

UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF SYRIAN AND TURKISH ADOLESCENTS IN GAZIANTEP, TURKEY TO SUPPORT PERSONAL RESILIENCE

- REPORT -



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Mercy Corps would like to thank all the Turkish and Syrian youth who participated in the assessment and their families for supporting their involvement. While we are cognizant of the challenges that lie ahead for this generation in Gaziantep, we are awed by their intelligence and spirit, and the resilience they demonstrate.

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– The Assessment Team

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Now in its fourth year, the conflict in Syria has reached a boiling point: Mercy Corps echoes UNICEF's recent call to action by the international community: in its No Lost Generation report, UNICEF highlights the critical education and protection needs of the 4.6 million children and adolescents inside Syria and in the neighboring countries affected by the ongoing crisis. Mercy Corps works with over one million young people in over 20 countries, including Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Columbia, Afghanistan, Somalia, Liberia and Yemen, through programs worth over \$100 million. We view adolescents and youth as especially vulnerable during times of transition and crisis, when they are at a critical pivot point in their lives - between hope and hopelessness, positive change and negative influence. Recognizing their great potential to shape their lives in a positive way, our programming helps adolescents and youth find the educational, social and emotional support they need to excel and gain the respect and recognition they deserve.

Building on a similar exercise that Mercy Corps conducted in Jordan and Lebanon earlier this year, our Turkey program conducted a qualitative assessment in Gaziantep in May 2014 to understand the needs and aspirations of Syrian and host community adolescents, and their perceptions of one-another. Mercy Corps engaged 119 Syrian and Turkish male (77) and female (42) adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19, in two days of activities involving drawing, painting, photography, writing, collage arts, sports, and folklore dance. Participants generated images, essays and poems that were subsequently used in focus group discussions of 10-14 people (facilitated by Turkish and Syrian employees, in groups segregated by sex and nationality), to identify their current needs, particular vulnerabilities and future aspirations. Findings from this assessment, conducted in collaboration with Gaziantep-based Zirve University, will allow Mercy Corps to design interventions that foster a protective environment from violence, exploitation and abuse; while building adolescents' skills and facilitating opportunities to explore their interests.

SUMMARY FINDINGS FOR SYRIAN ADOLESCENTS

The assessment illuminated challenges confronted by Syrian adolescents residing in Turkey, and shed light on interesting opportunities for personal resilience building. The war has deeply impacted the lives and futures of Syrian adolescents; their goals and dreams have been paralyzed by the losses they have suffered in the course of major life transitions, including the loss of family members, trauma, and their unexpected migration to Turkey.

The socioeconomic levels of participating Syrian adolescents ranged from the very vulnerable to lower-middle class. Based on focus group discussions and visits to family homes, the most vulnerable adolescents came from households with low socioeconomic status where up to four large families shared a single room. Some family members slept in unfinished 'cave-like' chambers which are part of traditional homes in Gaziantep, and are normally used for livestock or storage. Turkmen Syrian families whose adolescents participated in the activities were particularly vulnerable and appeared to have fewer resources than other Syrians.

Only 14 out of 40 adolescent Syrian boys (the younger ones) were attending school, as compared to only 1 out of 35 Syrian girls. All Syrian boys and nearly 30% of girls who participated in the assessment are working six days a week. Like many of their peers in Gaziantep, they work illegally in restaurants and small businesses or factories, where many face threats and abuse at the hands of business owners, work without any legal protections, and earn meager incomes below the legal minimum wage. Adolescents reported being the sole breadwinners in their families. According to interviews with the Government of Turkey and with Syrian refugees,¹ most Syrians in Turkey do not have passports or other official travel documents. This prevents adults from legally accessing work, thus forcing adolescents into the informal labor market. Some Syrian families reported paying smugglers to transport adolescents across the border into Turkey. Mercy Corps believes that the difficult conditions under which boys and girls are obliged to work in unskilled jobs, coupled with the trauma of war and displacement, cause the high level of stress, anger, and strong feelings of humiliation and degradation they expressed in the course of the activities.

Most adolescents discussed having little personal time, particularly Syrian girls. They feel isolated within the home during non-work hours, and are responsible for a double shift, in that they both work outside and domestically to feed and take

¹ Mercy Corps uses the term "refugee" loosely in this report to refer to Syrians who have crossed into Turkey, fleeing the conflict in their country. In this report, the term does not refer to a legal status.

care of family members. Moreover, displacement within Turkey has likely changed the roles of girls inside families and their daily schedule allows them little time to visit other adolescents, or take part in broader activities. Some of the Syrian girls reported not having any contact with peers in their daily lives. Several Syrian girls reported attending Turkish courses, and were eager to gain acceptance at a Turkish university. Consistently throughout the assessment, Syrian adolescents – boys and girls – expressed a lack of hope, and anxiety over their futures.

Overall, Syrian adolescents reflected a high level of awareness and strong sensitivity with regard to the negative perceptions of Syrians amongst host communities. For those who attend school or go to work, the daily trek home is particularly difficult because it is the time when they are most vulnerable to harassment from the Turkish public. Nonetheless, Syrian adolescents expressed gratitude to Turkey for welcoming them and opening access to healthcare and basic education.

Adolescents reported significant challenges in public spaces due to the language barrier. Knowledge of the Turkish language amongst Syrian adolescents was extremely limited, except for Turkmen Syrians whose native language is closely related to Turkish. However, their accent and varying vocabulary in Turkish, as well as their use of Arabic in public spaces, marked their ‘otherness’ in their host country. As a result, Turkmen Syrian boys reported feeling particularly isolated from both Turkish and Arab communities, making it challenging to fit into their host communities despite their language abilities.

SUMMARY FINDINGS FOR TURKISH ADOLESCENTS

Participating Turkish adolescents came from vulnerable to lower-middle class socioeconomic backgrounds. Despite having the most relative freedom of movement, Turkish boys described feeling isolated due to a lack of opportunity to express themselves, beyond the gendered norms of playing soccer. Neither school activities nor existing social activities provided adolescents with means of developing self-expression through art, writing, poetry, or other creative activities for personal development. Turkish boys reported having had few to no opportunities to explore goal-setting and being unaware of the range of future career options available to them. In terms of extracurricular or sports activities, they expressed an interest in taking part in activities that resemble those conducted during Mercy Corps’ event (arts, crafts, photography, creative writing). While some participating Turkish adolescent boys work, all of the boys reported attending school.

Turkish girls described experiencing high levels of isolation and receiving inadequate support from their families with regard to their studies and school attendance. Compared to Turkish boys, Turkish girls are pressured to remain in the home, preventing them from joining youth activities, exploring their interests or setting life goals. One Turkish girl stated that she is prevented from attending high school, and is being pressured into an early marriage. None of the Turkish girls who participated in the assessment were employed, although Mercy Corps aims to include Turkish girls who are working, in future program activities.

Several Turkish boys displayed negative behaviors and aggression towards the Syrian boys during activities, echoing in large part sentiments and ideas they had heard in their homes. Some Turkish boys and the Turkish girls did, however, expressed being pleasantly surprised to learn that Syrians were not as “bad” as their parents had told them, revealing this was in fact, the first time they had actually met Syrian peers.

Recommendations for Program Design

Findings of this assessment are only representative of the adolescents who participated in Mercy Corps’ focus group discussions and, while useful for identifying trends within and across groups for the purpose of program design, they are not representative of all Syrian and Turkish adolescents in Gaziantep. Nonetheless, moving forward, Mercy Corps recommends designing the following activities to address adolescents’ needs:

- Reducing isolation and stress for girls and boys, tailoring activities to the specific needs of each group.
- Supporting Syrian and host community adolescents to identify long-term goals.
- Supporting cross-cultural friendships.
- Providing access to language classes and language resources.
- Increasing access to education, vocational training and formal employment.
- Addressing war trauma.
- Enhancing adolescent programming approaches by paying particular attention to scheduling, locations, and addressing tensions, in an effort to reach the most vulnerable.

INTRODUCTION

The conflict in Syria and exodus of Syrians to neighboring countries is now in its fourth year, with hundreds of thousands of lives lost during the conflict and close to three million people seeking refuge outside of their home country. A recent study by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) showed that Syrian refugee children and adolescents are experiencing a variety of hardships including isolation and insecurity, psychological distress, extended disruptions of education and exploitative employment.² The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) recently called the global community to action, stating that in order to avoid losing an entire generation of educated, engaged and productive Syrian and host community children and adolescents, existing humanitarian efforts must be coupled with increased focus on developing future-focused strategies that prepare children and adolescents with the education and skills they need to help rebuild their lives and their societies.³ UNICEF reports that despite the amazing resilience demonstrated by Syrian children, another year of conflict and suffering is likely to severely constrain their ability to realize their potential and rebuild their futures.⁴ In recognition of the complexity of the situation of Syrian children and adolescents, and with the aim of coordinating Mercy Corps' approach to youth programming in countries receiving large numbers of Syrian refugees (Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey), our regional Syria response team and country teams have aligned existing and emerging programs with UNICEF's No Lost Generation strategy. We take a particularly sensitive approach to the different challenges and opportunities faced by girls and boys.

Of 1.2 million Syrian refugee children under the age of 18 living outside of Syria, nearly one in every three are adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18.⁵ Adolescents lack psychosocial support, education and skills building programs as they are often pressured to stay indoors – the case for many adolescent girls – or to work to help provide income for the family. These adolescents will also be first among the generation of Syrian children affected by conflict to be called upon to help mend torn social fabric and build back broken economies. In an effort to fill gaps in research on Syrian adolescents and their host community peers, Mercy Corps conducted ten focus group discussions in Turkey with 119 adolescents in May 2014. Based on those discussions, this report details findings and presents recommendations to guide investments in future-focused strategies to improve adolescent well-being and facilitate their development of critical skills.

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN GAZIANTEP, TURKEY

To better understand the findings from Mercy Corps' activities, it is necessary to paint a brief picture of the context in which Syrian adolescents live in Gaziantep. The Syrian crisis, now in its fourth year has forced 2.7 million refugees⁶ to flee into neighboring countries. In Turkey, the government remains in charge of all assistance in the 22 refugee camps, which accommodate approximately 27% of the Syrian population within its borders. A small number of Turkish and international NGOs work outside of camps to address the basic needs of Syrians in urban areas through food and non-food distributions, cash transfers, health clinics, primary education, and community centers that offer support primarily to women and children. The large number of Syrians in urban areas has overwhelmed host communities and national structures, affecting local capacity to cope with the needs of this population and creating tensions between host and refugee communities. The influx of Syrians – which could accelerate with the protracted crisis in neighboring Syria – has added to Turkey's existing refugee caseload, which hails primarily from Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan.

As of May 8, 2014, nearly 153,000 Syrians had registered in Gaziantep,⁷ making it the largest host city in Turkey in terms of Syrian population size. Despite its large urban refugee population, little formal international assistance was being

² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis*. (November 2013), <http://unhcr.org/FutureOfSyria/index.html>.

³ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). *No Lost Generation: Protecting the futures of children affected by the crisis in Syria*. (January 2014). http://www.unicef.org/appeals/files/No_Lost_Generation_Strategic_Overview_January_2014.pdf

⁴ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). *Under Siege: The devastating impact on children of three years of conflict in Syria*. (March 2014). http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/Under_Siege_March_2014.pdf.

⁵ UNHCR. *The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis*.

⁶ "Syria Regional Refugee Response: Regional Overview," UNHCR, accessed June 30, 2014. <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

⁷ "UNHCR Turkey Syrian Refugee Daily Sitrep," Reliefweb, last modified April 16, 2014. <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCRTurkeySyriaSitrep16April2014.pdf>

provided in the district, aside from a community center established by the Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM) in May 2014 and initial youth activities conducted by Mercy Corps.

Whether crossing into Turkey legally or illegally, Syrians, including those without identity documents, are encouraged to register with the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) through the various coordination centers until GDMM assumes this responsibility. Registration allows Syrians free access to public medical care in Turkish facilities, opens the possibility of being hosted in a camp, and potentially provides access to a handful of government-sponsored primary schools. In some cases – including for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) – Mercy Corps has found that services available to Syrians are unclear and those available to Turkish citizens are sparse as well.

The living conditions of vulnerable refugees in urban areas provide a stark contrast to that of Syrians residing in camps managed by the Turkish government, which have been likened to “five star hotels” or “perfect camps.”⁸ Refugee families who were initially able to secure housing have seen their savings dwindle over time, while rent prices across Gaziantep and Kilis more than doubled, affecting local communities as well. In July 2013, the Government of Turkey estimated that over one fourth of refugees in Gaziantep were living in overcrowded, insalubrious dwellings.

An estimated 85% of refugee children living outside of camps are not attending school as a result of the overcrowding of Syrian schools, limited availability of Syrian teachers, inability of families to pay transportation fees, and economic necessity for children to work. Girls and disabled children are particularly disadvantaged in this regard. For those who go to school or have graduated from high school, the issue is one of accreditation: the regime’s curriculum is not currently accredited in Turkey, nor is that of the Syrian Coalition, at the time of the writing of this report. Extra-curricular activities for youth and children outside of camps are also in short supply.

VULNERABLE TURKISH ADOLESCENTS

Mercy Corps defines vulnerable adolescents in Turkey as those who are not in school, are at a high risk of dropping out, who are working, or those who likely lack the skills and social capital needed to find employment. Below is a brief outline of some of the challenges faced by this population group according to secondary sources.

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION IN CIVIC LIFE

Among the Turkish population, children and adolescents under the age of 15 comprise the country’s largest demographic group. By 2015, it is anticipated that they will make-up 33% of the population.⁹ Nineteen percent of youth who are legally eligible (ages 15-25) and looking for work remain unemployed. Youth in Gaziantep are for the most part unengaged in politics or the civic sector.¹⁰ Nationwide, 69.31% of Turkish girls and 70.77% of boys are enrolled in upper secondary education, whereas in Gaziantep, these ratios are 10 percentage points lower for both genders (58.68% and 59.76% for girls and boys respectively).¹¹

⁸ Mac McClelland, “How to Build a Perfect Refugee Camp,” *New York Times*, February 13, 2014, accessed July 3, 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/16/magazine/how-to-build-a-perfect-refugee-camp.html?_r=0

⁹ “UNICEF in Turkey: Country Profile,” UNICEF, accessed June 30, 2014. http://www.unicef.org/turkey/ut/ut2_2010.html

¹⁰ Caner Özdemir. “Youth Political Participation in South-Eastern Anatolia Region of Turkey.” (paper presented at the Social Policy Association Conference, University of Lincoln, July 5-7, 2010), <http://www.social-policy.org.uk/lincoln/Ozdemir.pdf>.

¹¹ Government of Turkey National Education Statistics, “Schooling Ration by Statistical Regions Levels 3 and Level of Education”, Formal education 2007-2013.

EARLY MARRIAGE AND VIOLENCE

Adolescent marriage is common among Turkish women.¹² Nation-wide, 31.7% of Turkish women are married before the age of 18, compared to just 6.9% of boys.¹³

Violence against women and other forms of abuse heighten the vulnerability of women in Turkey. Nationwide, 42% of Turkish women have experienced sexual and/or physical violence in their lifetime, with the numbers dramatically higher among low-income and less educated women.¹⁴ According to national data, 55.7% of women with no education or only some primary school have experienced violence in the past year, while women ages 15-25 experienced the highest levels of violence. Reports show that violence against women, including honor killings, has increased dramatically since 2002.¹⁵ Despite their pressing needs, the vulnerable populations of Gaziantep's host communities remain largely underserved due to a lack of access to reliable information and the limited availability of services.

PURPOSE

The goal of the activity was to understand the needs and aspirations of Syrian and Turkish adolescents, and their perceptions of one another, in order to design interventions that foster an environment that protects them from violence, exploitation and abuse, builds their skills and facilitates opportunities to pursue their future plans. The activity was designed with the understanding that:

- 1) Lack of educational and other opportunities during a critical stage of personal and social development can set adolescents up for lives of exclusion and poverty, and for girls in particular, early marriage and domestic violence.
- 2) Adolescents are not effectively being engaged through current programs in Turkey and the Syria response as a whole.
- 3) An understanding that Syrian and host community adolescents are not interacting and that their perceptions of the other are being shaped by adults and community members around them.

Further, Mercy Corps is interested in designing programming that can directly support personal resilience¹⁶ amongst adolescents by enhancing the following four characteristics:¹⁷

Four elements of Personal Resilience

The four characteristics of personal resilience identified by Zeynep Karataş and Savi Çakarare:

- 1) Social activity: the ability to establish positive relationships both with adults and peers.
- 2) Problem-solving skills: the ability to ask for help from others, reason and to plan events under his/her own control.
- 3) Self-rule: one's feeling of possessing his/her own identity, behaving independently and making key decisions affecting his/her life.
- 4) Having objectives and the feeling of future: the feeling of having some targets, educational expectations, hope and a bright future.

¹² "Third of marriages in eastern Turkey involve child brides: NGO," *Hürriyet Daily News*, January 15, 2014, accessed June 30, 2014, www.hurriyetdailynews.com/third-of-marriages-in-eastern-turkey-involve-child-brides-ngo.aspx?PageID=238&NID=61055&NewsCatID=339

¹³ Government of Turkey's Family Structure Survey, "Age of first marriage by sex, %," 2006.

¹⁴ ICON-Institut Public Sector GmbH, Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies and BNB Consulting Ltd Co., "National Research on Domestic Violence Against Women in Turkey," January 2009

¹⁷ Glen Johnson, "Turkey: The life of a battered woman," *Al Jazeera*, February 10, 2014, accessed June 30, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/02/turkey-life-battered-woman-2014257594926477.html>

¹⁶ See Zeynep Karataş and Savi Çakar. "Self-esteem and hopelessness, and resiliency: an exploratory study of adolescents in Turkey." *International Education Studies* 4, no. 4 (2011): 84. Resilience is defined as "having a successful adaptation capacity, showing a great effort and thus becoming successful despite compelling and menacing conditions."

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

METHODOLOGY

On May 10 and 11, 2014 Mercy Corps convened ten focus group discussions, segregated by gender and country of origin, with 119 Syrian and Turkish adolescents ages 13-19. Discussions were conducted simultaneously at two Turkish CSOs in Gaziantep — TEGV (Turkey Education Volunteers Foundation) and ÇEKÜL (Promotion and Protection of Environment and Cultural Heritage Foundation) — with boys and girls at separate locations. Bus service was provided for all Syrian and Turkish participants and siblings or parents accompanying the girls. Adolescents were picked up from across the city, with as many as seven bus stops in a single morning. Turkish and Syrian students from Gaziantep-based Zirve University rode on the buses to welcome and escort the youth to their respective activity locations.

Given the age group, instead of adhering to traditional quantitative and qualitative research methods, an alternative approach was taken to increase engagement and improve the quality of participation. The methodology built on that used by Mercy Corps in Jordan and Lebanon. It was adapted from multiple methods, and most strongly drew from



Turkish and Syrian boys are served lunch in Gaziantep on the first day of activities.

Photovoice, IDEO's Human-Center Design Field Guide Aspirations Exercise and Technology of Participation's (ToP's) Focused Conversation using ORID¹⁸ questioning.

Adolescents participated in guided arts and crafts activities, which served as the basis of the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). After working on their creative pieces, adolescents selected photographs, stories, and artwork to share with their groups. FGDs were facilitated and documented by young adults (ages 20-30) of the same gender as the adolescents, and from the same country of origin. Facilitators and note-takers were a mix of Mercy Corps team members and Zirve University students. Facilitators were trained on note-taking, active observation and focused conversation facilitation skills. FGDs were complemented by unstructured interviews with attending parents, local Turkish CSOs, and Zirve University academics who served as observers during the activities.

Follow-up interviews with Mercy Corps staff members involved in the activities were also conducted to debrief findings and gain feedback for improvement of further Turkish-Syrian adolescent programs.

In the FGDs, facilitators asked adolescents a series of probing questions using the ORID focused conversation structure from the TOP facilitation methods to describe, reflect on and interpret their photographs, drawings, and essays: Questions included:

- 1) **OBJECTIVE QUESTIONS:** Please describe your visual or story and tell us why you took this photo/made this drawing/told this story.
- 2) **REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS:** How does this picture/drawing make you feel?
- 3) **INTERPRETIVE QUESTIONS:** What would you like to change in this picture/drawing/story?
- 4) **DECISIONAL QUESTIONS:** How do you see yourself changing this picture in three or six months?

In addition to the photography and focus group discussions, Mercy Corps organized recreational activities for participants. Both Syrian and Turkish boys participated in physically active games, including soccer and basketball. Turkish and Syrian girls came together to share folk dances from both Syria and Turkey. Joining hands in a circle, the girls learned dances from both communities. For both boys and girls, physical activities provided an important means of relieving stress after what were often emotionally taxing focus group discussions.

¹⁸ ORID stands for Objective, Reflective, Interpretative, and Decisional.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION

A majority of the adolescents were male (77, ~65% of participants), with 42 girls participating (~35%). While the recruitment target was to include half Syrian and half Turkish host community participants, and create a group that was half male and half female, Turkish attendance (44 adolescents) was lower than Syrian attendance (75 adolescents). Only 7 Turkish girls attended, as compared with 35 Syrian girls. This disparity in Turkish versus Syrian female attendance is explained below. A total of 15-20 parents and younger siblings also attended, primarily as companions to female Syrian participants.

Criteria for selecting adolescent participants included: membership in a vulnerable household that had not received assistance from the Turkish government, NGOs or CSOs; 13-19 years of age; current 'resident' of Gaziantep (including urban periphery/suburbs); out of school, at risk of dropping out of school or working, and available to participate in weekend activities; fluency in Arabic or Turkish; willingness to self-identify as Syrian or Turkish for inclusion in separate single-sex groups. For the purpose of this activity, the registration status of Syrians with the Government of Turkey was not a prerequisite for participation and was therefore not assessed.

Participants were identified by a group of outreach volunteers, made up of Mercy Corps staff and their personal networks, and also through local Turkish and Syrian CSOs. Since this was Mercy Corps' first activity in Gaziantep, the lack of established relationships with either community made it particularly challenging to recruit both Turkish and Syrian youth. Volunteers made frequent visits to the homes of informal community leaders and of Turkish and Syrian families to gain permission from the parents of potential participants. In this report, adolescents' names have been changed and their faces concealed to protect their privacy.



A Mercy Corps volunteer facilitator takes Turkish boys on a photography walk through a neighborhood in Gaziantep. The boys are wearing colorful arm bands to show what team they pertain to.

Mercy Corps initially expected recruitment of Syrian girls to be particularly sensitive due to perceived mistrust of non-Syrian or unknown organizations. As a result of the extra attention paid to the recruitment of this population, the number of Syrian girls who attended was higher than anticipated, to the detriment of the number of Turkish girls. While the ultimate reason for the low attendance of Turkish girls remains unclear, we posit that it is due to the relative lack of attention paid to the recruitment of this population as opposed to that of Syrian girls. It is also possible that Turkish girls were unable to participate due to host community family fears around sending Turkish girls to a mixed event with Syrians or familial pressure for Turkish girls to stay in the home. In focus group discussions with Turkish girls who attended, a major theme was the pressure to stay at home, while their brothers were allowed greater freedoms to go out and meet with friends.

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Most of the Syrian adolescent participants were originally from Aleppo city and its surroundings (70%), with the exception of the Turkmen Syrians (30%) who hailed from Turkmen towns and villages. Most of the participating Turkmen Syrian adolescents had been in Turkey for two years, while the other Syrians had arrived more recently (often in the past year). Because the adolescents had fled during very different periods of the war, they shared very different stories and experiences.

The participating adolescents came from socioeconomic levels that ranged from very vulnerable to lower middle income. Based on focus group interviews and visits to families, the most vulnerable adolescents came from households with low socioeconomic status, where up to four large families shared a single room. Some family members slept in unfinished cave-like chambers, which are part of traditional homes in Gaziantep and are normally used for livestock or storage. Syrian Turkmen families were particularly vulnerable and appeared to have fewer resources.



Syrian girls take photos on a photography walk in preparation for their FGDs.

Participating Syrian and Turkish adolescents resided in the following Gaziantep neighborhoods: Perilıkaya, Yaşam Hastanesi, 23 Nisan Elementary, Yeşilevler Camii, Cumhuriyet (Yaşar Torun Youth Center), Beşyüzevler, Gaziantep University, Zeugma Museum, Democracy Center, Kale Ana Kapı, Cengiz Topel, Atatürk Heykeli, Deva Hastanesi, Boyacı Camii, and Büyük Veliç Hotel. (For map, see *Annex 3*).

KEY FINDINGS FROM ADOLESCENT DISCUSSIONS

During the focus group discussions (FGDs), adolescents spent up to an hour and a half describing their artwork and writings, and reflecting on how these connect to their lives. Both Syrian boys and girls focused largely on returning to Syria, supporting different parties to the conflict, and remembering that which they had lost – family members, their homes, and the normalcy of Syrian family and community life. They also spoke about their current work and family lives in Turkey, the difficulties they face on a daily basis, and their feelings of powerlessness to change their circumstances. The FGDs conducted with Syrian girls were particularly emotional. In one FGD, at least seven girls cried continuously when they described what they had lost in Syria. Syrian boys' FGDs were equally sensitive, though the boys expressed their emotions differently. Many talked about close relatives killed, injured or detained by warring factions, while some stated they themselves had been injured. FGDs with Turkish adolescents were also revealing of their frustrations and deep-felt emotions. Most participants noted that they had never been asked about their needs before.

MOURNING SYRIA: SYRIAN ADOLESCENTS ARE FOCUSED ON THE CONFLICT AND ON REMEMBERING THE PAST



A Syrian boy's drawing depicts a young man holding two flags, one of the opposition and one representing ISIS, below an incoming bomb, and declaring "I want to live in freedom."

Mercy Corps found that Syrian youth are focused on mourning the displacement of their lives from Syria, the ongoing conflict, and on remembering the past. Most of the artwork made by Syrian boys and girls represented Syrian flags. Amongst Syrian boys, arguments about whether to draw the national flag or the opposition flag were common. A flag with three stars reflects the Free Syrian Army (FSA) flag, while a flag with two stars represents the national flag or the flag of the Assad regime.¹⁹ In the drawing to the left, a Syrian boy drew himself holding both the Syrian opposition flag, and a flag representing the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), stating in the caption, "I want to live in freedom." An incoming missile overhead threatens to land on him. The boy described to peers how he felt stuck between the regime, the FSA and ISIS, and wanted to live in a world free from the pressures of these competing factions.²⁰

Art, poetry and photographs selected by the participating adolescents often depicted houses and mosques. In their eyes, houses represented their homes and the unity and safety of their families in Syria, while mosques represented the safety and familiarity of their neighborhoods, as well as the protection of religion. None of the participants referenced or represented new homes or neighborhoods in Gaziantep, except as a reminder of what had been lost and how difficult their existence is now. An adolescent named Ahmed, who took a picture of laundry hanging to dry (right), had this to say:

The laundry represents the plight of this family which, like many others, was probably comfortable in Syria, but which has now lost everything. Here, they do not have a place to hang their laundry to dry, so they hang it in the street. They are not even living in a house; they live in a garage with no amenities.



A Syrian family's laundry hangs to dry on a Gaziantep backstreet.

¹⁹ While there are additional differences between the two flags, adolescents' debates focused on the number of stars.

²⁰ Contrary to Jordan and Lebanon, where Mercy Corps has also completed adolescent assessments, in Turkey, Mercy Corps has not found that boys are being pressured or asked to return to Syria and fight on behalf of the opposition, regime, or ISIS. Further, Mercy Corps did not observe any reports of Syrian youth or families being pressured to migrate to other countries. There were also no reports of human trafficking routes developing.



A Syrian girl photographs the old city streets of Gaziantep, describing them as something she "likes" because they remind her of Aleppo.

Syrian Girls' art often expressed a longing for the Syria they had known before the war. The following poem by a 14-year-old girl from Aleppo was written in Arabic on a collage she made and illustrates the changes she has experienced since the conflict began:

*Our country was beautiful
We could hear the sound of the birds every day! Morning and evening.
I used to go wherever I wanted in the park, I could see my relatives every day.
Since the war started everything turned to blood. The sound of shelling continues every day,
every hour.*

The arrests began and they began arresting young people. We could hear the sound of screaming every day. I saw blood brothers, weeping on one another. Syria was always smiling but the bright smile turned to blood.

Other girls wrote poems to express their resolute defiance of the Assad regime, which has held fast, even at the risk of losing their own lives. Several others wrote love poems to those they left behind in Aleppo.

ADOLESCENTS ARE UNABLE TO IDENTIFY SHORT OR

LONG-TERM GOALS

As evidenced by FGDs, participant artwork, poetry, and essays, Syrian girls had the greatest challenges identifying dreams and goals. A 19-year-old girl wrote about the sadness of having to grow up too fast, and about her fleeting ability to achieve her dreams and goals in light of the war. At this critical point in their lives, when they would normally be finishing school, preparing for university or marriage, and dreaming of their lives as adults, they are emotionally paralyzed by mourning the loss of their family members, homes in Syria, and future plans. A majority of Syrian girls were unable to identify any tangible goals for their period of stay in Turkey. Some were learning Turkish for the sake of improving their chances to find temporary work in Gaziantep, but in terms of long term goals, they were at a loss to imagine their lives over the next year. As one girl stated, "we are simply living moment to moment;" while another lamented that Syrians have lost the ability to think or dream.

Feras wrote, "I miss my father, I haven't seen him for two years. I am seventeen years old, and my mind is now older than I am." Focused on the past, Syrian boys found it difficult to imagine that their current experiences in Turkey are part of their future. All of their essays articulated a future solely imagined in Syria. Rami, 15, wrote:

I miss Syria; I hope to go back as soon as possible. I miss my friends in Syria and I miss girls in Aleppo. Love only to you Syria and longing only to you. I will never forget Syria.

Mohammad's story (right) is representative of other Syrian boys. He tells the story of the war from his own perspective, identifying the events he witnessed which made him lose hope for the future.

MOHAMMED'S STORY (SYRIAN, AGE 16)

I am 16 years old. I used to be very optimistic about the future, but then a crisis began in our life and we do not know when it will end. In the beginning of 2011, a revolution started in Syria carried out by some of the children in the school. Then the regime came and took them and tortured them, then brought them back to their parents in shrouds. They were children as young as twelve years old. People were angry with this and rose up amongst a major uprising, chanting "death not humiliation."

Then the Syrian army entered the areas of unarmed civilians and raised their voices with a word (*takbir*, or God is great) and arrested the youth, killed children, and raped women. People decided to defend their land and vulnerable families through a jihad for the sake of God.

Sixty percent of the liberated city of Aleppo was attacked by the Assad regime with missiles and guns. Each neighborhood the regime entered was massacred, and is now being bombarded by explosive barrels; and still the Syrian people, with stainless echoes, will not kneel...will not kneel...will not kneel except to God.



A Syrian boy took this photo of women in the hairdresser's window to represent differences in gender expression in Turkey and Syria.

Another Syrian boy reflected on the changes presented by his new social and political environment. Taking photos of blond, Western women in the window of a hair salon (left) he stated “this is something I like.” When asked to elaborate he said, “Girls in Turkey are free, this is a sign of being progressive; but Syria should be Islamic with Sharia law under ISIS.” Valuing both the gendered practices of a very conservative Islamic society, as well as the “freedom” he perceives for girls in Turkey, he imagines enjoying both sociocultural and political contexts in the future regardless of the inherent contradiction.

Most Syrian girls did not choose to write essays, and preferred to silently sit and express their thoughts through drawing and crafts, adding brief statements in Arabic within the body of their collages. Those who wrote essays or poems focused on political statements rejecting the Assad government, and mourning those they had lost. One girl wrote:

*Where to go? I no longer know where to go.
With each day your face becomes a part of my life.
You are away and it is not normal.
The unusual is becoming harder.*

Similar to Syrian boys, girls focused on the loss of loved ones and the pain of separation from the homes and communities they had known in Syria. This poem, like others, reflects hopelessness and the general loss of goals.

“When I was in Syria I used to go to school and enjoy beautiful days of playing soccer. Now I work in a Turkish internet café, and I see Syrians as helpless because they have become separated from Syria.”

- Abdullah, Syrian, age 16

When pushed to think about their futures, the theme of education came up in the writing and artwork of a majority of the Syrian girls, and for many of the Syrian boys. Because the majority are not studying, and do not have a clear plan of how to access an education while in Turkey due to a lack of schools, limited language skills and financial resources, most adolescents spoke of education as a dream, rather than as a realistic future possibility.

Anas wrote, “I used to love my teacher and my classes, and I wanted to become an engineer in the future. But this situation has changed everything.” Another Syrian boy, Bashar, wrote the following essay:

*My name is Bashar from Syria and I moved to Turkey because of the situation in our country. Turkey welcomed us and helped us. Now we are going to schools here and hoping that we can achieve our dreams, while at the same time the regime is bombing our schools, and our dreams. Now we are wishing to go back to our home town. I wish to visit my school, my neighbors, and my friends.
Before we use to think and dream of the future. Now we are only living in our past.
THANK YOU TURKEY FOR ALL YOU DID FOR US.*

Bashar is one of the fortunate adolescents attending school in Gaziantep. Similar to many other Syrian adolescents, he thanked Turkey, but did not articulate further his plans during his stay in Turkey. For a majority of participating Syrian adolescents, education represented the most significant means to building a future, and was the only future plan commonly articulated besides returning to Syria. A handful of Syrian Turkmen boys and girls, however, were barely literate, stating they had forgotten how to read and write since they left school.

In contrast, when thinking about the future and their dreams, Turkish boys did not focus on education. Instead they wrote essays about their plans over the next three months, focusing on their upcoming summer vacations as a means of relieving stress from school. Many of the Turkish boys described the Mediterranean and Istanbul family vacations they longed for, as well as their goal of becoming professional soccer players. Other occupations mentioned by Turkish boys included pilot, architect, policeman and military captain, suggesting limited aspirations or knowledge of the wide array of career options. Similarly, Turkish girls discussed wanting to become teachers and pediatricians, but they were unsure of the level of support they would receive from their families to achieve their dreams.

In the FGDs all but one of the Turkish girls reported regular school attendance. Turkish girls also talked about the stresses of school, and their hopes for attending a good university. Other girls wrote about their desire to learn English, and to protect animals from harm. However, concrete steps on how to achieve these dreams were scarce. Similar to Turkish boys, when writing about plans for the next three months, Turkish girls also wrote about their upcoming summer vacations.

Overall, there was a stark contrast between the essays of Syrian adolescents and Turkish adolescents. It was clear that Syrian adolescents are caught in an ongoing limbo between the futures they had planned, and the reality they find themselves in. They are unable to focus on the future or the present, and remain focused on recapturing the past. Even as they expressed hope for the future and rebuilding Syria, they avoided any discussion of plans for their time in Turkey, whether in the short or long term. Moreover, as articulated by Mark Eggerman and Catherine Panter-Brick in their discussion of resilience, for those displaced and highly marginalized, such as the Syrian adolescent population, “economic impediments, social expectations, and cultural dictates... combine to create entrapment, as the ability to realize personal and social aspirations is frustrated by structural inequalities injurious to health and wellbeing.”²¹ Though Turkish teens may face marginalization due to gender and poverty, they are not as heavily marginalized as Syrian teens experience extraordinary vulnerabilities due to their displacement, nationality, poverty, experience of trauma and lack of Turkish proficiency.

ADDRESSING THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Due to ongoing conflicts in the north of Syria between the FSA, regime, ISIS and other armed Islamic groups, Syrian adolescents in Turkey continue to be influenced by competing political views. According to interviews with mothers in attendance, several of the adolescents have siblings and male relatives who remained in Syria and are fighting in the war.

Several Syrian girls made drawings and collages which directly addressed the international community. Zahra, an 18 year old Syrian girl, drew a political cartoon depicting the United States as a chef cooking Syria according to its taste. A map of a Free Syrian Army-aligned Syria cries tears of blood. The “careless world” turns the other way. When asked about the drawing, the young artist emphasized that the international community, including the Arab world, was not taking enough action to stop the conflict.



A political cartoon by a Syrian girl describing the international community turning a blind eye to Syria’s plight, and the United States waiting until the time is ripe.

A Syrian boy wrote an essay condemning Arab nations for not taking action against Assad’s forces:

Mother Syria, is your heart like a wound, or like the dark? In the silence I hurt. I called out to the Arab rulers, why is Syria hurting? They did not answer, but I will answer. Did Syria burn Rome or explode the towns of the USA?

A group of Syrian girls made a collage comparing women in the West, and Arab women in Syria. Western women are comfortable and wealthy, visiting hair salons, enjoying elaborate meals, and having fun. In contrast, Syrian women are depicted as somber, working with cloth in factories in difficult jobs. The words on the collage read “God, why are Arabs getting so much pain? Please help them from this pain, sadness, and crying.”

²¹ Mark Eggerman and Catherine Panter-Brick. "Suffering, hope, and entrapment: Resilience and cultural values in Afghanistan." *Social Science & Medicine* 71.1 (2010): 71.

KEY BARRIERS TO A FULFILLING ADOLESCENCE IN TURKEY

WORK

Compared to the employment patterns in pre-conflict Syria, where youth (15-24) were largely excluded from the job market,²² a majority of Syrian adolescents and youth are working in Gaziantep, while many of their parents remain unemployed. Mercy Corps estimates that the number of Syrian girls working in Gaziantep is nearly equal to the number of Syrian boys. One Syrian father interviewed by Mercy Corps reported that his three adolescent daughters would never have worked in their teens in Syria, but due to economic hardship, he had to send them to work in shopping centers in Gaziantep, and was very ashamed of these circumstances. In effect, the employment patterns that existed in Syria prior to the conflict have been reversed for Syrians who have come to Turkey – both in terms of age and gender.²³ Also, given that access to the formal employment market for Syrians is limited due to work permit regulations in Turkey as of May 2014, social networking appears to have gained importance – relative to the employment market in pre-conflict Syria²⁴ – as a means of accessing low-skilled informal jobs. Jobs are reportedly located through informal social networks spanning from Aleppo to as far as Istanbul and Izmir.

Syrian boys and girls work in informal sectors without work permits, and are vulnerable to unsafe conditions, long hours, physical abuse and sexual harassment, and low wages; leading to feelings of anger at their situation and strong sentiments of degradation and humiliation. They do not have health insurance, although Syrians registered with the Turkish government are granted the right to access Turkish state hospitals. Arabic-speaking medical translators and physicians are not always available to Syrians seeking medical care.

Syrian boys reported working in the shoemaking industry, in the service industry as waiters, and as tailors. Boys as young as 10 years old are working in packing and shoe factories, gluing soles into place. It was frequently mentioned that Syrian bosses treated participants better than Turkish employers, but that they both tended to pay the same wages. Turkish bosses, however, generally were reported not to make adolescents work on Saturdays, whereas Syrian bosses were less likely to respect holidays and weekends, even if the Syrian boss is a relative. Syrian girls are working in the same industries as Syrian boys, with the exception of one girl, who reported working as an Arabic translator. One Syrian girl, who used to be employed as a tailor in Aleppo, reported that her job in Gaziantep requires her to sit under the table in a fabric factory, collect scraps of fabric tossed down by tailors, and fold them. She works 10 hours a day and is allotted a one hour break each day. Syrian girls also spoke of verbal abuse and harassment in the workplace, and said they feared beatings if they complained about their conditions.

One Turkmen Syrian girl, age 13, runs her parents' small *bakkal* (corner grocery), selling imported tea, coffee, cough syrup, and snacks in the predominantly Syrian neighborhood. Her parents, who can communicate in Turkish, are illiterate and had little formal schooling. Because she is the only one in her family, who can perform basic arithmetic, write receipts, calculate balances and read basic Turkish, her family has not allowed her to attend school since arriving in Gaziantep in 2012. She reported that participating in the adolescent activities provided her a rare day of play and self-expression with other girls her age, and that she hopes to attend Mercy Corps events again.

A few Turkmen Syrian boys reported that they felt the experience of working in Turkey was a positive opportunity to learn new responsibilities, such as running a business. In this case, the inversion of employment responsibilities for Syrian adolescents and adults may contribute to relieving the previous unemployment pressures experienced by some adolescents prior to the conflict.

A small number of Turkish boys participating in the survey reported working as tailors and waiters. None of the Turkish girls were employed.

²² Nader S. Kabbani and Noura Kamel. "Youth Exclusion in Syria: Social, Economic, and Institutional Dimensions." *Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper 4* (2007).

²³ *Ibid*

²⁴ *Ibid*.

HOUSING

One issue frequently raised by Syrian and Turkish adolescents was the difficulty their families faced obtaining housing and rising rent prices. One 13-year-old Syrian boy explained that he could not find an apartment for his Syrian uncle, who is single. The Turkish landlords he approached refused to rent to single Syrian men due to fears that a large family will secretly move in. The boy was also concerned that there was no one he could turn to for help to ensure that his family was charged a fair rent price. Since he is the only male in his family, and cannot speak Turkish, he wished he had help from an older male who could facilitate a referral system between Syrians seeking housing and Turkish landlords. In Gaziantep, Turkish landlords have started requiring six months' rent in advance for Syrian tenants. Additionally, signs with the following tenant requirements have started to appear around Gaziantep: "No Syrians, no families over 7 members, no shoes left outside the door."

In interviews with vulnerable Turkish communities during May 2014, Turkish residents of Gaziantep were found to also be facing challenges in locating affordable housing. In the past two years average rents in Gaziantep have risen in vulnerable neighborhoods from 200 TL (~\$94) to 800 TL (~\$375) per month. In middle class neighborhoods, rents have increased from 400 TL (~\$375) to 1,200 TL or more (\$563+). Several Turkish families Mercy Corps spoke with emphasized that it was "because of Syrians" that rent prices had increased so dramatically. Syrian families also recognize that rent prices have increased due to Syrian migration over the past two years. Vulnerable and middle class mothers, in particular emphasize that it is wealthy Syrians who are driving up rent costs.

LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION

LEARNING TURKISH

Four of the thirty-five Syrian girls were learning Turkish at a local municipality's youth center in their neighborhood. They began studying Turkish after they had been in Turkey for a year. While the girls dropped out of their first course, which had been taught by a Turkish citizen instructor who did not speak Arabic, the municipality later brought in a bilingual Syrian Turkmen teacher who was able to keep their interest and translate between languages to assist in their learning. The classes consisted of conversation, writing and grammar. Classes are however overcrowded and scheduled at an inconvenient time for those who work.

EDUCATION CERTIFICATES FOR SYRIANS

Students seeking entrance to Turkish universities must obtain certification of their Turkish aptitude through an exam offered by TÖMER,²⁵ a Turkish teaching center offering language instruction in local Gaziantep universities and throughout Turkey. However, information about educational certification amongst Syrian adolescents was inconsistent. There is massive confusion about which exams are accepted in Turkey and in the region for Syrians. Gaining recognition of baccalaureate certificates in Turkish universities remains a challenge for Syrian students. In parts of Turkey's Southeastern region, coordinating INGOs have reported that Syrian Coalition and other exams and certificates are recognized, but this appears to occur on a school by school basis. A common solution proposed was the Libyan Al-Shahada-Al-Thanawiyya (Baccalaureate) Exam, which is accepted at Zirve University, a private university in Gaziantep. In INGO coordination meetings, however, it was reported that the Libyan curriculum's legitimacy was being questioned, as rumors that certificates can be purchased on the black market are rife.

UNICEF is currently studying the schooling and certification situation for Syrians in the region to determine which certificates are recognized and accepted in each host country. Mercy Corps looks forward to sharing UNICEF's forthcoming report with Syrian refugee communities in order to help maintain clarity on the recognition of education certificates for Syrians in Turkey.²⁶

²⁵ TÖMER is the Türkçe Öğretim Merkezi, or Turkish Teaching Center

²⁶ Notes from UNHCR/UNICEF Education Working Group meeting on April 3, 2014.

FURTHERING EDUCATION FOR SYRIANS

Adolescents emphasized education as central to the acquisition of future employment. A fifteen-year-old Turkmen girl who works in a Turkish shopping mall six days a week told her group facilitator, "I don't want to work, I want to study." Given labor market trends and problems with unemployment prior to the conflict in Syria, completing higher education, more so than social networks, was one of the main means of obtaining ones' desired career within the Syrian economy. As such, education continues to be perceived as a primary means of financial success in Turkey. In her focus group, one Syrian girl from Aleppo reflected on the challenges of furthering her education: "We don't need a Syrian university; we need the Turkish universities to be more flexible with us ... since it is very difficult to be admitted."

Syrian girls also highlighted the critical need for Arabic books. Those studying for university entrance exams, such as the Libyan exam, cannot locate any Arabic books to use in preparation. Turkish universities have very limited numbers of books in Arabic, and there are no Arabic language libraries available to the public in Gaziantep or in the region. If Arabic books were available, and if there was greater clarity on which international university entrance exams were accepted in Turkey, Syrian adolescents would be able to study on their own and apply for admission to Turkish universities.

ISOLATION

Through expressions of anger and humiliation, Syrian boys and girls verbalized their isolation. This isolation stems in large part from the language barrier, although Turkmen adolescents who are proficient in Turkish also reported feeling left out. It is also a result of their experiences of harassment by Turkish men in their neighborhoods and other parts of the city, and their resulting feelings of insecurity and vulnerability. Additionally, boys wished their families had access to a Turkish identity card so they could participate more broadly in government-sponsored youth activities, such as the recent National Sovereignty and Children's Day holiday celebrations, which included municipality-sponsored youth events across the city. Syrian boys also reported feeling isolated because they do not have enough time to visit with other adolescents, nor do they have as many friends as they did in Syria.

Syrian girls also reported feeling unsafe in the streets and being isolated by their demanding schedule of work and domestic duties. After work they have little time to pursue their own interests. When they come home they are responsible for house chores, watching younger siblings, and preparing food. In focus groups they expressed a desire for free time to study and maintain their education. Several girls said that because their freedom of movement is restricted, their minimal free time is spent on Facebook or utilizing other social media to keep connected with friends still in Syria.

In writing about their daily lives, Turkish boys described how they go to school, return home to eat, spend their free hours outside playing soccer with other boys, and enjoy surfing the internet. They also wrote nationalist poems to the founder of the country, poems in praise of their fathers, and to their mothers. Turkish adolescents reported feeling frustrated, controlled and isolated by their parents, in particular by their fathers. For example, boys are often told what kinds of roles they can and cannot have in the local labor market, while girls are similarly limited in their career and education options and given access accordingly.

Similarly, social and family values direct the roles and recreational activities of boys and girls both inside and outside the home. Some of the boys described feeling isolated because they are surrounded by cultures of sports, and have a lack of opportunities for self-expression. There is a generalized lack of acceptance of boys who want to participate in art and other expressive activities. Several Turkish boys also reported that they are not encouraged to attend school as their families prefer that they work. They also talked about feeling unsafe in their neighborhoods due to drug abuse amongst the youth in their proximity. Some Turkish boys displayed disruptive behaviors during the activities,

AYŞE'S ESSAY (TURKISH, AGE 17)

This summer I want to go to see Mevlana (Rumi) in Konya. You know-- the one with the poems of love, who says "come, come whoever you are." I want to see the historical places of Nasrettin Hoja. I want to see my family happy. Actually, I really want to study. I can't study because of my father. Right now I'm engaged and I'm going to get married. But I really want to study. It has been four years since I studied in school. If I had continued studying I would be completing high school. But everything is fate, that's what I have learned from life. If I had an occupation in my hand I wouldn't feel so crushed to be marrying the man I will marry. Right now I am reading the school lessons of my cousin. I'm constantly writing and reading books. Most of the time, however, I do housework. The ones who like me most are my mother, my aunt, and my cousins. When I am with them I feel certain that I won't fall to pieces.

suggesting to Turkish male facilitators severe problems at home. The staff member later commented that “some Turkish boys are quite vulnerable, perhaps even more vulnerable than Syrians, in cases where their family structures have been disrupted, and the boys resort to cultures of violence for self-protection and self-esteem as a result.”

Like their Syrian peers, local social norms often help determine whether a Turkish girl can leave the house on a daily basis or not, with whom, and the time at which she must return home. It is often a broader patriarchal family structure that prevents vulnerable girls from attending school. Turkish girls reported challenges accessing education and free time for pursuing their own interests. All of the Turkish girls felt isolated because of family pressures to remain at home at all times except for extended family visits and during school hours. In one of the FGDs, participants were asked “What does freedom mean to you?” – a question that resonated with everyone. One Turkish girl, age 16, answered “listening to music is a kind of freedom to me.” Another girl reported: “When I am alone it is the best time to feel free.” Dilek, age 16, explained that at home a family member is often verbally abusive, and she struggles to live “in peace:”

People often say that what is most valued in life is to live in freedom, and to value everything that we live through. I wish that sometimes things could be as we wished and hoped. Sometimes people can unknowingly speak with prejudice and break another's heart, and the most important thing is for people to realize these mistakes. It is very important that while expressing one's feelings one should be able to express them comfortably. We can be happy while expressing ourselves in the company of someone we like, but with those we don't like it is so exceedingly difficult to hide our sadness.

Unable to access a space where they can have time to express themselves, unobserved by family members, Turkish girls felt hampered by their parents' restrictions and unable to participate in decision-making. Ayşe's example demonstrates the pressures faced by a generation of Turkish girls. In a FGD she stated:

Everyone lives with rules and nobody can be free. The word freedom doesn't exist. I have no future and I have no dreams. If I could study and have a job, I wouldn't be ashamed in front of my fiancé. My father is the one who prevents me from attending school. He is like a leader; what he says is always 'right.' We should act by his rules. If I were born again, I would study. I prefer not to get married and instead return to school.

According to interviews with local civil society organizations in Gaziantep, these cases are all too common in this region of Turkey. Psychological studies conducted in Turkey on self-reported loneliness in adolescents affirm that feelings of isolation are highly correlated with low academic achievement and perceived deviation from social norms.²⁷ This suggests that activities which promote academic achievement, provide space for self-expression, and build community may be successful in alleviating isolation and increasing teens' sense of self-worth.

In these examples, adolescents discuss the challenges they face in building personal resilience, due to isolation, and strict gender roles that limit the expression of girls and boys.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE OTHER

Adolescents' perceptions of the other community were diverse, although facilitators and observers noted resistance to interaction and tensions between the groups of Turkish and Syrian boys at one location, and the groups of Turkish and Syrian girls at the other location.

HOST COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF SYRIANS

During the activities, several Turkish boys displayed negative attitudes towards the participating Syrian boys. One Turkish boy yelled “go back to your country, we don't want you here” to a group of Syrians. Many of the Turkish boys' opinions about Syrians reflected that of their parents; they emphasized the high rent increases over the past two years, from 400TL (~\$187) to as much as 1,000 TL (~\$470). They echoed a similar anxiety with regard to the presence of Syrians on the activity days. Referring to the large number of Syrian participants, one Turkish adolescent lamented: “if

²⁷ Ayhan Demir and Nuray Tarhan. "Loneliness and social dissatisfaction in Turkish adolescents." *The Journal of Psychology* 135, no. 1 (2001): 113-123.

we didn't have Syrians here we would have more room to play." For both Syrian and Turkish boys, this tension persisted throughout the day of activities. Neither of the groups wanted to play soccer on mixed teams.

A few Turkish boys, however, told facilitators that it was the first time they had met Syrians, and that they were surprised and pleased to learn that they were not as "bad" as their parents had told them. One Turkish boy, Ahmet, wrote an essay about the day, describing the sense of brotherhood that evolved between the two groups.

Similarly, Turkish girls, outnumbered in the activities, reported to facilitators that they had never met Syrian adolescents previously, and were finding that they weren't "bad" as they had been taught.

SYRIAN PERCEPTIONS OF HOST COMMUNITIES

Syrian perceptions of Turkish host communities were largely based on how they have been treated since arriving in Gaziantep. Many Syrian girls and boys reported feeling particularly vulnerable due to the dominance of Turkish men in public spaces and the risk of harassment they face. Often the behavior of these men can be traced back to local cultures of masculinity, which refers to positions of power in a male dominated and gendered society,²⁸ compounded by feelings of prejudice. Syrian boys report that they cannot go out after 6:00 in the evening because they feel unsafe. When they are out on the street, they face harassment by Turkish men, so they remain isolated at home and unable to leave their neighborhoods. Youth often experience harassment as they are leaving school to travel home, or speaking Arabic in the street.

Adolescents also reported receiving unequal treatment compared to Turkish adolescents in their host communities, with some shops refusing to sell goods to Syrians. In focus group discussions, Syrian boys explained that Turks think Syrians are "bad" due to their poverty, "but Turks don't know that this is not for all Syrians," reported one youth. Overall, Syrian adolescents reflected a sensitivity and high level of awareness with regard to the negative perceptions of Syrians amongst host community members.

Nonetheless, Syrian adolescents thanked Turkey on several occasions for welcoming them, and for providing refuge. This also came up in conversations with parents in attendance, and in the artwork created by Syrian adolescents.

SYRIAN TURKMEN ADOLESCENTS: STUCK IN THE MIDDLE

Syrian Turkmen boys described feeling stuck in the middle with regard to fitting in, and that they experienced being 'othered' by Turkish host communities and other Syrians. Several of the Turkmen boys reported being raised to appreciate, identify with, and follow Turkish cultural events and sports teams: "My father didn't encourage me to watch Syrian soccer games, but we grew up following all of the Turkish teams." Yet in the streets and in public places the Turkmen boys reported harassment from the Turkish public, and were marked as foreign by their accent. Several Turkmen boys reported that while they did not have problems communicating in Turkish, language presented daily problems. They are discriminated against and reported feeling alienated from Turkish host communities when told "you aren't Turkish; you are Arab." While Turkmen boys identify more with Turkish culture, their Turkish host communities group them with Arab Syrians, meaning they are subject to similar disregard and exclusion. However, Turkmen boys can speak Turkish, find jobs, and secure housing with greater ease than non-Turkmen Syrians. As a result, they are also rejected by Syrian Arabs, with whom they did not mix previously in Syria.

AHMET (TURKISH, AGE 16)

An organization invited me and my friends, and we came together with our Turkish and Syrian brothers. Together we ate food, we played games, and we played a game of soccer. Actually it was quite boring at first, but after a time we interacted and started to become friends. Actually there's no reason to discriminate between Turks and Syrians because they are also people like us and Muslims like us. The Syrians here today acted as if they were our older brothers, and it was really fun to meet them. Together we took photos, we drew pictures, and explained our dreams for the summer. We were really happy together and had a really fun time.

²⁸ Paul Scheibelhofer, Scheibelhofer, Paul. "From health check to Muslim test: The shifting politics of governing migrant masculinity." *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 33, no. 3 (2012): 319-332.

Several Syrian Turkmen girls who spoke Turkish preferred to remain in separate groups from the Turkish girls. Although facilitators put them in mixed groups with Turkish girls and Arabic-speaking Syrian girls, it was challenging for them to cross the perceived barriers between the two groups. Turkmen girls appeared more comfortable interacting with Arabic-speaking Syrian girls. The Turkish girls remained standoffish. Similar to Turkmen boys, Turkmen girls found it difficult to integrate into activities with host community girls despite their ability to communicate in Turkish albeit with a different accent.

Due to linguistic and cultural divisions within the Syrian communities of Gaziantep, the needs of Syrian minorities should be addressed with sensitivity to these additional pressures.

TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE



A teenage girl's illustration, depicting further bombing, loss and violence.

Trauma and violence arose in the work of about a quarter of Syrian adolescents. Several Syrians, including some accompanying younger siblings, depicted traumatic events in their artwork and essays. A seventeen-year-old Syrian girl drew a picture (left) depicting bombs falling from a plane near a father and daughter. On the ground a man lays dead or injured, holding the FSA flag. A mother in the corner holds a child, and a woman sits calmly alone, perhaps emphasizing the loss of family members. While other girls her age drew flowers, trees and fish, one eleven-year-old sibling, Rula, ~~also~~ drew an airplane dropping bombs onto a school and mosque. Although her case is more of an exception, there was a stark contrast between the material depicted in her artwork and in that of her peers.

During writing activities, a sixteen-year-old boy wrote: "I need medical treatment due to my ongoing fear of the war. Inside my body shrapnel fragments of the war remain." The boy's father had died in Aleppo during the conflict. He came with his mother and sister to Gaziantep to find work. He works in a Syrian restaurant, while his sister works as a tailor. Together they live with three other families in a one-room apartment.

Previous research on refugee children has illustrated that exposure to violence is a major risk factor for depression and other mental health issues, but that living in a stable environment where they have social support outside of their home country can help to lessen this trauma.²⁹ The number of these vulnerable teens who have witnessed violence is not yet clear. Further research is therefore necessary to help determine the range of adolescents' needs and the prevalence of trauma-related mental health issues, and also to identify activities or practices that can help increase their sense of stability and social support in Turkey.



A drawing of bombs falling on the mosque and school, drawn by an 11 year-old Syrian girl.

²⁹ Mina Fazel et al. "Mental health of displaced and refugee children resettled in high-income countries: Risk and protective factors." *The Lancet* 379.9812 (2012): 266-282.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DESIGNING ADOLESCENT PROGRAMS TO ENHANCE PERSONAL RESILIENCE

DESIGN ACTIVITIES TO ADDRESS GIRLS' AND BOYS' STRESS AND ISOLATION

Syrian and Turkish girls emphasized the need for a girl-only space where they could relieve the stresses of family pressure; pursue self-expression; and speak to other girls about their goals and plans for the future. These spaces will also be ideal for activities focused on the prevention of SGBV. While there were no direct reports of SGBV during the FGDs (as FGD dynamics were not designed to address these types of sensitive issues), Mercy Corps understands from interviews with stakeholders and key informants that these issues are realities for girls in Turkey. Incidents of SGBV and early marriage among Syrian adolescent girls are reportedly high, with limited resources available to help them, and their families, to cope. Secondary research shows that these issues are also of concern for Turkish adolescent girls.

Turkish boys expressed a desire for activities to help relieve the stresses of school life, as well as foster greater self-expression through art as an alternative to sports. Syrian boys reported stress and isolation as a result of their new responsibilities and living conditions. Turkmen Syrian boys also expressed anxiety because of their isolation from both the Turkish host community and the Arab Syrian community. Efforts must be made to design social activities which target the most socially isolated adolescents.

SUPPORT ADOLESCENTS TO IDENTIFY SHORT OR LONG-TERM GOALS



A collage by a group of Syrian girls, ages 16, 19, and 14. They write, “With our hands together we’re going to rebuild the hope of Syria.” They also proclaim: “We’re going to rebuild Syria with our education and work.”

Syrian adolescents struggled to identify short-term and long-term life goals. Unable to plan for the next year or even the next few months, their dreams remain paralyzed as a result of the losses they have suffered and hardships they have endured as a result of war and forced migration. Both Syrian girls and boys, who had future career goals and aspirations specific to their lives in Syria, have lost touch with these plans as a result of their displacement.

Many Turkish adolescents, like their Syrian peers, had trouble planning for the future and setting goals. Turkish girls were, on average, less knowledgeable about available career options as compared with Turkish boys, and also struggled to identify long-term goals and the steps for achieving them. While talking about the stress of school, several Turkish girls described obstacles to keeping up with their studies, and were unable to come up with solutions for improving their grades on their own. Turkish boys had more clarity than other adolescents about their future goals, and could identify specific positions in which they were interested. Several Syrian and Turkish girls also talked about wanting to “help the poor” and contribute to the lives of others.

DESIGN ACTIVITIES TO SUPPORT CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTIONS

Turkish and Syrian adolescents confirmed they rarely interact. The degree of mistrust between the two groups is high. Therefore, it is anticipated that inter-Turkish and Syrian group activities could present challenges in terms of integrating participants. There was, however, interest amongst some of the Syrian and Turkish adolescents in both groups to continue engaging in cross-cultural and linguistic activities.

INVEST IN NON-FORMAL EDUCATION FOR OUT OF SCHOOL AND OTHER VULNERABLE ADOLESCENTS

Interest in language, literacy, and supplemental education classes was common amongst Syrian adolescents and Turkish girls, but far less common amongst Turkish boys. Syrians who were not in school expressed a desire to gain access to education so they could continue studying and increase their knowledge while waiting to return to Syria. Syrian girls were especially concerned that they might not have any further opportunities to continue studying. Turkmen Syrian girls were especially anxious about maintaining their basic literacy in Arabic. One Syrian Turkmen girl could not read or write in Arabic or Turkish, and had already fallen behind while in Syria. A handful of Syrian Turkmen boys were in the same situation.

A large contingent of Syrian adolescents was especially interested in Turkish and English classes. Turkish girls expressed a need for outside English classes to make sure they did not fall behind in the Turkish education system. A couple of Syrian adolescents also expressed a desire for language classes for their parents. They hoped that, if their parents could learn Turkish, they could re-open their businesses as tailors and blacksmiths, and the teens could stop working and return to school.

PROVIDE SUPPORT TO ADOLESCENTS TO ADDRESS WAR TRAUMA

Some of the participating adolescents illustrated or described traumatic events they had witnessed, including bombing and shelling. It is likely that some of the adolescents have suffered trauma and would benefit from counseling to enhance their resilience, and prevent the development of emotional or mental disorders. Psychological research conducted by Lennart Reifels and colleagues illustrates that it is important for trauma cases to be referred to psychological professionals within the first year following a traumatic event.³⁰ Further, the response to a massive traumatic event requires continuity of existing health services, establishing enhanced psychosocial services for the disaster-affected population, coordinating response agencies, integrating international resources, and monitoring population disaster impacts and the outcomes of response services.

IDENTIFY WAYS TO ENHANCE INCLUSIVENESS & ADDRESS TENSIONS BETWEEN ADOLESCENTS

Adolescent recruitment was successful, reaching 119 vulnerable youth in two weeks. The lowest attendance by group was Turkish girls. In future youth activities, Mercy Corps must engage more Turkish adolescents, particularly girls, in its activities. Activities must also be inclusive of adolescents living with disabilities. As for this event, future assessments and activities must also be conducted by staff members who speak the language of each participant group, and who come from the same broader community. For example, Turkish staff should not interview Syrians through interpreters or otherwise due to the difference in perceived or existing power dynamics, and risks of miscommunication.

During the arts and crafts activities, tensions arose between Syrian adolescents over political symbols, despite frequent requests from facilitators that they not discuss political issues during the activities or focus group discussions. Some adolescents drew the government flag, others depicted the FSA flag,³¹ while others drew ISIS symbols. Those who drew the government flag were pressured to add a third star. Some younger adolescents were quick to express nostalgia about how “good things were under the Assad regime.” While these examples may seem small, they have the potential to represent adolescents’ thoughts, loyalties, and experiences during the conflict. While adolescents will need productive and safe spaces in which to discuss and debate the politics and future of Syria, it is important that they develop strategies for diffusing tensions and respecting their peers, to avoid harassment and bullying. Now is the time to provide Syrian adolescents with the tools to safely and openly discuss critical issues which will one day contribute to the identification of new political and governmental solutions for the rebuilding of Syria.

³⁰ Lennart Reifels et al. "Lessons learned about psychosocial responses to disaster and mass trauma: an international perspective." *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*. (2013).

³¹ The government flag has horizontal bands of red, white, and black, with two green stars in the center, whereas the FSA flag has horizontal bands of green, white, and black, with three red stars in the center.

CONCLUSION

Forced displacement from their homeland, fracturing of extended families, and the economic demands of their new environment has caused Syrian adolescents as young as thirteen to take on adult roles in their families. In many cases, boys are taking on responsibilities such as negotiating with landlords, and working six days a week in factory jobs. Syrian girls are also taking on primary responsibility as income earners and caregivers for the family, especially in cases where fathers or brothers were lost or are embroiled in the conflict. Syrian adolescents are shouldering the burden of responsibilities usually allocated to adult family members, and many are the sole breadwinners for their families in Turkey—enormous pressure for one not yet eighteen.

Turkish adolescents also feel frustrated and isolated because of pressures they face to conform to family expectations, with girls facing far greater constraints. Sometimes these expectations result in adolescents being prevented from attending school, leaving the house unaccompanied, and enjoying “free time” during which they can pursue their own interests. Turkish girls often feel isolated or trapped within the home, whereas Turkish boys feel frustrated by a lack of opportunities to express themselves freely through arts or other non-sports activities, and the strict gender roles which prevent them from doing so.

Syrian and Turkish adolescents reported that the ongoing challenges which limit their opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills are: financial, i.e. working to support their families for low wages; social, i.e. feeling isolated and facing harassment in public; and emotional, i.e. coping with isolation, trauma, and uncertain futures.

Programs should be designed to address the specific challenges outlined above, and continuously dialogue with adolescents about the hurdles they face. This means creating activities and providing services according to the diverse needs of the different national, gender, and age groups present in the vulnerable adolescent population of Gaziantep. This also means remaining sensitive to the needs of ethnic minorities such as Turkmen and Kurds, who may face unique challenges, including further exclusion and harassment. By both addressing the specific needs of each group, and by designing effective cross-cultural/cross-linguistic activities, the challenges of both Syrian and host communities can be partially addressed by and integrated into future programming.

Syrian and Turkish adolescents reported their desire to pursue further education, as it would be both rewarding and allow them access to greater employment opportunities. The barriers preventing adolescents’ access to education are complex, and extend beyond their control, to the demands of the broader socioeconomic and family structures which they inhabit. Programming must therefore seek to enable them to more easily access further education and skills training.

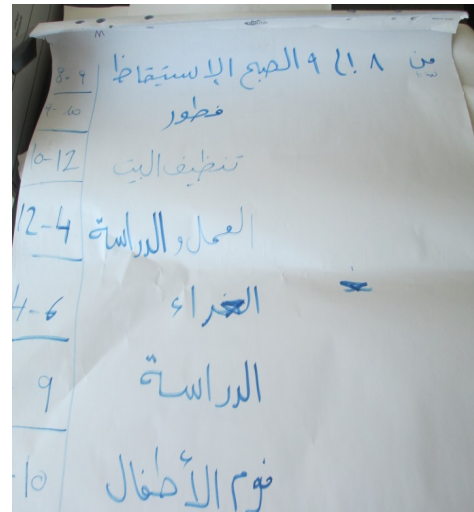
Mercy Corps found limited evidence that Turkish and Syrian social groups are building constructive ties across community lines. Challenges participants identified that are currently preventing cross-community adolescent efforts to promote peace, tolerance and reconciliation are linguistic, social, financial, and spatial. Furthermore, a majority of Syrian adolescents are focused on returning home to rebuild Syria, rather than on their ability to contribute to their present communities.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: DAILY ACTIVITIES SCHEDULE

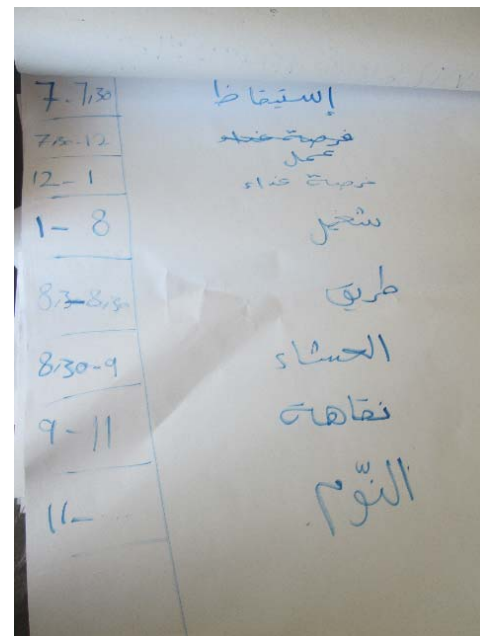
Daily Schedule for Syrian Girls who are Students/Unemployed

8:00-9:00	Waking up
9:00-10:00	Breakfast
10:00-12:00	House cleaning
12:00-4:00	Studying & working
4:00-6:00	Lunch
6:00-9:00	Studying
9:00-10:00	Put the kids to bed
10:00-11:00	Recovering (resting)
12:00	Sleeping
Sunday	Free time



Daily Schedule for Syrian Girls who are Employed

7:00-7:30	Waking up and traveling to work
7:30-12:00	Working
12:00-1:00	Lunch break
1:00-8:00	Working
8:00-8:30	Traveling home
8:30-9:00	Dinner
9:00-11:00	Rest
11:00	Sleeping



Daily Schedule for Syrian Girls who are Employed

7:00-7:30	Waking up and traveling to work
7:30-12:00	Working
12:00-1:00	Lunch break
1:00-8:00	Working
8:00-8:30	Traveling home
8:30-9:00	Dinner

9:00-11:00 Recovery

11:00 Sleeping

Daily Schedule for Turkish boys who are Students

7:00-8:00 Waking up and traveling to school

8:00-12:00 School

12:00-1:00 Lunch break

1:00-3:00 Studying

3:00-3:30 Traveling home

7:00 Dinner

Daily Schedule for Turkish Girls who are Students

7:00-8:00 Waking up and traveling to school

8:00-12:00 School

12:00-1:00 Lunch break

1:00-3:00 Studying

3:00-3:30 Traveling home

7:00 Dinner

ANNEX 2: YOUTH PROFILE

Gaziantep, Turkey	In School	Working	Accessing the Internet
Syrian Boys	14/40	40/40	10+ /40
Syrian Girls	1/35	10/35	5/35
Turkish Boys	37/37	2/37	37/37
Turkish Girls	6/7	0/7	3/7

ANNEX 3: NEIGHBORHOOD DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE & CITY MAP, BASED ON PARTICIPATION

This profile does not represent all of the participants. Several Turkish boys traveled from their homes by foot to TEGV (from the same neighborhood), and several Turkish girls came by car and were delivered directly by parents.

May 10, 2014 Participants - Gaziantep, Turkey	Syrian	Turkish
C1 Perilikaya (2)	X	
C2 Yaşam Hastanesi (1)	X	
C3 23 Nisan İlk Okul (11)	X	X
C4 Yeşilevler Camii (1)		X
C5 Cumhuriyet (Yaşar Torun) (3)	X	
C6 Beşyüzevler (8)	X	
C7 G. Üniversitesi (4)	X	
C9 Demokrasi Meydanı (2)	X	
C10 Kale ana kapı (4)	X	
TEGV Neighborhood (not on map) (11)		X

May 11, 2014 Participants - Gaziantep, Turkey	Syrian	Turkish
C2 Yaşam Hastanesi (2)	X	
C3 23 Nisan İlk Okul (4)	X	
P1 Cengiz Topel (Cergibozan) (18)		X
P2 Atatürk Heykeli (17)	X	
P 3 Deva Hastanesi (1)	X	
P 4 Boyacı Camii (15)	X	
P 5 Büyük Veliç Hotel (4)	X	
C8 Zeugma Müzesi (4)	X	
C4 Yeşilevler Camii (2)		X

Gaziantep Neighborhood Map:



ABOUT MERCY CORPS

Mercy Corps is a leading global humanitarian agency saving and improving lives in the world's toughest places. With a network of experienced professionals in more than 40 countries, we partner with local communities to put bold ideas into action to help people recover, overcome hardship and build better lives. Now, and for the future.



45 SW Ankeny Street
Portland, Oregon 97204 USA

888.842.0842
[mercycorps.org](https://www.mercycorps.org)

CONTACT

Jihane Nami
Refugee Program Manager, Turkey

jnami@rs.mercycorps.org