



**GROUND TRUTH  
SOLUTIONS**

MIXED MIGRATION PLATFORM

**REFUGEE, ASYLUM-SEEKER AND  
MIGRANT PERCEPTIONS**

IZMIR / TURKEY

– SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS –

22 AUGUST 2017

**MIMP** | MIXED  
MIGRATION  
PLATFORM

# INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the findings of four focus group discussions conducted with a total of 36 refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants in Izmir, from Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Eritrea, Nigeria, and Ethiopia. All focus group discussions took place on 26 July 2017. Two discussions were held with male participants, one with

female participants, and one with a mixed group.

The ages ranged from 20 to 43. The discussion topics were developed by Ground Truth Solutions to delve deeper into the issues that surfaced in surveys conducted in Istanbul, Kilis, and Gaziantep in April and May 2017 and in Izmir in July 2017.<sup>1</sup>



## READING THIS REPORT

This report presents the main findings from the focus group discussions with main conclusions drawn from each discussion topic. Where relevant, we also include bar charts for questions from the survey conducted in Izmir in July 2017 with responses quantified on a Likert scale from 1 to 5. The charts show the percentage of respondents who selected each answer option in the survey, with colours ranging from dark red for negative answers to dark green for positive ones. The mean or average score is also shown on a scale of 1 to 5.

This report covers eight broad themes – access to information and awareness of services and support, priority needs, employment, housing, fairness of support, awareness and fairness of cash transfer programmes, awareness of legal options, and social support and integration. More background and information about the methodology can be found at the end of the report.



## INFORMATION / AWARENESS OF SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Participants across all groups do not feel well informed about the kind of services and support available to them. Afghan participants in particular said there is no support available for people from their country. Most participants said they currently get information through other refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants or through social media, including Facebook, while some mentioned receiving information through leaflets or posters. Some people expressed scepticism about the reliability of information passed on through social media. Several participants said they would prefer to receive

information face-to-face or via social media in their own language. This partially supports findings from our quantitative survey conducted in Izmir, which revealed that a quarter of the 521 refugees interviewed prefer to receive information on available support through social media.<sup>2</sup> Male participants from Africa - including Somalia, Eritrea, Nigeria and Ethiopia – suggested that the Turkish government or aid agencies establish a dedicated office to share information about issues that other refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants are facing. When discussing ways to communicate information to affected

<sup>1</sup>For all findings from Ground Truth's work under the Mixed Migration Platform, see <http://groundtruthsolutions.org/our-work/by-project/mixed-migration-platform/>

<sup>2</sup>Ground Truth Solutions and Mixed Migration Platform, "Refugee, Asylum-Seeker and Migrant Perceptions in Izmir, Turkey" (Ground Truth Solutions, August 2017).



people, a common theme is that information should ideally come from official sources, offered in the native languages, and preferably delivered face-to-face so as not to exclude those who are illiterate.

Participants would like more information about healthcare, work permits, education, their rights and obligations

as refugees, cash assistance, and residency. Specific issues raised by Syrian women include how to replace lost residence cards, as well as the legal procedures for obtaining or transferring temporary residence cards from one province to another. They also want to know more about how aid is distributed and the criteria for eligibility.



## PRIORITY NEEDS

Education, employment, and healthcare are identified as needs shared by almost all participants. These needs were among the top priorities revealed in the quantitative round of data collection in Izmir as outlined in Figure 1. In addition to these core needs, Afghan participants said a priority for them is obtaining Turkish citizenship or a *kimlik*, a Turkish identification card. Moreover, they would like increased communication between refugees and aid agencies to solve problems like housing. They also spoke of the desire for cultural programmes, food, free education for children, and language courses. Male participants from the African countries represented in this sample cited learning Turkish and shelter as their most basic needs, in addition to health insurance, work, and education. Syrian men mentioned the need for several basic items such as diapers, baby formula, blankets, stoves, and food items. They also said they need a health clinic that is more accessible to Syrians residing in Bornova, as the current hospitals are too far and do not provide interpreters for those who do not speak Turkish. Syrian women said that they needed financial support in order to pay rent, as well as help in finding suitable jobs, particularly for those with university degrees.

Afghan participants stressed that they are coping without their basic needs being covered by getting help from relatives, as well as attempting to solve the issues on their own. Male respondents from the African countries listed prior said that many refugees rely on food rations distributed by local mosques. They feel it can be difficult to find a job without speaking Turkish, although some worked as porters or cleaners to pay for their accommodation. Many know of refugees who sleep in parks if they cannot find housing. Participants from African countries also stressed that a lot of money is required to access healthcare, because health insurance does not cover them.

### What are your most important unmet needs?<sup>3</sup>

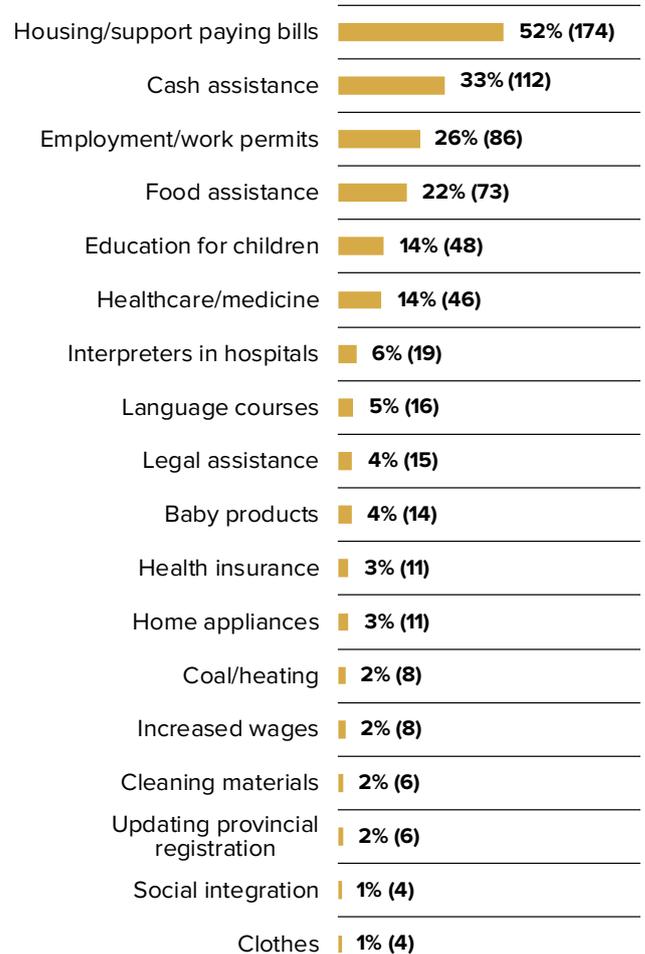


Figure 1: Priority needs

The chart shows the percentage and frequency of respondents indicating a certain answer to this open-ended question. Percentages do not total 100% because respondents had the option to provide multiple answers.

<sup>3</sup> This question was asked to 337 of the 521 respondents of the quantitative survey, as these individuals indicated that the services and support they receive in Turkey do not meet their most important needs. For more information see, Ground Truth Solutions and Mixed Migration Platform, "Refugee, Asylum-Seeker and Migrant Perceptions in Izmir, Turkey" (Ground Truth Solutions, August 2017), 11.



Syrian men also described difficulties with navigating the health system in Turkey, saying that those who cannot afford to hire an interpreter to come along with them resort to taking painkillers instead of visiting a doctor. Women from Syria also pointed out that some hospitals refuse

to treat refugees if they hold residence cards issued by another province. They also spoke of having to wait for hours at immigration centres to see an official about the residence cards, but often leaving without the required information.



## EMPLOYMENT

Most refugees arrive in Turkey without saving or assets, leaving already vulnerable people unable to improve their standard of living or deal with shocks.<sup>4</sup> Employment, considered a priority by almost all participants, is difficult to find. For most, the formal labour market remains largely off-limits, with Turkey having issued less than 20,000 work permits, corresponding to an estimated 1% of the working-age refugee population.<sup>5</sup>

Participants of the focus group shared this concern about employment. In the mixed Afghan group, for example, several said they had a job but it was unsatisfactory, while several others were unable to find work. Male participants from the African countries represented in the sample stressed that language barriers make it difficult to find employment, with one believing that Turkish people will not hire him because he is black and they assume he will steal from them. Syrian men explained that in order for them to find legal employment; they have to obtain costly official papers, and that Turkish sponsors who help issue work permits for Syrians deduct money from their wages, deterring some from seeking employment.

Female participants from Syria felt there were fewer job opportunities for women, and that the men they know with university degrees work in construction and sewing workshops because there is little else available. They also said that some children are unable to continue their education because they have to work to support their families. A few of the women participating in the discussions had found employment, including low-paying jobs that can be performed at home, such as hand embroidery. Other rely on illegal means, with one explaining that she was a nurse in Syria and now works at a health centre without a work permit.

It is clear from existing research and confirmed by the findings of the focus group discussions, as well as results from the quantitative survey (Figure 2), that most refugees in Turkey end up working in the informal sector.

### What type of employment are people from your home country able to find?<sup>6</sup>



Figure 2: Employment

When asked what aid agencies or authorities could do to help people find decent jobs, participants had several suggestions. Afghans said they would like an official source or an aid agency to help refugees find jobs in various sectors, as well as speaking in favour of greater collaboration between aid agencies and the Turkish government.

Male participants from the African countries represented in this sample said it would be helpful to have better legal protection and decent jobs to avoid exploitation of refugees. They also said that agencies and authorities could help refugees gain the necessary qualifications for employment, such as technical education or job training. Male participants from Syria suggested establishing a relief office that would pay for issuing work permits, as well as registering refugees with employment agencies. Female participants from Syria said job opportunities could be created through development projects in Izmir. They also said that agencies or authorities could ensure the rights of workers by facilitating work permit procedures.

To reduce the risk of children dropping out of school in order to work, Syrian women asked that financial support be provided to those who attend school.

<sup>4</sup> The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2017-2018: Turkey*, (UNHCR & UNDP, 2017), 29.

<sup>5</sup> The Economist, *Turkey is taking care of refugees, but failing to integrate them*, (The Economist, June 2017).

<sup>6</sup> This question was asked of 237 of the 521 respondents of the quantitative survey, as those individuals indicated that people from their home country are able to gain employment. For more information see, Ground Truth Solutions and Mixed Migration Platform, *Refugee, Asylum-Seeker and Migrant Perceptions in Izmir, Turkey*, (Ground Truth Solutions, August 2017), 26.





# HOUSING

Participants spoke of the difficulty of finding housing, as well as the high prices of renting private accommodations. Only 41% of the respondents involved in the survey conducted in July 2017 feel that people from their home country are able to find a place to live in Izmir, as shown in Figure 3.

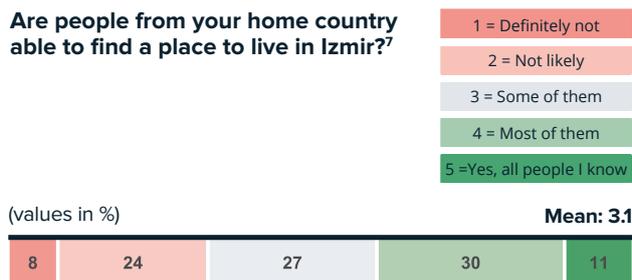


Figure 3: Housing

While Afghan participants mostly spoke about the difficulty of finding housing, some also mentioned that the task was made easier with money and help from relatives or Turkish friends.

Male participants from the African countries represented and men and women from Syria raised concerns about finding housing due to their status of being refugees. Many complained that Turkish people are unwilling to rent their houses to refugees, in part because they think they will vandalise their homes or fail to pay rent, particularly when there are families with several children. They said that locals who do rent to refugees often charge extortionate prices. Syrian men said that as a result they rent very expensive accommodation that is nearly uninhabitable – extremely hot in the summer and very cold and uninsulated in the winter. Syrian women echoed this sentiment, describing renting in underserved areas as the only affordable option. They also said that rent consumes the largest portion of their income, taking priority over food. They added that landlords want to

avoid paying taxes, so refugees are not given formal rent contracts and rent is agreed upon orally. This feedback supports information gathered from the quantitative round of data collection, which identifies the high cost of living in Turkey, discriminative landlords, and an overall lack of suitable housing as common obstacles faced by refugees when looking for shelter (Figure 4).

**Why are people from your home country not able to find a place to live in Izmir?<sup>8</sup>**

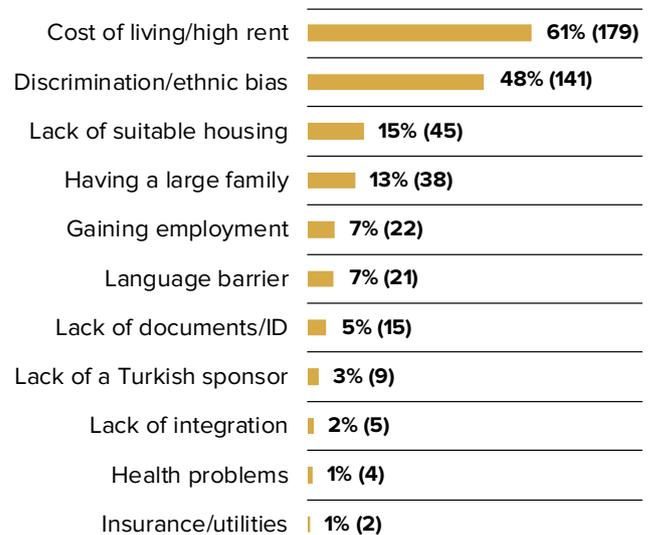


Figure 4: Obstacles to finding accommodation

The chart shows the percentage and frequency of respondents indicating a certain answer to this open-ended question. Percentages do not total 100% because respondents had the option to provide multiple answers.

Participants suggested establishing housing projects for refugees where they cannot be extorted and can pay reasonable prices for decent housing. An alternate suggestion was to create an organisation that would coordinate and secure rental homes for refugees at fair prices. Several participants also said that financial assistance for rent payments would be very helpful.

<sup>7</sup> Ground Truth Solutions and Mixed Migration Platform, "Refugee, Asylum-Seeker and Migrant Perceptions in Izmir, Turkey" (Ground Truth Solutions, August 2017), 23.

<sup>8</sup> This question was asked of 300 of the 521 respondents of the quantitative survey, as these individuals indicated that people from their home country struggle or are unable to find accommodation in Izmir. For more information see, Ground Truth Solutions and Mixed Migration Platform, "Refugee, Asylum-Seeker and Migrant Perceptions in Izmir, Turkey" (Ground Truth Solutions, August 2017), 24.





## FAIRNESS OF ASSISTANCE

Many participants expressed concerns that some agencies engage in favouritism, and that those who have relatives or friends working at some organisations benefit over others. All participants, including some from Syria, feel that Syrians have more advantages than refugees from other countries. Afghans said it is easier for Syrians to obtain a *kimlik*, with one participant explaining, “I don’t think we have any support compared to other nationalities in Turkey”. Male participants from the African countries represented believe that Syrians are also given more services, particularly regarding education. Opinions among Syrian men were somewhat split: some said they do not know enough about other nationalities to know whether it is easier or more difficult for them, while others said they believe Syrians have more advantages than others. Syrian women also said they do not know much about people from other countries but nevertheless believe that Syrians have more advantages. To improve the situation participants suggested that aid agencies and authorities try to better understand and improve the situation for refugees, as they all face similar problems.

When asked whether they believe gender plays a role in being able to meet one’s needs, participants offered mixed responses. Most Afghan participants and African men said they believe men have it easier than women, with one male participant from Afghanistan saying, “Men have more rights than women in our country and it’s the same here”. Both men and women from Afghanistan said that it is easier for men to find employment as they are able to go everywhere by themselves. A female Afghan participant suggested that agencies should create programmes to enable women to work from home, as this is more typical in their culture than women working outside of the home. Among the group of African men, one said there is no difference, one said that women have it easier because agencies consider them vulnerable and offer them more assistance, while the rest of the group argued that it is easier for men to cover their needs because of physical attributes and societal norms. Participants from Syria said there is no difference, with women pointing out that aid is distributed to families so one gender does not have greater access.



## AWARENESS AND FAIRNESS OF CASH ASSISTANCE

Only participants from Syria reported receiving cash support from aid agencies or the government. This supports findings from the quantitative survey which showed Syrians largely feel more informed about cash programmes than the other nationality groupings (Figure 5). Syrian men said they received cash support from the Turkish Red Crescent. Among Syrian women, four out of ten received cash cards while the other six did not, because their families did not meet the eligibility criteria. All Syrian participants said receiving cash support enabled them to better meet their needs; men said they use the card to buy baby milk and diapers and meet their household needs on days when they do not work, and both men and women said it helps them pay their rent.

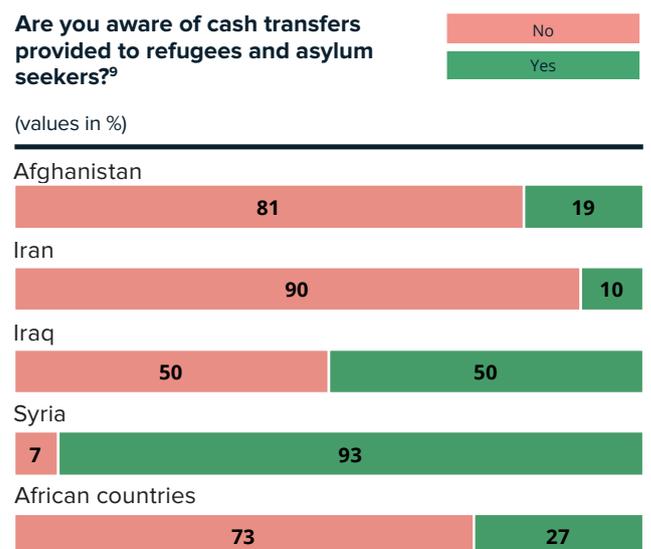


Figure 5: Awareness of cash transfers

<sup>9</sup> Ground Truth Solutions and Mixed Migration Platform, “Refugee, Asylum-Seeker and Migrant Perceptions in Izmir, Turkey” (Ground Truth Solutions, August 2017), 13.



Despite most Syrian participants receiving cash support, both men and women do not think cash support is provided fairly. Syrian participants explained that cash cards are distributed to families of more than four members, which they feel is unfair as smaller families are still in need and have to pay rent and bills, such as water and electricity. Male participants also said they know of families who met the eligibility criteria but did not receive a cash card. Female participants said they believe that refugees who live in homes that are in a good condition are excluded from cash support, as well as those who

have certain household items, even if they are old or borrowed. Participants suggested that cash cards and the amount of cash support be distributed based on the size of the family, granting more money to larger families, but that smaller families be included as well.

Afghan and African participants said they never received cash support. Participants from Afghanistan pointed out that they do not know of any agencies providing cash support to Afghans, although they had heard of it being given to Syrians.



## AWARENESS OF LEGAL OPTIONS

Almost all participants said they do not understand their options as regards to staying in Turkey or applying for resettlement in another country, which supports findings from the quantitative round of data collection (Figure 6). The only information male participants from Syria have about resettlement is from informal conversations, not from official sources. Afghan participants do not know their options, but most of them said they would want to stay in Turkey if they were to receive the same support as people from other countries. Female participants said they have heard about resettlement options to certain countries, such as Canada, but do not know the requirements. Several Syrian participants had questions about their temporary protection cards, as they had heard that the cards expire if and when the war in Syria ends. They wanted to know what will happen if the war continues and whether they will be able to stay in Turkey with the temporary protection status, if it will become permanent, or if other actions will need to be taken. In general, most participants do not fully understand their current temporary or international protection status.

Participants from the African countries represented want more information about their status, what protection they need, and how they can get it. Male participants from Syria said they would like information about whether they will be granted Turkish citizenship, as well as the validity and expiration of their temporary protection card. Female participants from Syria want to know more about the rights of refugees and whether they will be deported. Participants from the African countries represented said they currently do not receive any information, while Syrians said their main sources are through informal conversations, Facebook, and news sites. They said they would like to see official pages or the creation of special offices to provide information. Afghans were unwilling to answer questions about their status, fearing it will cause difficulties for their future in Turkey.



Figure 6: Information about settlement and further movement

<sup>10</sup> Ground Truth Solutions and Mixed Migration Platform, "Refugee, Asylum-Seeker and Migrant Perceptions in Izmir, Turkey" (Ground Truth Solutions, August 2017), 16.





# SOCIAL SUPPORT AND INTEGRATION

Responses were mixed when asked whether they feel welcomed by Turkish citizens. Apart from one person, Afghan participants said they do not feel welcomed. On the other hand, participants from the African countries represented have had both negative and positive experiences, some recounting instances where Turkish people have been friendly and made them feel comfortable, while others told of being excluded or 'feeling foreign' because they did not speak Turkish. Responses were also split among Syrians, with some telling of positive encounters with their Turkish neighbours, and others saying they feel Turks are waiting for refugees to make a mistake to have a reason to dislike them. They also said they feel Turks regard the actions of some refugees as representative of all refugees, and that they look down on Syrians.

Most participants feel the way Turks feel about refugees has worsened in recent years, confirming trends documented in existing research and the media. There is a general sense among the participants that locals resent refugees for taking their jobs, their money, and their food. Afghans said they would welcome having social workers who understand and support both refugees and locals. They also suggested strengthening the education about refugees to help Turkish children and others to better understand their situation and their needs.

Syrian men pointed to several reasons why they believe Turks feel antagonistic toward Syrians, including the sense that Turks are jealous of Syrians because they are good workers and are willing to work for a lower wage than locals, often outnumbering them in certain workplaces or taking away jobs. They also said Turks stereotype Syrians as being noisy. There is also resentment among the local populace, they feel, as Syrians increasingly become naturalised. Syrian women said they believe that Turkish people in Izmir dislike refugees because they are opposed to the ruling party in Turkey that is sympathetic to refugees. The reasons cited by the focus group participants for feeling unwelcome in Turkey align closely with what was revealed in the quantitative data collection (Figure 7).

## Why do you not feel welcomed by Turkish people in your neighbourhood?<sup>11</sup>

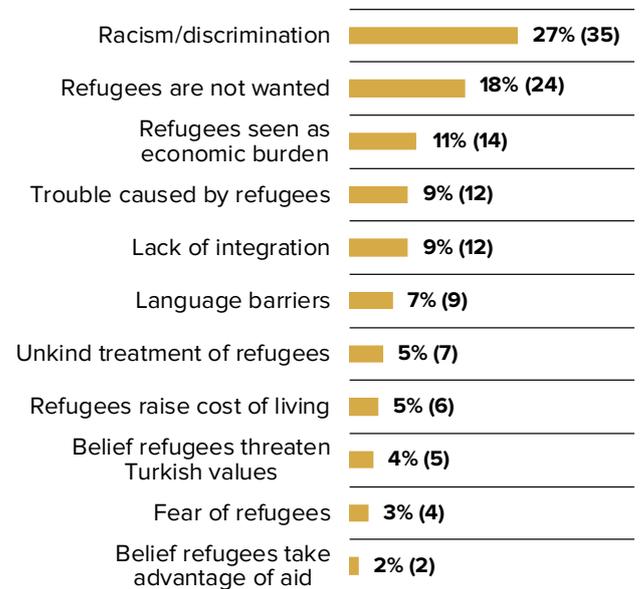


Figure 7: Relationship with host community

The chart shows the percentage and frequency of respondents indicating a certain answer to this open-ended question. Percentages do not total 100% because respondents had the option to provide multiple answers.

Participants had several suggestions to help refugees feel more integrated in Turkey. Afghans hope for the establishment of an aid agency for refugees as well as cultural programmes for people of different nationalities. African men said that media and social media could be used to inform Turkish people that refugees are good people, also saying they believe the problems will be solved as time passes. Syrian men suggested other refugees should learn Turkish. Syrian women also advocated for more Turkish lessons to help with integration, as well as the provision of seminars and awareness-raising sessions for refugees and locals about the importance of acceptance.

<sup>11</sup>This question was asked to 144 of the 521 respondents of the quantitative survey, as these individuals indicated that they do not feel welcomed by the Turkish people in their neighbourhood. For more information see, Ground Truth Solutions and Mixed Migration Platform, "Refugee, Asylum-Seeker and Migrant Perceptions in Izmir, Turkey" (Ground Truth Solutions, August 2017), 21.





## OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

The discussions allow for the identification of the following recommendations for aid agencies and authorities working with refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants in Turkey:

- ✓ Ensure better access to information, particularly regarding education, employment, and healthcare;
- ✓ Strengthen communication on the eligibility criteria for different types of aid, including cash-based support;
- ✓ Improve access to healthcare facilities, ideally with translators present;
- ✓ Provide access to legal counsel to improve understanding of legal status and options for staying in Turkey or applying for resettlement;
- ✓ Aid in the search for and obtainment of adequate housing that meets proper living standards;
- ✓ Offer affordable and accessible opportunities for refugees to learn Turkish;
- ✓ Try to address the real or perceived discrepancy in aid distribution between Syrians and other nationalities;
- ✓ Encourage dialogue and interaction between refugees and locals to promote harmony between communities.

## NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

### Background

Ground Truth Solutions is one of seven partners that jointly provide analytical services as part of the [Mixed Migration Platform \(MMP\)](#). The other partners are [ACAPS](#), [Danish Refugee Council](#), [Internews](#), [INTERSOS](#), [REACH](#), and [Translators Without Borders](#). The goal of MMP, which was launched in October 2016, is to provide information related to mixed migration for policy, programming, and advocacy work, as well as to provide information to people on the move in the Middle East and Europe. Ground Truth Solutions' contribution to the platform is the collection and analysis of feedback on the perceptions of people in different stages of displacement – in the borderlands, transit countries, and countries of final destination.

### Instruments used in focus groups and surveys

Ground Truth Solutions designed these focus group discussions to gather feedback from refugees, asylum-seekers, and migrants about the provision of humanitarian assistance in Izmir. The aim is to help guide NGOs and authorities in creating more effective and responsive aid programmes. Focus group discussions were held to delve deeper into some of the issues that surfaced in surveys conducted in Istanbul, Kilis and Gaziantep in April-May 2017 and in Izmir in July 2017.

### Sample size

A total of 36 people (15 women and 21 men) participated in the focus group discussions.

### Sampling methodology

The Afghan group was mixed gender, with three male and five female participants. The all-male African group was composed of three Eritreans, two Ethiopians, two Somalis, one Sudanese, and one Nigerian. Two focus group discussions were held with Syrians; one male and one female group. The ages of participants ranged from 20 to 47.

### Language of the surveys

The focus group discussions were conducted in Arabic for Syrians and Iraqis, and in English for the respondents from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan and Nigeria.

### Data collection

Focus group discussions were conducted until all issues had been discussed. There was no need to have uniform agreement on any one topic, and the enumerators encouraged each participant to voice their own thoughts. Data was collected on 26 July 2017 by H.D. Statistics and More e.U., an independent data collection company contracted by Ground Truth Solutions. The discussions were held in hotel meeting rooms.

**For more information about Ground Truth Solutions surveys in Turkey, please contact Elias Sagmeister (Programme Manager – [elias@groundtruthsolutions.org](mailto:elias@groundtruthsolutions.org)) or Andrew Hassan (Programme Analyst – [andrew@groundtruthsolutions.org](mailto:andrew@groundtruthsolutions.org)).**



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