

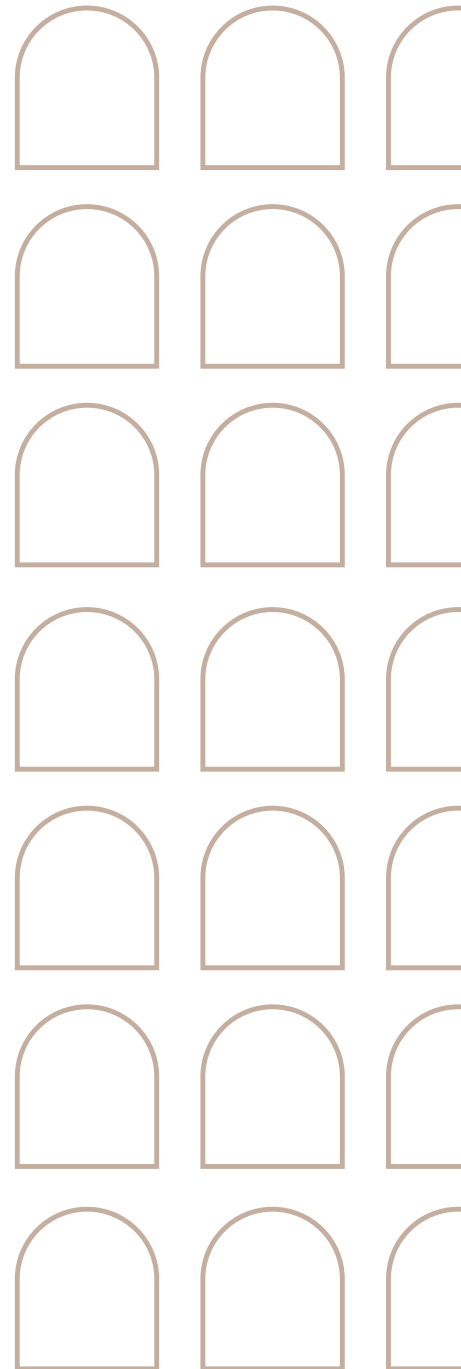
STG Policy Papers

POLICY BRIEF

HOW TO ENSURE SOCIAL INCLUSION IN POST-DISASTER RECOVERY: IMPROVING NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RELIEF EFFORTS

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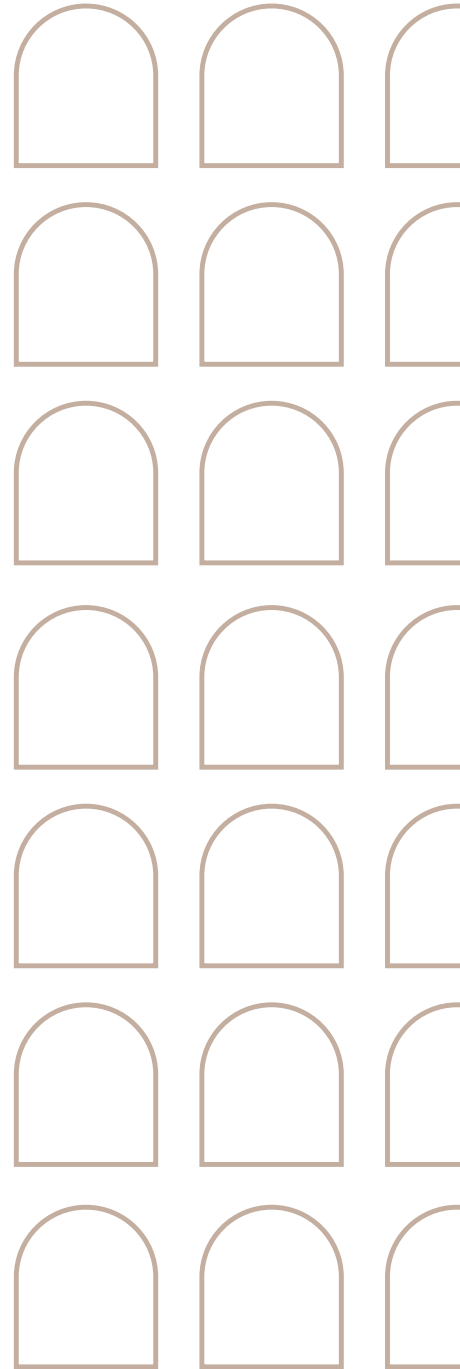
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 6 February 2023, Southeast Türkiye and Northwest Syria were hit by magnitude-7.8 and magnitude-7.5 earthquakes within a couple of hours of each other, with more than thousands of aftershocks. The scale of destruction and predicted long-term effects were unprecedented. This policy brief details the impact of this natural hazard on Syrians living under Temporary Protection in Türkiye and how it exacerbates their pre-existing precarious living conditions. It then explains why Syrians should be uniquely included in recovery approaches while rebuilding lives and livelihoods in supporting affected communities to resume their lives. With its policy recommendations, the brief provides a roadmap for main stakeholders in the medium- and long-term recovery to ensure that relief efforts are inclusive in the post-disaster recovery era through **(i)** ensuring equity for all quake-affected communities, **(ii)** creating meaningful dialogue mechanisms for communities, **(iii)** improving self-resilience of the quake-affected communities by rebuilding livelihoods, and **(iv)** establishing further legal and complementary pathways as effective avenues towards responsibility-sharing.

This policy brief is addressed to international stakeholders, including UN agencies, the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, other International Development Agencies, the main national stakeholders in Türkiye, the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), Presidency of Migration Management (PMM), and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) to sustainably address the needs of affected communities in the region.

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1. INTRODUCTION

On 6 February 2023, Southeast Türkiye and Northwest Syria were hit by magnitude-7.8 and magnitude-7.5 earthquakes, in just a few hours of each other, with more than ten thousand aftershocks in the days that followed (See Figure 1). This natural hazard was the most powerful and lethal earthquake in the modern history of this region. The World Health Organization (WHO) described the earthquakes as the European region's [worst disaster in a century](#). It was the world's fifth-deadliest disaster of the 21st century and the deadliest worldwide since the [2010 Haiti earthquake](#).

Figure 1



Source: [BBC](#)

The earthquakes and aftershocks have caused catastrophic devastation in the region (See Box 1). The [reported death toll](#) has surpassed 51,800 in both countries, at more than 45,000 in Türkiye, and more than 6,700 in Syria. Hundreds of thousands have survived yet with severe injuries, amputations, and signs of acute psychological trauma. More than 300,000 buildings have collapsed, and at least 4 million have been damaged. Given the scale and severity of the disaster, more than 5 million people are expected to be homeless. It is estimated that the disaster may affect as many as [23 million people](#), including 1.4 million children who already needed assistance

due to the ongoing conflict in Syria. The area hit by the disaster is also at the heart of the displacement and migration debate. Being in the Türkiye border region, the quake-affected area is a significant location already hosting more than 1.75 million Syrian refugees (Syrians under Temporary Protection and International Protection Applicants and Status holders).¹

Box 1. The affected area in both countries

In **Türkiye**, the quake hit at least 11 Turkish provinces, 10 of which have declared a state of emergency (Adiyaman, Gaziantep, Kilis, Hatay, Malatya, Diyarbakir, Adana, Osmaniye, Kahramanmaraş and Şanlıurfa) and Elazığ. **The affected area is a socio-economically underdeveloped region and a location of significance as it is home to half of the 3.5 million Syrian refugees.**

In **Syria**, Aleppo, Latakia, Hama, and Idlib were severely hit, with buildings damaged and many reported to have collapsed. Aleppo, already ravaged by civil war, was among the most affected areas, where more than 4 million people already relied on humanitarian aid.

2. DISPLACED SYRIANS

2.1 Welcoming newcomers to Türkiye

Syrians constitute the largest displaced population worldwide.² With a 911 km land border with Syria, Türkiye implemented an open-border policy after the eruption of the Syrian civil war in 2011. Due to its preexisting political and socioeconomic conditions as a developing country, the arrival of newcomers brought Türkiye a further challenge in meeting their humanitarian, social and economic needs. Yet, Türkiye hosts the world's largest number of refugees today.³

Being home to 3.5 million Syrians out of 6.8 million displaced Syrians worldwide, Türkiye dedicated its efforts to founding the Presidency of Migration Management (formerly, the Directorate General of Migration Management) and enacted Temporary Protection in Law

¹ The term 'refugee' will be used as a descriptive category regardless of their legal status in Turkey, noting that they are not granted legal refugee status due to Türkiye maintains geographical limitation on the on the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

² Please see UNHCR statistics: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>

³ UNHCR statistics declare the number to be 3.7 million Syrian refugees in Türkiye, please see: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/>. The Turkish Presidency of Migration Management (PMM) shows the number is 3.5 million as of 19.01.2023, see: <https://en.goc.gov.tr/temporary-protection27>. Considering UNHCR statistics are updated after midyear data collection, this brief adheres to the PMM statistics due to the earlier publication date.

on Foreigners and International Protection in 2013 to ensure their rights to access health, education, and social services. After the EU refugee policy crisis in 2015, work permit regulation was a policy reform that enabled Syrians full access to the Turkish labor market.⁴

Today, 99% of Syrians in Türkiye live outside of camps after the gradual closing of the temporary shelter centers in the Turkish border cities. After a decade of being welcomed into Türkiye, Syrians have become urban refugees settling across different cities around Türkiye and living within Turkish society, yet still facing barriers in accessing public services.

2.2 Disaster over displacement

The earthquake zone in Türkiye has a sizeable Syrian population at 1.74 million. In the hardest-hit provinces of Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, and Hatay, 1 out of every 4 or 5 people is Syrian. In the other hardest hit one, Kilis province, 1 out of every 2 people is Syrian. The [death toll](#) for foreign nationals has been declared to be 6,807 out of 49,589 people. However, there is no public disaggregated data available on the death tolls, survivors, or internally displaced refugee populations in the affected area.

The displaced Syrian population already settled in this region have again lost their homes. The quake has caused immediate misery in the affected area for these people, who have already suffered ill-equipped public services for many years despite the efforts of national and international actors.

2.3 Internal and cross-border displacement in Türkiye

Large-scale destruction of housing and the risk of damaged buildings collapsing has triggered large-scale displacements. [According to the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency \(AFAD\)](#), 2 million people are internally displaced by their own means and registered with the district governorships in provinces outside the destruction zone (See Box 2).

The Circular issued by the Presidency of

Migration Management after the earthquake stated that Syrians under Temporary Protection were allowed to leave the earthquake zone, as under normal circumstances, they would be required special travel permission to leave their city of residence. With the Circular, travel restrictions were lifted for 90 days, thereafter, limited to just 60 days. The Circular lastly regulated Syrians in Türkiye voluntary return to Syria within a 6-month period, and they would be legally able to enter Türkiye. After this new regulation to return to their country, [42,000 Syrians were recorded leaving for Syria](#).

Box 2: Internal and cross-border displacement

- No disaggregated data are available on the death tolls, survivors, or internally displaced refugee populations in Türkiye
- More than 2 million people are recorded as internally displaced due to the destruction within Türkiye
- The total number of Turkish citizens who were given shelter in the affected region is more than 1.5 million. In other provinces, a total of 329,960 citizens have been provided with accommodation services.
- 42,000 Syrians have returned to their country from Türkiye

2.4 Syria: At-a-glance

Syria's humanitarian emergency is among the largest humanitarian crises in the world. While the majority of the destruction of the earthquakes are located in Türkiye, the humanitarian situation in Syria was already strained before the disaster, diminishing the country's ability to deal with the aftermath of the earthquake effectively. More than a decade of ongoing hostilities with their long-lasting effects, including large-scale internally and cross-border displacement, destruction of civilian infrastructure, and violations of international humanitarian law, constitute the complex humanitarian emergency in Syria.

⁴ Low participation in the formal labor market and refugees' engagement in the informal labor market is one of the policy failures within the scope of this reform. This is also related to the shadow economy's estimated size of Turkey's shadow economy being 31.2% of the economy as a whole.

The earthquake-affected areas were previously identified as having acute protection needs in the 2023 Humanitarian Needs Overview, with a funding gap of 48% identified for the last quarter of 2022.

The destruction caused by the earthquake that impacted at least 8.8 million people in Syria, an estimated 5 million people will need shelter assistance.⁵ Therefore, the Circular in Türkiye regulating their voluntary return to Syria within 6 months period will bring another challenge to quake-affected communities. On the other hand, the Circular also causes a financial and mental strain on Syrians with an uncertain future in Türkiye. Due to the 60-day limit, they will not be able to settle down in the new destination city in the longer term and will not be able to plan to rebuild their lives outside the affected region in Türkiye. They might be forced to return with lacking safe housing arrangements in 60 days. The high number of returns to Syria is one of the impacts of these uncertain conditions and legal barriers in Türkiye. However, at a glance, the situation in Syria also offers inadequate housing arrangements and further humanitarian needs and pushes Syrians into another limbo.

3. THE POTENTIAL IMPACT ON SYRIANS

3.1 Multiplying the at-risk-groups

At the bottom of the socio-economic ladder in Türkiye, Syrians constitute one of the most fragile populations. The current acute crisis, characterized by an increase in forced displacement, insufficient shelters, and a lack of access to basic needs, worsens the environment for community protection and significantly escalates the protection risks for at-risk groups among refugee populations. Considering 1.7 million refugees are residents of the affected area with their already precarious living conditions, they will most likely face double barriers in accessing public services and relief efforts.

The Circular prevents affected people from

seeking longer-term solutions and rebuilding their lives. The 60-day limit brought financial and mental strain on Syrians and an uncertain future not to rebuild their lives caused by the legal barriers. This will imply a forced return to inadequate housing arrangements in the devastated provinces or not being able to access their rights in their new destination city. Against this background, refugees will be more vulnerable to particular protection risks such as increased violence and discrimination, exploitation and sexual abuse, human trafficking/smuggling, and financial exploitation. The protection risks will significantly be escalated for separated family members, children, women, and disabled people, especially survivors with possible amputations and people with acute mental health disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

3.2 Escalated polarisation

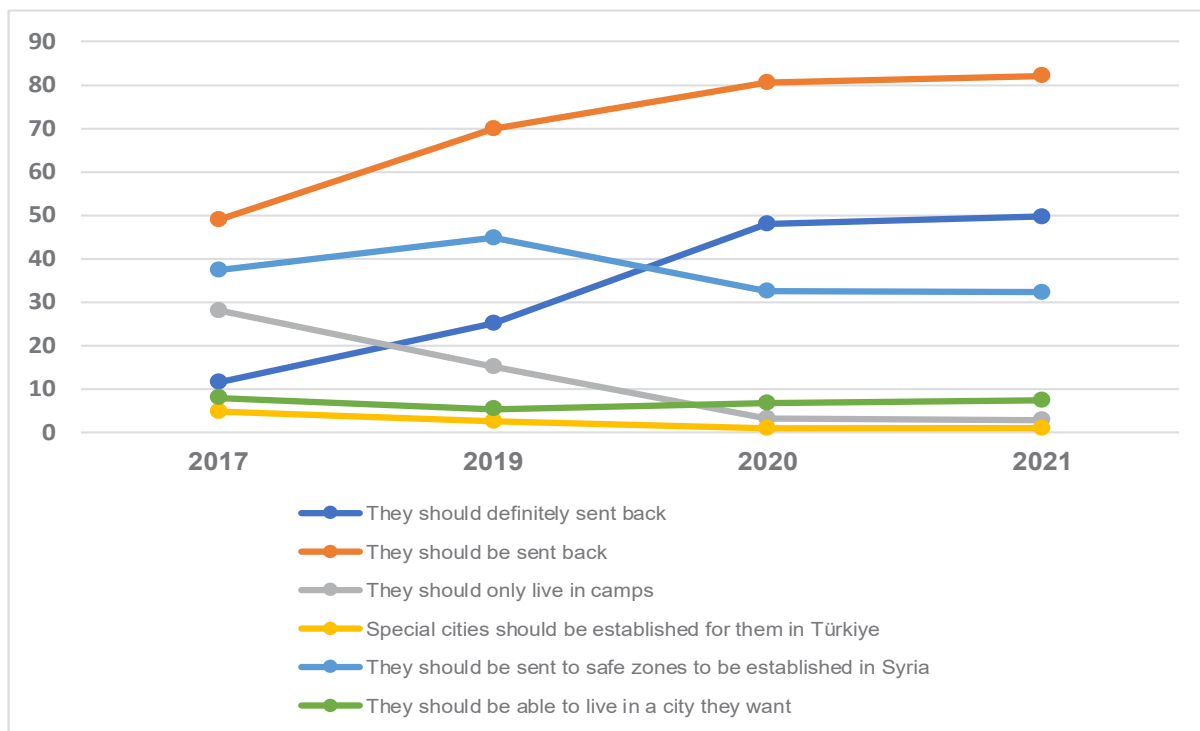
Due to refugees pre-existing marginalized socio-economic conditions, the sudden nature of this hazard exacerbated certain inequalities in society. In addition to the challenges Syrians face in the post-earthquake era, the escalated polarization between Syrians and local communities is another impact that requires closer attention. According to the Syrians Barometer research on public attitude (2022) reveals that Syrians in Türkiye are among the top three most critical problems the country is facing. The solidarity spirit with the newcomers in the first years has turned into *fragile social acceptance* and then ended up tolerating their presence in the last period.⁶ This research also shows the percentage of Turkish people responding that the refugees be returned to Syria increased to 82% in 2021 (See Figure 2, page 6).

With this given context, early signs of tensions between populations were highlighted in the aftermath of the disaster. Competition over limited national resources caused further tension among communities. The emergency responses immediately exacerbated the

5 See UNHCR news: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/unhcr-over-5-million-may-need-shelter-support-syria-after-quake>

6 Erdogan, 2022. "Syrians Barometer-2021: A Framework for Achieving Social Cohesion with Syrians in Türkiye." Türkiye: <https://www.mmuraterdogan.com/?pgid=kewjqheq-2615ab80-0801-40b8-9dea-d1b613c50d80>

Figure 2: The change in public attitudes of Turkish people towards Syrians between 2017-2021



Source: The data compiled from the Syrians Barometer, 2021

conflict and fueled public hostility toward vulnerable groups. Fragile quake conditions worsened [negative attitudes](#) towards Syrians as they were portrayed as looters, and the quake zones witnessed acts of violence showing signs of xenophobic motivation.

The rapid reports indicate the invisibility of refugees in the affected zones: refugees' exclusion in the rescue and relief efforts, and faced barriers in accessing the resources, beyond being unable to access shelters in the affected area, have been extensively remarked upon. Therefore, within this given context of the post-disaster era, coupled with the impact of forced displacement and natural hazard, Syrians' inclusion in services and recovery plans as well as social cohesion between communities require further intervention, policy development and allocation of resources as well as international cooperation.

4. THE WAY FORWARD: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCLUSIVE RECOVERY EFFORTS

As the damage and losses are estimated at approximately US\$103.6 billion (equivalent to 9% of Türkiye's forecast GDP for 2023), international funds and cooperation will play a key role in alleviating the long-lasting impact of this still-unfolding disaster. This recommendations section aims to ensure social inclusion in post-disaster recovery and to foster an enabling environment that facilitates social cohesion within communities. Such actions must invest over the medium and long term to ensure a full recovery, and rebuilding that incorporates **integrated approaches within the humanitarian-development nexus approach**. The actors deliver their response to the earthquake in a manner that **avoids exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities** and

tensions, seeks to address the specific needs of affected people, and addresses emerging protection risks as a result of the earthquake, with leaving no one behind.⁷

4.1 LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND: TOWARDS EQUITY FOR ALL QUAKE-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

Those most at risk among refugee and local populations will be vulnerable to the impact of emerging protection risks such as sexual and gender-based violence, child abuse, financial exploitation, human smuggling, and trafficking, and homelessness. To enhance accountability to the affected populations (AAP), actors should aim to ensure their response is gender-, age- and disability-sensitive and incorporates community-based protection approaches. **To deliver tailored services and remove barriers to access for the most vulnerable groups,** the recommendations are as follows:

Policy changes to support the right to move freely and to provide shelter for all affected communities

- Lifting the 60-day time limit and allowing indefinite time to travel outside the quake zone for all affected communities,
- Treating all quake-affected communities the same way in providing public accommodation and shelter services.

Funding for the enhancement of service-provision and legal protection efforts

- Providing/receiving further funding to provide additional housing and temporary accommodation services and building referral mechanisms
- Deploying new or refurbishing old neighborhood-level community centers and mobile support units to provide custom-tailored protection responses and legal support,
- Scaling up emergency response activities in the affected areas, including Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS), case management, and dignity kit distribution,

among others,

- Responding to the shortage of staff with expertise, by providing/receiving immediate funding to bring additional specialized protection staff in MHPSS and case management.

National and sub-national level of coordination

- Activating the MHPSS coordination mechanism with a multi-stakeholder approach in all affected governorates,
- Mapping stakeholders and region-wide community out-reach activities to spread the word about these accessible, safe spaces for those people at-risk.

The solutions are not limited to these. Further solutions will be found not only through consultation with local experts, service providers, or international organizations and guidelines but also should be designed with **the meaningful participation of the affected groups within both local and refugee communities.** The affected groups should be put at the core of developing new localised responses and the provision of dedicated services to all affected communities.

4.2 IMPROVING SOCIAL COHESION: CREATING MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE MECHANISMS

Improving the tools for strengthened social cohesion should be cut across all other recommended actions. Affected communities should be included in policy-making and the development of social cohesion strategies and processes. Given that this crisis might exacerbate polarization in the communities, **creating new tools, innovative solutions, and holistic programs for two-way social integration** should be at the heart of the relief responses in the medium and longer terms to achieve a resilient and sustainable post-disaster recovery. The funds should aim to **strengthen the social cohesion among affected communities,** and specifically accommodate the activities and tools to achieve improved societal relations and peacebuilding. The

⁷ The term "Leaving no one behind" was borrowed to refer to the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

relief efforts should employ a **community engagement approach** and tap into local networks and that all recovery efforts should be guided by meaningful participation by,

- developing tools and coordination mechanisms to strengthen engagement between refugees, the host community, opinion leaders and service providers, and promoting harmonious relations between the communities,
- creating inclusive and safe spaces in the neighborhood-level one-stop-shops, community centers, and mobile support units,
- strengthening citizen and refugee participation in all affected governorates in order to influence and collaborate with governmental actors,
- improving multi-stakeholder collaboration among public authorities, civil society organizations, and community leaders' committees.

Community engagement is a key method, the model of community leaders committees (composed of affected local and refugee communities) could be adapted for actors at the local, national, and transnational governance levels. When regulating policies or implementing new projects, affected refugees and local communities should be at the centre of policy-making processes in policy and project cycles to achieve inclusive, safe, resilient, and durable solutions for all counterparts.

4.3 REBUILDING LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS: IMPROVED SELF-RESILIENCE OF THE COMMUNITIES

The disaster has worsened already precarious livelihoods and negated opportunities to escape from poverty. Therefore, the early intervention should start with **the provision of social safety nets** and un/conditional cash transfer programs in the context of humanitarian assistance. Secondly, **the emergency livelihood programs should target the unlocking of peoples' potential** and improvement of their livelihoods through income- and employment-generation opportunities for all affected

populations by focusing on longer-term sustainable development.

Allocation of funds in promotion of local recovery

- Support for local initiatives to promote sustainability and the strengthening neighborhood and systemic resilience to national and local stresses,
- Delivery of income-generating solutions, such as cash-for-work programs,
- Improvement of access to finance for small businesses and the revival of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with start-up and small grants,
- Provision of counselling and advisory support for businesses and employment generation opportunities,
- Incentives for local and refugee communities for collaboration across diverse job sectors,
- Support for business development and future-proof value chains for industries, manufacturing, and agriculture, among other sectors,
- Delivery of innovative solutions and collaboration with the private sector for recovery and reconstruction in the affected areas,
- The offer of free and accessible trainings for employers and employees to support sector-specific skills development and short- and long-term employment generation, focused initially on waste and debris management and the construction sector.

While promoting local recovery, the interventions should aim for reconstruction and reintegration of the region's economy to preserve human capital and to create livelihood opportunities in the affected region. These interventions should return to improving the social cohesion approach while rebuilding lives and livelihoods in a harmonised society.

4.4 ESTABLISHING FURTHER LEGAL AND COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS: EFFECTIVE AVENUES TOWARDS RESPONSIBILITY-SHARING

The UNHCR offers three durable solutions for refugees: voluntary repatriation, implementing local integration policies, and resettlement in a third country. Considering the conditions in Syria as highlighted earlier, working to promote voluntary repatriation is neither a durable nor humanitarian solution for Syrians. The second solution, that of implementing local integration policies, was exhausted under the previous recommendation sections.

The third durable solution is to increase resettlement quotas, and create expedited refugee settlement quotas. This would be a timely and feasible response to be on the decision-making table for international actors.⁸ Establishing **legal and complementary pathways** is another longer-term and durable solution, by **facilitating visa regulations and sponsorships for the quake affected communities**. This can be achieved through advocacy and lobbying with the stakeholders to scale up these pathways, including increased quotas, the introduction of more flexible selection criteria, diversified intake, and agreements with a greater number of resettlement countries.

⁸ See the case of Spain in implementing expedited refugee settlement quota for the quake affected communities: <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2023/3/64034ac14/unhcr-iom-welcome-spains-expedited-resettlement-syrian-refugees-turkiye.html>

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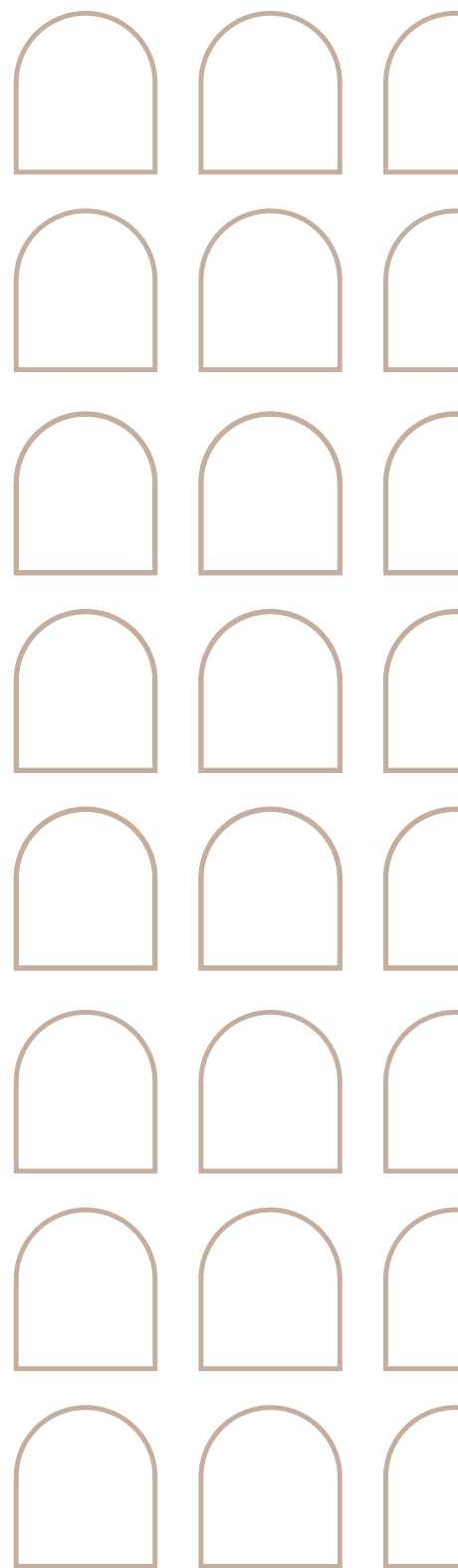
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