

# Mid-term evaluation report

## COMMUNITY CENTRE PROJECT FOR SYRIAN PEOPLE UNDER TEMPORARY PROTECTION IN TURKEY



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## **Acknowledgements:**

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## 1. Background / Situation

The four-year conflict in Syria has caused the loss of thousands of lives and damaged many more. The crisis has also caused internal and external displacement. Four million Syrians are currently living in the neighbouring countries, and the crisis has spread over the region, producing further displacement into more safe areas. In Turkey, the number of registered Syrian people has surpassed 1.7 million; some 255,000 people out of them are currently living in camps under the protection of the Turkish Government. 80 per cent of this population consists of the most vulnerable portion of the population: mainly women and children.

In the protection camps, the Turkish Red Crescent (TRCS) is offering a variety of services including nutrition, shelter, and psychosocial support, thus contributing to the Turkish Government led operation for Syrian population.

By December 2014, the cities hosting the most Syrian people are Sanliurfa, Istanbul, Gaziantep and Hatay. The needs and vulnerability of Syrian people living in urban areas are increasing as their previously available resources are getting depleted. Thus, realizing that there is a structured system in place for supporting the protected Syrian population living in camps, the Turkish Red Crescent has been broadening the scope of its activities to address the needs of these people and aims to engage in action in urban areas as well.

As a result, the first community centre of this kind started to operate in Sanliurfa as of 20 January 2015 within the scope of the Turkey: Population movement International Appeal (MDRTR003) operation, with the support from the Turkish Red Crescent and the Secretariat of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

## 2. Purpose and scope of the evaluation

The purpose of this mission was two-fold:

1. Assessment and mid-term evaluation of the services provided by the community centre (with the conducting of the Beneficiary Satisfaction Survey)
2. General PMER supporting mission (basic PMER and BSS trainings).

Taken into account the fact that since of the start of the community centre's operation more than six months have passed, it is considered to be essential and important to assess the services (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coverage, impact, coherence, sustainability, etc.) the community centre is providing to the affected population.

With the objective to improve our services and accountability through a two-way communication to people receiving assistance, after conducting the assessment on the received services and delivering the necessary support, we ask the beneficiaries to tell their thoughts and provide feedback on the services they received. Improving our accountability also enhances our credibility and the trust from the affected populations, and the process is also focusing on long-term community support for displaced people to help them cope with their new situation and to enhance their integration into the local (Turkish) community.

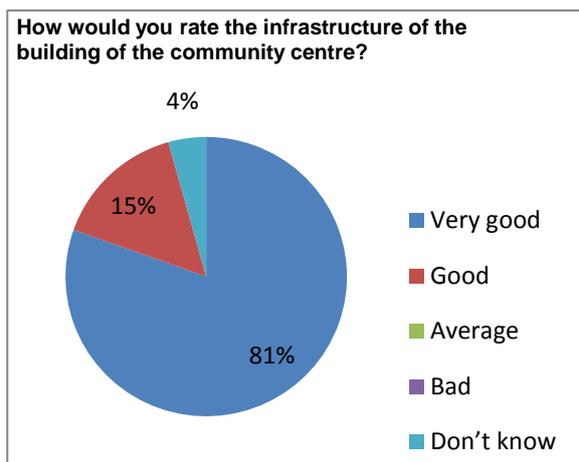
As indicated above, the results of the assessment will be used in the further improvement of the quality of the operations and the services provided by the Sanliurfa centre based on the assumption that gathering feedback from the beneficiaries will result in learning from the affected population through sharing of experience and gained knowledge, and that the assessment results will be followed up and if necessary and required, will lead to changes in operational practices and/or policies.

The results will also serve as a good practice and example for the other, to be opened community centres in Turkey under the Emergency Appeal operation.

The aim of the mid-term evaluation was to analyse and comment on the project progress up to date and review the process of implementation of the project. The evaluation saw how the project is progressing, documented lessons learnt, achievements and challenges, and provides recommendations and ideas to take forward to 2015 and onwards.



- There are four large rooms and two smaller rooms in the first floor of the building. Two course rooms and the large Child Friendly Space (CFS) are situated on the ground floor. Most of the rooms in the centre are big enough to accommodate a class of at least 10 people. There are also some smaller rooms. The Child Friendly Space is very spacious, can accommodate 40+ children. Meeting room Nr. 5 is well equipped with 10+ desktop computers. Course room Nr. 3 is equipped with 7 sewing machines. More is needed as per evaluation results. All course rooms have whiteboard and markers.



- As far as the hygiene facilities are concerned, there is one bathroom for males and a separate ones for females on the first floor. There is no proper ventilation inside and they tend to get very hot. There is one bathroom for males and females and one disabled toilet downstairs. All bathrooms are equipped with soap, toilet paper and paper towels.
- All course and meeting rooms and also the CFS are equipped with air condition, thus being cool and comfortable in the extremely hot summer weather conditions. The outside corridors are very hot.
- The community centre partially fits to people with disabilities. The first floor would require support for people in wheelchairs or needing to walk with crutches because there is no elevator. The rooms downstairs are easily accessible and could be used by these people. The stairs to reach the first floor are quite large with big gaps. There is a visible yellow sticker on the floor about the steep stairs, also a sign on the right of the stairs.
- The emblem of the Turkish RC is very visible on the outside part of the building. In some rooms there are flags, banners or photographs of the activities in which the emblem is shown. The emblem is not shown in the hallways and corridors. There should be more visibility of the emblem inside the building, for instance at the doors and inner windows of the CFS, as currently there is only the logo of the UNICEF there. The staff is wearing the vest of the TRCS with the emblem clearly shown. Placing the no-arm signs to the outside of the building was in progress during the visit.
- Fire extinguishers are available on the ground floor and the first floor. Seven security cameras are set in the building, which are constantly monitored on a screen in the reception by a security guard.
- There is ablution facilities along with a praying room in the basement.

### **Outcomes of the FGDs and BSS results**

Altogether 51 beneficiaries were interviewed during the evaluation mission. Out of this number 5 were children, for them a specialized and shorter version of the questionnaire was prepared.

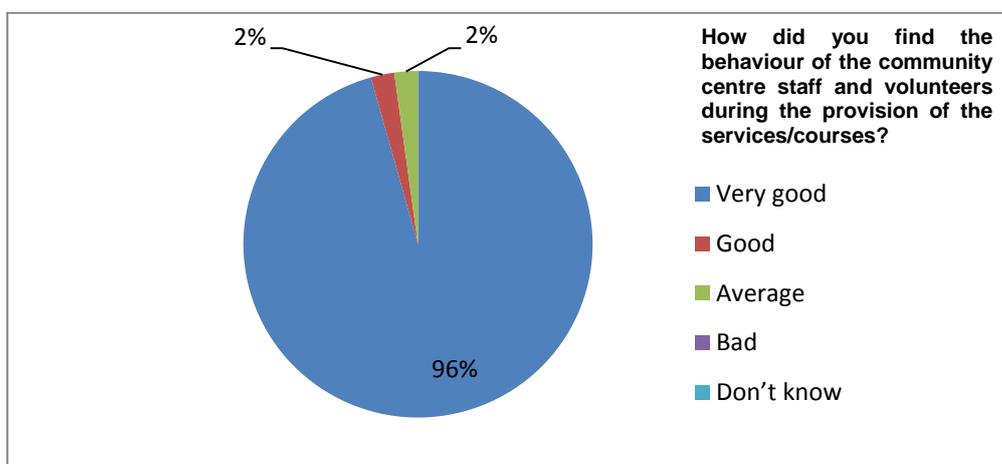
For the detailed information about their age, gender, nationality, level of education and information on how they were affected by the crisis please refer to Annex 1.

An estimated number of 200-250 people are benefitting from the services of the community centre per month. Altogether, approximately 2,500 people has used the services of the centre at least once as of mid-August 2015. Calculating with an average number of 225 visitors per month, the interview sample represents 22.6 per cent of the beneficiaries using the services.

- The beneficiaries – without exception – mentioned that they are very grateful to the staff of the community centre for their services, behaviour, approach and care. They emphasized that the friendly atmosphere and attitude of the staff and the centre itself make them feel more confident in Turkey and they trust and show respect towards the TRCS. The beneficiaries mentioned also

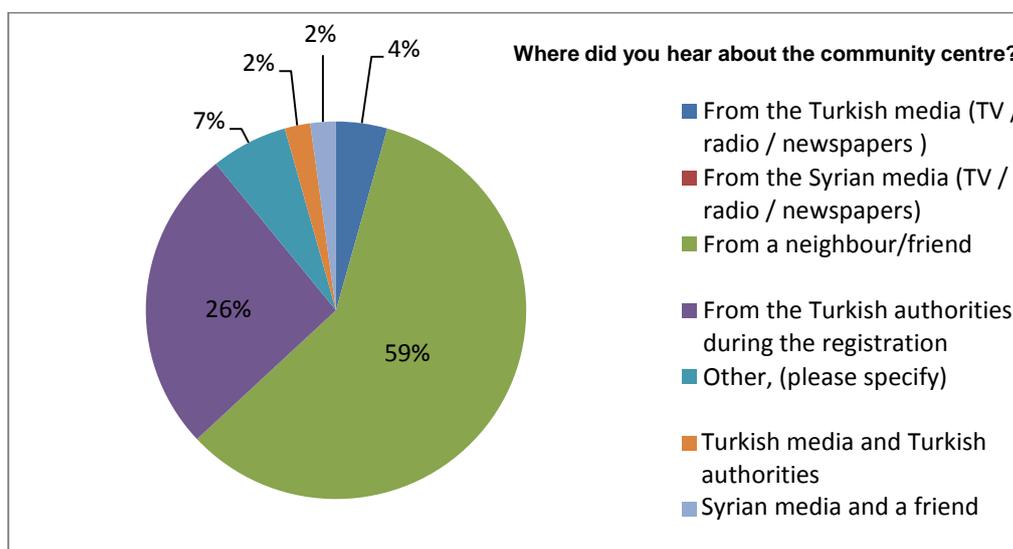
that they feel safe and comfortable in the community centre, with the feeling that they are spending their time useful in an enabling environment, with the possibility to make new friends.

As one beneficiary mentioned *“being in the community centre is a breath from my current life, my everyday struggles and problems”*.



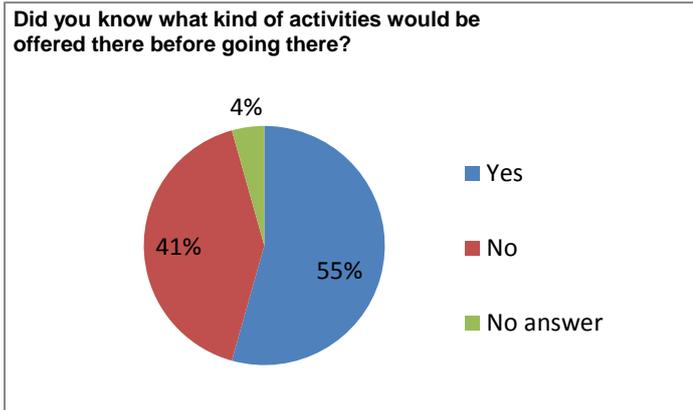
The beneficiaries emphasized that the Turkish Red Crescent helps them a lot, and it welcomed them very positively in the community centre. They noted that as far as they are aware, among the refugees coming from the region, the ones being hosted in Turkey have the best conditions compared to other refugees hosted by other countries in the region.

- Almost 60 per cent of the beneficiaries were informed about the activities of the centre by word of mouth, i.e. from neighbours and friends.

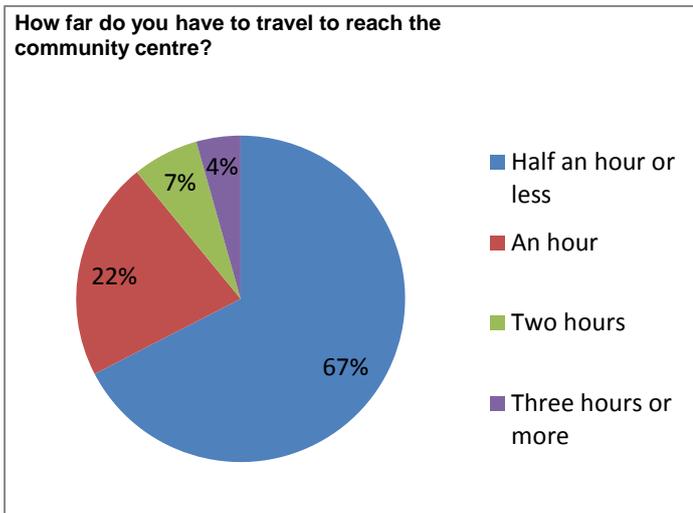


Besides the results of the BSS indicated above, during the FGDs some beneficiaries mentioned that they received information about the community centre through outreach activities/home visits of the staff of the centre. Some of them noted that they heard about the activities in shops and markets, and also they mentioned that they saw it on the internet and in the social media. One beneficiary mentioned that she came across the centre by accident, she was just walking on the street and realized that there is a dedicated institution for refugees.

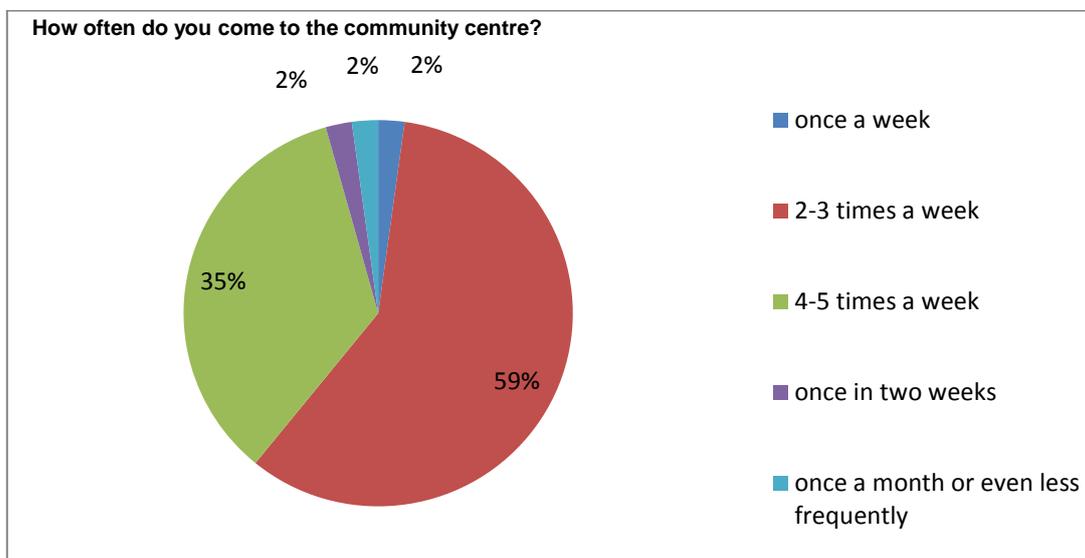
- When the beneficiaries were asked about whether they knew about the community centre as well as its activities prior to going there, more than half of the interviewed beneficiaries answered positively. However, according to the beneficiaries, awareness of the Syrian people shall be raised that the centre is available for them.



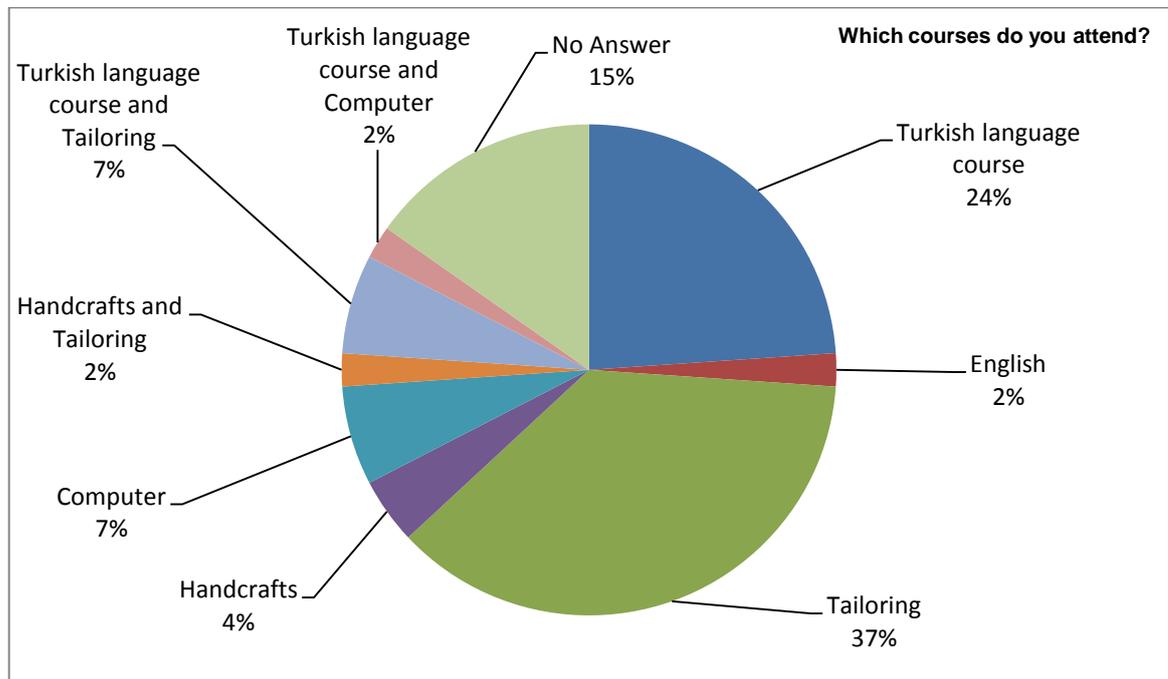
- Regarding the proximity of the community centre to the beneficiaries' homes, 89 per cent of the interviewed people mentioned that they have to travel an hour or less to reach the centre. However, there were some who mentioned that it takes them two or even three hours (or sometimes even more) to reach the facility. The beneficiaries themselves clearly indicated that they would need some kind of transportation (organized by the community centre) so that more people could visit the centre, and even those could benefit from its services, for whom the distance is the only impedimental factor.



- As far as the frequency of the beneficiaries' visit to the centre is concerned, 59 per cent of them are coming to the centre 2-3 times a week, and 35 per cent 4-5 times a week. These data show that there is a definite and clear great interest from their side towards the activities and services of the community centre and also indicate that they are satisfied with the currently running activities. When interviewed, the beneficiaries made some recommendations, which will follow in the coming section of the report.



The centre currently provides the following services to them: Turkish language course, tailoring course, handcraft course, computer course and English course. There is a special programme for children in the framework of the Child Friendly Space (CFS), and the centre is also providing referral services to the ones in need. For example, cases of referral to psychological support, health care, registration and social support centre were mentioned.



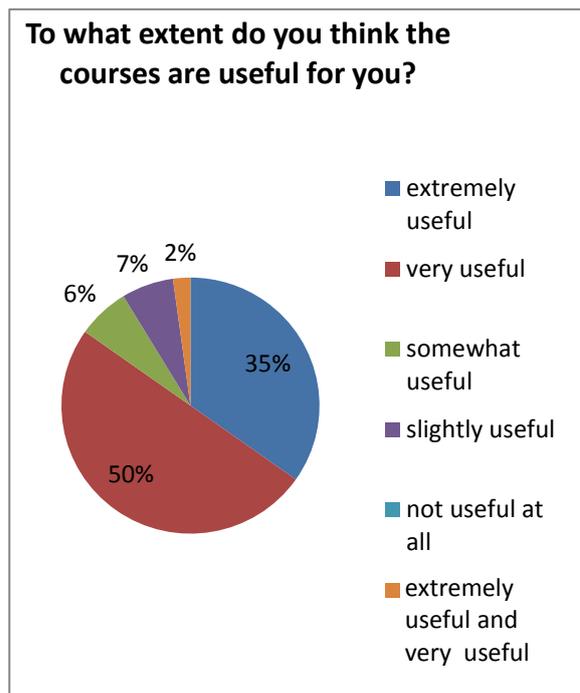
Comparing the results of the BSS (see above) and the outcomes of the focus group discussions, it is clear that the Turkish language course (24%) and the tailoring course (37%) are the most popular and attended ones.

Regarding the Turkish language course, the beneficiaries mentioned that the opportunity to learn Turkish is one of the greatest added value of the centre, as such they can better adapt and integrate to the host community; and also, they have better opportunities to find a job as well.

The knowledge of the local language (and thus learning about Sanliurfa's culture, traditions and customs) makes the lives of the beneficiaries considerably easier, both in the private life, both work-wise, as it creates the feeling of "being part of the local context", and also raises their cultural awareness. Also, it is valid from the other way round: the host community also understands the Syrian better, thus creating the environment of acceptance.

The beneficiaries mentioned, however, that the period until opening a new course is quite long. One Turkish language course lasts for two months, and there are not enough teachers to serve the raised interest.

As far as vocational courses are concerned, the interviewed people noted that it is very important for them to improve their vocational skills and learn new activities in the framework of training and education, as it is a potential for them to generate income and also a long-term solution to integrate



themselves into the society. They also mentioned that it is much higher appreciated to have a talent than receive for example a one-time food package as a support from the community centre. The beneficiaries told that they are satisfied with the methodology of learning and the way the tutors teach them.

When asked about why the courses are useful for them, the beneficiaries among others emphasized that they are good activities to spend their time useful, the environment is relaxing, they can make new friends and socialize, essential from psychological point of view and they can learn as well, which experience can be used for a job-finding opportunity in the future. They also mentioned that the community centre is the place where they have the feeling that people are not judging them, they can express their views and feelings freely, the staff is friendly and the environment is safe. They were referring to the centre as the “*supporting social friend*”. The beneficiaries have the feeling that someone cares about them (even in the rural areas through the outreach activities) and they are precious. Their voices are heard, they have the impression that they are important and feel the ownership in the project.

- The operation of the Child Friendly Space (CFS) was highly appreciated by the interviewed beneficiaries from several points of view. They are very grateful that their children are in good hands, in an enabling environment, with possibility of playing and also learning. The parents mentioned that for some children the attendance at the CFS’s activities mean the only possibility and opportunity to be educated. They also learn about life and how to behave with others. The feeling of socialization, being in community and with children of the same age is also an added value of the centre.

It is also essential from psychological point of view to organize different kind of joyful activities for the children, who might have been traumatized. There have been cases where due to previous bad memories and experienced, the children were playing “war-like role plays”, with shooting, injuries and fighting, and also, some of the children got frightened when they heard some louder voice. So there is definitely a need to continue the activities in the CFS as the stress and trauma of the children clearly decreases via taking part in the children-specific activities.

The teachers and staff dealing with kids are very experienced, they are motivated to play with and teach the kids and are very engaged in the activities. The community centre is promoting for the children to attend school, and it serves as an alternative of the school if there is no school during the year. However, the best possible option would be if the children are going to school and to the community centre simultaneously and the activities of the two institutions could run parallel and complementarily.

The results of the questionnaire for the children show that they are very much satisfied with the services of the centre, they have friend there and they have the opportunity to play different games, draw, prepare some small ornaments, sing songs and also, to learn Turkish and Arabic. Learning Arabic is important for the children not to forget their own culture, traditions, language and not to lose their cultural identity. The children looked full of hopes and happy, happier than adults, and according to the tutors, their self-confidence is considerably raised since the beginning of the implementation of CFS activities, their attitude has been changed from being shy to open.

### ***Outcomes of the meeting/discussion with staff members and volunteers***

- As mentioned earlier, the FGDs were conducted by the staff of the centre. Before the action, they had a briefing with the evaluators on the methodology of organizing the discussions. As it was a completely new experience for them, they had the opportunity to clarify any technical issues with the evaluators regarding the process of the interviews prior to them. After each focus group discussions, the facilitators briefed the evaluators about the outcomes of the meetings. In the framework of the discussions, the BSS questionnaire was filled out. For those illiterate, help was provided to put their answers on the paper.
- During the discussions with the staff it turned out that they like the centre very much, they like working with beneficiaries, even if it is sometimes very hard mentally and emotionally to cope with the situation.
- The staff feels responsible for the work they are doing day by day, they have a real ownership in the project. They expressed that they are aware of the trust coming from the beneficiaries and

they, in return, would like to provide them as much as experience and knowledge as possible. They are proud to be referred to as “*friends*” by the beneficiaries. It is clear that the proper level of trust is built between the staff and the beneficiaries, which is inevitable for conducting the activities and providing the services of the centre.

- Out of the three Syrian volunteers interviewed, two had been working with SARC in Syria. The volunteers feel their work useful with helping others, even if they have more background (university, etc.) than “just” being a volunteer. It is also essential for them to spend their time in a conducive way. They work in the centre voluntarily, however, possibilities shall be explored how they can be supported, as there is a risk if they find a job, they will quit from the centre. They mentioned that it would be very useful for them to have the vest with the TRCS’s emblem, so as to distinguish themselves, and also to make them feel part of the staff.
- The community centre’s staff and the TRCS is seen as an organization to provide support to people in need. When the centre started to operate, they were looking at the practices of other NGO’s community centres, but by now the TRCS’s community centre became a model on the process, on the way of dealing with beneficiaries, and others are checking its services. As the community centre is now in the position of social networking, activities shall be harmonized and coordinated between the different organizations so as to address the beneficiaries` needs to the utmost extent and to avoid duplication of activities.
- There has been a very hard and effective job done by the community centre’s manager and all the staff that the centre has reached its current form and state now: they considerably increased the number of staff, they have reached some 2,500 people with the services as of August 2015. By now, people are well aware of the activities of the TRCS and also the community centre. They started their outreach activities, as well as attracted volunteers. They managed to establish a functional, operating place, which is furnished and well-equipped. The centre has started its information and referral services. The logistics and HR processes are still ongoing. They managed to established from zero the currently working financial system step by step. The community centre has introduced measures and established methods to track the progress on what they are doing (case reports, weekly reports, direct observations, attendance sheets, registration forms).

## 5. Recommendations

Taken into account the key findings and observations, the following recommendations shall be taken into account:

- One of the most essential issues is how to enhance the **visibility of the community centre**, i.e. how to attract and reach more people to use the services of the centre. It might be useful to seek for possibilities to set up information boards, posters, awareness raising materials in public places (hospitals, schools, etc.), as well as inside the centre (board at the reception promoting the courses and activities, their schedules, etc.). The use of the social media would be also an added values, as more and more beneficiaries have access to internet, so it might be useful to have a dedicated section for the centre under the official webpage of the Turkish Red Crescent. Outreach activities can be also a way to have more people benefitting from the services provided by the centre. Of course, when talking about the number of people visiting the centre, it shall be taken into account that it was summer time when the evaluation was conducted, which means that quite some people were working in the fields. With the approach of autumn, winter, and with the continuation of the announced seminars, the number of people reached might also raise.
- The issue of **transportation** was raised several times in different context. On the one hand, it would be useful to arrange transportation for those who have to travel a lot to reach the community centre, and at the same time, it would be essential to provide transportation for children going to school, thus enhancing the number of children attending school. A shuttle bus would definitely be an option to transfer people to the centre and back to an in advance agreed meeting point. If the issue of transportation is solved, not only the number of beneficiaries reached would raise, but also the level of attendance.
- The **number of personnel and staff** shall be raised, as it is clear that there is a definite need for courses of different kind, there is enough place to accommodate even a higher number of

participants, however, there is shortage of experienced trainers. More Arabic speaking trainers would be definitely an added value.

- Possibilities shall be explored to launch **other types of vocational courses** (for example hairdressing, nursing, First Aid, English, etc.) or more advanced courses and activities (for example intermediate level of Turkish course or a higher level computer course or tailoring course with learning some new models and styles), with a shorter waiting period. It would be also important to start a greater number of income-generating courses and activities. It might be good to organize small exhibitions after one course ends, so as to attract more people.
- As the size of the centre allows (even with re-organizing the course rooms), it might be considered to buy **more machines and materials** for the vocational courses, also taking into account that with the approach of winter, thicker and warmer clothes might be needed to be prepared by the beneficiaries.
- The **involvement of men** into the courses and activities of the community centre shall be solved, as there is a considerably higher number of women benefitting from the services of the centre. Possibilities shall be explored how to launch tailor-made courses for men (computer, language, even vocational ones of “men-kind”).
- As far as the Child Friendly Place is concerned, there is a clear need for a place where **outdoor and sport activities** can be commenced, such as a playground or some green field and garden.
- Establishing **“day care centre/nursery”** for those parents, who want to attend the courses of the centre, but might be not in the position to do so, because they do not have anyone to take care about their babies/smaller children while they are in the courses.
- The needs of youngsters shall be also satisfied with the establishment of a **“Young(ster) Friendly Space”**, as they are no longer fit into the CFS. Activities and courses for them shall be tailored to their different and “more grown-up” needs, and a special place shall be created for them for socializing.
- All interviewed beneficiaries are aware of the services of the community centre, however, some of them expressed their need for clothes, food, etc., so it might be useful to refer them to other organizations from whom they can receive this kind of support (i.e. **satisfying their basic needs**). It is essential to establish proper networking with other organizations so that the relevant needs of the beneficiaries can be satisfied (referral to registration, health care, psychologist, schools, food items etc.). It shall be also explored how the tracking of those who have been referred to some institutions by the community centre can be managed.
- The number of **volunteers** (both Turkish and Syrian) shall be also increased and a clear **volunteer policy** is to be developed. Increasing the volunteers` visibility would be also essential, for example through a provision of a vest/T-shirt with emblems to them,
- Opportunities shall be explored for **building the capacities of the staff** of the community centre (specialized trainings for those who work in the centre and also for those who do the field visits and outreach activities). In this way the quality of the services can be enhanced and also, the staff feels the ownership and their responsibility in the project. It shall be also explored how the development of beneficiaries can be tracked. Also, internal deadlines shall be set up in the form of an activity tables so as to be able to properly track the progress of the planned activities.
- Taking into account the fact that the staff is exposed to sensitive life stories moments day by day, there is need for proper and adequate **psychosocial support (PSS)** for them to avoid their burn-out and to secure their wellbeing. This is of utmost importance, as there are cases to which the staff of the centre would like to react, but it overgrows on their emotional capacities.
- Regarding the effectiveness and timeliness of the operation, it was noticed that the progress in activities is slowed down by some **internal, bureaucratic procedures**. Thus more structured programme and planning would be necessary with the streamlining of the internal procedures (financial, HR, etc.).

## 6. Lessons learned

In general, the community centre project has been running well since the centre opened its doors in January 2015. More and more beneficiaries are visiting the centre and are benefitting from its services. The number of people reached could be enhanced through better awareness raising and visibility, the relevant recommendations can be read above.

The beneficiaries are extremely appreciative of the services of the Turkish Red Crescent and its community centre, this has impacted their life in a positive way and they have come to realize that there is opportunity and possibility to continue living their lives after their previous struggles. They know it is not easy for them to adapt from one day to another, but the community centre is definitely an added value for this new chapter in their journey of life.

Last, but not least the host community's engagement shall be mentioned: they shall also feel the ownership and they have to be involved in the project in the future so as to create the atmosphere of "peacefully living together".