

DEEP PLATFORM IFRC TURKEY PROJECT

SECONDARY DATA REVIEW (SDR) STUDIES SERIES #2

**TURKEY | Social cohesion between
refugee communities and their hosts**

by International Federation of
Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) Turkey Delegation



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What?

DEEP is a secondary data library covering all the published information from local and international media, humanitarian and development sector and academia on all the aspects of the lives of refugees living in Turkey. It also provides various analytical tools to summarize and analyze this information so that you can conduct complex Secondary Data Review (SDR) research and create ready-to-go reports, all in one place.

How?

IFRC staff can use their **IFRC email**, and the password sent to them via email to login to the Platform. Non-IFRC readers please follow the link [here](#) to request access to the **2021 IFRC ESSN Turkey Project**.

Copies of academic studies cited within this work can be requested directly from the authors or from the IFRC Turkey DEEP Team.

Why?



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DETAILED ASSESSMENT OF REPORTS IN TERMS OF THEIR METHODOLOGIES AND DATA QUALITY

For more information on the IFRC Project in DEEP please reach out to Ebru Eren Webb (eburu.webb@ifrc.org) or Corey Dickinson (corey.dickinson@ifrc.org) from the Information Management Team and go to the [DEEP Support](#) page to learn more about the Platform.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

An extensive literature review has been conducted to identify the contextual drivers of social cohesion and to better understand the present and the future of the relationship between refugee and host communities in Turkey.



Findings from the available literature show close interpersonal relationships and rareness of reports of physical aggression between refugee and host communities, indicating a high level of social acceptance for over 4.1 million refugees.



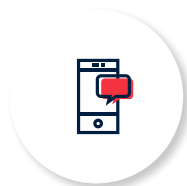
On the other hand, several studies point to a correlation between the economic situation and social cohesion; the current Turkish economy is significantly weaker than it was in 2021. While some of the local respondents to available

surveys relate the economic downfall to the presence of refugees, there are others reporting that either the quality of public services or their access thereto has been affected. The host community's security-related concerns constitute another factor impacting social cohesion.



The studies covered in this SDR Report show that part of these concerns is based on misconceptions on the impact of refugees on the country and the society: Available research has for instance shown that the loss of

jobs remained limited, while statistics by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs show that refugee presence does not have a discernible impact on crime rates.



Key studies note that the narrative about refugees vary depending on media outlets, as well as over time. For example, the literature describe how reporting by some outlets has moved from a 'humanitarian'

narrative, describing the needs of the new arrivals, to an 'anti-immigrant narrative' by 2016, highlighting the burden on Turkey of hosting the refugee population. Many other studies found there is limited coverage of refugees' access to rights, and the voices of the refugees are nearly absent in the public discussion. While Twitter is widely used to spread anti-refugee content, one analyst, Sevilay Çelenk in [Duvar](#), points out that social media does not necessarily reflect the general mood of a society, but the feelings of a limited number of social media users.



Despite the significant support provided by the Government of Turkey, national and international NGOs, there continues to be a need for specific interventions to support relationship building between

refugees and their hosts. Recommendations within the literature to further promote social cohesion includes strengthening access to language learning opportunities, working with media to strengthen the representation and visibility of the refugees' coverage, including awareness campaigns to counter false news, are recommended as well increased international burden sharing, including increasing the number of resettlement spaces.



Additional research is recommended to address remaining information gaps. For instance, there is no systematic analysis on the conditions of all municipalities with an important refugee caseload, nor are reasons for variations in the levels of social

cohesion between geographic areas well captured within the existing literature. There is a gap in information on the vertical integration of refugee communities in Turkey which refers to integration within refugee groups in areas such as refugee community civic engagement, refugee community trust in institutions and the extent to which communities feel represented in decision-making processes. Overall, to better understand what drives social cohesion, and to better identify opportunities and challenges, standardized variables and methodologies should be utilized to add to the comprehensiveness of future endeavours.

DISCLAIMER:

It is important to note that the research findings presented here as well as the insights that can be derived from them do not always necessarily reflect IFRC's position. They are chosen in this study purely due to their methodological rigor and their potential to inform the humanitarian sector, which works to support the vulnerable refugee communities living in Turkey.

METHODOLOGY

Turkey is currently hosting the largest number of refugees¹ in the world, at an estimated 4.1 million refugees in 2021. The **objective of this desk review is to identify the levels and drivers of social cohesion between refugee and host communities**, with a specific focus on the current situation; the evolution of the social cohesion dynamics since 2012; sentiments in the media and the society, and response recommendations and possible developments in the future. The current situation under analysis is characterized by certain key developments: the impact of the COVID crisis on host and refugee societies' living conditions (Dayioglu, Kirdar, and Koc, 2021), as well as the August 2021 developments in Afghanistan resulting in an increasing focus on the arrival of Afghans to Turkey (The New Humanitarian 2021). In addition, the refugee-related movements in Ankara in August 2021, and approaching national elections in the summer of 2022 further underlined the complexity and importance of social cohesion in Turkey (Euronews 2021).

This review draws from over **250 sources of information**, including media content, and studies produced by academic institutions and the humanitarian sector. Graph 3 details the main studies used, as well as the methodological scope and limitations of studies including primary data collection. The secondary data collection and analytical development tool behind this SDR report is an interagency-led initiative known as the data entry and exploration platform ([DEEP](#)). **DEEP is an intelligent web-based platform offering a suite of collaborative tools tailored towards humanitarian crisis responses.** It includes common analysis workflows and frameworks for thinking using both structured and unstructured, quantitative and qualitative data (See Appendix A for the analytical framework used in the DEEP IFRC project data collection and categorization). By using a customizable analysis framework, users can easily catalogue information contained in large number of documents and export it in a variety of formats.

DEEP IFRC Turkey ESSN Project is the largest and most actively used project within the DEEP Platform as of April 2022. Through this project, **IFRC aims to build the most extensive secondary data library on the refugee-related topics in The Turkey context** and produce thematic SDR reports on a regular basis as an outcome of this project. This report is the second product of this project following the SDR report on the economic integration of refugees in Turkey, published in August 2021. The overall goal of this project is two fold: contributing to the knowledge and data quality available by providing access to reliable sectoral and academic data, while simultaneously increasing synergy between different agencies working on similar matters.

The study provides insights into the social cohesion situation in Turkey by summarizing and contrasting the latest available research. It starts with a consolidation of the available secondary data on **the drivers of social cohesion** in Turkey. It then includes a review of the literature on **measures of social cohesion**, including social relationships, **perspectives on the impact on the economy, and willingness to share public services as well as dimensions of vertical integration**. It is seen that various contextual elements drive the level of social cohesion, including the arrival patterns and the number of those displaced, economic conditions, language ability of refugees, and perceived cultural proximity. Our review ends with a summary of the available information sources on **possible developments in the future and recommendations for response**. The consolidated information mostly refers to the situation of Syrian refugees, who make up over 90 per cent of the refugee population in Turkey, along with information on the Afghan refugee population.

Note that, where possible, citations provide hyperlinks to the original sources to which they refer to.

¹ Please note that this analysis uses the word 'refugee' to refer to all those fleeing crises in Syria and Afghanistan, regardless of their legal status in Turkey.

1. DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Turkey is hosting an estimated 4.1 million refugees, including 3.7 million Syrian refugees (under temporary protection), at least 300,000 Afghan refugees, and thousands of refugees from other nationalities such as the Iraqi and Iranians. This represents 5 per cent of the total population of Turkey (DGMM 2022).

Under the framework established in the aftermath of the outbreak of the crisis, Syrian refugees in Turkey are eligible for “Temporary Protection” status. This status is separate from “International Protection” refugee status, which has broader international legal protections and can apply to other nationalities (including Afghans.)

2. REFUGEE SETTLEMENT TRENDS

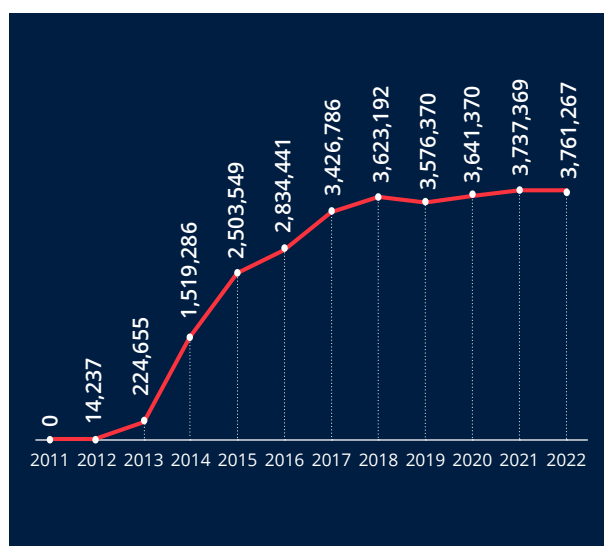


More than 55 per cent of Syrians who fled their country are currently residing in Turkey. Most Syrian arrivals occurred in the first years following the start of the civil war in 2011 and around 75 per cent of the Syrians have by now been in Turkey for over 5 years (UNHCR 2020).

Between 2014 and 2021, close to 18,000 Syrian refugees were transferred to third host countries for resettlement.²

While the rate of arrival of Syrians to Turkey has considerably decreased since 2018, The New Humanitarian (2021) reports that most of the Afghan refugees arrived in the country after 2018. Since the early 2010s, there has been a considerable increase in Afghan movement to Turkey, with a peak recorded in 2018 and 2019 (although the 2021 events may have exceeded this). Some analysts attribute this to the intensification of tension in Afghanistan during this period (The New Humanitarian, 2021). In 2020, more than 500,000 asylum seekers, the majority of whom were Afghans, entered Turkey irregularly through the border in Van province. The 2020 arrival trend is lower than that of the preceding years, mostly due to the COVID-19 outbreak and associated movement restrictions in countries of origin and transit. Likewise, in 2021; thousands of Afghans entered Turkey irregularly through the eastern borders aiming to escape the recent political developments in Afghanistan (Guardian, 2021, The New Humanitarian, 2021).

Figure 1: Syrians under Temporary Protection by Year (DGMM, 2022)



Many of those entering Turkey make their way to a third country, as reported by TRT World in August 2021, where the President Erdoğan said that Turkey was hosting some 300,000 documented and undocumented Afghan refugees (TRT, 2021). The Economist estimates a total of between 200,000 and 600,000 Afghan refugees residing in Turkey (Economist, 2021).

² Mostly to Canada, the USA, and in smaller numbers to Britain and Norway. From 2016 up until April 2021, about 30,000 Syrians were resettled to the EU as part of the 2016 EU-Turkey Statement, including 2,400 people in 2020.

Figure 2: Timeline of Main Events in Turkey as of April 2022³

Color Key ■ Population movement ■ Legal and political events in Turkey ■ COVID and other emergencies ■ Economic development



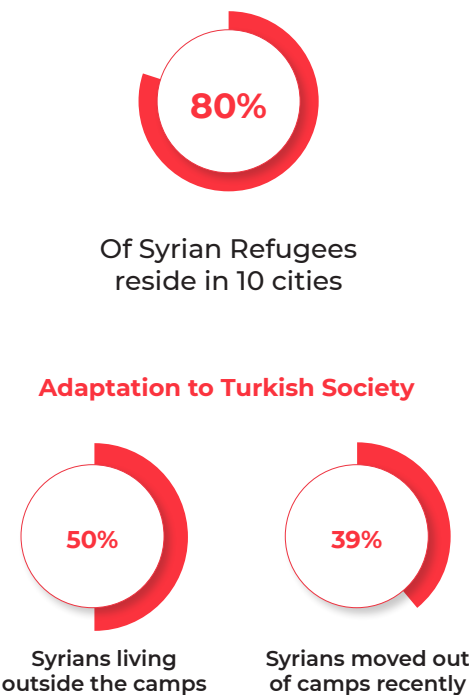
³ See the Annex B for more detail on the major events in 2021 and 2022.

Figure 3: Data Collection Methods, Scope and Limitations of the Main Studies

	Name	Data collection technique	Representativity and Limitations
Quantitative studies	WFP 2019	5 online anonymous surveys between 2017 and 2019, with a total of 16,498 participants from both Turkish and Arabic-speaking refugee communities. 18 focus group discussions, involving 155 refugees.	The confidence interval was determined as 90% with 5% margin of error (first three rounds) and below 3.3% for rounds 4 and 5. In each round of data collection, the surveys were representative at regional and national level for both Turkish and refugee populations. The main limitation to the representativeness of the survey is its online nature: literacy of participants, access to internet, and willingness to participate in online surveys on this topic are three preconditions to participating.
	IFRC PDM 2020	Results based on a stratified random sample of 5.148 refugees in 2017 (baseline) and 2020.	The main limitation of this PDM survey is that it is designed to be representative of the ESSN applicant pool, but not for the entire refugee population living in Turkey.
	Syrian Barometer 2017 - 2020	Comprehensive face to face public opinion surveys. In 2017, the study was conducted in 26 provinces with 2089 Turkish citizens on an individual basis; and in 11 provinces with 1235 Syrian families on a household basis. In 2019, face-to-face surveys were conducted in 26 cities with 2.271 Turkish citizens and in 15 cities with 1.418 Syrian households. 20 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).	The survey was conducted with a 95% confidence level. The face-to-face nature of this survey is likely to have resulted in respondent bias, with those interviewed adjusting their answers to sensitive questions.
Qualitative studies	Nilüfer Narlı, Mine Özaşçılar 2020	380 Syrians were surveyed in face-to-face interviews in their flats between August 2016 and November 2017 Zeytinburnu, in Istanbul, Turkey.	The geographic coverage of this survey is limited to Zeytinburnu, Istanbul.
	Erdoğan, 2017	Semi-structured questionnaire used with Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality authorities and authorities of the 27 district municipalities.	The geographic coverage of this qualitative survey is limited to Istanbul.
	GAR, 2021	50 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Afghans in Istanbul (online and face to face). 9 in-depth, semi-structured online interviews were conducted with the representatives of Afghan associations, non-governmental and international organizations, grassroots initiatives, and specialized journalists and human rights activists.	The geographic coverage of this qualitative survey is limited to Istanbul. Undocumented and unregistered Afghans are the hardest to reach and the results do not reflect all experiences of this population group.
	Açıkalın, 2021	Face-to-face interviews with 1106 Syrian women in Ankara in 2018-2019 visiting Public Training Centers.	Results can only be extrapolated to the female population visiting Public Training Centres in Ankara at the time of the study in 2018 and 2019.
	Beyazıt University, 2018	Text mining of Tweets of 633 accounts at the end of 2017, using Twitter API1.	Only reflects the tweets that met the eligibility criteria: tweets need to be in Arabic, in the geographic area of focus and created before 2014.

2.1. Resettlement Patterns

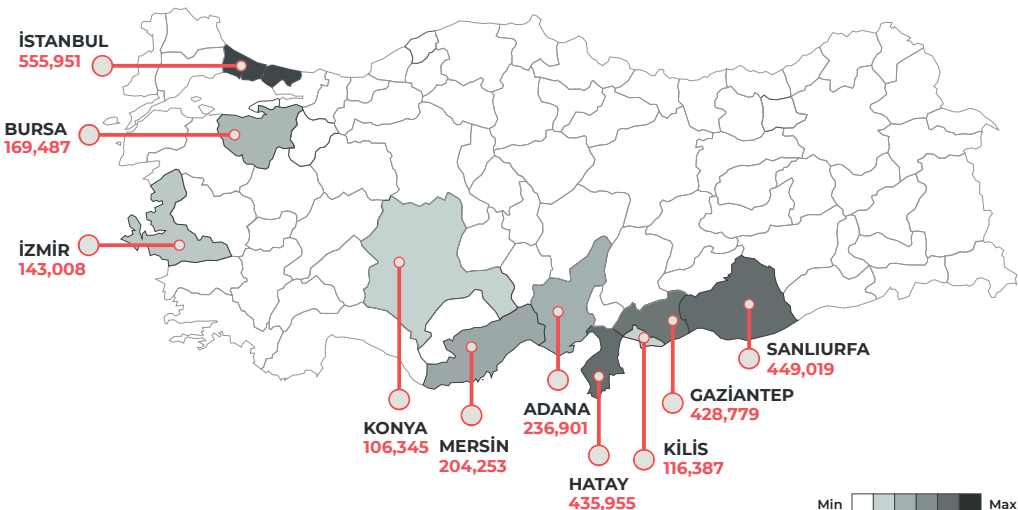
Figure 4: Resettlement patterns of Syrians



The highest numbers of registered Syrian refugees can be found in Istanbul, followed by border towns in the south and south-eastern regions of Turkey such as Gaziantep, Hatay, and Sanliurfa provinces. (DGMM, 2022)

While at the start of the crisis, a significant number of Syrians resided in camps, this has now reduced to 1.5%, or around **55,000 specifically vulnerable Syrians hosted in 7 temporary accommodation centers.** [Baban, Ilcan and Rygiel highlight in The Journal for Ethnic and Migration studies](#) the difficulties of those in camps to maintain strong social and economic networks, and establish a secure life. Illustratively, refugees interviewed by the World Food Programme (WFP) as part of the fifth Comprehensive Vulnerability Monitoring Exercise (CVME5)⁴ who have been living out of camps were much more likely to consider themselves as having adapted (50 per cent) to Turkish society compared to those who moved out of the camps recently (39 per cent).

Figure 5 : Map of Syrian population density:
Most Syrians are residing in Istanbul, Şanlıurfa and Hatay (DGMM, 2021)



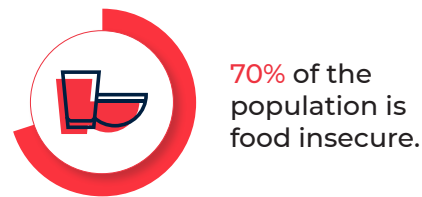
⁴ Results based on a face to face survey of 380 households, comprising 8 027 individuals in 2020. Representative at the national level.

2.2. Return Patterns

Media sources estimate that over 350,000 people lost their lives since the onset of the conflict in Syria in 2011 and by 2021, an estimated 12.3 million Syrians have been internally displaced or fled to other countries. Syria continues to face an economic crisis while the value of the Syrian pound has dropped to an all-time low. Between 2020 and 2021, the number of people considered to be food insecure increased by 3 million, totalling 12.4 million, or 70 per cent of the population, according to the Syrian HNO. **Despite these conditions, there has been an increase in returns to Syria since 2015, with over 400,000 voluntary returns registered by the Turkish Government** ([ECHO, 2021](#)).

For decades, insecurity and economic hardship have forced **Afghan refugees to flee their country in significant numbers** ([Brooking Institute, 2021](#)). By August 2021, UNHCR reports that between 20,000 and

Figure 6: Food insecurity of the returned Syrians



30,000 people left the country weekly ([UNHCR, 2021](#)). Afghanistan is one of the most dangerous countries in the world for aid agencies, with frequent delays of assistance. The country is also ranked as the least peaceful country in the world by the Global Peace Index and the conflict remains one of the deadliest for civilians by global measures ([GPI, 2021](#)). As such, **the return of Afghans is currently limited.**

2.3. Special Situation: Afghan Refugees in Turkey

The available information on the relationship between the estimated 300.000 to 600.000 Afghans ([Economist 2021](#)) and the host community, shows how their situation is, in a number of ways, similar to that of Syrian refugees in the country:

In general, there have been **few incidents involving violence** reported between different communities. Illustratively, a significant number of Afghans consider Turkey as a destination, instead of a transit country, as they feel (relatively) safe and secure ([Talwasa, 2020](#)). Afghans often live with other Afghans, separated from their Turkish hosts ([Afghanistan Analyst Network 2020](#), [GAR 2021](#)). Afghan presence is a “hot political topic” ([FP 2021](#), [The National 2021](#)).

However, the experiences of Afghans are also distinctly different from Syrian refugees, in a number of ways:

Informality: Unlike the Syrian population, large majority of Afghans reside in the country informally, without the required paperwork. Fearing detention and deportation, many do not register with authorities. Those who do apply for ‘conditional protection’, are assigned to ‘satellite cities’ during the process. As they are not legally allowed to work, with limited access to assistance, many choose informality.

Limited social interaction: The few available sources highlight how social interaction between the Afghan population and Turkish communities is extremely limited.

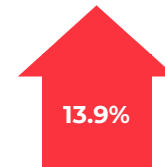
Length of stay: Most of the Afghan refugees arrived in the country after 2018 ([The New Humanitarian 2021](#)).

Access assistance: Partly due to this informality and separation, Afghans have more limited access to assistance from (international) organizations ([Afghanistan Analysts Network 2020](#)). Illustratively, according to the response data provided by UNHCR, less than 3 per cent of non-Turkish beneficiaries of Protection Sector activities are Afghans or other nationalities ([UNHCR, 2021](#)). Services provided by municipalities are therefore of specific importance for unregistered Afghans, who have difficulties accessing other sources of assistance ([Afghanistan Analyst Network 2020](#)).

3. EXACERBATING SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS

Various studies and articles point to a **relationship between the economic situation in Turkey and the population's willingness to host refugees** ([Syrian Barometer, 2019-2020](#) , [International Crisis Group, 2018](#)). The Turkish economy in 2021 is significantly weaker compared to the period when refugees started to arrive in 2012 ([Brookings, 2021](#)): Turkey's unemployment rate increased to 13.9 per cent of the total labour force in 2020 ([World Bank, 2021](#)). **The Syrian civil war has negatively affected the Turkish economy, especially in its border provinces.** In 2009, when Turkey and Syria abolished their visa requirements, tourism and commercial visits to and from Syria increased economic activity in Turkey's border provinces (e.g., Hatay, Gaziantep, Kilis, Adana, Mersin, Şanlıurfa, and Mardin). However, this economic boost came to an end with the start of the Syrian civil war ([Kargin, 2018](#)). On average, refugees are more likely to live in poverty compared to their hosts. In 2018, 79 per cent of Syrian households were categorized in the bottom quintile of the wealth index ([Dayioglu, Kirdar, and Koc, 2021](#)).

Figure 7: Turkish unemployment rate



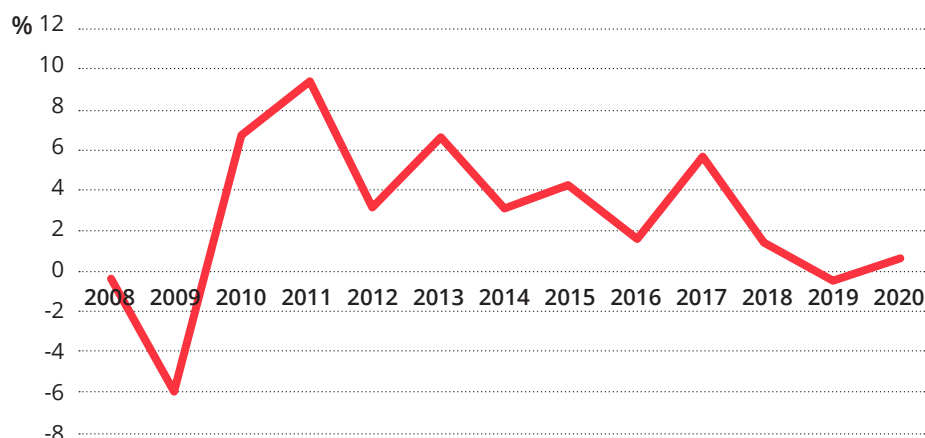
Unemployment rate
within Turkey in 2020

Figure 8: Poverty among Syrians in Turkey



79% of Syrian households
were categorized in the
bottom quintile

Figure 9: Turkey's annual GDP growth has reduced significantly between 2011 and 2020
([World Bank, 2021](#))



The contribution of Syrians to the Turkish economy has increased over time. According to a report by Suay Nilhan Açikalin in 2020⁵, Syrian refugees affect the Turkish economy in both positive and negative ways. **On the one hand, there is economic growth due to the establishment of refugee-owned companies and the increased availability of unskilled labour** (Acikalin, 2020). Syrian-established companies went from representing 0.2 per cent of newly established companies in Turkey in 2011 to 2.4 per cent in 2015, mostly in Southeast Turkey and western metropolitan cities and often specializing in textiles. **Conversely, the increase in rent costs in the regions densely populated by refugees, growth of the informal economy, reduction in unskilled-labour wages are some of the reported negative effects of the refugees that are highlighted by various studies.**



Housing: A 2018 Balkan study, quoted in the [World Refugee and Migration Council Research Report \(2021\)](#) notes that the presence of refugees has had a significant effect on housing prices ([WRMC, 2021](#)). As Syrians started moving into lower-quality housing, the host community moved toward higher-quality units, resulting in price surges. The authors argue that negative attitudes towards refugees are partly causing this development, with Turkish families moving away from lower-rent areas with a high refugee concentration. The increase in rental costs, especially in border cities such as Hatay, Gaziantep, and Urfa, is one of the most immediate impacts of the Syrian refugee inflow that feeds into anti-Syrian sentiments ([Saraçoğlu and Bélangerhese, 2019](#)).



Labour Market Competition: Access to decent work for Turkish and refugee communities is a key driver of social tension and social cohesion ([3RP, 2021](#)). The International Crisis Group study notes in a 2018 that Turkish citizens feel that Syrians threaten their access to jobs in an economy with high and under-employment ([ICG, 2018](#)). A [September 2021 World Refugee and Migration Council Research Report](#) notes that Syrian refugees, who are on average younger and less-educated than the host community, decreased production costs as they replaced the low-skilled native labor. This decline in the costs of production resulted in a **higher demand for the labor of skilled host community members**. However, the positive impact is mainly concentrated in the informal economy. In the south in and around Urfa, **Syrians displaced the Kurdish workers formerly employed in this sector** (so-called 'shift poverty'), which contributed to greater tensions ([Baban et al, 2016](#)).



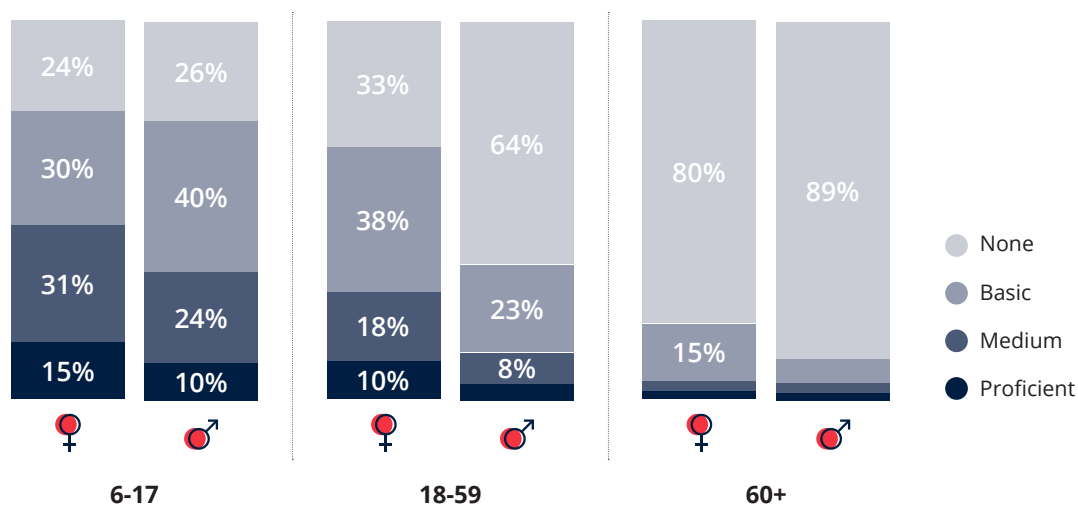
Health care: The [Union of Turkish Doctors \(2017\)](#) notes the impact of the increase in demand for care in public hospitals, especially those in border provinces, capacities have been particularly strained since the arrival of the Syrians. Since then, Syrian healthcare professionals have increasingly been allowed to work in Turkey to meet this increase in demand, and overcome language barriers, as noted within a [2019 IGAM study](#). The limited information available on the impact of the refugee presence on the cost of essential needs, shows that impact of Syrian immigration on Turkish prices is currently moderate ([Genc and Gahramanov, 2021](#)).

⁵ Face-to-face interviews with y 1106 Syrian women visiting Public Training Centres in Ankara in 2018-2019. Results can only be extrapolated to this population.



Turkish Language Ability Factor: Many recent sources (including [Refugees International](#) in 2019, [WFP](#) in 2019, [Simsek](#) in 2018, and [Hashemi et al](#) in 2020) state that language remains one of the largest barriers to access services, including hospitals, police stations and education, and towards social cohesion. The Syrian Barometer notes **an improvement in Turkish Language Skills among Syrian refugees over time**, at the start of June 2019, 75 per cent of Syrians spoke at least some Turkish. Around 40 per cent considered themselves an intermediate or advanced Turkish speaker ([SB, 2019](#)). The fourth round of the [WFP-TRC CVME](#) found that **gender and age play an important role in the participants' ability to acquire command of the Turkish language**:

Figure 10 - Language skills by gender and age: Turkish Proficiency is lower among elderly and women ([WFP, 2020](#))



Very little information is available regarding the Turkish-speaking ability of the Afghan refugees. It seems that the Uzbeks and Turkmens are in a relatively better position as their languages are more similar to Turkish, they learn Turkish faster and therefore have greater opportunity to find jobs with better pay and conditions compared to other Afghans ([GAR, 2021](#)).



4. DISCOURSE IN TURKEY ON REFUGEES

4.1. Political Parties



An often quoted [2020 study](#) explains how **the Turkish government has adopted a “protective” approach to Syrian refugees since 2011, avoiding the discourse that refugees pose a “problem”** ([Erdogan, 2020](#)).

The government presents the support for refugees as the elements of “religious or cultural solidarity”. While

the author notes that the opposition also pursued a cautious policy, other sources have noted opposition parties have intensified their rhetoric against refugees, mostly due to the upcoming elections that will be held in the Summer of 2023. For instance, a leading opposition lawmaker called Syrians and Afghans, “the number-one issue for Turkey's survival” and tweeted that Turkey will not become “an open prison to refugees” ([Economist 2021, New York Times 2021](#)).

4.2. Media



Several studies, such as those by Refugees International, International Crisis Group and TEPAV, highlight that misconceptions about refugees feed anti-refugee sentiment ([RI, 2019, ICG, 2018, Tepav, 2018](#)). A 2015 national survey shows that Turkish people receive most information about Syrian refugees through TV, Internet and other media channels, which highlights the important role of the media in social cohesion ([TMFSP, 2016](#)).

Studies show the strong relationship between newspapers’ political stance and their news content on Syrian refugees. A 2015 study by Efe, a 2019 study by the Hungarian Communication Studies and a 2020 Pandir article found that pro-government Turkish dailies’ framed the Syrian refugees as people in need of support, with references to the shared religion and brotherhood on the basis of Islam, and with an emphasis on the humanitarian approach ([Efe, 2015, HCS, 2020, Pandir 2020](#)). Non-mainstream dailies more often use criminalizing and hegemonic language. Overall, Ozturk notes that the narrative of “short-term guests” continues to be prevalent in the media ([Ozturk, 2020](#)). Various studies note the discourse of victimhood presented, with Syrians represented as “suffering,” “poor people” and “in need of help”. Several studies note a change in discourse over time; from the ‘humanitarian’ to the ‘anti-immigrant narrative’ by 2016.

While this ‘anti-immigrant narrative’ is common within media coverage, **the media has also generated support for refugees**. For instance, the 2017 kidnapping, rape, and murder of a Syrian pregnant woman and

her 10-month-old led to a large-scale condemnation, focusing on the refugee women’s vulnerability.

The Family and Social Policies Minister, Fatma Betül Sayan Kaya, stated “Terror and barbarity have no race or nationality [...] Turkey is home to “our Syrian brothers and sisters”. In addition, the newspaper quoted Zeki Toçoğlu, the Mayor from the city of Sakarya, where the incident took place, saying: “We will stand with the oppressed and against the oppressor. Our fraternity is eternal” ([Hurriyet Daily News, 2017](#)).

Several studies found that there is limited coverage of refugees’ access to rights, while Atasü-Topcuoğlu notes in its 2018 analysis that the voices of the refugees themselves are nearly absent in the public discussion. Illustratively, during the first 6 months of the COVID outbreak, television news did not mention once the difficulties faced by Syrian refugees nor were they directly interviewed ([Atasu-Topcuoglu, 2018](#)).

The varying approaches of media outlets are illustrated when reviewing specific events. An initial review of reporting by outlets on a national and international level during the crisis in Ankara between 10 and 13 August 2021 reveals two approaches: On the one hand, several newspapers ([Al-Monitor](#), [Euronews](#), [Al Jazeera](#), [Deutsche Welle](#), [Ahval](#), 2021) **place the events in the larger context** of increasing anti-refugee sentiment, and point to underlying causes such as refugee policies, the economic instability and political discourse. For instance, Ahval reports:

“

‘The incident reflects poor policy decisions worsened by hyperpolarised politics and a struggling economy, (...) In addition, these newspapers highlight the relationship between Afghan migration to Turkey and the events in Ankara. For instance, Euronews reported ‘Turkey, which is grappling with a battered economy and high unemployment, is home to around four million mostly-Syrian refugees. But there is public concern that the country may be faced with a fresh refugee influx from Afghanistan’.

-Ahval, 2021

On the other hand, several media outlets such as [Anadolu Agency](#), [Sozcu](#), [Yeni Şafak](#) and [Milliyet](#) **solely focus on the direct cause of the unrest**, and detail the death of the Turkish boy and the community's response. Illustratively, on the day of the start of the unrests, the Turkish media outlet Sozcu published an article with the title ‘**One of those stabbed in Altındağ incident died**’, with limited mention of the following unrest:

“

“Emirhan Yalçın (18), who was injured in a fight with a foreign national group in Altındağ district of Ankara, died in the hospital where he was treated. The treatment of Ali Yasin Güler, who was injured in the fight, continues. After the incident, there was tension between the residents of the neighbourhood and foreign nationals in the district.”

-Sozcu, 2021

Only few of the reports focus on the impact of the violence on Syrians affected, mostly reporting on the tweet made by Turkish Red Crescent Chairman Kerem Kinik on the Syrian child who was hospitalized after sustaining an injury by a stone thrown at his family's home (for instance as reported by [Al-Jazeera](#), 2021).

EXPLAINER: EVENTS IN ANKARA

On the evening of August 11, over a hundred Turkish men attacked homes and shops belonging to Syrians in a neighbourhood of Ankara, which is home to a large Syrian refugee community. Several Syrians were forced to flee the situation and at least one child was hospitalized after being injured. While tension between the refugee and host community has been limited to date, analysts quoted by Euronews and BBC attribute the event to increasing tensions in the country, partly due to economic hardship and harsh rhetoric in the run up to the elections ([Euronews](#), [BBC](#), 2021).



4.3. Social Media



A June 2020 study by Ozturk found that unlike the print press, a more discriminatory discourse is consistently perpetuated by the users on Twitter ([Ozturk, 2020](#)). Researchers identified specific events that resulted in an increase in anti-immigrant sentiment online, including:

1. **The news of undocumented Afghan arrivals** and the US Refugee Action Plan announced that allegedly included Turkey as one of the target countries for Afghan refugee resettlement ([The Stockholm Centre for Freedom, 2021](#)).
2. Following the **anti-immigrant unrest in Ankara** in August 2021, when posts and messages were shared widely on social media including the hashtag “Turkey to the Turks” ([InfoMigrants 2021](#)).

Overall, Ozturk, (2020) identified **a negative-other representation of Syrian refugees on Twitter**, while self-positive presentation is achieved through victimizing the Turkish community who are claimed to suffer from the acts of refugee populations in Turkey. However, as Sevilay Çelenk in [Duvar](#) notes, in reaction to the Twitter activities following the Ankara events in August 2021, **social media does not necessarily reflect the general mood of a society, but the feelings of a limited number of social media users** ([Duvar, 2021](#)).



5. LEVELS OF SOCIAL COHESION

5.1. Panorama

Figure 11: Levels of social cohesion among the host and refugee communities

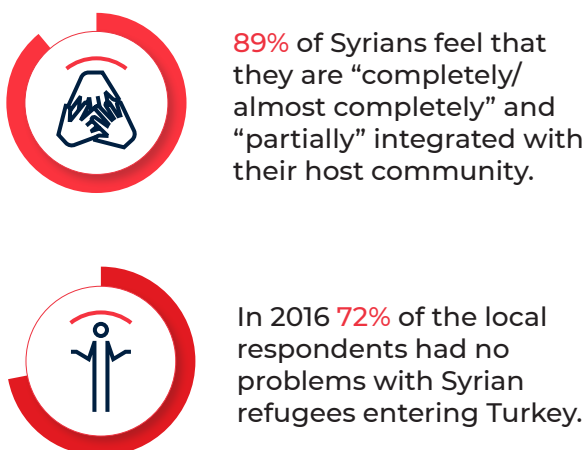
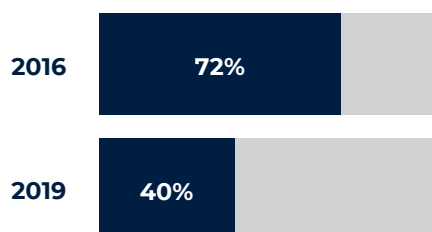


Figure 12: Change in local perception of Syrians over time



There is generally high level of social acceptance. Various sources, including the [Syrian Barometer \(2019\)](#) and the [European Commission \(2020\)](#) note that there is a very high level of social acceptance of Syrians by Turkish society, with limited tensions in the 9 years since the first refugees arrived. The increasing integration of Syrians into Turkish society has been recorded, with Syrians **declaring that they feel safer, more at peace, and happier in Turkey**, according to an analysis over time by the [Syrian Barometer \(2019\)](#). The [Syrian Barometer \(2019\)](#) also showed that almost 89 per cent of Syrians feel that they are “completely/ almost completely” and “partially” integrated with their host community.

There is a measurable change over time in the perceptions of the host community towards the refugee community. In the initial years of their arrival, Turkish communities received Syrians mostly with open arms. In 2016, 72 per cent of the local respondents had no problems with Syrian refugees entering Turkey ([Sazak, 2019](#)). Many sources quote the solidarity provided by Turks to the new arrivals, with examples of neighbourhoods coming together to provide basic needs and support. Illustratively, one-third of the Turks participating in the [Syrian Barometer \(2019\)](#) had provided cash or in-kind assistance to Syrians. However, studies show a **change in attitude over time**, especially after 2016. According to the [Konda Barometer](#) in 2016, 72 per cent of Turks were content to live in the same city as Syrians. However, by 2019, this proportion reduced to 40 per cent. WFP noticed a deterioration in relations between refugees and the

host community between 2018 and 2019 and attributes this to the economic slowdown in mid-2018 and the political discourse on refugee returns during local elections in 2019 ([WFP, 2019](#)). Ethnographic fieldwork and polls show that there are **four main concerns among Turkish communities** related to the refugee presence in the country:

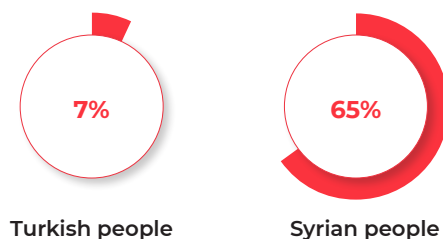


5.2. Perceptions on cultural proximity

While cultural proximity has often been assumed, public perceptions point to the fact that **Turks perceive Syrians as different from themselves**. In 2019, only 7 per cent of the Turkish respondents interviewed as part of the [Syrian Barometer \(2019\)](#) believe that refugees are culturally similar, a proportion that has not significantly changed since the first round in 2017. However, Syrians mostly identified the commonalities between the Syrian and Turkish way of living. “Our social relations, food cultures, languages, and traditions are all very similar” ([Syrian Barometer 2019](#)), 65 per cent of Syrians feel

Turkish and Syrian people share similar culture and lifestyles (WFP, 2019). Several studies have shown the role of religion within this environment, with Turkish sharing a religion with Syrians more likely to welcome them. ([Çetin, 2019](#)).

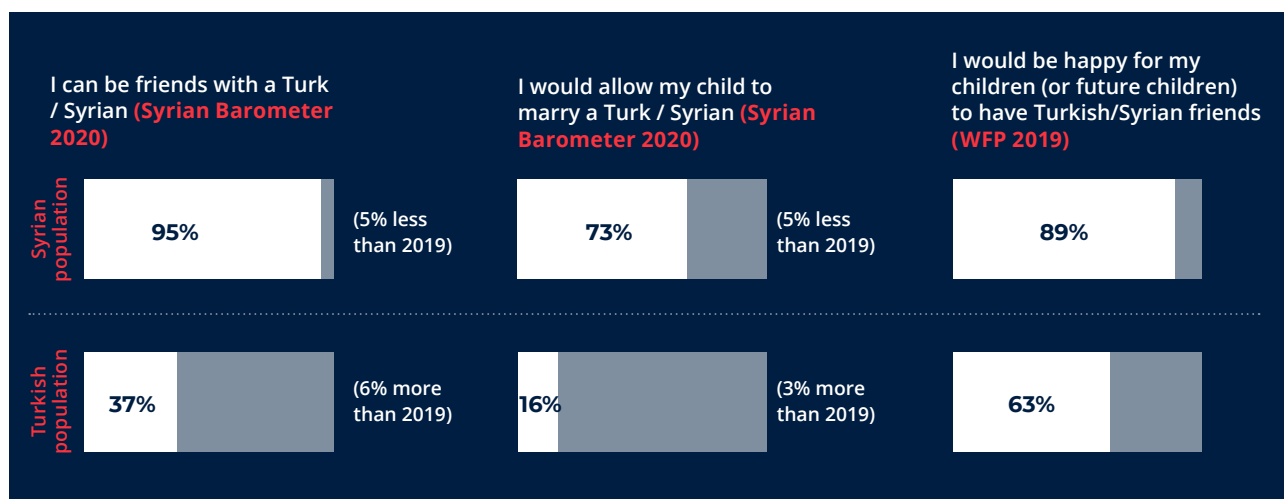
Figure 13: Turks vs. Syrians perception of cultural similarity



5.3. Perceptions on interpersonal relationships

The findings show **close contact between Syrians and Turks**. In the [Syrian Barometer \(2019\)](#) 74 per cent of Syrian refugees indicate they have one or more Turkish friends, and only 5 per cent disagreed with the statement ‘I can be friends with a Turk’. WFP provides more detail on the type of friendship, with about a third of Syrians report having Turkish friends whom they can talk to when upset, get financial advice from, get advice for getting things done or to visit ([WFP, 2019](#)).

Figure 14: The diverging Syrian and Turkish perspectives on personal relationships (per cent of the population responding ‘agreed’, ‘partially agreed’ or ‘neutral’)



Intermarriage can be an indicator of social cohesion and acceptance in a community. While marriages between Turkish people and Syrian refugees seem to be approved by a large part of the population, the [WFP Survey \(2019\)](#) shows **about a fifth of Turkish respondents reported that they wouldn’t mind if their children would marry a Syrian person, while about half of Syrians wouldn’t mind their children marrying a Turkish person**. However, over half of the Turkish respondents would completely disagree with such a marriage. Compared to other types of relationships mentioned, **the responses of Turks and Syrians in the available surveys are more similar when it comes to the interactions of their children**. A 2019 WFP Survey found that 63 per cent of Turkish respondents are “happy” or “neutral” for their children to have Syrian friends, compared to 89 per cent of Syrians. As noted in this survey, children’s friendship reciprocally increases language skills and social cohesion.

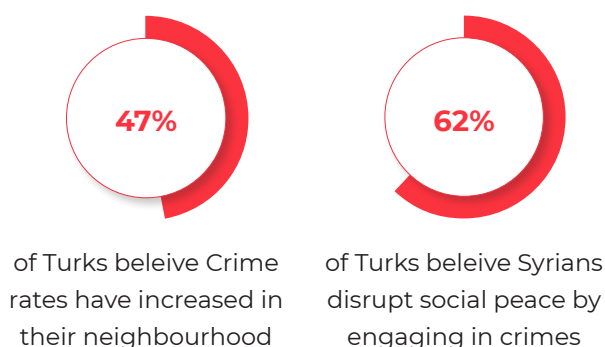
An additional **opportunity for creating social bridges has been found on the work floor**. For instance, a large majority of those interviewed in a [2017 Bilgi University study](#) would welcome doing business with a Syrian. Important social bridges are reported between Syrians who run businesses and the host community, in the forms of friendship, reciprocity and mutual support ([Şimşek, 2018](#) [Bilgi, 2017](#)). The few available sources highlight how social interaction between the Afghan population and Turkish communities is limited. As one Afghan mentions during a [Association for Migration Research \(GAR, its acronym in Turkish\) 2021 study](#)⁶; “I do not attend any meetings or gatherings. We do not have anything to do with these activities, we work”.

5.4. Perceptions on Safety and Security

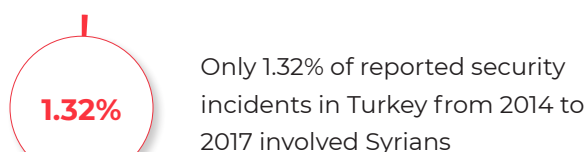
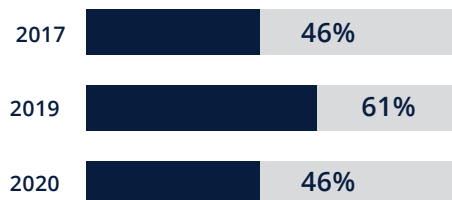
One of the main concerns among the Turkish community is the impact of the presence of refugees on the **security situation**. A [2021 article from the London School of Economics and Political Science](#) goes as far as stating that for many, safety is a higher priority than any economic concerns. This is confirmed by [the WFP Social Cohesion Survey](#), during which **47 per cent of the respondents indicated that, in their perception, crime rates have increased in their neighbourhood**. In a different study, quoted by [Keskin](#) and [Yanarışık](#), 62 per cent agreed with the statement ‘Syrians disrupt social ethics and peace by engaging in crimes’. Research, such as by [Akyuz in 2021](#), shows that Turkish respondents with close relationships with Syrians are less likely to perceive a relationship between refugee presence and crime. In the Syrian Barometer survey, 46 per cent in [2017](#), 61 per cent in [2019](#) and again 46 per cent in [2020](#) of the Turkish respondents were worried that the Syrian refugees would harm them or their families. Studies from [Yitmen and Verkuyten, 2020](#) and from [Stansfield and Stone in 2018](#) highlight that this perceived threat is a primary source of negative attitudes towards refugees.).

However, Global research and Turkish data show that **these perceptions are largely a prejudice**. According to the data released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and quoted by [Keskin](#) and [Yanarışık](#), and [WFP](#), **only 1.32 per cent of reported security incidents in Turkey from 2014 to 2017 involved Syrians**, while the Syrian population constitutes more than 5 per cent of the Turkish population. Global research shows that refugee presence does not have a discernible impact on crime rates ([Masterson and Yassenov, 2021](#)) . Kayaoglu goes further in his [2021 working paper](#), arguing that **Syrian refugees decreased the number of crimes per 100,000 residents because their propensity to commit a crime is lower compared to the host community**.

Figure 15: Perceptions vs. reality of the refugees` effect on safety and security



The Turkish respondents worried that the Syrian refugees would harm them or their families



Only 8% of the interviewed households report incidents in the three months before data collection, and only 2% report frequent or very frequent issues (IFRC and TRC, 2021)



⁶ Results based on 50 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Afghans in Istanbul (online and face to face) and 9 in-depth, semi-structured online with the representatives of Afghan associations. Undocumented and unregistered Afghans are the hardest to reach and the results do not reflect all experiences of this population group.

5.5. Host community willingness to share public services

Erdoğan, in the [Syrian Barometer](#) (2019), states that at this point in the crisis, it is the numerical size and the **existing capacity of the economy and public services, rather than cultural closeness, that determine the relationship between refugees and their host.** Despite the perceived impact on public services, as outlined in the previous chapter, a **significant part of the Turkish community agrees with sharing public services:** according to [WFP](#), in 2019, 4 out of 10 members of the host community responded that Syrians should be allowed to benefit from government-provided health and education facilities in Turkey.

Figure 16: Host community willingness to share public services

In 2019, 4 out of 10 members of the host community responded that Syrians should be allowed to benefit from government-provided health and education facilities in Turkey.



17% of Turkish respondents: "Syrian children shouldn't be able to receive any education."



32% of Turkish respondents: Turkish government should provide assistance to Syrian families.



51% of Turkish respondents: Assistance should be provided by NGOs, international organizations and foreign governments.

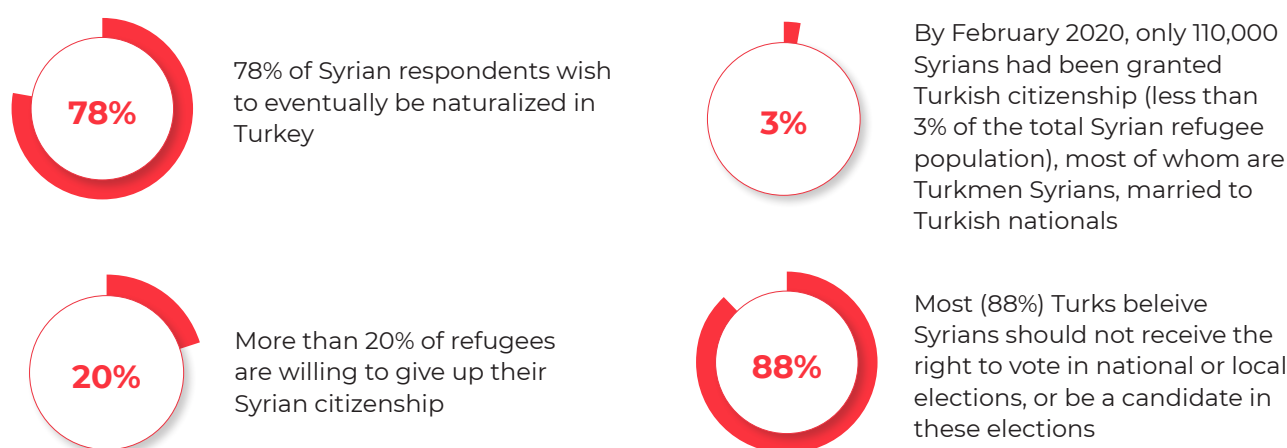
At the same time, studies show that there is a **considerable part of the Turkish community that expresses strong reservations to sharing these services.** In the [Syrian Barometer](#) (2019, [2020](#)), 17 per cent of Turkish respondents indicated that Syrian children "shouldn't be able to receive any education". The studies also confirm the **important role of international organizations** in supporting access to essential needs and services: During a [study](#) in June 2019, only 32 per cent of Turkish respondents indicated that the Turkish government should provide assistance to Syrian families. More people, around 51 per cent, indicated that this assistance should be provided by NGOs, international organizations and foreign governments. No such information is available on the perspectives of sharing public services and assistance with refugees of other nationalities.



6. VERTICAL INTEGRATION

6.1. Citizenship and political rights

Figure 17: Statistics on Syrians interest in Turkish citizenship



In 2016, President Erdogan made an announcement that Syrians could eventually be granted Turkish citizenship. This move was largely welcomed by Syrians: **the majority of Syrian respondents to the [Syrian Barometer \(2019\)](#) expressed their wish to eventually be naturalized in Turkey**: 78 per cent of Syrians want to have “citizenship”, including more than 20 per cent who are willing to give up their Syrian citizenship.

However, public opinion polls show **there is a strong resistance among the Turkish population against granting citizenship**. By February 2020, only 110,000 Syrians had been granted Turkish citizenship, less than 3 per cent of the total Syrian refugee population. These are mostly of Turkish descent, such as Turkmen Syrians, or those married to Turkish nationals. As outlined in several sources, other nationalities are even less likely to obtain citizenships.

Most (88 per cent) interviewed during the [Syrian Barometer \(2019\)](#) stated that Syrians **should not receive the right to vote in national or local elections**, or be a candidate in these elections. [A 2019 report](#) highlights some of the barriers that Syrian refugees face when trying to access legal assistance and justice: there are only limited resources available for translation while the bureaucratic barriers are significant, with refugees having to provide complex and detailed documentation to access legal aid schemes (Refugee Rights Turkey 2019).

The 2020 study by Zeynep Sahin Mencutek on **Refugee Community Organizations** identifies an increasing number of Syrian organizations working in Turkey (over 550 in Gaziantep, Istanbul and Sanliurfa alone), working on various activities, including those aimed at improving their situation in Turkey. However, the **functioning of Syrian civil society organizations is restricted** for a number of reasons, including the fact that Turkey traditionally has a centralized, with limited space for active citizenship and civil society. [SKL International](#) confirms that there is a noticeable lack of associations, and those that exist lack structural ties to local governments and Syrian Society. While in some cases refugees are able to cooperate with local actors such as municipalities or INGOs, the author concludes that they are **rarely included in the decisions that affect them**.

6.2. Refugee community trust in institutions

There is only limited information available on whether **refugees feel represented by trust institutions or trust them**. In a survey conducted in 2018, Özaşçılar et al. found that trust from refugees in police was high (Ozascilar, 2018). In many police stations, there are Arabic speaking police officers to assist the registration process, as observed in Zeytinburnu. Likewise, another survey conducted by Acikalin et al. shows that most of the assessed Syrian refugee women believe or strongly believe that the security forces can protect them (Acikalin, 2021).

6.3. Refugee community perceptions on discrimination as a barrier to livelihoods, education, health and shelter

Several studies, including by International Crisis Group (2018), GOAL (2021), WFP (2019), report day-to-day discrimination perceived by refugees, specifically when accessing basic needs and services:



Access to documentation: A study from 2018 published in the Journal of Refugee Studies and 2021 GOAL study notes how Syrians face discrimination when interacting with Government institutions, for instance to access documentation.

In a 2020 study, Talwasa notes that Afghan refugees wait for months to obtain their conditional legal protection and their identification cards. The study notes how single Afghan men are discriminated against during the process of applying for documentation.



Livelihoods: According to several studies published, both Syrian and Afghan refugees perceive that -when given the possibility to work- they are paid less than their Turkish counterparts, and work under more difficult conditions. IGAM,

2019, reports that Syrians in Hatay and Sultanbeyli face significant discrimination when looking for employment. Afghan refugees are reported to be subject to discrimination as the conditional refugee status does not provide the right to work, while the few work permits granted are subject to sectoral and geographical limitations (Uskadar University, 2020). AIDA (2020) reports that poor health and safety conditions at work remain a major concern.



Education: In 2014, an estimated 85 per cent of Syrian children were out of school. Since 2016, considerable efforts have been made to increase enrolment rates with over 180 new schools built or planned to be built (AIDA 2020). Children accommodated in the camps had full access to basic education. However, by 2021, Save the Children estimates that 35 per cent of school-

aged refugee children remain out of school (Save the Children 2021). Moreover, enrolment rates decrease - particularly at a high school level (Özer, 2021). Both the language barrier and perceived discrimination and bullying by peers or teachers restrict school access and attendance (Gümüs and all, 2020). Syrian parents are reluctant to report such incidents of discrimination, fearing reprisal (International Crisis Group, 2019).



3 out of 10 report they are charged higher rental fees compared to Turkish renters - which is an improvement compared to 2017's rate of 43%

Shelter: 3 out of 10 Syrians interviewed as part of the 2019 WFP survey report they are charged **higher rental fees** compared to Turkish renters. While this is a significant proportion of the refugee population, this is a reduction compared to the 43 per cent of Syrian respondents who considered that landlords charged more rent to refugees in 2017. IGAM (2019) also reports that some Turkish landlords impose curfews

on their Syrian tenants. Moreover, the lack of state-funded accommodation for international protection applicants, including Afghan refugees, results in issues

of homelessness, living under sub-standard conditions and risks of facing discrimination (AIDA 2020).



Health: Discrimination has been reported by refugees trying to **access health care**, especially LGBTI+ refugees, as documented in a [2021 HEVI report](#). Furthermore, the main barrier to health services remains language: recent surveys

have shown that while many hospitals host translators speaking Arabic, such translations are not available for languages such as Persian, Dari or Pashto. Moreover, [AIDA report](#) shows that most hospitals give appointments over telephone but do not serve other language than Turkish in their call centres.



69% of refugees surveyed have lost their jobs during the pandemic

COVID impact: Two 2021 studies, by [IOM](#), and [TRC](#), note how the COVID crisis has increased discrimination against refugees, with refugee communities exposed to discrimination and stigmatization resulting from the belief that disease is more prevalent among refugees. Moreover, the COVID

pandemic has particularly affected refugees who mostly depend on informal labour to survive and who cannot benefit from government COVID-19 support. [The Turkish Red Crescent \(2020\)](#) found that 69 per cent of refugees surveyed had lost their jobs during the pandemic. A [2021 study](#) in the International Journal of Intercultural Relations confirmed that perceived discrimination during the pandemic predicted a higher level of depressive and anxiety symptoms among Syrian refugees in Turkey.

7. DISAGGREGATION PATTERNS OF SOCIAL COHESION

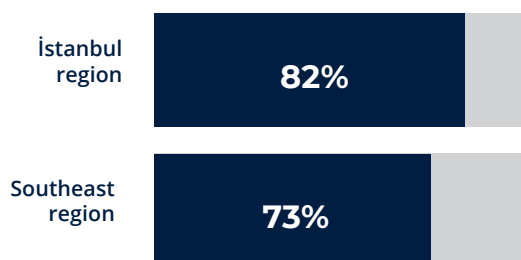
7.1. Geographic disaggregation effects on Social Cohesion

Several reports, such as a 2018 analysis by the International Crisis Group and 2018 study by the Public Policy and Democracy Studies, have noted that the **cultural and geographic proximity in provinces bordering Syria has reduced tensions between communities at the start of the crisis** ([International Crisis Group, PPDS, 2019](#)).

A 2021 New York Times article hails the town of Kilis as a good example, where Syrian and Turkish communities live in harmony, share social spaces and benefit from the positive impact on the economy. However the [WFP survey](#) that shows that overall measures of social cohesion are not above average in the south eastern part of the country ([NYT, 2021](#)).

Alexander Betts, in his study on the role of municipalities on the refugee response in Turkey and Lebanon identifies **several elements that determine whether a**

Figure 18: Turks' willingness to share common living areas by region



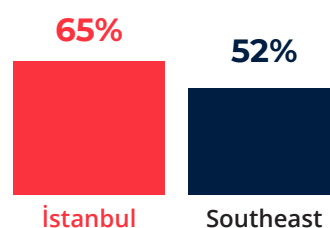
municipality pursues a refugee inclusive policy.

The **political party** in charge of the municipality is an important determinant of the refugee response: Gaziantep, where the AKP is in power, pursues an 'active solidarity' approach, while in Izmir, the CHP led municipality is categorized as 'disengaged'. [SKL International](#) notes how the **personality of individual mayors** plays a significant role as well, highlighting for

instance that in several APK municipalities there are no specific initiatives, while Şişli, a CPH led municipality, was the first to establish a Migration Unit. A 2021 Lowndes and Polat study documents the distinct local narratives between municipalities and identifies 5 policy narratives that impact the local response: humanitarianism, pragmatism, social cohesion, equal rights and anti-refugees. Other elements that determine the position of the municipality include the **state of the economy and whether the municipality receives external resources** from national or international actors. In several municipalities, the support provided targets refugees who 'they have a common kinship with', such as the support provided specifically to the Turkmens in Adana.

Istanbul is documented as the city with strongest social cohesion. For instance, in the WFP 2017 survey, 65 per cent of refugees in Istanbul agree with intermarriage, versus only 52 per cent in the Southeast.

Figure 19: Turks' approval of intermarriage with Syrians by region



The International Crisis Group notes the **specific context in Ankara**. As the capital overall hosts relatively few Syrians (around 100.000 Syrians), and so there are few internationally funded programs to foster social cohesion. Yet most refugees are concentrated in a few neighbourhoods where they constitute as much as 20 per cent of the population, which has overcrowded classrooms and fuelled host community resentment.

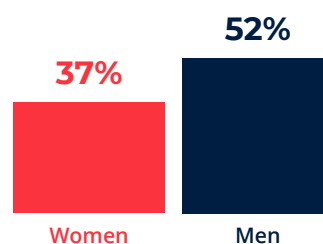
7.2. Demographic Charecteristics effects on Social Cohesion

Studies have identified that the different dimensions of social cohesion are related to the age, gender, length of stay in the country as well as the economic status of the refugees.

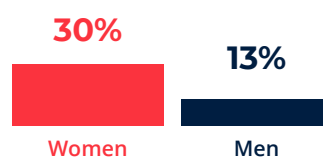
Both the [WFP](#), [UN Women](#) and [Syrian Barometer](#) note a strong gender dimension to social cohesion: In the Syrian Barometer 2019, only 37 per cent of women interviewed considered the Syrian population to be integrated in Turkey to a great extent, compared to 52 per cent of Syrian men. A Language, Culture and Curriculum review concluded that women, in general, are less likely to work, which could reduce their social interactions with the Turkish community. According to a report from [AIDA \(2020\)](#), this is partly due to the lack of childcare, the lack of information and training or to family pressure.

Figure 20: Gender dimensions to social cohesion

Syrian men consider themselves more integrated than Syrian women



Syrians reporting having close Turkish freinds



However, there are notable exceptions to this trend. A 2020 review by Nilufer Narli and Mine Ozascilar in Zeytinburnu⁷, a district of Istanbul, notes higher levels of social cohesion among women. Similarly, [WFP](#), in the [CVME5](#), notes that women were more likely to report having close Turkish friends compared to men (30 per cent for women compared to 13 per cent for men).

⁷ Results based on face-to-face interviews with Syrians between August 2016 and November 2017 Zeytinburnu, in Istanbul, Turkey.

Age is an additional important factor. The Syrian refugees are mostly young: about 70 per cent are under 30 years old and almost half of them are younger than 18. Younger Syrians are for instance more likely to be able to speak Turkish.

Length of stay in Turkey also determines social cohesion, with those residing longer in Turkey showing higher willingness and interest in social interaction with the host society. A study by [Simsek \(2018\)](#) showed that refugees with skills and formal education have more resources to support the construction of social bridges with members of the receiving society. The same study confirms



70% of Syrians are under 30 years old and almost half of them are younger than 18. Younger Syrians are for instance more likely to be able to speak Turkish.

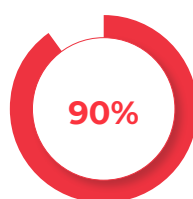
that **wealthier Syrians are in a better position to establish social bridges.** For instance those who establish their own business, construct social bridges with members of the receiving society and engage in socio-cultural activities ([Simsek 2018](#)).

7.3. Outlook

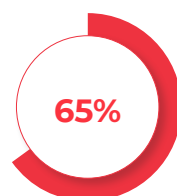
In light of the on-going crisis in Syria, several studies have highlighted the fact that **Syrian refugees in Turkey are increasingly likely to remain.** Some Syrians have expressed no desire to return home, even when the conflict war ends and expressed an interest in obtaining Turkish citizenship. Likewise, the 2019 Syrian Barometer showed that 90 per cent of Turkish society now believes the Syrians are here to stay, while more than 65 per cent of Turks want the some 3.7 million Syrian refugees living in Turkey to go back home, according to the SODEV November 2021 survey. While 22 per cent of the population in a recent survey by [DeZIM Institute \(2020\)](#) aspired to move on to a European country, less than 2 per cent of the participants had the financial means to afford the journey and thus the capability to migrate. [International Crisis Group \(2019\)](#) reports that Turkish authorities project that by 2028 there will be around five million Syrians in Turkey, most of them under eighteen. **Likewise, the number of Afghans fleeing to Turkey is expected to further increase, with return to Iran or Afghanistan, or further travel to Europe, increasingly unlikely.** [SKL International \(2020\)](#) reports how a new mass influx of Syrians into Turkey cannot be excluded, especially if an offensive against Idlib takes place, where an estimated 3 million civilians are residing.

In this context, studies point to several possible, concerning developments in the nearby future: The [2020 Syrian Barometer](#) and the [TEPAV 2018](#) study warn of increased **geographical and social separation** between refugee and Turkish communities. The

Figure 21: Turks want Syrians returned, though they know this is unlikely (SB,



of Turkish society now believes Syrians are here to stay.



of **Turks** want Syrian Refugees to go back home.

[International Crisis Group \(2018\)](#) notes that refugees' tendency to cluster with fellow nationals result in "ghetto-like" segregation that can intensify hostility on both sides. The [TEPAV 2018](#) study provides examples of this in areas in Istanbul now referred to as 'the Syria Bazaar' and "Aleppo Avenue", where Syrian communities have limited interaction with Turks. [Keskin and Yanarışık](#) warn that further concentration of Syrians in specific areas will increase the disconnect between them and their Turkish hosts.

Several media outlets warn that the **political discourse around the presence of refugees will intensify in the run-up to the 2023 elections**. The events in Ankara in August 2021 indicate that anti-immigrant statements by political parties can aggravate existing tensions between refugees and host communities. The framing of the crisis might have longer term consequences. An analysis highlights that if support for refugees is legitimized on the basis of their need for charity only (not on the basis of international refugee rights), then they are no longer perceived as refugees when their conditions are relatively improved, and they are expected to return to their countries. [The International Crisis Group](#) refers to this as **'compassion fatigue'**. Illustratively, more than 80 per cent of the Turks interviewed in 2017 during a [study by Bilgi university](#) indicated that all Syrians should be returned once the conflict in Syria ends.

It is important to highlight the **safe and/or voluntary return policy** of the Turkish Government and the discourse around that policy, which can be summarized by the words of the head of DGMM:

“

Our President at every opportunity stated that safe zones should be created in Syria, but unfortunately the world did not support this at that time. In fact, according to the 18 March Agreement between Turkey and the European Union, the EU would support the improvement of humanitarian conditions in safe areas in northern Syria, together with Turkey. The EU did not stay behind this commitment. Turkey created these safe zones in the north of Syria with its own means, and almost 500 thousand Syrians returned voluntarily to these safe zones, completely of their own will.

-[Head of DGMM, Doha Forum 2022, March 2022, Hurriyet Daily News](#)

This discourse is supported by the statistics declared by Government of Turkey as close to 500k Syrians have returned voluntarily to Syria. On the other hand, UNHCR reported that in total 300,000 returns to Syria have been registered in total while approximately 30 per cent are from Turkey ([UNHCR, 2022](#)). Reports coming from the Syrians, who have returned, indicate a rather pessimistic picture when it comes to the measurements of a good quality of life ([HRW, 2021](#)), leading some international actors to approach the voluntary return policy and its future repercussions with suspicion. ([Amnesty International 2021, 2022, MEI, 2022](#))

8. CURRENT RESPONSE

8.1. Government

After the initial emergency phase, the Government of Turkey has turned to **a policy of social cohesion and harmonization**. In February 2018, the Government of Turkey adopted the **National Harmonization Strategy and Action Plan**. In line with the legal framework, and coordinated by DGMM, this strategy promotes harmonization activities at both national and provincial level. As outlined by Narli and Ozascilar in 2020, the government's policy to promote social cohesion has taken various forms: **providing citizenship to over 100,000 Syrians, building social cohesion**

centres across Turkey, integrating Syrian children into Turkish state schools and implementing a law to enable registered Syrians to work (Narli and Ozascilar, 2020). According to the International Crisis Group (2018): “civil society groups welcomed government efforts to correct misconceptions by explaining how Syrians contribute to the economy and debunking myths about high refugee crime rates. The government's strong statements on behalf of refugees also encouraged local authorities to prioritise the issue of integration.” ([ICG, 2018](#)).

Various studies highlight the **important role of municipalities, who have been at the forefront of the response**, including by providing free language courses, instituting social support programs, permitting a degree of legal flexibility for Syrians opening businesses, and in the case of at least one district, Bağcılar, encouraging Syrians to participate in advisory citizens' councils. Municipalities face specific challenges in providing this support, including legal, administrative and resource restrictions ([Erdogan, 2017⁸](#)). **No additional budget is assigned from the central government to municipalities** hosting Syrian and other refugees. However, some municipalities take the lead on this matter such as the city of Gaziantep whose mayor (since 2014), Fatma Sahin, is reported by the New York Times to have “made the safeguarding of refugee rights a signature policy” ([NYT 2017](#)).

A 2021 [Lowndes and Polat study](#) highlights the **important role of NGOs in municipality service delivery**, as they provide both the financial backing and enable an ‘arms-length’ provision of services for migrants, thus **reducing the visibility of local policies that may conflict with central government sensibilities**. Refugees and asylum-seekers also benefit from social assistance coordinated by the governorships in the provinces. Under the administration of the governorships, the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASF) targets vulnerable Syrian refugees and host community households and provides one-time cash assistance, non-food items, coal aid, assistance for education, shelter, health, etc. Applications for the ESSN Programme are received through the Social Assistance and Solidarity Foundations (SASF), however the SASF Allowance allows reaching out to vulnerable refugees who do not meet the ESSN eligibility criteria ([UNICEF 2021](#)).

8.2. International and national organizations

The 3RP divides social cohesion programming into three main areas; specific activities aiming at improving social cohesion, mainstreaming of social cohesion in other programming, and adoption of safeguards in line with the ‘Do No Harm’ principle ([UNHCR 101](#)). The Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) was designed by the European Commission to help the most vulnerable refugees with an assistance of 155 Turkish Lira (about €16) monthly per family member. It reaches more than 1.5 million

refugees living in Turkey through a partnership between IFRC and the Turkish Red Crescent Society. In addition to the ESSN programme, several large-scale projects have been implemented with the specific objective to promote social cohesion: including school-based cohesion activities, projects to improve employability, support set up of refugee councils, awareness raising, language lessons and refugee desk in support of municipality surveys.

9. SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen these efforts, studies recommend the following priorities to bolster social cohesion:

- **Working with the Turkish state and focusing on the support for local actors:** In its Turkey Social Cohesion Framework Document (2021), 3RP states that all social cohesion related efforts of the 3RP actors are well aligned with the Turkish Government’s Harmonization Strategy Document and Action Plan, particularly its first strategic priority focused on social cohesion. The 3RP claims to be particularly well aligned with the Government’s focus on strengthening the role of municipalities in fostering dialogue, interaction, and participation between communities at the local level.
- **Language and education:** Almost all documented recommendations highlight the need to strengthen access to language learning opportunities. These classes should be accessible to all, including those working long hours (recommended for instance by [Refugees International in 2017](#) and the [Language, Culture and Curriculum Journal](#)). To facilitate social cohesion in schools, [Sevda Akar & M. Mustafa Erdoğan in 2018](#) suggested that cultural training for teachers should be strengthened.
- **Vocational training:** In addition to language courses, [Acikalin et al in 2020](#), and [Celik and White in 2021](#) recommend the use of vocational training for refugees to increase the integration

⁸ Results based on a semi-structured questionnaire with Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality authorities and authorities of the 27 district municipalities in 2017.

within the labour market and therefore the overall integration in the Turkish society, especially for women ([European Review, 2021](#)). The International Crisis Group also highlights this recommendation, combined with the increase of apprenticeship opportunities. However, the group states that “Syrians are generally unaware that they can also enrol in such vocational training”.

- **Media and communication:** The [Public Policy and Democracy Studies](#) and [International Crisis Group \(2018\)](#) recommends for civil society organizations to work together with media outlets to promote a balanced coverage of the situation. In addition, awareness campaigns to counter false news are recommended, including on the assistance provided, by explaining how Syrians contribute to the economy and debunking myths about high refugee crime rates.
- **Community centres:** Several studies note the need to expand and strengthen community centres as locations promoting intercommunity dialogue and where refugees can access information about their rights and services. WFP (2019) recommends including more one-on-one activities between refugees and host community members to encourage closer interaction.
- **Access to psychosocial support:** Simpson (2018) notes how helping refugees to overcome trauma is key to building the relationships required for social cohesion.
- **Rights and legal status:** Advocacy on reducing the legal restrictions that refugees face are recommended, especially for Syrians to move beyond what Erdoğan (2019) calls the ‘temporariness-permanence duality’: [The World Refugee and Migration Council](#) promotes further access to formal employment opportunities. The [2019 Syrian Barometer](#) recommends that travel restrictions inside Turkey, whereby refugees are to stay within the province of initial registration, are to be reviewed and loosened. Erdoğan also recommends the review of the Temporary Protection Status and whether it remains fit for purpose in this protracted displacement situation.

- **Discrimination:** The [IGAM Durable Solutions Platform](#) recommends increasing regulations on landlords and property owners to ensure that rental arrangements are not exploitative or discriminatory.
- **Localised interventions:** [Erdoğan \(2020\)](#) promotes support to municipalities to strengthen society based and local policy making. This not only includes strengthening access to resources, coordination and technical support, but also involves providing better data at a local level. Several studies highlight the need for creating data registry systems for refugees at the local levels, what the [2019 Syrian Barometer](#) refers to as ‘the Refugee Database’.
- **International burden sharing:** Several studies note the importance of the international community to show solidarity, for instance by increasing the available resettlement spaces for refugees from all nationalities and strengthening complementary pathways, as well as increasing international assistance provided.
- **Working with the Turkish society and not despite it:** 2020 Syrian Barometer shows that despite all the negative effects of the contextual factors such as the pandemic, the economic situation and the developments in both the national and international politics, there is still **considerable willingness on the side of the host community to form and keep solidarity with the refugees**. However, this perception shared by at least 30 per cent of the population is not well represented, thus invisible, in the public discourse. This silence may be linked to the fact that there is currently a lack of humanitarian discourse related to the refugees in Turkey, which can be constructed by close cooperation of the Turkish state and the humanitarian actors working in the field. The positive results of a recent sensitivity campaign by IFRC and TRC supports this claim as among the 389,000 people from the host community who engaged with the campaign content, including stories of Syrians living in Turkey, only 7 per cent were negative; 56 per cent were neutral, and 37 per cent were positive.

ANNEX A

DEEP Platform IFRC ESSN Project Analytical Framework

OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT	CONTEXT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Politics • Security and Stability • Legal and Policy • Demography • Economy • Socio Cultural Environment 	DISPLACEMENT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Cohesion • Intentions • Push and Pull Factors • Type, Numbers and Movements 	HUMANITARIAN ACCESS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Humanitarian access gaps • Physical Constraints • Beneficiaries to Relief • Relief to Beneficiaries 	INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication Means and Preferences • Communication Challenges and Barriers • Knowledge and Gaps

SECTORAL INFORMATION

Impact			
Driving/ Aggravating Factors	Impact on People	Impact on System and Services	Number of people Affected

Humanitarian Conditions			
Living Standards	Coping Mechanisms	Pyhsical and Mental Wellbeing	Number of people in Need

Priorities			
Priority Needs for the Population	Priority Needs for the Staff	Priority Interventions for the Population	Priority Interventions for the Staff

Capacities And Response					
ESSN	RCRC	Communities	Government and Local Authorities	International Actors	Number of People Reached

Flags

- Key Event
- Reponse Gap
- Information Gap
- Lessons Learned
- Rumors

Sectors

- Cross-sectoral
- Food Security
- Livelihoods
- Health
- Nutrition
- WASH
- Shelter
- Education
- Protection
- Agriculture
- Logistics

Secondary
Level Tagging

- Affected Groups
- Specific Needs
Groups
- Demographic
Groups
- Information Date
- Location

ANNEX B

Major events in detail: Fall 2021-Spring 2022

FALL 2021

Aug 2021: Ankara riots and Turkish-Syrian community conflict leave 1 dead and many arrested. After two Turks were stabbed and one killed by Syrians, hundreds of Turks in the neighborhood rioted and destroyed Syrian properties.

Sep 2021: Amidst rising tensions, poll shows 2/3 of Turks support closing borders to migrants as anti-migrant hate crimes increase

Sep 2021: Afghan crisis provides fresh influx of refugees into Turkey. As Taliban gained control over Afghanistan, numerous refugees fled the country, many of whom traveled via Iran into Turkey. Refugee numbers remained relatively small compared to Syrians but were subject of numerous viral media posts amongst Turks highlighting conservative refugees as threatening Turkish society.

Sep 2021: Turkish governor of Bolu province issues discriminatory instructions for refugees. Among the controversial instructions are not going outside after 9 p.m. "unless it is a necessity" and "not bothering neighbors by using too much spices" in the dishes.

07 Nov 2021: Syrian boy hospitalized in Istanbul in suspected hate crime. A 17 year old Turkish student attacked a 12 year old Syrian boy after asking if he was Syrian.

13 Nov 2021: 45 Refugees who posted videos of themselves eating bananas in response to viral joke are deported. Refugees posted humorous videos responding to a video of a Turkish citizen complaining Syrians have more money than Turks and can afford to buy many kilos of Bananas. Said response videos were used as justification by DGMM to deport refugees who created them.

WINTER 2021-2022

Dec 2021: Ongoing depreciation of lira sees value sink by 44 per cent in 2021

Jan 2022: GoT reports 500k Syrians have reportedly returned to safe zone in northern Syria and that approximately 200k citizens have obtained citizenship since the start of the year

01 Jan 2022: Turkish court halts opposition municipality's anti-migrant policies

Jan 10 2022: Attack on refugees' shops in Istanbul by a mob of angry Turks chanting "This is Turkey, not Syria."

Jan 17 2022: The leader of CHP (Principle Turkish opposition party) vows Syrian migrants will voluntarily return to their homeland within two years of CHP coming to power. "They sure want to go to their country and work on their own lands. They will ask the life and property security, as well. We will create the infrastructure for this. You will see, Hatay will return to its good times," he stated.

Jan 26 2022: Presidential Communications Director Fahrettin Altun declares that voluntary return of Syrian migrants center of Turkey's refugee policy. He said that "We attach great importance to voluntary, safe and honorable return of refugees to their homeland. This is one of the vital and central elements of our refugee policy."

05 Feb 2022: More than 65 per cent of Turks want the Syrian refugees living in Turkey to go back home, according to a new survey by SODEV.

18 Feb 2022: Turkish authorities have relocated more than 4,500 Syrians from an Ankara neighborhood where anti-migrant mobs rioted last August.

SPRING 2022

23 Feb 2022: GoT announces it will be no longer admitting additional refugees for settlement in areas where the number of Syrians is greater than 25 per cent of the local population. This policy is framed as a solution to overcrowding and to the issues that led to the Ankara riots of 2021. Syrians in areas with large per centages of foreigners will be relocated to different districts on a voluntary basis. The policy is said to apply across the board in 16 major provinces and in many other neighborhoods across Turkey.

Feb 2022: Turkey's authorities have reportedly deported more than 150 Syrian refugees for coming to Istanbul.

2 March 2022: Turkey, Jordan agree to cooperate in the voluntary return of Syria refugees. After reiterating commitment to 2021 deal, the foreign minister announced GoT's intention to "host a conference on the ministerial level on this issue" of the voluntary return of Syrian refugees"

03 March 2022: Turkey claims 16 migrants found dead near Greek border

08 March 2022: Over 20k Ukrainians are reported to have been displaced into Turkey as a result of Russo-Ukrainian conflict

15 March 2022: Turkish media reports at least 246 irregular migrants have been detained in three separate "security operations" across Turkey.

17 March 2022: Turkey's main opposition leader calls for referendum on citizenship for refugees and accuses president Erdogan of planning to naturalize the country's millions of Syrian migrants in a bid to bolster support in the upcoming elections.

16 March 2022: Metropoll finds that 85 per cent of supporters of ruling Justice and Development Party favor the return of Syrian migrants while opposition supporters support migrant return at a rate of 89 per cent.

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