do not have necessary information on procedures on access to health services, the extent of the services they can receive in Turkey and health referral system in Turkey. Some of the challenges in access to health services mentioned were:

- Contribution fees that they are required to pay at pharmacies.
- Not knowing language and inability to communicate with health staff impacts the quality of the services they receive.
- Due to previous debts to the hospitals before the endorsement of the Law on Foreigners and International Protection, it is reported that hospitals do not admit these individuals for treatment anymore.
- Delays in issuance of documentation by Foreigners Police were also reported to be one of the reasons of delays in access to health services in general.
- Participants stated that they become hesitant to approach hospitals due to rumors about organ trafficking at hospitals.

##### *Discrimination*

Participants relayed that local community has negative perceptions towards refugees in particular following the increase in numbers. Both adult and children groups reported facing discriminatory attitudes at public places including at schools, at work and even when they use public transportation. It is mentioned that this takes the form of both verbal and physical abuse.

Not having Turkish language skills also limits their communication and prevents them from establishing social relations with the local community. This has increased their isolation in general and resulted in alienation. More concerning of all is that rumors concerning mistreatment of other refugees by local community have also diminished their willingness to establish social relations with the host community and creates a perception of fear, even if they did not face mistreatment themselves. Discrimination was also reported towards different groups such as religious minorities and LGBTI.

### 5. Proposed Solutions and Responses

Below recommendations reflect the proposed solutions expressed by the participants:

#### Self-Reliance: Livelihoods & Skills Building

- More information on legal procedures on access to work permits. Mass information materials including leaflets on work permit application procedures was requested.
- Discussions on accreditation of professional diplomas and entitlements obtained from country of origin in cooperation with Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Labour and Higher Educational Council is also recommended.
- Expansion of Turkish language and vocational training opportunities with flexible course hours is recommended. Linking vocational courses and skills-building activities with direct income generation activities is needed to expand livelihood opportunities for persons of concern.

- Information materials are recommended to be produced and disseminated on vocational and language training opportunities in Turkey, especially on Public Education Centers.
- Easing legal and financial penalties imposed on persons of concern working informally and facilitation of complaints for exploitation, work related accidents and sexual harassment at workplace.
- Information materials on social assistance schemes, particularly on the procedures for SAFs was another proposed solution by the refugee community.

#### Child Labor

- Development of mass information materials on negative consequences of child labour represents an important response to raise awareness among refugee community.
- Psycho-social support and rehabilitation services for children who engage in child labor also would play an important role in re-integration of children to education.

#### Education

- Information materials on right to education, importance of education for children's mental and social development, procedures on access to formal education, validity of education certificates obtained in Turkey, access to higher education and education assistance opportunities.
- Capacity building and awareness raising activities targeting education staff and school administrations to familiarize them with the legal framework regarding access to education by refugees.
- Standardized additional Turkish language courses and catch-up classes are one of the important proposals of the refugee community to enable integration of refugee children to Turkish schools.
- Education grants, cash assistance and material assistance to children are also essential to increase enrollment rate.
- Promotion of follow up mechanisms by the school administration on the drop-out rates and its root causes.
- Facilitation of access to specialized education facilities of MoNE by disabled children.
- Awareness raising activities for school administrations and teachers, families and Turkish students to address discrimination and bullying.

#### SGBV

- Identification mechanisms should be strengthened to identify victims or potential victims of SGBV to refer them to necessary support mechanisms.
- Financial and in-kind support to vulnerable families should be extended, as well as psycho-social support to reduce risk of SGBV and address vulnerabilities. In this respect, integration of women into labor market is also recommended to support women's self-reliance.
- Support community-based initiatives by persons of concern focusing on prevention and identification of SGBV in the community are another recommendation came out from the exercise. Supporting the establishment of community centers and women's safe spaces would also facilitate community based initiatives.

#### Early & Forced Marriages

- Mass information materials on legal age of marriage in Turkey and adverse consequences of early marriage are important to raise awareness among the refugee community. Influential community members like teachers, imams and community leaders in information campaigns, awareness raising and outreach activities are also considered to be important.
- In order to address the socio-economic factors resulting in early marriages, expanding livelihood opportunities for adults, improving identification mechanisms of vulnerable families and provision of socio-economic assistance to identified vulnerable families are recommended.

- Access to education by girls through educational grants recommended. Follow-up mechanisms should be promoted to monitor school drop-outs to identify its roots causes stemming from early marriage.

Other Protection Concerns

- Since many of the challenges with respect to access to health care is identified to be stemming from lack of information, information materials turned out to be essential on access to health services, health referral system in Turkey, and coverage of health insurance scheme.
- Alleged discrimination claims from the local community need to be addressed through comprehensive social integration programmes with the involvement of multiple actors including state institutions, NGOs, Universities, Municipalities, and more importantly with the involvement of refugee and local community members.

UNHCR Turkey  
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