

CASE STUDY

TURKEY 2017–2020 / SYRIAN CRISIS

KEYWORDS: Community engagement, Gender mainstreaming, Housing rehabilitation, Infrastructure upgrades

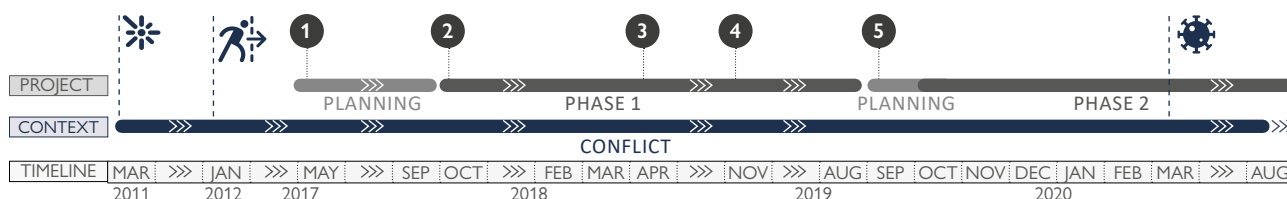
CRISIS	Syrian crisis, 2011 onwards
PEOPLE DISPLACED	3.6 million people displaced to Turkey (peak in 2019)*
PEOPLE WITH SHELTER NEEDS	Approx. 1.98 million people in Southeastern Turkey with basic needs**
PROJECT LOCATION	Gaziantep, Kilis and Sanliurfa Provinces of Southeastern Turkey
PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY THE PROJECT	House upgrades: Phase 1 1,090 HHs (26,649 individuals) Phase 2 889 HHs (7,148 individuals)
PROJECT OUTPUTS	1,979 houses upgraded 10 community level interventions completed
SHELTER SIZE	Average of 40m² for an apartment
SHELTER DENSITY	Average of 3.5m² per person
DIRECT COST	USD 400 on average for HH level upgrades USD 500 on average for building level upgrades
PROJECT COST	USD 800 on average for house upgrades



PROJECT SUMMARY

The project supported conflict-affected refugees inside Turkey (Syrian and other), returnees, internally displaced populations (IDPs) and host communities through interventions at three scales. This included household level upgrades, building level interventions to improve communal areas, and community level interventions done in consultation with communities and in partnership with the municipality to improve shared spaces and services for the whole neighborhood. The shelter project was part of a wider program focused on Shelter, Protection, and Women’s Economic Empowerment.

* Source: UNHCR, Syria Regional Refugee Response Operational Portal
** Source: Turkey: Basic Needs Sector Dashboard (April 2020)



- Mar 2011:** Eruption of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria).
- Jan 2012:** Influx of refugees due to new violence in Syria.
- 1** **May-Sep 2017:** Needs assessment.
- 2** **Oct 2017:** Shelter/WASH Project started.
- 3** **Apr 2018:** Changed to Cash-for-Shelter modality.
- 4** **Nov 2018:** Rise in inflation changed the price of materials.
- 5** **Sep-Dec 2019:** A joint and integrated communal upgrade process established.
- 11 Mar 2020:** WHO declared the novel COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic.



The project was implemented predominantly in urban areas, in Gaziantep, Kilis and Sanliurfa Provinces.

CONTEXT

Turkey hosts the highest number of refugees in the world in absolute numbers, including over 3.6 million registered Syrian refugees – with Gaziantep, Kilis, and Sanliurfa being the provinces hosting the most. While Turkey has had formal mechanisms to support Syrian refugees – such as the Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) – refugees are increasingly politicized which creates significant protection risks.

The displacement of refugees and their arrival in Turkey started in 2011 and has continued to the present day. Refugees are mainly from Northern Syria; Aleppo, Afrin and Idlib and Kurdish territories predominantly from urban areas. Arriving in the Southern provinces of Gaziantep, Kilis and Sanliurfa, refugees firstly stayed in camps and border district level settlements. In 2014 when the number of refugees started to reach into the millions, the Turkish government allowed the refugee population to move in the provinces into rental houses, with the rental costs covered by refugee families themselves.

By 2017, the ESSN support was activated in Turkey and the government also facilitated the process for refugees to move into other cities from where they first registered. However the housing capacity was not enough to host the increased population, and the rental costs increased significantly. From 2011-2016, rental housing being occupied by refugees was often shared by a minimum of 2-3 families. As conditions of the housing stock slowly improved and rent costs stabilized, over 90% of families started to live as one household in each house/apartment.



The project worked across three scales, with interventions at the household, building, and community levels.

PROJECT APPROACH

The project aimed to support communities affected by conflict and displacement to become self-reliant, empowered and able to achieve basic needs and rights. This was done by collaborating with civil society, women's movements and the Turkish authorities, and through utilizing community and gender-based approaches to achieve long-term sustainable solutions, lasting change and social cohesion.

The project supported conflict-affected refugees inside Turkey (Syrian and other), returnees, internally displaced populations (IDPs) and host communities – with a focus on vulnerable women, girls and boys.

The organization worked in three provinces of the Southeast Region, Gaziantep, Sanliurfa and Kilis, where the majority of refugees are hosted. The organization applies a 'One Neighborhood Approach' model. This approach is an integrated sectoral approach based in a specific geographic area, starting with the identification of a neighborhood with high levels of vulnerable refugees and host community members.

The shelter intervention was part of a wider holistic program which works at three different scales:

- **Household level interventions** focused on individual household upgrades;
- **Building level interventions** upgraded shared spaces between households; and
- **Community level interventions** upgraded shared spaces or services available to the whole neighborhood.

Assessments showed that nearly half (49%) of the shelters/apartments were recorded as 'requiring upgrading' and could be repaired. The majority of the upgrade needs were found to be replacing or installing doors (82%), upgrading the toilet (68%) and upgrading or installing a bathroom (65%). The top protection issues raised were having no rental agreement (66%), followed by not having enough privacy at home (39%). The top three shelter concerns of women and girls were the need for lockable doors for toilet/bathroom (80%), doors and locks for sleeping areas (76%) and kitchen improvements including taps, tiling and counter tops to improve hygiene and reduce household chores/labor (70%).

This project started with a predominantly contractor-led approach in 2017. Following some challenges with delays in completion and managing the relationships between contractors, laborers and households, the team decided to pilot a purely household-led approach using Cash-for-Shelter. Cash transfers were made through the Post Office and local vendors were used to supply items. Awareness sessions were run for all participants on housing, land and property (HLP) issues, information, education and communication (IEC) materials on tenants' rights were distributed and hotline numbers shared.

TARGETING

To identify targeted neighborhoods, a neighborhood assessment was carried out which consulted stakeholders including tenants, landlords, local authorities, Mukhtars (heads of villages or neighborhoods who are selected through local elections) as well as local and international NGOs.

Household selection prioritized families living in sub-standard housing that also had a high dependency ratio (e.g. children, older persons, or adults who cannot work); had a family member who was disabled, chronically ill, or otherwise incapacitated; female-headed households; and families with a gender-based violence (GBV) survivor.

To avoid increasing social tensions, the shelter project aimed to support vulnerable Turkish host community members as well as refugees. In addition to Syrian refugees, the organization also prioritized refugees from other countries, including Iraq and Afghanistan.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

HOUSEHOLD LEVEL INTERVENTIONS

- Following assessment and approval for assistance, the shelter team provided a basic level of training on “DIY - Do It Yourself” activities using DIY materials, explaining the simple repairs, that households could do themselves.
- MoUs were signed between the organization, the tenant and the landlord outlining that during the 12 months following the completion of the rehabilitation works, the tenant must not be evicted and the monthly rent should not be increased.
- For more comprehensive repairs the team created a BoQ and cost estimate for the household, which calculated the amount of the cash payment.

- The team compiled a list of suitable vendors in the area who stocked the list of items as well as tested local skilled laborers and shared this list with the households.
- For other more heavy or technical repairs (accounting for about 10% of the upgrades) such as plumbing, households were linked to technical providers in the neighborhood through skilled labor lists and recommendations from other households via a Whatsapp Group.
- Women in the households were prioritized to be the one to receive the cash where it was possible and safe to do so.
- The organization transferred 75% of the cost estimate amount to the household and connected them with local skilled laborers, who were mainly Syrians.
- The team’s engineers scheduled a follow-up visit after two weeks to confirm that the rehabilitation had been done according to standards.
- Once completion and the approved quality check was done, the organization transferred the remaining 25% of the cash to the household.
- If the household failed to complete the upgrades, the remaining funds (25%) were not transferred. In case of a change in prices of materials leading to an increase in cost from the original estimation, the organization supported the household with the additional cost.



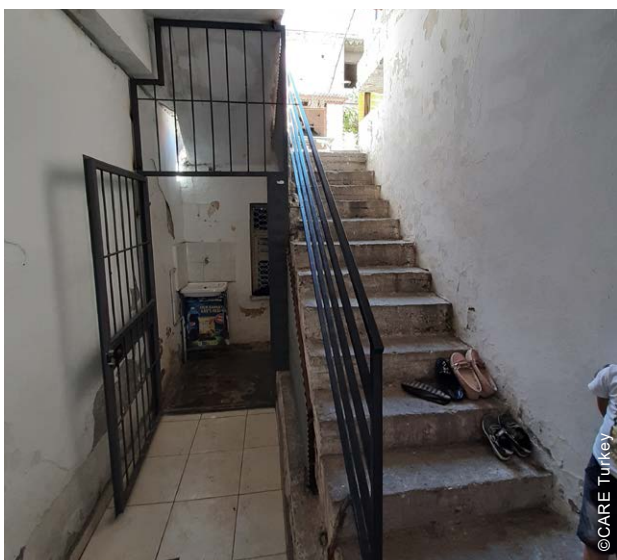
Before and after: Installing doors to improve protection, security and weather-proofing was a priority intervention.



Before and after: Many upgrades included improving kitchen areas to improve sanitation and usability.

BUILDING LEVEL INTERVENTIONS

- During the initial assessment the shelter team also identified needs in the apartment buildings in which household interventions would take place. Upgrades to the common areas were prioritized (entrances, stairways, gates) and spaces between buildings (alleyways, sidewalks, and public gathering spaces).
- The team surveyed each building using a standard checklist, which included assessing protective measures against GBV risk such as secured entrances, lighting in common areas, and exterior lighting.
- Through meetings and social worker visits, residents then prioritized which upgrades were most important.
- Upgrades and rehabilitation in common areas included access to utilities (such as safe connections to the electric grid and wiring), insulation from rain and wind, and protection-related items such as lockable entrance doors and lighting of communal areas.
- Improvements were made based on input from and considerations for women’s and children’s well-being.
- A sub-contractor model was used for these upgrades.



Before and after: Building level interventions included improving the safety of shared staircases.



Before and after: Community level interventions included improving parks and recreation areas. Collaboration with local authorities led to the authorities co-funding projects in some cases.

COMMUNITY LEVEL INTERVENTIONS

- In the neighborhoods where the upgrades were planned the team organized focus group discussions with residents and stakeholders to seek input on ideas and prioritization of community level upgrades.
- Continuous discussions were also held with local authorities.
- Some examples of interventions included improving street lights (for safety), garbage bins and collection areas, free public laundromats, renovation of benches, and improving recreational parks, playgrounds, and other spaces for young people and women to be able to safely gather.

GENDER AND PROTECTION MAINSTREAMING

The needs of women and girls were prioritized throughout the project. Assessment teams always included female field staff to ensure access to talk to women on their own. Women could prioritize the upgrades they felt were most important, with a focus on dignity, privacy, safety and family hygiene. These priorities were tracked throughout the shelter project by the program quality team to ensure they featured on the BoQ and in the final inspection. The names of women in the household were always prioritized as being the recipients of the cash grant while making sure this did not cause conflicts within the family.

MAIN CHALLENGES

An unstable economic and political context within the country meant that work was sometimes delayed. Building in flexibility to the workplan to allow for days where it may not be possible to work in the field or contractor delays was necessary.

Tensions between host and refugee communities caused by different issues related to access to resources, was challenging especially during field visits where the demands from host communities increased and local residents were denied access to specific neighborhoods. As a result, the program was extended to also cover upgrades for host communities.

Inconsistency between organizations. Different organizations implementing shelter support provided different levels of support which caused tensions.

Unstable market prices and inflation. Monitoring the market and adjusting the average BoQ expectations from year to year allowed for some movements in cost of materials. The team maintained an overview of the changes in the market prices and made the necessary increases in the BoQs and cash grants.

Carrying out critical field activities during COVID-19 restrictions was not possible. Alternative remote ways of working were developed to ensure project continuation such as remote assessments via WhatsApp video calls, and sending photos showing progress of the works.

The demand for rehabilitation in neighborhoods increased as the project gained more and more visibility. Direct implementation through contractors was costly and slow. Switching to a cash approach meant that more households were met with support without increasing the budget, as savings were made by reducing the use of contractors.

There was limited access to Turkish households. It was sometimes hard to get permission to do assessments as this was seen as sensitive. This was overcome by advocating to the authorities that staff were only assessing the houses not the people.

OUTCOMES AND WIDER IMPACTS

Between 94-100% of families interviewed were satisfied with the Cash-for-Shelter approach. According to monitoring, they appreciated the freedom of the unconditional second tranche, and also found it an interesting new way of working with NGOs. The cash approach promoted greater ownership over rehabilitation and involvement of households.

Through the cash approach, households were directly linked to the local market, using local vendors and services, which supported the local economy. This in turn also encouraged more social integration and an increase in self-confidence – especially for refugees. Households also received support from their relatives, neighbors and skilled labor in the neighborhood.

94% of households did not experience any repercussions with landlords. Any challenges they did have were associated with COVID-19 lockdowns limiting their access to markets and vendors. Houses were reported to be healthier which was especially important for COVID-19 as sanitation areas were improved.

The cash for shelter activities increased the interest of other humanitarian organizations and donors in shelter/WASH programming in southeast Turkey.



© Amelia Rule

Switching the modality of household level upgrades from implementing through contractors to a cash-based approach proved to be more cost effective and to have multiple other benefits.

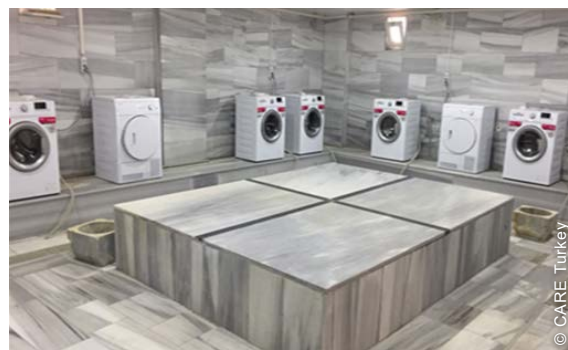
STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS

- ✓ **Scale and timeliness.** The Cash-for-Shelter programming was successful in reaching quality and speed in rehabilitations.
- ✓ **Capacity building.** The project focused on developing the practical skills of the households through DIY methods which directly contributed to the Cash-for-Shelter approach being more impactful.
- ✓ **Local markets strengthened.** The cash approach linked households to local vendors who were pre-vetted – this also allowed second-hand items to be purchased and re-used where safe to do so, reducing the environmental impact of the project.
- ✓ **Gender mainstreaming.** The needs and priorities of women and girls were prioritized throughout the project and the project approach and tools were adapted accordingly. Systems such as having a strong internal M&E mechanism supported this through verification that the inputs of women and girls were included in the selected upgrade interventions and in BoQs.
- ✓ **Collaboration with local authorities.** The organization had a good relationship with municipalities and other public institutions. Specifically, the community level projects encouraged a collaboration with the local authorities, namely the mayor's office, resulting in the infrastructure projects being co-funded by the town hall in some cases.
- ✓ **Security of tenure.** Through MoUs signed with landlords the project improved household's security of tenure. The project also contributed to advocacy on tenancy rights and increased awareness within the community and with government institutions in order to highlight refugee rights.

WEAKNESSES

- × **Capacity to meet need.** The organization was stretched to meet the increasing demand from the community for rehabilitation needs.
- × **Security of tenure.** It was not always possible to make a longer-term agreement with landlords and rental increases continued in some cases after the rehabilitation. Yet, minimal evictions occurred, and in these cases the team supported these families to find new accommodation. HLP issues could be improved by better engaging the municipality or local leaders.
- × **Modality of rehabilitation delivery.** Although the modality shifted to cash support for the household rehabilitations, contractor-led work continued for the communal projects, with some delays, higher costs, and no local labor or vendors used. The program therefore started to pilot the communal rehabilitation activities through Cash-for-Shelter using the same process as household upgrades.
- × **Host community support.** Only 7% of the project participants were from the host community as there were barriers to accessing Turkish households linked to government approvals.



Community level interventions – such as the provision of laundry facilities – were prioritized by community members and other stakeholders.

LESSONS LEARNED

- **Supporting households to take a DIY approach** where possible increases the skills of households and can also increase self-confidence. The cash approach resulted in households being able to make savings and spend money on other priority needs. In this project the team specifically focused on supporting female headed households.
- **Community level interventions.** Working in collaboration with local authorities, for example in this case collaborating on community level interventions, can build stronger relationships, demonstrate the wider benefits of interventions for host communities, and lead to potential co-funding. Phase 3 of the project plans to build on the community infrastructure work, focusing on making the project identification process more community led using participatory planning workshops with coordination at a municipal level. The project hopes to empower local neighborhoods to advocate for appropriate, locally rooted projects.
- **Gender mainstreaming needs to take place at all scales of interventions.** In this case for example the focus on gender inclusion and reducing protection risks was integrated into the household, building and community level interventions.