



Co-funded by
the European Union



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Implemented by

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft
für Internationale
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH



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Social Cohesion Concept Note Community-Based Local Initiatives Project

Definition of Social Cohesion

The Network International Cooperation in Conflict and Disasters (NICD) Working Group on Social Cohesion in (Post-) Conflict and Displacement Contexts and the working paper by the Competence Centre Peace and Emergency Aid (KC 4C40) provide guidance towards the operationalisation of the multi-dimensional construct “social cohesion”. The NICD has developed the following definition: “Social cohesion is a descriptive trait of a society; it expresses the quality of co-existence within that society. A cohesive society has close social relations, a strong feeling of connectedness/ focus on the common good as well as positive state-society relations (core dimensions). These can be strengthened directly or by fostering enabling elements, which are positive living conditions for all, equality and human-rights-oriented values, such as tolerance and non-discrimination. Social cohesion is a graduated phenomenon, meaning that societies can be more or less cohesive. The peaceful co-existence of social groups is a milestone on the road to a robustly cohesive society.”

Coexistence on the other hand is a much more comprehensive term and one which truly embraces each and every human regardless of colour or creed. Rather than merely ‘tolerating’ those who are different, coexistence is the very real means of living side by side in peace and harmony, where differences are celebrated rather than punished or merely accepted.¹

Also, **Social Cohesion** can describe a state of relations in a society across two dimensions: between individuals and social groups in a particular environment and between those individuals and groups and the institutions that govern them.

- **Qualities of relationships:** Cohesive societies are characterized by **[positive interactions, trust, sense of belonging, participation in collective action for the common good]**
- **Levels of relationships:** Social cohesion is determined by the quality of relations i) within social groups, ii) between different social groups within a society as well as iii) between individuals, social groups and the institutions that govern them.
- Social Cohesion is influenced **by attitudes, behaviours and norms and by structural factors such as [economic environment, various fields of government policy such as education, employment, municipal services, but also prevailing ideologies, norms, history, media discourses, etc.]**

¹Tolerance, coexistence and social cohesion CLIP 2 Turkey: Concept paper



Levels of Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is a concept that involves people coming together and forming strong bonds within their communities. It can be understood and analysed at two levels: horizontal and vertical.

The horizontal level of social cohesion can be observed through various behaviours, such as increasing and diversifying interactions within and between different groups. This includes engaging in social, cultural, and civic activities together. When people from diverse backgrounds interact and participate in these activities, it helps to strengthen social cohesion. Social cohesion is not only about behaviours but also about attitudes.

As relationships improve and participation is encouraged, people develop a stronger sense of belonging and their perception and attitudes towards other groups become more positive. Additionally, trust in others increases as people feel more connected to their community. In summary, social cohesion at the horizontal level is about changing perceptions and attitudes toward other groups, building relationships, engaging in activities together, and fostering a sense of belonging and trust among individuals and groups within a community.

Social cohesion at the vertical level refers to the relationship between social groups and institutions. While institutions are responsible for delivering services and upholding rights, they often lack strong connections with the people they serve. However, it is essential for individuals to feel a sense of belonging in their communities, and this can only be achieved when they have meaningful interactions and are acknowledged by these institutions. When people actively participate, contribute and influence decisions regarding service delivery and inclusivity, it not only brings about changes in their attitudes but also fosters a positive perception of the services and institutions, leading to the development of trust.

These horizontal relationships include bonding social capital, i.e. trust and attachment within groups with shared commonalities; bridging social capital, i.e. relationships and networks that extend across groups and societal divisions; and linking social capital, i.e. the cooperation across societal organizations, institutions, and leaders, such as inter-faith religious organizations.²

In addition, GIZ Turkey's **Support to Refugees and Host Communities (SRHC) Cluster** has developed its own understanding of social cohesion which refers to the Social Capital Theory. Accordingly, social capital of a community results from the structure and quality of relationship between people as well as people and institutions. Civic participation, trust, shared norms, values and obligations as well as vital social networks constitute the social capital of a community and contribute to political and economic stability and effectiveness. The definition takes into account these components of social capital. The term "social cohesion" is related to the extent of

²<https://www.socialcohesion.info/concepts/concept/united-nations-development-programme-undp>

³Coleman, James; Putnam, Robert; February 1999; *Social Capital Theory and Practices*, UIC



solidarity within a society and includes material and non-material aspects. Specifically, the social cohesion definition of the cluster identifies three relationship levels by considering the Turkish state, Syrian/refugee community, Turkish community, and other group-based identities (e.g. women) as the main actors:

- Linking relationships that connect different identity-groups to state institutions
- Bridging relationships that connect different identity-groups at community level
- Bonding relationships that connect different identity-groups with a common identity-characteristic (e.g. young people, women, residents of the same building...)

Horizontal Social Cohesion		Vertical Social Cohesion
Bonding (within group/ community)	Bridging (across diverse groups/ communities)	Linking (across levels and hierarchies)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solidarity • Social support • Emotional closeness • Shared identities • Intra-group / intra-community trust and reciprocity • Access to limited pool of resources (information, knowledge, finances, connections, opportunities) • Intra-group / intra-community mobilization around a common purpose • Addressing intra-group / intracommunity differences • Preparedness of group / community for substantive engagements with the "other" 	<p>Broader identities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More general forms of trust and reciprocity • Access to larger pool of resources external to a group / community (information, knowledge, finances, connections, opportunities) • Addressing conflictual issues across groups / communities • Purposeful cross-group / cross community interactions for mutual benefit • Multi-purpose inter-group / inter-community platforms for collective action on shared agendas 	<p>Connections with civil society organizations, government, service providers and/or private sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships across hierarchies— formal, informal, institutional lines of power, authority and influence • Increased access to key resources in formal and/or informal institutions outside the community (information, knowledge, connections, finances, technical support, capacity building, etc.) • Increased access to formal decision making processes • Mutual trust between communities and different hierarchies and institutions (formal and informal) • Legitimacy of formal and informal institutions and leadership • Addressing issues embedded in systems and structures that undermine the building of socially cohesive societies

Note: This table is from Kamatsiko 2019 and was derived from cross examination of field-based case studies in Mercy Corps 2017 and CRS 2017 (Interreligious Action for Peace).⁴



Social Cohesion in CLIP 2

The CLIP 2 Project aims to strengthen the beneficiaries' personal and socio-economic resilience including creating a safe and supportive environment where the rights and dignity of individuals and groups are respected. This facilitates participation and positive interactions with others and improves the target groups' self-help capacities and self-esteem as well as their feeling of connectedness to their living environment and access to needs-based social services. Social cohesion activities are implemented at different relationship levels:

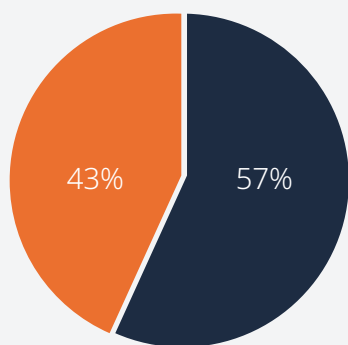
- **Linking:** Connecting refugees and vulnerable members of the host community to state institutions by promoting equal access to social services and participation (e.g., referrals, legal and social counselling)
- **Bridging:** Providing a safe space for interaction and exchange between refugees and host community members as well as different social groups (e.g., joint activities, intercultural exchange activities and activities designed for raising awareness i)
- **Bonding:** Strengthening the relationship within specific target groups that find themselves in similar life situations (e.g., through empowerment, self-reliance and psycho-social well-being activities)

Social cohesion is the primary focus of 15 out of the 17 ongoing projects involving 17 partner organizations. While fostering social cohesion is the primary objective for some projects, it also serves as a means to other objectives in others. Specifically, in 8 projects, the main objective is the increase of social cohesion, while in the other 6 projects, social cohesion acts as a tool to achieve other goals, such as increasing the resilience of refugees and vulnerable host community members.

⁴<https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1782&context=pcs>

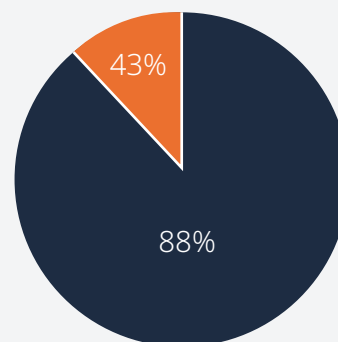
⁵*Tolerance, coexistence and social cohesion CLIP 2 Turkey: Concept paper*

How is social cohesion addressed in the project objectives?



■ Primary Objective ■ As a Tool

Does the project objective statement include a reference to social cohesion?



■ Yes ■ No

This data highlights the mainstreaming of social cohesion. In other words, activities aimed at social cohesion, protection, non-formal education, and facilitating access to services all contribute to social cohesion. Partner organizations have planned their interventions with this in regard. Although many activities can be designed to promote social cohesion, the key is how these activities are designed and implemented. Additionally, clearly defining assumptions from the outset is crucial for the smooth implementation of the process.

When analysing the current project activities, social cohesion activities stand out. These activities generally fall under the social cohesion component but vary in definition depending on the partner, location, and overall project content. Typically, social cohesion activities include social mixing activities that bring together different communities to enhance positive social interaction and contribute to the increase quality of relation between people and groups (horizontal dimension of social cohesion). Some examples of these activities are:

- **One-off event:** special day events, celebrations, exp. International Women's Day (IWD), World Refugee Day etc.
- **Outdoor activities:** picnics, cultural trips, "World Refugee Day" Picnic, "End of Summer" Picnic Event, social cohesion excursions in Istanbul (a day tour where they get to know nice parts of Istanbul, museums and recreational places), city tours etc.



- **Art activities:** concerts, theatrical performances, musical activities, creative drama, rhythm workshop for women, art therapy workshop, dance fusion class, storytelling drama session, music jam day, open-air cinema night, bridging cultures through films.
- **Food:** dinner meetings, "Recipes from Home" kitchen workshop, food culture sharing, breakfast meetings.
- **Sport activities:** Tournaments, sports games such as football, basketball, volleyball, and chess etc.
- **Cultural Activity:** Community events, Community Cultural Exchange Workshops, Cultural Exchange Fair
- **Child Development Activities:** Child development activities such as drawing, meeting with book writers, painting, dancing, educational learning, reading books and child tales and playing, Positive Parenting, Schooling and Child Labour Workshops, Social Cohesion Activities for Children, Child-Resilience Workshops, Children Workshops will be conducted for the children from Syrian and host communities aiming to develop social cohesion through arts, music and other leisure activities.
- Women's and Child Health Trainings

Most of these activities are unstructured or semi-structured, often being one-off events. Even if an activity is repeated, it is not mandatory for the same individuals to participate each time. Additionally, there are a few structured activities that are designed to contribute to the quality of relationship between groups/ people and organizations/ public institution(vertical dimension of social cohesion). These include:

- **Workshops:** workshops on specific topics like Social Acceptance of Refugees in Türkiye, interaction sessions.
- **Women Solidarity Group (WSG) for social cohesion:** WSG is a 6-weeks program which aims to build solidarity among the members of Syrian and host communities while raising participants' awareness on issues such as discrimination, interpersonal communication, social cohesion, women's rights, gender equality etc., ToT for Women Solidarity Group for social cohesion
- Community-based small interventions



- **Participation:** Children’s Council, Youth Advisory Board etc.
- **Language:** Turkish or English-Speaking club, Language Exchange Sessions
- **Young people:** Raising Awareness and Capacity Building Activities for Volunteers, Orientation Training for Volunteer, Youth Advisory Board and Board Meetings.

In addition to the activities labelled as social cohesion activities under the social cohesion component, Turkish language training, other non-formal education activities, and protection services also contribute to social cohesion. Specifically, facilitating access to services and state services can significantly enhance the vertical dimension of social cohesion and linking in social capital theory. This approach fosters stronger connections with civil society organizations, government agencies, service providers, and the private sector, thereby increasing mutual trust between communities and various hierarchical levels and institutions, both formal and informal.

Categorization of Social Cohesion Activities

Categorizing social cohesion activities is also a valuable effort to understand how each activity serves social cohesion. These activities can be categorized under different frameworks. For example, they can be examined in terms of the vertical and horizontal dimensions, as discussed in this paper, or through the lens of social capital theory.

Horizontal Social Cohesion		Vertical Social Cohesion
Bonding (within group/ community)	Bridging (across diverse groups/ communities)	Linking (across levels and hierarchies)
Child Development Activities: Child development activities such as drawing, meeting with book writers, painting, dancing, educational learning, reading books and child tales and playing, Positive Parenting, Schooling and Child Labour Workshops, Social Cohesion Activities for Children, Child-Resilience Workshops, Children Workshops	Cultural Activities: Community events, Community Cultural Exchange Workshops, Cultural Exchange Fair Food: dinner meetings, "Recipes from Home" kitchen workshop, food culture sharing, breakfast meetings. Outdoor activities: picnics, cultural trips, "World Refugee Day" Picnic, "End of Summer" Picnic Event, city tours etc.	Participation: Children's Council, Youth Advisory Board etc. Community-based small interventions Young people: Raising Awareness and Capacity Building Activities for Volunteers, Orientation Training for Volunteer, Youth Advisory Board and Board Meetings. Access protection and non-formal education services



<p>Women's and Child Health Trainings</p> <p>Women Solidarity Group (WSG) for social cohesion</p> <p>Turkish Language Training Language: Turkish or English-Speaking club, Language Exchange Sessions</p> <p>One-off event: special day events, celebrations, exp. International Women's Day (IWD), World Refugee Day etc.</p> <p>Workshops: workshops on specific topics like Social Acceptance of Refugees in Türkiye, interaction sessions.</p>	<p>Art activities: concerts, theatrical performances, musical activities, creative drama, rhythm workshop for women, art therapy workshop, dance fusion class, storytelling drama session, music jam day, open-air cinema night, bridging cultures through films.</p> <p>Community-based small interventions</p> <p>Women Solidarity Group (WSG) for social cohesion</p> <p>Sport activities: Tournaments, sports games such as football, basketball, volleyball, and chess etc.</p>	<p>Referrals</p> <p>Legal and Social Counselling</p>
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Impact Hypothesis

Categorizing social cohesion activities is also a valuable effort to understand how each activity serves social cohesion. These activities can be categorized under different frameworks. For example, they can be examined in terms of the vertical and horizontal dimensions, as discussed in this paper, or through the lens of social capital theory.

Horizontal:

Implementation of partners' projects will contribute to improvements in access to protection and non-formal education services. Improvements in beneficiaries' access to services (including those by projects) is expected to contribute to:

- Improvements in the sense of belonging to the local community,
- Improves attitudes towards outgroups,



because they will feel that their access is sufficient and equal in comparison to their respective outgroup. These behaviors facilitated/enabled as part of the projects contribute to a positive attitude towards outgroups, and trust towards members of outgroups.

If designed and implemented appropriately, social cohesion activities create opportunities for increased interactions among different beneficiary groups and encourage civic participation and socio-cultural participation.

Vertical:

Improvements in beneficiaries' access to protection and non-formal education services (including those facilitated by projects) are also expected to contribute to an increased sense of trust by beneficiaries towards the partner organizations and/or state via public institutions.

If designed and implemented appropriately, partners' projects are expected to facilitate positive interactions between final beneficiaries and public officials and/or NGO representatives.

These positive interactions then are expected to further contribute to improved attitudes and behavior at the vertical and horizontal levels. *

*Not stated explicitly in the hypothesis but interpreted to include: Sense of responsibility to the community; Trust in institutions; Interactions among beneficiaries and partner NGOs; Civic participation

If partner organizations design their projects in a participatory (inclusive) manner and/or take measures regarding community participation, allowing final beneficiaries to provide their inputs in line with their experiences and needs, this process itself alone is expected to contribute to increased trust of residents towards the organizations.

Impact Hypothesis

The implementation of partners' projects, particularly those enhancing access to protection and non-formal education services, is expected to contribute to strengthened social cohesion at both horizontal and vertical levels.

Horizontally, improved access to services will foster beneficiaries' sense of belonging to the local community and promote more positive attitudes towards members of other groups.

when individuals perceive that access to services is fair and inclusive across groups, this can reduce intergroup tensions rooted in competition over limited resources. Misconceptions—such as the belief that one group is favored over another in receiving aid—can fuel resentment and social fragmentation. By ensuring transparent and equitable access to services, projects can correct such misperceptions, fostering a greater sense of belonging and reducing hostility towards outgroups. As individuals feel that their needs are met comparably to others, more positive intergroup attitudes and trust are likely to emerge.



As individuals perceive their access to services as fair and adequate compared to others, feelings of inclusion and equality are expected to increase. Furthermore, activities that encourage interaction among diverse groups and civic or socio-cultural participation are anticipated to reinforce mutual understanding and trust between different community members.

Vertically, increased access to services is expected to enhance trust in partner organizations and state institutions. Projects that create opportunities for meaningful interaction between beneficiaries and public officials or NGO representatives are likely to generate more favorable perceptions of these actors. If these interventions are designed with participatory approaches—allowing beneficiaries to contribute based on their experiences and needs—they are expected to further deepen trust and foster a sense of shared responsibility and civic engagement.

Expected Results in Partner Organizations' Projects Regarding Social Cohesion

Strengthening Community Bonds

- Strengthening social cohesion by including both host and refugee communities.
- Increasing solidarity between host and refugee communities through joint participation.
- Bringing host and refugee communities together to become active participants in social cohesion.
- Supporting community participation where host and refugee communities shape activities together.
- Enhancing mutual trust and understanding between refugee women, youth, and host community members.



Reducing Tensions and Promoting Empathy

- Reducing tensions between host and refugee communities.
- Emphasizing common traditions and practices to increase empathy and peaceful co-existence.
- Organizing celebrations of historically and culturally significant days to create a common sense of understanding.
- Raising awareness about refugee rights and reducing discrimination through information counselling and public awareness initiatives.

Child and Youth Development

- Promoting empathy, respect, and self-awareness among children through development activities such as drawing, painting, and educational learning.
- Organizing sports games and creative drama sessions to foster personal development and social cohesion.
- Conducting workshops to teach children emotional awareness, effective communication, and positive thinking.
- Running a campaign to address peer-bullying and promote living together harmoniously.

Social and Cultural Integration

- Facilitating language training and non-formal education activities to eliminate language barriers and support self-reliance.
- Implementing social events and language courses to increase interaction between host and refugee communities.
- Conducting social cohesion activities that promote collaboration and mutual respect between communities.



- Hosting city tours, lunch events, and celebrations of important days to share cultural practices and strengthen relationships.

Empowerment and Capacity Building

- Providing psychosocial support workshops to enhance children's communication skills and personal awareness.
- Offering trainings that encourage women from both communities to discuss common problems, socialize, and develop natural relationships.
- Supporting social cohesion through Community-based intervention activities focused on environmental and climate issues, as well as community participation and active citizenship.

Building Social Capital

- Strengthening social cohesion through mixed-group activities that facilitate information exchange and mutual tolerance.
- Promoting positive relations and a sense of belonging through dialogue sessions and collaborative projects.
- Encouraging participation in community service activities to foster social responsibility and a sense of belonging.
- Organizing recreational activities to open spaces for mutual interest and interaction.

Published by
Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

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Directorate General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid
Operations (ECHO) and
German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

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Ankara, 2023

* This note is prepared in the scope of the "Community-based Local Initiatives Project (CLIP 2)", co-funded by the European Union through its Humanitarian Aid Operations department (ECHO) and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Its content covers humanitarian aid activities implemented with the financial assistance of the European Union and should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of the commissioning parties.