



Livelihoods and social cohesion must be priority sectors

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As faith-based organisations working inside Syria and in neighbouring countries hosting refugees, we welcome the Brussels Conference on Syria as a chance for the international community to assess its priorities and focus its attention on the needs of the millions of Syrians affected by the crisis, as well as the host communities in the surrounding countries.

This paper calls on donors and the international community to increase the focus of attention on livelihoods and social cohesion, which remain amongst the most underfunded sectors of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan.

The three themes of the Brussels Conference – ‘Empower, Protect, Sustain’ – are all fundamentally important for those affected by the Syrian Crisis, and neighbouring states. Livelihoods and social cohesion are key to realising all three themes, and will be fostered by the protection of civilians and the promotion of their rights under national and international law. The international community should support neighbouring states in their efforts to protect and promote the rights of citizens and refugees.

Caritas member organisations are present in every country affected by the Syria crisis, and we deliver services to refugees, IDPs, and host communities across a spectrum of sectors including livelihoods, WASH, education, shelter, health and protection.

Working closely with crisis affected people on a daily basis, we see at first hand the devastating effect that lack of jobs, livelihoods and a sustainable income source have on people. Traditional family breadwinners feel disempowered as their livelihoods have been destroyed and their sense of dignity and self-worth is battered as they cannot adequately provide for their families, and parents worry about how to feed, clothe and educate their children.

Within Syria, the economy has plummeted from a middle-income country to a low income country largely based on a war-economy with limited employment prospects. In neighbouring countries - which have borne, by far, the greatest burden in responding to the humanitarian consequences of the Syrian crisis - Syrian refugees are largely forbidden to work legally and are often pushed into the low-paid informal sector, with resultant risks of increased child labour or families forced to adopt survival coping mechanisms such as child marriage.

Many host communities, whilst wishing to support the refugees and share their limited resources with them, are also under pressure as economies are squeezed and there is a growing perception of competition for jobs, which creates increased tension and threats to social cohesion. The lack of job opportunities for both refugees in the region as well as people inside Syria constitutes a serious threat to them, forcing them to flee from Syria. For refugees in surrounding countries, lack of job opportunities can force them to give up in desperation, chancing their luck returning to Syria or leaving in the hope of better opportunities in Europe, North Africa or elsewhere. Ambiguous legal status and challenges relating to the ability to register births of refugees in some countries further add to people's insecurity and vulnerability and compound their difficulties in accessing employment or training.

As of September 2016, social cohesion and livelihoods were the least funded sectors within the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan. According to the November Dashboard only 15,150 individuals had been supported to get paid work: a fraction of the number of people needing paid employment, with a mere 433 community support projects implemented, representing only 37% of planned 2016 response.¹

Livelihoods and employment

The legal impediments to refugees accessing decent work vary across the region: in Lebanon obtaining legal residency is a pre-condition to obtaining work permits, and many refugees live in an insecure and legal limbo neither able to regularise their residency status nor their ability to legally work.

Public works programmes only generated 1,000 jobs in 2016. The World Bank's Concessional Financing Facility, started in April 2016, is set to invest US\$200 million in a multi-year road rehabilitation and rural access programme which will provide jobs for both Syrian refugees and Lebanese. The EU's Facility for Refugees in 2016 allocated EUR100 million to projects which have a socio-economic support component, however, the social cohesion and livelihoods components of the Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan remains the least funded of all sectors at a mere 13% of needs already funded.

The small-scale nature of most of the other livelihoods interventions means that it is highly unlikely that there will be a significant increase in funding to support dignified and secure employment for refugees living in the country. A positive development is the establishment of a Livelihoods Sector Steering Committee in 2015 to coordinate the efforts of government, UN, national and international NGOs, donors and the World Bank.

Lebanon: Small scale Solidarity Initiatives

During 2016 Caritas Lebanon undertook a series of 36 small Solidarity Initiative projects which involved 720 people at the community level, aimed at promoting social cohesion and peaceful co-existence within and between communities. Projects involve both Lebanese and Syrians using several approaches including: outings, awareness sessions, sports activities, waste management activities. The primary participants were young people, persons with disabilities, and women and children.

¹ <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Regional-3RP-Dashboards-November-2016.pdf>

In Jordan, the legal framework relating to refugees' rights to work are obscure and inconsistently applied. Most skilled professionals are not permitted to practice their profession and most refugees gain their money in the informal sector. Although the Government of Jordan has made the welcome pledge to create 200,000 work permits for Syrian refugees, as of January 2017, only 37,325 had been issued.²

Jordan: Livelihoods and social cohesion training

In 2015 Caritas Jordan, with funding from the European Union, started a livelihood skills training programme to enable young Jordanians to develop the skills and knowledge they need to secure employment or set up their own businesses. In programmes spanning 80 hours, participants chose from modules ranging from catering, food processing, handicraft or re-cycling. They also learn employability and entrepreneurship and at the end of the training, Caritas Jordan supports them to set up and run their business. More than 2000 beneficiaries have been trained on life skills, 70% women and 30% men. Over 200 beneficiaries have started their own business and almost the same number have found jobs. The Programme has enhanced the participants' quality of life, and follow-up surveys report a greater openness to living in peaceful coexistence with refugees.

In Turkey, the government announced in early 2016 that Syrian refugees who had been in the country more than 6 months would be granted the right to work. However, bureaucratic impediments and financial hurdles, as well as limited awareness amongst refugees of this right, mean that after one year, less than 9,000 Syrians had been awarded work permits³, and an estimated 300,000 refugees, out of a working age Syrian population in Turkey of 1.6 million continue to work in the informal sector.

Local capacity and social cohesion

As Caritas agencies working with communities, we consider that donors must urgently explore creative ways to get more funding directly to national civil society organisations. In every single country in the region hosting Syrian refugees, there is a plethora of experienced, capable and highly professional local and national NGOs who are the front-line service providers undertaking a significant percentage of the humanitarian aid to the refugees.

Yet in 2016 a mere 0.13% of the US\$2.7 billion reported in the Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan was received directly by National NGOs⁴. Caritas agencies note that almost all the significant bi-lateral donors into the Syria refugee crisis signed the Grand Bargain in May of 2016, which commits them to pass 25% of humanitarian funds as directly as possible to national actors

²http://www.google.co.uk/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0ahUKEwiG26WSynSAhVHK8AKHZOzBcsQFggaMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Freliefweb.int%2Freport%2Fturkey%2Fstand-and-deliver-urgent-action-needed-commitments-made-london-conference-one-year&usg=AFQjCNFjSH3X4Ex_y-0M-nWsoWaP10GCog&sig2=CMtPySB1pZnd2L716VUE4Q&bvm=bv.150729734,d.ZGg

³ Ibid

⁴ Date from <https://ftsbeta.unocha.org/appeals/1090/recipients> (data analysis provided by Development Initiatives www.devinit.org)

by 2020. We expect there to be a significant change over time in this situation, with donors providing direct funding to many of the very capable national organisations providing humanitarian assistance to those affected by the Syrian conflict.

The Country-Based Pooled Funds (CBPF) in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan are starting to pass more funds to National NGOs. In 2015 national NGOs received 47% of the Turkey CBPF and 36% of the Lebanon fund.⁵ The figures for 2016 are likely to be higher. We welcome this trend, and urge donors to ensure that these figures increase significantly. If donors find themselves unable to reach the 25% figure of humanitarian funds passed to national actors that they have signed up to in the Grand Bargain, they should ensure the UN managed country based pooled fund mechanisms provide a much greater proportion and arguably the majority of their funding to National NGOs.

Recommendations:

- Donors must look beyond short-term funding cycles and commit to flexible multi-year funding to allow for the fluid dynamic of the conflict, and in line with Grand Bargain commitments. Such approaches will assist practical programme development, efficient and needs-based programming and continuity of support to vital services
- Donors and all humanitarian actors must urgently address social cohesion and livelihoods solutions using long-term and strategic approaches. Focusing on these issues will enable Syrian refugees to gain more control and autonomy over their lives and will facilitate the flourishing of civil society and promote integration. Furthermore, they are vital elements of protection, development and integration.
- Donors, UN agencies, host government and international NGOs must examine how local communities, CSOs and local and national NGOs can be better supported, provided with direct funding and have their vital role recognised within national and regional coordination structures.

For more information, please contact Anne Street (astreet@cafod.org.uk) or Giovanna Reda (greda@cafod.org.uk)

⁵ <http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/humanitarian-financing/annual-reports>