SOCIAL COHESION ASSESSMENT

Quantitative and Qualitative Assessment of Host-Refugee Cohesion in Three Districts in Turkey

June 2017

Assessment Report

for the Districts of

Antakya, Fatih and Sultanbeyli

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*for IOM/Turkey*

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# Executive Summary

Understanding the challenges of social cohesion in Turkey between Turkish host and Syrian refugee communities can be crucial in framing holistic approaches that can reduce the likelihood of exacerbating emerging social tensions.

While studies have been conducted on the impact on social cohesion of Syrian refugee hosting arrangements in Lebanon and Jordan, more limited research has been conducted in Turkey of this nature. Recognizing the potential impact of the research and understanding gaps specific to the context of hosting areas within Turkey, IOM examines through this assessment the social cohesion dynamics in the key districts of Antakya in Hatay Province, and Fatih and Sultanbeyli in Istanbul Province where significant numbers of Syrian refugees are currently being hosted.

The findings, based on a largely qualitative methodology detailed in the report, are presented around four core themes with significant demonstrated impact on the social cohesion dynamics between host and refugee communities in the districts of interest.

These four themes explored herein are as follows:

1. **Language**, including the impact of linguistic barriers on the ability of refugee communities to access state services and to forge inter-communal relationships;
2. **Labor** **Market**, including wages and labor market access, labor protections, and mutual perceptions of work ethic;
3. **Integration**, including perceptions of acceptance by the counterpart community, hindrances stemming from registration and identification procedures, mutual misplaced blame, the opportunities and challenges presented by common religion and culture, and the demonstrated empathy from both communities towards the other; and
4. **Access to Information**, including the sources and type of information most used and sought after by members of both communities.

Each of the four themes is explored through the perspectives shared by the participants and interviewees engaged in the assessment to ensure the analysis and findings remain grounded in the daily reality of cohabitation of the Turkish and Syrian communities in the three hosting districts of interest to the study. Each thematic exploration highlights present and emergent tensions, opportunities that present themselves, and, where relevant, suggested considerations to keep in mind when moving forward on a particular theme or sub-theme.

# Background and Overview

The ongoing armed conflict in Syria, has fueled a protracted refugee flow into Turkey, with figures in March 2018 estimating a presence of over 3.5 million[[1]](#footnote-1) Syrian refugees in Turkey. In response to the refugee influx, the Government of Turkey (GoT), with the support the international community, is setting a global precedent for a refugee response with two unique features, namely camp-based and non-camp approaches.

The GoT defined its response to the arrival of refugees from Syria through the 2013 “6458: Law on Foreigners and International Protection,” which defined a Temporary Protection (TP) regime for the Syrian refugees. Within this context, IOM Turkey is partnering with local humanitarian organizations in implementing interventions to enhance access to basic services, strengthen resilience of refugee and host communities, and facilitate social integration of refugees.

The enormous influx of refugees in host communities is understandably not being matched by an equal expansion of municipal and social services, such as health, education, sanitation, housing and socio-economic infrastructure. Studies show that rising social tensions between communities have the potential to generate secondary conflict in host countries that if not properly addressed, fissures in the social, economic and political fabric risk to further worsen, leading to radicalization and making the use of violence to solve conflicts more probable and widespread. This poses new and diverse challenges to authorities, humanitarian actors and receiving host communities who are struggling to adjust to prevailing social, economic and demographic shifts and pressure. IOM is seeking to expand the interventions that address the potential risks to conflict as well as promote social cohesion between refugees and host community.

Several definitions about social cohesion can be found in the literature (e.g. Bernard, 1999; Jeanotte, 2000; Rajulton, Ravanera & Beaujot, 2007; De Hart, 2008; Harrel & Stolle, 2008). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines social cohesion as “networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups”. According to REACH (2014), major elements of social cohesion include ‘strengthening social relations, interactions, and ties’; building trust and understanding between communities; reducing community inequalities; and adopting a holistic strategy on livelihoods, public services, and other socio-economic interventions to improve community participation.

## Assessment Rationale

According to the Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM), more than 92% of Syrian refugees in Turkey reside outside of camp settings, among Turkish communities. While studies have been conducted on the impact on social cohesion of Syrian refugee hosting arrangements in Lebanon and Jordan, more limited research has been conducted in Turkey of this nature. Studies show that rising social tensions between communities have the potential to generate secondary conflict in host countries.

As understood by IOM, one of the key challenges expressed by the Government of Turkey is to mitigate the potential negative impacts of hosting Syrians under Temporary Protection, while building on the positive contributions refugees can make. Understanding the challenges of social cohesion can be crucial in framing holistic approaches that can reduce the likelihood of further conflicts and that remain cognizant of potential ramifications on social cohesion.

Recognizing the potential impact of the research and understanding gaps specific to the context of hosting areas within Turkey, IOM therefore sought to examine the impact, if any, on social cohesion dynamics in the key districts of Antakya district of Hatay Province, and Fatih and Sultanbeyli in Istanbul Province where significant numbers of Syrian refugees are currently being hosted.

## Methodology

The assessment was designed to capture perceptions from both the host and refugee communities through a mixed methodology, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods aiming to enable a more nuanced understanding of the social cohesion dynamics presenting themselves in each of the three districts.

#### Assessment Target Population

The assessment largely considered youth and the economically active as the age categories most prominently represented among Syrian refugee populations. Youth aged 12-17 years represent approximately 45% of the Syrian refugee population, and those in the economically active age range of 18-59 years represent an estimated 52%[[2]](#footnote-2). Turkey reflects a similar demographic population pyramid[[3]](#footnote-3) pattern as Syrian refugees although Turkey has a higher ageing and economically active population and slightly lower proportion of youths. Given the comparable demographic groups, similar target groups were considered amongst the host and refugee communities. For purposes of the assessment objectives, and to reflect age groupings seen in IOM’s efforts with youth, the category of youth was defined as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, and therefore is represented in the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and survey results presented herein.

#### Selection of Assessment Locations

Assessment enumeration locations were purposely selected to assess areas where IOM has ongoing operations in Istanbul and Hatay provinces, given that these areas host considerable Syrian refugee populations. For the purposes of this study, three large hosting districts, namely Sultanbeyli and Fatih districts in Istanbul province, and Antakya district in Hatay province, were considered. Area or geographically based sampling approaches were be used for targeting within these locations.

#### Assessment Design

In order to ensure the study, and its data collection tools, did not commence with preconceived notions of the causes of nascent social tensions seemingly emerging in hosting communities in Turkey, qualitative data collection started with Key Informant Interviews to support identification of headline themes. IOM’s ongoing work in Turkey, supporting both the Turkish Government and Syrian refugee communities, provided a strong starting point as Key Informants were identified from among IOM’s network of interlocutors in the study’s three target districts.

Key Informant Interview (KII) results were then analyzed in order to identify core re-emerging themes, based on which Focus Group Discussion guides and a perception survey were developed. Given the elusive and abstract nature of the social cohesion within the context, the assessment significantly leaned towards a qualitative research design in order to explore social cohesion issues in detail and to provide a more contextualized and nuanced analysis. Quantitative surveys were therefore deployed as self-administered exit interview questionnaires for FGD participants to complete supplementing the largely qualitative analysis for the study.

#### Profile of Data Collection Teams

Locally mobilized data collection teams, sensitive to the local context in terms of gender, ethnicity, and language skills as well as local knowledge of the survey area were formed. This was crucial in ensuring that data collection teams were familiar with local cultural norms and values which eased creation of rapport with interviewees. The data collection team was comprised of a total of 30 enumerators in both Hatay and Istanbul, led by a team leader who oversaw enumerator training, planning for data collection, mobilization of field level equipment, team supervision, and data quality assurance. During enumerator mobilization, literacy skills, language skills, experience in running surveys, and FGD and documentation were taken into consideration, while the team leader was recruited based on experience in leading quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, coordination and leading data collection teams, computer literacy and data quality assurance, all of which were very vital skills in meeting the objectives of the assessment.

#### Sampling Approaches

Due to the descriptive and exploratory nature of the study, non-probability sampling approaches were used for the assessment. Criterion based selection methods involving selection of the sample on the basis of characteristics that are relevant to the objectives of the assessment, which mainly aim to explore social cohesion issues in detail in the assessment locations as described, were deployed.

##### Sampling methods

To determine FGD and KIIs sampling, the following factors were considered:

1. **Key Informant Selection** – A minimum of at least 5 key informants per location **purposively selected** to represent stakeholders at various levels of government, responders and host and refugee communities, were engaged in the first portion of the study to provide a rounded initial picture of social cohesion issues.
2. **Focus Group Discussion Size** – FGDs were comprised of between 10-14 participants in order to remain manageable but reflect an appropriate amount of diversity or variation as exists in the population of interest.
3. **Saturation** –According to Guest G. at al (2006), saturation of meta-themes can usually be achieved with 12 interviews. The study assured that this minimum was met for FGDs held separately for host and refugee communities. Data collection themes were attentive to themes emerging from the discussions to ensure that additional FGDs were conducted until saturation in themes was noticed, at which point no additional FGDs were needed.

#### Key informant interviews (KII)

Key informants were purposively selected and interviewed. A key informant interview guide, tailored for each interviewee profile, was used by the interviewer to moderate the KII whilst a note-taker was documenting the discussion verbatim. During interviews, key informants were asked to suggest names (snowballing) of other persons who, in their opinion, would add value as key informants. A total of 24 key informant interviews were conducted that included representatives from Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Health, DGMM, local community leadership, implementing partners management and local NGO management.

#### Focus Group discussions (FGD)

Age and gender disaggregated Focus Group Discussions (FGD) were conducted with the respective communities. Given the sensitivity of the discussion topic, separate FGDs for refugees and host communities were administered using specially designed FGD guides. Given challenges in mobilization of FGD participants in urban contexts, convenient sampling was used to select FGD participants, whilst local authorities, including community mukhtars, also supported participant mobilization. FGDs were comprised of 8 to 14 participants, with a moderator facilitating the FGD, with the support of two note takers who were documenting discussion points verbatim. Voice recorders were also used to ensure that all key discussion issues were captured. A total of 28 FGDs were conducted (details in Table 1).

### Table : Summary of focus group discussions conducted

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Location | FGD category | FGD disaggregation | Number of FGDs by target group | |
| Host community | Refugees |
| Fatih | Youths | Male | 1 | 1 |
| Female | 1 | 1 |
| Adults | Male | 1 | 1 |
| Female | 1 | 2 |
| Sultanbeyli | Youths | Male | 1 | 1 |
| Female | 1 | 2 |
| Adults | Male | 2 | 1 |
| Female | 1 | 1 |
| Antakya | Youths | Male | 1 | 1 |
| Female | 1 | 1 |
| Adults | Male | 1 | 2 |
| Female | 1 | 1 |
| Total number of FGDs by target group | | | **13** | **15** |
| Cumulative total number of FGDs (Total of 276 participants) 28 | | | | |

#### Self-administered questionnaires

Close-ended questionnaires were administered to FGD participants for self-completion. Self-administered questionnaires allowed FGD participants to give more truthful responses on controversial issues anonymously and privately. In order to ensure that illiteracy or misunderstanding of the questions did not pose a problem, the FGD facilitators occasionally read questions and responses to the group, and provided needed support and clarification. As enumerators aggregated data from the self-administered quantitative questionnaires, surveys where it was deemed confusion was prevalent, were not integrated into the final data set for quality assurance purposes. In total, 252 self-administered questionnaires were included in the data set analyzed for the study.

Given the specific focus on qualitative methods for this assessment, the quantitative survey analysis represented herein is purely indicative and is not intended to be representative of the target populations. The assessment’s use of the quantitative survey tool can be considered a pilot of the tool to assess reliability in reflecting the views expressed through the KIIs and the FGDs, and can be rolled out through a farther-reaching quantitative survey.

#### Data management

Following completion of Focus Group Discussions, note takers’ transcripts were completed based on the recordings taken during the sessions. All session transcripts were translated for uniformity and analysis.

After all quantitative data was collected, a seven day data cleaning process was conducted by age cohort and location. In order to ensure the quality of the data, each of the self-administered questionnaires were manually checked for completeness and consistency before coding on SPSS version 18. All data was checked for reliability, consistency, completeness and coherence with the teams deployed for data collection. As mentioned, some data that were not meeting the stipulated quality standards were re-administered again for quality assurance for self-administered questionnaires.

Basic frequency analysis were run during data entry for data quality assurance. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS 18) to generate frequency analysis, cross tabulations and statistics.

#### Data analysis

After data consolidation, all data were categorized and organized around themes relevant to the objectives of the study. Content analysis was used to determine prominent thematic issues emanating from the results, and articulated in the assessment report.

# Key Assessment Outcomes

The findings expressed in this report draw heavily from the qualitative data collected throughout the various phases of this assessment through Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions held in each of the three districts of Antakya, Fatih and Sultanbeyli.

The report is presented around four core themes with significant potential contribution on social cohesion between host and refugee communities in the districts of interest. These themes are 1) **Language**, 2) **Labor** **Market**, 3) **Integration**, and 4) **Access to Information**.

Each of the four themes is explored through the perspectives shared by the participants and interviewees engaged in the assessment to ensure the analysis and findings remain grounded in the daily reality of cohabitation of the Turkish and Syrian communities in the three hosting districts of interest to the study. Each thematic exploration highlights present and emergent tensions, opportunities that present themselves, and, where relevant, suggested considerations to keep in mind when moving forward on a particular theme or sub-theme.

## LANGUAGE AS KEY CONTRIBUTOR TO SOCIAL COHESION

Nearly every interview and discussion held over the course of the assessment identified language barriers as a primary obstacle to social cohesion between Syrian refugees and their Turkish host communities. Language difficulties hindered interactions ranging from basic social discussions that could enable a rapprochement between neighbors, to capacity to educate oneself on rights afforded by the Turkish government to Syrian refugees and rights owed in turn, to effective access to services provided in practice.

Efforts to support language acquisition for both Syrian refugee communities and for Turkish host communities should be a considered a key first step in addressing social cohesion concerns in areas hosting significant numbers of the Syrian refugee population in Turkey.

While it is likely that, once linguistic barriers are removed, other dynamics explored herein and new hurdles to integration may emerge more prominently as potential challenges to social cohesion, there was a clear priority given by both communities to the strain added by their mutual inability to communicate with one another.

*If we had understood Arabic, maybe we would have a lot of things in common, but because we are not sharing ideas, we don’t know if they really have the same way of thinking as us or not.*

* *Young Turkish Woman, Antakya District*

Beyond noted concerns over the lack of a common language, there were many potential benefits highlighted in passing by participants from both the Syrian and Turkish communities that would stem from learning Turkish or Arabic respectively. Prime among these for both communities is the ability to communicate socially, for the Syrian community is the enhanced capacity to access services, information and events that can include them, and for the Turkish community is the ability to better understand the Qur’an.

Each of these personal motivations to invest in language acquisition would certainly amplify the demand for, and participant commitment in, language exchanges and specific language courses. With the commitment by the Turkish Government to integrate Syrian refugee children into Turkish primary schools directly, the need to support adult language acquisition is further amplified to alleviate potential strain on children of both communities to be charged with bridging linguistic divides, and attendant tensions where they exist, on behalf of their parents.

### Access to State Services

While quantitative surveys did not indicate a significant difference in the perceived accessibility of health and education services between Turkish and Syrian communities in the targets districts of Antakya, Fatih and Sultanbeyli, concerns over inability to access services provided by the Turkish government for Syrian refugees was a reemerging discussion point in many of the interviews and discussions conducted.

Access to Healthcare **-** Interviews with Turkish government authorities highlighted that in many clinics and health care services, there have been particular provisions added to ensure that Syrian communities are able to access healthcare comfortably. These provisions include in some cases providing translators in the health clinics, and in other cases, working closely with national and international civil society to ensure surge accessibility of health services in areas hosting large Syrian refugee communities. Across all discussions with Syrian refugee community members, these provisions by the Turkish government to make services accessible were recognized, but associated challenges were also mentioned by many.

Challenges noted by Syrian interviewees did not question the availability of services for their communities, but rather the effectiveness of some services. For example, in health clinics where there have been efforts to ensure presence of translators, there is often only one person on duty with Arabic language skills. In these instances, cases were noted of doctors prioritizing Turkish community members or Syrians with Turkish language skills for consultations, and waiting to serve non-Turkish speaking Syrian patients in one group. By virtue of having been grouped for a shared consultation, the effectiveness of health care support provided to Syrians in these particular centers was diminished. In some cases, Syrian refugee respondents noted bringing along a friend who speaks Turkish in order to ensure they would be able to access health services provided, but this was noted to then add another layer of difficulty in accessing the services as work schedules often delay the joint visit for some time.

From the perspective of Turkish patients, several remarks were made about the strain on health care services since the arrival of Syrian refugees. These remarks emerged particularly in Antakya district, where some participants wished there were separate health services that could accommodate Syrians, and others noted that there has in fact been an increase in construction of new health services for all to use. Some Turkish FGD participants in Istanbul province noted that there are many “doctors, architects and engineers” who are now idle in Turkey[[4]](#footnote-4) and who could serve in these occupations while in Turkey. Syrian FGD participants similarly noted that perhaps placing Syrians who speak Arabic and Turkish in key services, including health centers, but also schools and markets, would present a win-win for both communities.

Access to Education **–** In several instances, the Turkish Government’s commitment to integrating children in Turkish primary schools directly was praised by participants from both communities as a way to bridge potential linguistic and culture gaps. Syrian community members also noted that the Turkish government has made it a priority to support children and pregnant women in accessing their registration and identification papers to ensure they are able to access educational and health services. This government facilitation for children and women also appears to echo Turkish residents’ desires as some Turkish FGD participants advocated for the women and children to be allowed to stay in Turkey, while the men should go back and “work for their countries.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

Access to State Protection **–** A few participants in the FGD discussions mentioned the inability to access law enforcement services as one of their primary concerns due to the lack of a common language. The few participants who noted they were able to seek support from state security services stated, in some cases, that they found state law enforcement forces to be responsive therefore highlighting a need to ensure these communication links are established.

Similarly, inability to access first-hand information on registration processes due to existing language barriers highlights the urgency of ensuring core administrative guidance for Syrian communities, which can impact future ability to access services, open bank accounts, engage in productive activities locally, etc., is available in Arabic through accessible dissemination pathways.

The significant variations in perceptions of accessibility of state services noted in Syrian and Turkish participants’ responses demonstrates that, beyond specific language training to facilitate communication at the site of a state service, greater efforts may be needed to ensure consistent information on rights, duties and systems for the benefit of both communities.

**Accurate and accessible information in both the Turkish and Arabic languages detailing which state services are available, and which steps to follow to access these, would enable community members and leaders from both Syrian and Turkish communities, and local Turkish authorities charged with implementing the national agenda, to overcome a primary linguistic hurdle impacting access to services**. Assisting both communities in sharing a common understanding of their rights and obligations under Turkish Temporary Protection Mechanisms would be a first step in reducing barriers to effective accessibility of service associated with language.

### Daily Interactions

Language barriers similarly presented a core obstacle in capacity to forge cross-community interpersonal relationships, thereby hindering potential trust-building between the two communities. This obstacle was noted as a key area of concern by both Turkish and Syrian communities, and government representatives, who expressed a desire to communicate directly with one another.

Support to the creation of direct communication ties can assist in fostering positive relationships as well as in contributing to resolving tense situations. In nearly all discussions held, participants noted that they would be better able to engage in joint community activities if there was a common language that enabled them to interact with the other community groups in their areas. They also noted that they would be able to share information more easily – a point that is explored further in the exploration of theme ‘Access to Information’. In some instances, inability to discuss issues or concerns between neighbors directly led to the creation of palpable jealousies between neighbors and, in some cases, to evictions of Syrian tenants by Turkish landlords.

In many discussions, participants noted that, despite the language barrier, they often attempted to foster relationships with neighbors using sign language or by encouraging their children to forge friendships. An adult Turkish woman noted, for example, that *“at first, I saw Syrians everywhere, and then I made some friendships and communicated somehow. With one friend, we talked about why she needed to come and what had happened. My ideas changed then. I put myself in her shoes.”[[6]](#footnote-6)* Some Syrian participants noted situations where their Turkish neighbors were the ones to accompany them to defend their rights in local institutions. Enhancing the capacity for direct interaction and connection could potentially also expand the space for positive narratives of collaboration to emerge and serve as examples.

The ability to exchange directly with neighbors, fellow students, and co-workers was expressed as a desire by many of the participants. Some participants did however note concerns over language assimilation. A few Syrian participants and representatives of the Syrian community noted fears that they would forget the Arabic language. This fear will be particularly pertinent when considering the inclusion of Syrian children into Turkish primary schools, as families would be responsible for ensuring their Arabic language education and may need support in maintaining both languages.

A few Syrian participants also expressed fears that, even if they were to learn the Turkish language, some members of their host community may still refuse to speak to them. Reducing the language barriers to constructive interaction would serve as demonstration of goodwill by one community to the other. **Enhancing ability for community members to converse and share experiences among themselves, or to discuss with representatives of other communities of the area, may enable the creation of exchanges that foster trust and gradually reduce tensions as they arise**.

## LABOR MARKET

Fair engagement in the labor market emerged as another core theme expressed throughout the discussions with Turkish and Syrian communities alike. Turkish communities feared that the difficulties they faced with unemployment were being exacerbated by the presence of Syrian refugees in their areas. Both communities also shared a concern over the reduction in wages that was perceived to be correlated with the increase in Syrian refugee presence and employment in the informal labor market.

The association of the reduction in wages with the arrival of Syrian refugees in Turkey, as well as the lack of protection for refugees working in informal sectors, had clear impact on the willingness of the two communities to engage with one another constructively. These concerns were also seemingly amplified by negative perceptions from both communities of the others’ work ethic. Simultaneously however, both communities understood each other’s’ concerns, with many expressing empathy over the impact of mistreatment by their own communities towards the other.

### Wages and Labor Market Access

In discussions with young Syrian men in Antakya district, a few expressed concerns over living in an environment where they would not be able to engage in entrepreneurial activities independently. They noted that in order to engage in trade, for example, Syrian refugees must enter into partnerships with members of the Turkish host communities. Similarly, many of the discussions also highlighted that in order for Syrian refugees to be able to enter into the work force, they needed to have already processed their registration and identification documents in Turkey, which in itself was a process many Syrians expressed was quite opaque as will be explored further later on. While both policies may seek to alleviate potential strain between the communities, inability by some to access the prerequisite documentation or to forge the relationships necessary to enter into partnerships presents obstacles in the attainment of the potential positive impact seemingly intended by these policies.

With these hurdles in mind, many among the refugee population seek informal employment opportunities. Many Syrian participants expressed their grievances over the expectation by their employers, and sometimes by their colleagues, that they must work longer hours (many mentioned 12 hour shifts when Turkish colleagues worked 8 hour shifts) for half the pay of their Turkish colleagues, and without the insurance coverage provided to their Turkish counterparts. Simultaneously, Turkish participants noted concern over the impact these labor conditions for Syrians were having on their own access to formal, well-remunerated employment. These participants noted that employers now sometimes seek Syrian employees specifically as their wage rates are more advantageous for the employers.

*Our employers are giving jobs to Syrians for nothing. We are also using Syrians. The men, who have many children, are working for 4-5 pennies without insurance.*

* *Adult Turkish Man, Fatih District*

Many from both communities noted that, given that this precedent of Syrian workers accepting low paid employment, was set, it was now harder for many new jobseekers to argue for better conditions. Many participants from both communities empathized with the frustrations of their counterparts noting that Syrian refugees are in the tough position to need to accept whichever employment opportunities are available to them, which then has the adverse impact noted on all communities. Some Turkish community members also faulted their fellow countrymen, noting that there are many who are happy to exploit refugees’ position of weakness and that it is therefore due to them that these adverse impacts on both communities’ employment opportunities take place.

There were also remarks by some Syrian community members empathizing the apprehension among some Turkish communities to open all industries or employment levels up for refugee communities.

The remarks by both communities, particularly the notable empathy expressed alongside the frustrations, demonstrate the potential benefit that could stem from **greater clarity on employment sectors open to refugees, wage regulations and recourse mechanisms available for all to ensure a common base for employees, and a common standard for employers**.

### Lack of Labor Protection

Access to recourse mechanisms and to labor protections in Turkey was noted by many of the Syrian participants in the FGDs. Several participants highlighted that in addition to accepting the lower wages to which they have access, many Syrians are also made to accept employment with no protection thereby depriving them of recourse mechanisms in case of injury or unjust dismissal.

This again sets a precedent limiting access to better employment terms by other Syrian refugees, but also creates marked tension between the refugee and host communities. Several Syrian participants mentioned that poor treatment comes not only from employers but also from fellow employees, even when the two counterparts hold the same positions. Syrian participants expressed that they felt they are viewed by other workers as inherently less capable, while simultaneously being unable to voice their complaints due to their lack of inclusion in labor protection mechanisms.

*Here I should work and stay alive, or complete my studies but without living.*

* *Young Syrian Woman, Sultanbeyli District*

An additional impact of the lack of protection is the significant number of Syrian minors who are also employed in the informal labor market. In several FGDs, parents noted heavy-heartedly that their children either split their time between work and studies, or were asked to forego their studies entirely in order to contribute to the family’s expenses. While enhanced access to protection mechanisms may not influence family necessity or decision-making, **enhanced access to labor protection could potentially create an environment with more equitable employment compensation for adults that would reduce the drive behind decisions to reorient children away from formal schooling and into informal employment**.

### Perceptions of Work Ethic

Work ethic also arose in many discussions as a point of introspection and of misunderstanding. In a few of the discussions with Turkish communities, both men and women noted that Syrian refugees are up at all hours. The assumption expressed was that this was due to the fact that everything was being provided for Syrian refugees, including rent, food, services, etc., and that they therefore did not need to work.

Simultaneously, Syrian refugee communities expressed their inability to participate in social events, to interact with their community and neighbors, or to settle administrative matters, due to the long hours required of them and the low wages that necessitate that they accept to work these long hours or that prevent them for being able to afford participation in events that are far from their areas. The disconnect in perception associated with work ethic highlighted a greater underlying concern over assistance thought, accurately or inaccurately, to be provided to Syrian refugees within Turkey.

A positive introspection was brought to light in discussions with Syrian youth, and particularly young women, who reflected positively on the increased sense of responsibility they had felt since their arrival in Turkey. Many noted that they would not have been expected to contribute to household expenses in Syria, however their displacement had made their contribution necessary and many highlighted this newfound agency positively.

## ABILITY TO INVEST AND INTEGRATE IN CURRENT AREA OF RESIDENCE

The longevity of the present hosting arrangement emerged as an overarching theme in many of the discussions held, whether with community members or representatives. Views differed from one region to the next about whether current levels of integration of Syrian refugee communities were greater closer to Syria, where there is a higher prevalence of familiarity with Syrians and with the Arabic language, or whether integration grew stronger the deeper inland one traveled.

*I think they feel temporary. Their behavior is temporary.*

* *Young Turkish Man, Fatih District*

The most vocal opinions on this topic came from Turkish participants from the district of Antakya. Many stated that Syrians in their district are in reality migrants who enter into Turkey to work for a short while and return. Others noted that Antakya district is accustomed to diversity and to hosting various groups and therefore the district’s population does not object to hosting arrangements, that is until they feel that there is influence over the economic and security situation in the district. Young men in Antakya district also posed the question in a few groups on the intention of Syrians once the war ends.

Looking into the quantitative survey results on the specific question on the relationship between the host and refugee communities through the lens of the present hosting arrangements, the following emerged.

### Chart 1: Perceptions of Host-Refugee Relationship

The results demonstrate the most marked discrepancy between host and refugee perceptions of their relationship in Antakya district where the proportion of host community members noting that the refugee communities had overstayed their welcome far exceeded the Syrian respondents’ estimation of the prevalence of this sentiment among the host community. Of significant note as well is the discrepancy between perceptions of host community acceptance of Syrian communities in the two districts of Fatih and Sultanbeyli in Istanbul province. In Fatih district, the refugee community’s sentiment of being accepted by their host community far exceeds the host community’s own estimation of the same. Conversely, in Sultanbeyli district, the host community perceived itself to be much more accepting than what was expressed by the refugee community.

Qualitative discussions also highlighted a few core obstacles preventing sentiments of integration, and continuing silver lining through expressions of empathy. Many of these influencing factors are seen as impacting the Syrian community specifically, while others influenced both communities’ perceptions of cohabitation with one another.

### Registration and Identification

Difficulties in registration and in securing identification documents in Turkey was noted as one the recurring struggles faced by Syrian refugees as they started their lives in Turkey. Registration documents were noted as a necessary precursor ahead of being able to access many of the services offered by the Turkish state, opening a bank account, or being able to travel across provinces.

Coupled with the lack of clarity felt by Syrian refugees on the process to undertake, and to secure these documents, many of the Syrian participants noted feeling singled out and trapped by the administrative processes. Some also noted concern over the consistency of application of the regulations governing the issuance of registration cards, as in some cases local *mukhtars* would ask for additional payment to issue registration cards, in others, authorities requested additional documentation outside the standard requests, while for others again, the process was described as smooth.

This inconsistent application of registration procedures was noted by both communities as an area of concern. By Syrian participants, it was noted as an added uncertainty that could have the impact of preventing their access to service, employment, and their mobility; and by Turkish participants, the concerns over slow registration processes signaled potential lags in vetting of Syrian refugees present. This was noted specifically by young men in Antakya district who feared that the lack of vetting and registration also meant that if a security situation were to take place, potential implication of Syrian refugees present would go un-prosecuted.

Concerns were expressed in discussions with Turkish counterparts in Antakya district over the potential for Syrians to be granted Turkish citizenship and to obtain the right to vote. *“Once they get the right to vote, we will start seeing the real clashes begin.”*[[7]](#footnote-7) This apprehension emerged only in Focus Group Discussions held in Antakya district, and were expressed before the approval of the 16 April 2017 constitutional amendments that included provisions creating pathways for citizenship for refugees hosted in Turkey.

This preemptive concern, and the existing concerns expressed by both Syrian and Turkish communities over the lack of clarity and length of time it takes to process registration documentation, demonstrates **the need for investments in ensuring a common understanding of the steps in implementing nationality provisions for refugees and, in the interim, continuing registration procedures to reduce potential for tensions stemming from reciprocal misunderstandings between Turkish and Syrian communities**.

### Misplaced Blame

Mutual misunderstandings and assumptions from one community about the other reemerged in most discussions held during the course of the assessment. At best, these led to mild annoyances, but several participants noted more significant impact due to misinformed attributions of blame.

*I heard from Syrian women that when Iraqi people came to our country, we also acted the same way.*

* *Youth Turkish Woman, Fatih District*

Cost of Rent in Host Areas **-** Nearly every FGD noted the increase in rent prices as a core concern purportedly stemming from the presence of Syrian refugees in the target districts. This was noted by Syrian refugee and Turkish host communities alike. The variety of ways in which this shared concerns was highlighted however is noteworthy.

In most instances, the increase in rent prices was noted by Turkish communities as a fact associated with the increasing presence of Syrian refugees. From Syrian refugees, high rent prices were also noted as a fact of life in Turkey. In fewer cases, Turkish host communities noted the fact that their compatriots had increased rent prices to profit from the presence of Syrian refugees, with disappointment. One Turkish woman participating in an FGD in Sultanbeyli district stated that *“the rent increase in our country, our people, our compatriots, are doing that. Syrians do not want to increase the rent.”[[8]](#footnote-8)* Others noted that since Syrians have access to rental subsidies, among other types of state support, the increase is justified. Members of both communities also alluded to the use of the high rent prices as a way to dissuade Syrian refugees from living in Turkish residential buildings.

Whether expressed with empathy or with disappointment however, the issue of increasing rent prices was ascribed by most Syrian and Turkish participants to the arrival, and increase in presence of, Syrian refugees in Turkey, and was noted by nearly every interview and participant.

Aid Received **–** Echoing the sentiment of ‘justifiable rent increases,’ many of the discussions with Turkish communities indicated a generalized view that Syrian refugees are receiving aid to ensure their lives in Turkey are rendered stress-free. This included perceptions that nearly all Syrians received aid covering their rent payments as noted earlier, in addition to direct salaries and additional financial aid. There were also views expressed that the registration card allowed Syrian refugees to access free goods, such as bread, food, clothing, and shelter.

These generalizations of the various types of support that may be provided for the various Syrian communities by the Turkish state, various national and international actors, and by individuals locally, led to expressed frustrations among many Turkish participants that their own fellow citizens are not treated this way when in need.

This element of equity in humanitarian and recovery assistance between the refugee and host communities plays a critical role in the creation or discouragement of social cohesion in areas of intervention. **While the reasons for prioritizing assistance to the refugee communities are evident, there are significant gains to be reaped from ensuring that Turkish community members who are in similar need of assistance are included among the populations receiving assistance. Such joint approaches diminish the formation of group-based delineations, and enable the association of the arrival of Syrian refugees with increased attention to host populations for mutual benefit.**

An additional point of contention brought forth by Turkish youth pertained to facilitation of access for Syrian refugees to certain services which are traditionally earned by Turkish citizens. The specific example noted is the current perception among Turkish students that Syrians have been given access to their universities without needing to undergo examinations while this prerequisite is still in place for Turkish students. This grievance highlights that equity in direct assistance is only one element to consider when aiming to avoid the creation of tension-inducing distinctions between communities, as inequitable facilitation of shared processes similarly has the palpable adverse effects.

Ongoing Conflict in Syria - Multiple discussions alluded to, or directly highlighted, grievances among Turkish communities that Syrians have sought refuge in Turkey, while Turkish soldiers are now fighting in Syria. This view was expressed by both the host and refugee communities with the former largely highlighting this as a point of contention preventing their acceptance of Syrian refugees’ presence in Turkey, while the latter expressed regret knowing that the war in their country of origin was now claiming young Turkish lives as well.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| *One of the reasons that make Turkish people hate Syrians is the Turkish war in Syria and the death of some Turkish soldiers on the Syrian border.*  *- Adult Syrian Woman,*  *Fatih District*  *We wish that this war would finish so that they can go back to their countries, otherwise if they want to stay, they should get their military service done in Turkey and go fight for Turkey in Syria.*  *- Adult Turkish Man,*  *Antakya District* | *How can you trust these people who won’t even stay in their country and fight for their own war?*  *- Adult Turkish Woman, Antakya District*  *The foreign countries see Turkey as a war zone.*  *- Young Turkish Woman, Sultanbeyli District* | *There is a war in their country, yet their youth has come here for refuge instead of fighting their war.*  *- Adult Turkish Man,*  *Antakya District*  *I don’t know if I could be their friend at all because what bothers me is that while our soldiers are fighting in Syria, Syrians are having fun here in Turkey. I would always have this thought in the back of my mind.*  *- Young Turkish Man,*  *Antakya District* |

This individualized attribution of blame for a dynamic beyond individual control was most frequently expressed in Antakya district. **Disassociating individual or community decisions to seek refuge from personal interactions in the host areas could be a feat accomplished by significant information campaigns to better orient host communities on the factors that have motivated the refugee populations they host to seek refuge and reassurance from the Turkish state that these communities have been welcomed by the state to seek refuge.**

Concerns were also expressed over both the perception of Turkey in the eyes of foreign states, and the potential that the war may come into Turkey as well.

### Empathy

In juxtaposition to the frequent mutual misattributions of blame for social ills experienced in recent years by both Turkish and Syrian communities in large hosting areas in Turkey, there were also significant expressions of empathy throughout the discussions.

Many participants highlighted the similarities in culture, religion and day-to-day life as a way to remind fellow participants in group discussions of the proximity between the two populations. Many also noted that the troubles faced by one community are shared troubles, and that these have not been instigated by one community or the other, but rather are conditions that exist in their areas of residence that are now shared with a wider community.

*I feel sorry when I see those [Syrian refugees]. There is a war in their country. I also think that they are really victims. They are trying to adapt to a new country. They are trying to live here. And they left everything behind and came here. I think they are in a more difficult situation comparing to the hard conditions in which we are living here. There is a war in their country.[[9]](#footnote-9)*

In discussions with communities and with authorities and service providers, many mentioned that psychosocial trauma occasionally noticeably influenced some Syrian community members’ ability to engage with their surroundings, and some Syrian children’s need for greater attention to succeed in their schooling. There were also many stories shared throughout the course of the assessment by Syrian community members who were grateful to Turkish neighbors for helping them to overcome many of the obstacles cited thus far in the assessment.

One Syrian woman noted that her Turkish neighbor brought her back to the hospital where she had been denied service to ensure she would be able to secure treatment for her son. Many others noted positive interactions with their neighbors where both were willing to sign to one another to forge an amicable relationship.

These stories were frequent, and members of both communities often made a point of noting that ill treatment faced by one or two persons should not be generalized to classify the whole group. Many noted introspectively that there are members of their own communities who do not present admirable behaviors and a similar recognition must therefore be afforded to members of the other community.

### Culture and Religion

As mentioned earlier, culture and religion were often noted as shared traits that can bridge any existing or future gaps between the two communities. Religion in particular was noted by nearly all participants and interviewees as the primary commonality between the Turkish and Syrian communities, although participants still noted core differences that impacted their perceptions of the other community.

Participants of all ages noted that, while there is a common faith that ties the two communities, youth in Turkey are more liberal than Syrian youth. This was noted with both its positive and negative elements, as Syrian women noted that Turkish men are very respectful towards them, the inverse of which was reproached by Turkish communities who were disappointed in Syrian men’s treatment of women. A few Turkish women also noted feeling uncomfortable with the increased presence of Syrian men in public spaces, noting that this restricted their movements, or at least their comfort in moving freely. Some Syrian women similarly noted that they have a hard time finding events in which they can participate as most events in Turkey are mixed, and many stated they were not accustomed to attending such events.

*There can be a play made in both Arabic and Turkish. It can be a comedy about all the hardships both cultures have faced after the arrival of the Syrians.*

* *Adult Syrian Woman, Antakya District*

Syrian and Turkish women also criticized one another for the way they wear the veil, with Syrian women surprised that Turkish women can wear the veil while wearing formfitting clothing, and Turkish women noting their surprise that Syrian women can wear the veil with full makeup. These seemingly minor details were significant enough to be brought up in several discussions as though indicative of character flaws that could prevent effective relationship-building.

There were similarly slight cultural differences that were noted on multiple occasions as signals of lack of appreciation between the two communities. For example, several Syrian participants noted that they had not been invited for coffee in Turkish neighbors’ homes, while also noting that Turkish coffee culture generally brings people to gather in cafes as opposed to homes but it was still viewed as a sign of disrespect. These differences were also echoed in the participants’ discussions of the value placed on family and collective activities as opposed to individualistic activities. Syrians noted surprise on multiple occasions that Turkish communities seemed to place more value on individualism, while Turkish communities noted annoyance over Syrian communities hosting their family and friends at home until the late hours.

Despite these divergences, however, both Syrian and Turkish communities noted a shared love of football, food, and music as commonalities that can be harnessed to bring them together. Those who had participated in, or witnessed, shared events noted that the most positive ones were centered around shared classes, whether language, music or skills; shared meals, for example during Ramadan; and shared concerts, where each could be exposed to the other culture’s artists.

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION

As noted throughout this assessment, many of the core themes emerging relating to troubles in integration largely pertain to misunderstandings between the two communities, erroneous assumptions about one another, or misinterpretation of objective policies and mechanisms put in place by the Government of Turkey.

When asked how community members access necessary information, responses largely placed emphasis on online tools, including social media and WhatsApp groups. Other sources of information cited were family and local trusted leaders. Syrian communities noted additional reliance on children who speak Turkish, and Turkish communities noted additional accessibility of municipality websites, billboards and event calendars.

Syrian participants noted in the discussion groups wanting news on registration, available services , visas and information pertaining to when the borders to Syria are open, and some noted wanting news about the situation back home. Some women from both communities noted that they do not have steady access to information.

The type of information sought in different districts and by the host and refugee communities differed significantly however. Responses and the variations between host and refugee community responses in each of the three studied districts are aggregated in the chart below.

### Chart 2: Information Needs by All Communities

Notable patterns emerging from the above aggregation include, *inter alia*, the shared focus by both host and refugee communities responding in Antakya district on employment opportunities, and the disparate interest in information on ‘security concerns’ between the host communities, who expressed consistent interest across all three districts in obtaining this information, and the refugee communities who expressed very little interest also across all three districts.

Also of note is the relatively low expressed need in information about registration expressed by Syrian refugee respondents from Sultanbeyli district, and their simultaneous high interest in updates on the situation in their areas of origin. Turkish communities in Sultanbeyli district expressed much less interest than other communities in accessing information about social events, or educational services, while all six of the communities represented expressed an interest in receiving more information about accessibility of health services.

The disparate need for access to specific information demonstrates the localized approaches needed in first identifying, and then addressing and disseminating information on service and information gaps and needs being addressed.

Misperceptions of Syria – In addition to these specific information needs, and topical information needs highlighted throughout to address tensions stemming from misconceptions, there also emerged a theme in discussions with Turkish communities that, despite being neighbors, Turkish communities knew very little about Syria and Syrians before the crisis.

Given this, a few Syrian participants stated they felt they were being viewed and treated as inferior due to perceptions from their hosts that they had nothing back home. Turkish participants reflected their assessment of Syrian work ethic noting that Syria was so inexpensive that families did not need more than one person to work for 5 hours a day in order to make ends meet. Simultaneously, Turkish communities also view Syrians within their borders as the least fortunate, noting that those with greater means have gone towards the Gulf States or Europe. A similar sentiment was signaled to be creating strain even within the Syrian community, as Syrians with high levels of education now need to compete for the same accessible jobs as less educated Syrians.

While this demonstrates that the generalization that Syrians in Turkey all represent the least fortunate of Syrians is not applicable, it also reinstates the necessity to consider the additional ramifications on social cohesion of current labor policies which prevent some refugees from accessing employment in their sectors, of language integration efforts which may shift household balance of power to children who have acquired the language of their host communities, and of assistance efforts that may instigate avoidable social tension.

# Recommendations

The assessment’s exploration of the nascent social strain perceived to be emerging in Turkey between Turkish host communities and Syrian refugee communities was shown to be multi-faceted and to hold particularities at the level of each province and district.

The marked variety of influencers impacting social cohesion within the districts of Antakya, Fatih and Sultanbeyli, can pull decision-makers and actors in various directions as efforts are designed and resource allocation decisions are made.

Based on the findings of the present assessment, a few starting points present themselves that could offer ripple gains on social cohesion:

* Support to Mutual Language Acquisition: The issue of the language barrier was noted by nearly all participants as a primary obstacle to relationship-building, and to effective access to services, employment, and rights afforded by Temporary Protection mechanisms instituted by the Government of Turkey (GoT). Turkish and Syrian communities expressed interest, for varied reasons, in learning one another’s language. This interest and goodwill should be leveraged to ensure communication links can be created that will enable direct inter-communal ties to be forged in addition to independent capacity by Syrian refugees to communicate with Turkish local authorities. This capacity to communicate directly for enhanced inter-personal and administrative fluidity will be even more necessary as the GoT institutes recently-approved constitutional amendments that may permit the various refugee communities hosted by Turkey to establish more permanent presence in-country.
* Support Accurate Information Dissemination: Similarly with the approaching incorporation of refugee communities into formal pathways for nationality, it will be essential that new legislation and procedural guidance be understood analogously by all parties. While there are significant additional demands for information, a starting point focused on ensuring the next phase of government integration of refugee communities proceeds without exacerbating nascent inter-communal tensions is key.

This will require information and sensitization efforts on three prongs:

* 1. Engagement with Host and Refugee Communities

*Tailored communication efforts should clarify the true scope and implications, in terms of rights and obligations especially, on each of the communities of new legislation. A common understanding that dispels assumptions of favoritism, or other misconceptions, will be key to maintaining social cohesion.*

* 1. Engagement with Local Authorities

*Systematization of roll-out of new legislation and concerted training to ensure effective and consistent application of legislation throughout the country will be essential to ensuring no strain emerges due to lack of procedural clarity, as was noted to be the case in relation to registration and access to services. A system that is perceived as equitable by its beneficiaries will reduce space for grievances to emerge between the communities.*

* 1. Joint Engagement between Local Authorities and Host and Refugee Communities

*Building on both campaigns, it will essential for local authorities to be perceived as presenting accurate information to both communities equitably. These efforts should also, with engagement of relevant actors, integrate details of existing labor protections currently in place for refugee communities, as well as those planned, to reassure refugee communities that their fears are being considered and demonstrate to host communities that a protection shift is forthcoming.*

* Support to Social Events and Joint Assistance: In similar fashion, and building on the expressed contentment of both communities with joint cultural events held and the concern expressed by the host community that assistance has overlooked its own meriting populations, events that bring together host and refugee communities over neutral socio-cultural or assistance proceedings would likely provide a platform from which to build more substantive collaborative relationships between the communities. It will be essential in hosting such shared events to remain cognizant of, and accommodate for, the various cultural restrictions that may restrict participation for either side inadvertently.

In planning implementation towards any of these themes, it remains necessary to cyclically revisit the understanding of the context applied to ensure relevance of interventions. For example, while core themes and their articulation were often echoed across the districts studied, aggravations were often more pronounced in Antakya district calling into question assertions of increased ease of integration due to past familiarity with cultures cross-borders. This nuance is one of which actors will need to remain aware, revisiting implicit assumptions made frequently to adapt as the context continues to shift.

1. According to Directorate General of Migration Management (DGMM) statistics: http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/temporary-protection\_915\_1024\_4748\_icerik [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://populationpyramid.net/turkey/2016/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Focus Group Discussion with Young Turkish Men. 14 February 2017. Fatih District, Istanbul Province. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Focus Group Discussion with Adult Turkish Women. 13 February 2017. Fatih District, Istanbul Province. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Focus Group Discussion with Adult Turkish Women. 13 February 2017. Fatih District, Istanbul Province. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Focus Group Discussion with Adult Syrian Women. 24 February 2017. Antakya District, Hatay Province. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Focus Group Discussion with Adult Turkish Women. 15 February 2017. Sultanbeyli District, Istanbul Province. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Focus Group Discussion with Adult Turkish Women. 15 February 2017. Sultanbeyli District, Istanbul Province. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)