

2016 GPC Fall Convenings on Syrian Refugees Crisis Summary Report



A growing number of GPC members are actively addressing or concerned about the refugee crisis in Europe and the Middle East. To enable members to be more effective, the GPC has formed an affinity group on this issue to promote peer learning and collaboration.

The group held two meetings this fall, one taking place in Istanbul, Turkey on September 29 and the second one in New York on November 3. The members discussed the programs in the areas of education, employment and children in crisis, shared their experiences from their involvement and brought ideas for joint action.

Central Takeaways

- The holistic approach seems to be the most effective approach to refugee crisis. The mayors are the key figures in changing the environment, being able to monitor and intervene in all critical sectors.
- Employment in hosting countries is an important part of sustainable existence of long-term refugees. Support of micro-investments in these countries, using the know-how of the refugee entrepreneurs, could be a sustainable way for refugees to create their own working opportunities.
- Turkish education reform that would consider and include the special needs of the refugee community is crucial. Cross-sectoral approach in this is much needed for the inclusive strategy.

Keynote speaker: An Effective Model of Holistic Integration of Syrian Refugees

Fatma Şahin, Former Minister of Family and Social Polices and Mayor of Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality

Following the September, 2016 GPC convening in Turkey which focused on the Syrian refugee crisis, Synergos held a presentation of Ms. Fatma Şahin, Former Minister of Family and Social

Polices and Mayor of Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality. The mayor presented how the city of Gaziantep that hosts a large number of Syrian refugees deals with their presence and integration.

Gaziantep, a city with 1.8 m population, is currently hosting almost 340 000 Syrian refugees, where only 15% of them live in refugee camps. The main challenges both the local citizens and the refugees encounter are shelter, health, unemployment and education. The local administration developed a solution for the crisis situation on municipality level with focus on Emergency response, Humanitarian aid, Capacity building and Social development. The city administration uses a holistic approach during the decision making and finding solutions and therefore bridges different sectors and provides communication with international institutions, universities and NGOs.

Syrian Refugee Crisis Overview: A Regional Perspective

Christina Bache Fidan, Research Fellow, Center for International and European Studies, Kadir Has University and Co-Chair of the Ambassador Council, International Crisis Group

Christina Bache Fidan introduces the results of a quantitative research on the movement of people in the Middle East region due to the Syrian crisis.

“Turkey has had an open door policy for Syrian refugees, while at the same time has pursued the construction of a tightened border with Syria. There seem to be almost conflicting policies, and certainly with the predominant of Syrian refugees living within those border cities, aside from Istanbul of course, it’s been interesting to see how the awarding of this temporary protection to only Syrian refugees is perceived to some here as a threat to the social cohesion of the country.

And although there is currently a temporary protection for Syrian refugees, I think that there is an opportunity for the migration and refugee legislation in this country to be realized, because even if the Syrian conflict were to end in the near future, how will Turkey respond to other conflicts?

Again, there’s a geographical limitation on Syrians if they are registered, for instance, in Gaziantep, they can only find employment in Gaziantep, in the province. And so this also poses challenges for individuals because they are often working in jobs that do not match their educational levels or their occupational experience. And then also the other challenge for host communities is that the southern parts of Turkey, again where there are large numbers of Syrian refugees, have historically had high rates of unemployment and so that can be a trigger if not managed well for host communities, when they see these Syrian refugees in their region.”

Peer learning sessions: How Can Philanthropy Make an Impact?

Discussion focused on how philanthropy can make an impact. Members shared examples of how they are working to support and empower refugees in the Middle East and Europe.

Conversation with Patricia Kahane, GPC Member and President, Karl Kahane Foundation

Patricia Kahane tells what drew her to initiate personal action during the immense influx of refugees across Europe.

“... this involves human beings. People in the local populations everywhere, starting in the Arab countries, here in Turkey and all along the way to Europe, and we decided to trace to Vienna in general to think as a basis to route. Yeah, they’d say Egypt was not so much in focus, then and Jordan and Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey, Greece, Italy, straight up to Sweden. We thought about who is representing the people, human beings in the most immediate way. And then we said, “Okay, this is their local government, because they are in a huge city like Istanbul, in Gaziantep, or in a very small town in Austria, it doesn’t matter, and they’re all comparable situations, where you have things have to be managed, where actually physical people live together, not numbers, not percentages, but people.”

And so we invited Mayors from this whole route and some experts and some representatives of NGOs. And we never work without having at least one refugee at each table because we don’t want to talk about people, we want to talk with them, and they have to be a part of the discourse because they actually know what they wish, what they need, what they dream of, what they ran from, what they fear. It’s not for us to decide or prioritize.”

In conversation with Christine Mahoney, Co-Founder, Alight Fund and Director of Social Entrepreneurship, University of Virginia

“There’s a number of private sector major corporations that are talking about, “Well, what if we strategically open a factory in a refugee zone so we’re hiring refugees as well as local coast community people?” So I think that the burden is on us to be bringing in new investment, creating opportunities for small companies and larger companies, and in that way then we’re creating jobs for both host communities and the displaced. And to answer the question of how, the idea is to not just give micro loans to some promising refugee entrepreneurs and some promising host community entrepreneurs, but instead to do it in a systems thinking market building way so we’re actually strategically investing in a host community supplier and a refugee buyer.”