

Dialogue for Social Cohesion

Turkish and Syrian youth engage community leaders to envision a shared future

The 'new' Gaziantep and Sanliurfa

In recent years daily life in Gaziantep and Sanliurfa has been transformed. The arrival of more than 350,000 Syrian refugees to Gaziantep, and 460,000 to Sanliurfa, has led to major changes in the two cities. Gaziantep and Sanliurfa look, sound and feel very different than they did a decade ago.

Rapid changes bring both opportunities and challenges. While the influx of new residents has spurred strong economic growth and new business activity, it has also led to a rising cost of living and put pressure on the availability of housing. And despite historical and cultural ties between Turkish and Syrian communities, the integration of nearly a million newcomers is made more complex by a language barrier and uncertainty over how long Syrian refugees will need – or want – to remain in Turkey.

Over the past year there have been signs of an intensification of negative stereotyping and mutual distancing between the Turkish host population and Syrian refugees in Gaziantep and Sanliurfa. Among Turkish residents in particular, the perception that the two communities have culturally little in common is on the rise. More opportunities for young Turkish and Syrian men and women to meet, interact, and get to know one another are acutely needed to counter these negative tendencies and to foster social cohesion in the two cities.

Why a Dialogue?

The aim of the Dialogue for Social Cohesion is to foster closer relations between Turkish and Syrian residents in Gaziantep and Sanliurfa by promoting listening, appreciation and respect as the basis for jointly imagining a shared, positive future. Through the Dialogue process, young and

The Education Programme for Syrian Refugees and Host Communities (BILSY)

Implemented by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of Germany's Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), BILSY aims to help Syrian refugees and members of the host communities in seven provinces of Turkey to live together in a spirit of neighbourly trust.

BILSY works closely with motivated young women and men – both Turkish and Syrian – to organise intercultural activities for children and youth of both nationalities. The project helps to ensure that Syrian and Turkish children and youth learn how to participate in local community life and actively engage in shaping civic processes.

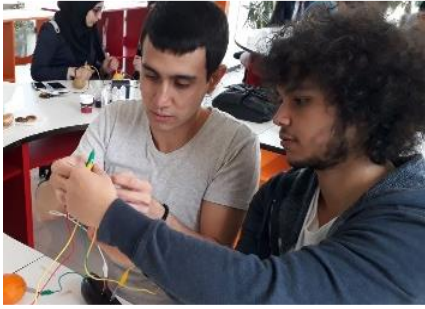
older Syrian and Turkish leaders, both female and male, jointly explore what they value about the 'new' Gaziantep and Sanliurfa; envision how the cities should evolve in the coming years to be peaceful, fulfilling places for all their inhabitants to live; and consider how they could personally contribute to this. A major objective of the Dialogue is to put young people – and young women in particular – at the heart of discussions about community life.

The Dialogue fosters participants' self-confidence and sense of agency, encourages them to form new partnerships on the basis of common interests, and inspires them to help build the kind of future they would like to be part of. In short, it focuses on **the best of what is**; opens up spaces for imagining **what can be**; and, by doing this, helps shape **what will be**.

The Dialogue for Social Cohesion is being organised by the Education Programme for Syrian Refugees and Host Communities (see box), with additional support from the Sector Programme Promoting Gender Equality and



L. to r.: Syrian youth meeting government representative; training of youth leaders in Sanliurfa



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L. to r.: Turkish and Syrian youth at a workshop

Women's Rights. The Sector Programme brings more than 15 years of experience, in a dozen countries in Africa, Asia and Europe, in organising intergenerational and community dialogues that create safe spaces to address difficult and divisive issues and to work towards overcoming them.

The Dialogue step by step

As part of the Dialogue for Social Cohesion, young Turkish and Syrian men and women from Gaziantep and Sanliurfa will **interview Turkish and Syrian community leaders**, both men and women. Through the interviews they will find out what has inspired them to become leaders, what is personally meaningful to them in efforts to build the 'new' Gaziantep and Sanliurfa, and what they are particularly proud of in this regard. They will collect stories about what the leaders value in Gaziantep and Sanliurfa today, with their mix of Turkish and Syrian residents; what positive experiences they have had working collaboratively within the two communities; and what their hopes are for the cities' young residents.

The young people will then **jointly reflect about what they heard**; how it relates to their own personal experiences, beliefs and values; and how they, as young women and men in the 'new' Gaziantep and Sanliurfa, can reach their their full potential as future community leaders. They will also discuss the common values and shared interests between the two communities which emerged from the interviews. On this basis, they will develop their own vision for Gaziantep and Sanliurfa, and reflect on the kind of support they would need from the leaders to move towards it.

A **Futures Conference** will bring the young people, the community leaders and other relevant stakeholders together as the third step of the Dialogue process. Here, the young women and men will showcase stories from the interviews they conducted and present the results of their joint reflections, including their hopes and visions for their cities' futures. Together the young leaders and community leaders will then discuss concrete steps which can be taken to achieve the vision they have crafted, actively involving and building upon the skills and capacities of young women and girls in particular.

How will the Dialogue spread?

Highlights of the leaders' interviews and young people's testimonies, along with photographs of the young and older leaders in their favourite places in Gaziantep and Sanliurfa, will form the basis for an **exhibition** which will be launched at the Futures Conference and open all residents of the two cities. To encourage sharing of the stories in social networks in and beyond Gaziantep and Sanliurfa, the exhibition will also be brought online, as a **website**, to which further testimonies can be added as the Dialogue expands.

For more information

If you are interested in learning more about the Dialogue for Social Cohesion, please contact:

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