The Syrian Refugee Crisis:
understanding and responding to tensions and conflicts in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey

Introduction

As of February 2016 approximately 4.6 million Syrians will be registered as refugees with the UNHCR.[1] Official registered numbers by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) indicate around 2.6 million refugees in Turkey (over two per cent of the population), 1.2 million refugees in Lebanon (approximately 30 per cent of the population), and 628,000 refugees in Jordan (approximately nine per cent of the population).[2] The actual numbers of refugees from Syria, however, are likely to be higher in all of these contexts.

As this refugee crisis extends into its fifth year, neighbouring countries hosting these large populations are struggling to cope with the continued influx. Resources and infrastructure are strained, social services are unable to meet the needs of the growing population, and rising prices and job scarcity are increasingly sources of stress for both refugees and host communities. Additionally, as aid fatigue has set in and host countries make it increasingly difficult for refugees to acquire and maintain legal residency, many are either returning to Syria or making the dangerous journey to Europe through irregular means.

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Above: A maths class for Syrian refugees in Jordan. Access to education is key to avoid a so-called 'lost generation' of Syrian youth and maximise chances for integration in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. © Giacomo Pirozzi/Panos

These conditions have also contributed to increasing tensions between host communities and refugees, as well as between local communities and local and national authorities. Unsurprisingly, Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey have all experienced varying degrees of political and security threat since the beginning of the Syria crisis. Responding to these challenges necessitates a strong understanding of the root causes of the tensions, based on in-depth context analysis that is often highly localised. And any attempt to undertake effective context analysis, or to detect and respond to early signs of conflict and instability, must begin with local actors.

Unfortunately, local actors are often overlooked in such analyses, which has a negative impact on policy and programming. In 2014 and 2015, under the 'Capacities for Peace' project, Saferworld and Conciliation Resources conducted a series of workshops in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. The workshops centred on bringing out community-level insights and analysis on the effects of the influx of Syrian refugees in each country, and providing a channel of communication between local actors and those working at the national and international level. The workshops brought together refugees, civil society organisations (CSOs, including Community Based Organisations), local and national authorities, and international actors (donors, International NGOs) to share insights and conduct joint analysis on causes of tensions between refugees and host communities, and to work together to identify solutions and share lessons on appropriate responses.

This briefing paper provides a summary of the key issues raised in the workshops, and highlights some crosscutting challenges, dynamics, and policy recommendations identified by stakeholders in all three contexts.

SUMMARY

Despite differences in context, a number of cross-cutting issues emerged from the workshops held in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey:

- **Balancing short-term relief with long-term responses:** Local, national, and international actors have prioritised immediate humanitarian needs since the start of the refugee crisis. However, longer-term planning to address social and economic integration has been overlooked. This has contributed to coordination difficulties, growing tensions at the local level, an increasing reliance on aid, and missed opportunities to examine and build on the potential benefits that might come with the presence of refugees. For example, measures to promote access to the legal labour market is a key issue in all three countries, not just for the livelihood of Syrians and their ability to integrate into society but will also be integral to any post-war reconstruction in Syria.

- **Strengthening governance at all levels:** Emerging tensions related to access to resources, livelihoods and basic services – for both Syrian refugees and host communities – have highlighted, and in places heightened, pre-existing governance challenges at the local and national level. International engagement in these countries should also aim to support frameworks and processes which will improve communication, coordination and collaboration between different actors, including local and national authorities, civil society organisations and INGOs.

- **Addressing the challenges of social cohesion and integration:** The sheer number of refugees in neighbouring countries has placed a significant burden on recipient countries, and as the crisis enters its fifth year, frustration has grown among host communities. While incidents have so far not led to significant insecurity in any of the countries, peacebuilding initiatives that bring together host communities and refugees remain necessary and significant to prevent long-term conflict.

Highlights of each workshop

JORDAN

The protracted crisis in Syria has seen a large influx of refugees into Jordan. While official figures from the UNHCR place the number of Syrian refugees in Jordan at 628,000, unofficial numbers are likely to be much higher – potentially exceeding 1.3 million. These numbers do not include over 30,000 refugees from other countries who also reside in Jordan, including Iraqi, Palestinian, Yemeni, Sudanese and Somali refugees. The influx of Syrian refugees has placed a large burden on the host government, and particularly host communities, many of whom are struggling to cope with rising prices (especially accommodation), overstretched public services, and growing unemployment.

In Jordan, the Capacities for Peace workshop held in June 2014 brought together local community actors, including CSOs and local municipalities, to identify sources of, and responses to, challenges resulting from the influx of Syrian refugees. This included training on the use of conflict analysis tools, as well as the undertaking of joint conflict analysis in order to strengthen the capacities of local municipalities and CSOs to analyse root causes of conflict, and to work collaboratively to identify solutions. The training concluded with a half-day workshop, which brought together local actors, international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), donors and representatives from the government.

During the workshop, participants painted a vivid picture of how the arrival of displaced Syrians has affected local communities. From the increasing strain on social services and rising competition over jobs to tensions between INGOs and local communities, and a noticeable rise in domestic violence due to socioeconomic stress, it was clear that there is a growing gap between the capacity and resources required to address the refugee crisis, and what is available. In some cases, the influx of refugees brings to the surface pre-existing challenges, such as unemployment, poverty, and the tense relationship between national and local authorities. In other cases, the influx of refugees has created new tensions, such as around conflict-insensitive practices by INGOs.

Three broad issues emerged during the discussions in Jordan that are worth highlighting:

Tensions around social services reveal underlying governance issues

"Conflict between central government ministries and local municipalities is a problem for effective response. For example, the municipality suggested buying vehicles for trash collection many months ago but the ministry has still not provided funds or approval on this decision."

Representative from Mafraq municipality

The northern governorates of Mafraq, Zarqa and Irbid have seen the greatest numbers of refugees, and the strain on infrastructure has been felt in a number of ways: an increase in traffic, shortages in water and health facilities, pressures on schools, an increase in the price of rental accommodation, and the collapse of trash disposal services in some cities with a particularly high proportion of refugees.

Upon deeper analysis, workshop participants identified that pre-existing governance challenges underlie the resource constraints experienced at the municipality level. The relationship between local and central government was identified as one particular area of concern. Municipalities explained how they often struggle to identify focal points within central government (as well as with donors and INGOs) that can respond to their needs. They also felt that donor money was being given to national-level ministries, and local actors were often unaware of how much money exists for different projects, or how this money is being spent. Participants also identified nepotism, a lack of communication and corruption as underlying causes of these governance challenges. Municipalities felt that if policies for greater decentralisation were implemented, they would have greater control over resources and therefore be better able to respond as needs emerged.

Tensions between Jordanians and Syrians over jobs

Employment emerged as a particular concern for local communities, and many prioritised unemployment when discussing growing tensions between refugees and host communities. While public and media rhetoric often blames unemployment and falling wages on the influx of refugees, an in-depth analysis of the causes of unemployment and reduced wages by participants revealed that the situation was more complex.

Because Jordan lacks domestic refugee legislation and policy, Syrians are not protected under labour laws and are prone to exploitation – often working under minimum wage, thereby driving down overall wages. In identifying responses, local municipalities and CSOs felt that it did not make economic or humanitarian sense for Syrians to be barred from regulated work, and with strategic and effective regulation, the presence of Syrian refugees could be utilised to boost the labour market. One possibility for this was to create more opportunities for Jordanians and Syrians to learn from each other, particularly about agriculture and food production. Syrians could also work for, and thereby support, large production industries that could contribute to economic growth. At the same time, more needed to be done to protect and support Jordanian workers through microfinance projects, business incentives and vocational training.

Tensions resulting from conflict-insensitive practices of INGOs

"We are an elected council and yet we are the last to know about everything. We aren't included in needs assessments or decision-making around projects, and we don't have authority to implement without approval from central government. Many donors and INGOs go straight to ministries and surpass the municipalities, who get marginalised. If you're a female municipality representative like I am then the marginalisation is often double."

Representative from Zarqa municipality

There are growing tensions resulting from the practices of some INGOs in governorates with high numbers of refugees. In some areas, such as Mafraq, this has resulted in demonstrations and sit-ins protesting the presence of INGOs. The main problems identified by municipalities and CSOs concern the lack of transparency in how projects are developed and needs assessed, as well as the lack of clear channels for communication between local authorities and INGOs. This contributes to a sense of unaccountability, and a perception by municipalities that INGOs are bypassing democratic governance structures and mechanisms at the local level.

The effect is two-fold. At the level of project implementation, local actors feel that the lack of engagement by INGOs contributes to unsustainable programming that does not target the real needs of the community. Municipalities felt they were often not consulted in needs assessments conducted by INGOs, who were perceived to enter the community, undertake their own assessments, and then sometimes (but not always) return to set up projects that fit the needs of donors rather than communities. The results were often unsustainable projects that contributed to tensions, particularly when certain segments of the community felt excluded.

The second effect is that the lack of accountability further challenges existing governance mechanisms and contributes to tensions between communities and elected municipalities as municipalities face anger from communities who feel they have been excluded from INGO projects. This is worsened by the centralisation of authority at the national-level, meaning that municipalities often feel they are stuck at the local level with an increasingly disgruntled community, unable to implement projects without authorisation, and not seeing funds trickle down.

LEBANON

With Syrian refugees making up around 30 per cent of the total population, Lebanon hosts the highest proportion of refugees relative to its local population in the world. Syrian refugees in Lebanon join nearly 500,000 refugees from Palestine and other countries, along with thousands more who remain unregistered with UNHCR. The government's reluctance to authorise the opening of official refugee camps has meant that Syrian refugees have settled in urban areas with host communities who already face acute socio-economic challenges. This has placed a major strain on the country's economic, political and security situation, increasing accommodation and living costs and overstretching public services. Additionally, the absence of clear, adequate government policy has left municipalities and civil society groups to bear the brunt of response efforts.

In Lebanon, the Capacities for Peace workshop held in November 2014 brought together local municipalities, civil society organisations (CSOs), and INGOs to reflect on practices, challenges and lessons learned from their efforts to reduce tensions between Syrian refugees and host communities. While a number of informal initiatives have developed across Lebanon to deal with the influx of Syrian refugees, there has been little opportunity to reflect on how effective these have been in reducing tensions. Six case studies of current community cohesion and tension-reduction initiatives from across Lebanon were presented, stimulating discussion on lessons learned from existing practice and innovative approaches. Participants – including municipal representatives and local civil society from Beirut, West Bekaa, Tripoli, Akkar and Southern Lebanon – also undertook joint conflict analysis to identify common challenges and understandings of emerging conflicts.

While Lebanese and Syrian political and security dynamics remain closely intertwined, tensions and conflicts between Syrian refugees and host communities in Lebanon are more likely to be driven by socio-economic issues. Lebanese communities identified worsening economic conditions due to the fall in tourism and cross-border trade in the wake of the conflict in Syria. Some participants drew a direct link between worsening economic conditions and the increased number of refugees, arguing that it had led to unequal job opportunities as Syrian refugees were providing cheaper labour and raising house rental costs. Participants noted reduced job opportunities, high unemployment, and an increase in poverty, crime and of arms proliferation. Participants also blamed government inaction as contributing to the negative economic impact of Syrian refugees. For example, the non-recognition of refugee rights by the state, including the right to work, negated any potential positive impact of refugee economic activity.

Local CSOs and municipalities also shared some key lessons they have learned in their response to easing tensions between refugees and host communities. These included:

Better communication between municipalities, local CSOs and INGOs

"Without the support of municipalities we would not have been able to resolve the problems we had. There must be a compromise between municipalities and civil society."

Workshop participant, Tripoli

Effective coordination between municipalities and CSOs was identified as a crucial factor in successful initiatives. However, both municipalities and CSOs highlighted that this relationship can be difficult. CSOs felt that while some municipalities are cooperative, others are not and their responses have in some cases worsened tensions between refugees and host communities (such as through the imposition of curfews). Municipalities felt that CSOs could be unaccountable and lacking in transparency, and often bypassed municipalities during project implementation. It was widely agreed that consultation and coordination were key to overcoming mutual suspicion.

Both municipalities and CSOs felt that international actors, particularly INGOs, had at times hindered relationships with each other by favouring one sector over another. This was a particular concern for municipalities, who often felt sidelined in favour of CSOs. There was consensus that international actors should be more transparent with all local actors and encourage local ownership in project conception, design and implementation. Through greater engagement, international actors could also play a role to overcome mistrust and foster strengthened relations between local authorities and CSOs.

Longer-term planning by all actors

"Many problems are related to the absence of the state. And this is also related to the inefficiency of the political class in Lebanon, and to a lack of awareness at the level of voters due to the legacy of the civil war and sectarian divisions."

Workshop participant from Akkar

An important issue for many was the need to look beyond immediate service delivery and develop long-term strategies in responding to the crisis. The Lebanese state has historically faced challenges in the provision of key social services to citizens, and the influx of Syrian refugees has compounded this. A clear concern was the collapse of the public waste management system; in-depth analysis revealed deeper governance issues regarding the lack of adequate infrastructure and sustainable waste management policies, and the poor management of public services more generally.

Many participants argued that local, national and international responses should target both host communities and refugees. For this, it was felt that local actors were best placed to identify such needs: in fact, many highlighted that CSOs have already begun to take a long-term vision in their planning. A common challenge identified was the central government's reluctance to develop medium-to-long-term policies – partly due to political sensitivities in acknowledging the long-term nature of the crisis. This reluctance has been obstructive not just for local actors but also for international NGOs, and contributed to a lack of long-term strategies that would benefit both refugees and host communities.

A wider peacebuilding lens in refugee response

"Most initiatives overlook the social tensions between families and tribes [such as] the Lebanese fighting among themselves."

Workshop participant, Akkar

Participants highlighted that tensions were not limited to those between refugees and host communities; in fact, divisions in Lebanon predated the conflict in Syria, and the complexity of political dynamics at the local and national level go beyond simplistic Lebanese-Lebanese and Lebanese-Syrian divisions. The Syrian crisis – the influx of refugees and associated tensions – is exposing some of these fault lines more acutely, and any responses to address Syrian refugees would be more effective if they were mindful of broader societal dynamics.

Because of this, participants felt that a key lesson learned in responding to the refugee crisis related to the need for humanitarian and development projects to encompass a wider peacebuilding approach. A holistic, conflict-sensitive, community-driven approach based on sound context analysis and tailored to the specific dynamics of each community is necessary to avoid worsening tensions or conflict. Such an approach would also be useful to overcome resistance to the inclusion of Syrian voices in efforts by promoting better relations between the two communities in safe, non-political spaces.

TURKEY

"We, Syrians, need to stop thinking that by staying in Turkey we are giving up our identity."

Syrian workshop participant, Gaziantep

With approximately 2.6 million Syrian refugees (a figure that is increasing steadily) on its soil, Turkey is hosting the world's largest community of Syrians displaced by the ongoing conflict in their country. While the Turkish government was quick to respond to the influx of refugees at the outbreak of the conflict – building well-equipped refugee camps and providing incentives for refugees to register with the government – the longevity of the crisis has stretched government resources, and the country is now grappling with developing a longer-term response that would support the integration of Syrians into the country in a sustainable and conflict-sensitive manner.

In December 2015, two workshops were held in Gaziantep and Ankara to discuss dynamics around the Syrian refugee response in Turkey, with a particular focus on relations with host communities and mid-to-long-term challenges related to integration. The workshop in Gaziantep brought together Syrian and Turkish organisations to discuss these issues from a local perspective. Participants raised concerns about the lack of clarity on the legal status of Syrian refugees, which is often fuelled by rumours and contingent on the wider political climate. Additionally, education, employment and business opportunities were considered key opportunities to support Syrians to integrate into Turkish society.

The second workshop, held in Ankara, brought together representatives from national and local authorities, CSOs, think tanks and international organisations, to discuss the policy implications of long-term planning around refugee response. Discussion revolved around the 'brain drain' of Syrian refugees from Turkey to Europe, the need for policies that would allow Syrians to contribute positively to the Turkish economy through investment and entrepreneurial opportunities, and the need to prevent risks of tensions, xenophobia and radicalisation among both host and refugee communities.

Participants in both workshops identified three main issues related to long-term planning and integration:

Lack of clarity and communication on legal status impedes long-term planning

"There were a lot of rumours and word of mouth around the elections. We were worried what would happen to us..."

Syrian workshop participant, Gaziantep

Under Turkish law, Syrians residing in Turkey are not considered refugees; rather, they are granted 'temporary protection status' under a special category, which grants them certain rights and access to basic services upon their registration. While this situation offers them better security than other countries in the region, many Syrians have becoming increasingly disillusioned by the lack of clarity around their legal status, which inhibits their ability to plan for their future. This is compounded by the lack of clear communication channels between Syrian refugees and official bodies at the local and national level. Many Syrians are only made aware of changes in legislation through rumours and word-on-the-street. Given the diversity of the Syrian refugee community (in fact, many referred to Syrian refugee communities), a clear and more formal communication channel needs to be developed between authorities and refugee communities.

Coordination challenges within Turkish bureaucracy

While the Turkish government has taken steps to ease the integration of Syrians into Turkey, bureaucratic hurdles continue to pose challenges for Syrians. For instance, Syrians are required to obtain a residence permit to open a bank account, but are also required to have a bank account to obtain a residence permit. Policymakers in Turkey are aware of the lack of coordination between different institutions in the private and public sector, and there is a growing awareness that the lack of a coordinated, multi-dimensional action plan to address the Syrian refugee crisis could lead to greater challenges that threaten social cohesion.

Promoting access to jobs and education for Syrian refugees

"From an economic point of view, we should not only see Syrians as consumers but also as entrepreneurs and investors."

Workshop participant, from Gaziantep Development Agency, Ankara

One of the biggest obstacles facing Syrian refugees in their attempt to integrate into Turkish society has been their inability to get work permits. Several steps have been taken recently, such as the adoption of a new legislation in January 2016 to grant Syrian refugees work permits after six months of stay in the country.[3] The Turkish Labour Agency has also begun to develop a comprehensive strategy to identify sectors in need of additional work force employees and to map the capacities of Syrians throughout Turkey. These steps should contribute to support Syrian self-reliance, as well as protect the Turkish labour market and ultimately benefit the Turkish economy.

Additionally, education was highlighted as a key tool for Syrians to secure livelihoods in the future, and to avoid a potential 'lost generation' of Syrian youth who did not attend school. This is a particular concern given that less than half of the 708,000 school-aged Syrian refugees in Turkey are currently enrolled in school.[4] In both employment and schooling, the language barrier was identified by participants as a key challenge facing non-Turkish speaking Syrians.

Crosscutting lessons, issues and analysis

Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey are very different contexts, both in terms of the capacity and strength of state institutions and civil society to respond to the influx of refugees, as well as in their unique political and security dynamics that affect how tensions between host communities and refugees manifest. Nonetheless, a number of key crosscutting issues can be drawn from the workshops held in each of these locations when it comes to strengthening community-based mechanisms for analysis and response to tensions and conflicts in situations of mid-to-long-term refugee crises.

Crosscutting issue 1:
Balancing short-term relief with long-term responses

A key point of tension that has emerged in all three contexts relates to the sensitive balance between immediate emergency response and long-term development planning. At the beginning of the crisis, government institutions and local and international organisations conceptualised the refugee crises as emergencies, prioritising immediate food, medical and shelter relief at the expense of long-term planning and preparation. While emergency relief remains a priority to ensure physical survival, the policy has at times been narrowly focused restricting the long-term outlook needed to respond to the structural changes in labour markets, the economy, infrastructure and social services. This is particularly the case in border towns in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, many of whom were reliant on cross-trade with Syria and have seen their source of income vanish in the wake of the conflict.

Long-term planning for refugee response, however, is often considered a politically sensitive topic in host countries. Turkey has taken steps to address long-term response planning, including developing new institutional structures and policies that look at how education, employment, health and long-term integration could be strengthened to ensure that refugees are not only able to secure their own livelihoods but also contribute to social, cultural and economic life in their host country.

On the other hand, in Jordan and Lebanon, the political climate has not allowed authorities at the national level to develop long-term approaches to handling the refugee crisis, despite the fact that at the local level some authorities and local organisations have been calling for a more proactive approach. The hesitation on the part of political elites in Jordan, and particularly in Lebanon, is very much linked to sensitive questions around socio-political and demographic implications of the long-term integration of Syrian refugees into host communities, which are intricately tied to concerns around national security and existing political dynamics. Jordan has had a long and relatively successful history of integrating refugees into Jordanian society – most notably Palestinian refugees in 1948. However, in a resource-poor country where the population has grown exponentially in the last five years, integration is a sensitive political issue. In Lebanon, questions around the long-term stay of refugees are particularly sensitive given existing inter-communal tensions between Lebanese communities, as well as the legacy of the Lebanese civil war. Given these issues, the possibility of acknowledging the long-term presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon remains taboo.

However, this hesitation has come at a cost – the resilience of both refugee and host communities has been undermined as they struggle to adapt to changing environments. The lack of a long-term strategy to respond to the crisis has contributed to coordination difficulties, growing tensions at the local level, an increasing reliance on aid, and a missed opportunity to maximise the potential benefits that might accrue from the presence of refugees.

Finally, it is important to note that little is known about how Syrians themselves feel about their own long-term plans. The workshop in Turkey revealed that more work needs to be done in communicating and understanding Syrian perspectives on their future prospects and plans, not just to manage expectations but also to ensure that policies in place are responsive to the needs of diverse communities of refugees.

Crosscutting issue 2:
Promoting resilience through employment

The key to ensuring long-term resilience and stability in contexts of protracted refugee crises is to put in place conditions that promote self-reliance amongst both refugees and host communities. The ability of Syrians to access education and actively participate in economic life is essential to their social integration, as is a degree of clarity and security in their legal status in the host country. As discussed above, issues around the long-term stay of refugees can be sensitive; in contexts where full legal status is not politically feasible, a hybrid set of rights that protect Syrian refugees, and ensure they can sustain their livelihoods as well as contribute positively to their host community, should be encouraged.

The most pressing issue that has emerged in all three countries concerns the right to work, a key

factor affecting refugee resilience and domestic labour markets more broadly. When it comes to employment, the lack of legal frameworks for Syrians in the labour market is an issue that cuts across all three countries, and makes Syrians particularly vulnerable to exploitation through irregular working arrangements. In most cases, many Syrian refugees are already working in informal, low-paid work in all three countries, and while this has generated a degree of economic growth, it has also had negative effects on the formal labour market, driving down wages and creating tensions with host communities. The lack of formal work opportunities for Syrians also contributes to poor living conditions, and a reliance on aid to secure livelihoods: as aid fatigue begins to set in, this could contribute to growing frustrations and conflict. There is also evidence that if labour policies are utilised strategically, there could be a knock-on effect on the host population, revitalising industries and ensuring that no workers are exploited and the minimum wage is not driven down through informal employment. These were the main reasons behind the recent adoption of a legislation to grant work permits to Syrian refugees in Turkey.

Promoting refugee self-reliance is important not just for the livelihood of Syrians and their ability to integrate into society; it is also integral to any post-war reconstruction in Syria. Refugees are a key resource in post-war reconstruction efforts, and their potential can be strengthened through providing them with work permits in their host countries, supporting Syrian CSOs, and providing high quality education for Syrian children. Preventing Syrians from pursuing education and employment opportunities could not only contribute to short-term criminality, ghettoisation and conflict in host countries but could also rob Syria of a key resource in the future, which would have serious regional and international political, economic and security consequences.

In both Turkey and Jordan, there have been some positive shifts in policymakers' attitudes on promoting labour rights for Syrian refugees. This can be done while also ensuring that the local labour force is supported and not threatened by the influx of foreign workers – by limiting foreign workers to particular industries or by providing incentives and vocational training to host communities, particularly youth and women who are most vulnerable to being 'squeezed out' of the labour market.

Crosscutting issue 3:
Addressing the challenges of social cohesion and integration

"Building trust is not easy and takes time – we are trying to build trust but things are progressing slowly. It is necessary to work with both Lebanese and Syrians to create a bridge of communication and reassurance."

Workshop participant, Beirut

The sheer number of refugees in neighbouring countries has placed a significant burden on recipient countries, and as the crisis enters its fifth year, frustration has grown amongst host communities. In some cases, refugees are blamed for problems that existed prior to the crisis, such as inadequate infrastructure and service delivery in Lebanon, or unemployment in Jordan. Refugees have also been demonised in the media, and instrumentalised by political elites to garner support through appealing to populist anti-refugee rhetoric.

While such incidents have so far not led to significant insecurity in any of the countries, peacebuilding projects or initiatives that bring together host communities and refugees remain significant to preventing long-term conflict. However, any kinds of interaction process needs to be done sensitively and slowly: delving too quickly into sensitive discussions with both refugees and host communities may create more tension, particularly if host communities feel that refugees are increasingly being involved in local decision-making around issues of resource allocation and social service delivery.

In Lebanon, where tensions are arguably highest, participants discussed the benefits of cross-community activities that are non-political in nature, such as cultural events, theatre shows, and spaces for youth. In Jordan, communities spoke about the importance of small gestures such as invitations to weddings and parties as ways to harmonise relationships that may otherwise be strained by cultural differences, mistrust and growing resentment. In Turkey, the language barrier has been an obstacle to exchange and dialogue, but workshop participants recognised the importance of having opportunities to interact in order to establish positive and more sustainable relations. Over time, as trust grows, communities may be able to discuss more sensitive issues around resource allocation, decision-making, and long-term integration.

Conclusion and recommendations

"To what extent will EU support focus on integration, rather than just border control?"

Turkish workshop participant, Gaziantep

There has been a growing acknowledgement by national and international actors that humanitarian approaches are not sufficient to respond to the escalating refugee crisis, and that a more long-term, structural approach needs to be taken. In a positive step forward, under the European Union (EU) Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis, also known as the Madad Fund, the EU has acknowledged the need to "pursue conflict-sensitive approaches across humanitarian, development and political dialogue and engagement, taking into account the wider root causes of conflict and chronic insecurity and the impact of these factors on the vulnerability of populations."[5]

Building on this approach, lessons learned from the Capacities for Peace project in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan highlight the following key recommendations for the EU in operationalising their strategy:

Legal framework

● **The EU should use incentives to urge host governments to define clear legal frameworks that protect the rights of refugees.** There is an urgent need for all three countries to establish clear domestic legal frameworks for refugees, which sets out the rights of refugees in accordance with international law. While Turkey has begun to strengthen the legal framework of refugees, there is currently no clear domestic legal framework for supporting refugees in Lebanon or Jordan.

● **The EU should continue to provide resettlement opportunities for refugees, and encourage others to do the same.** The Syrian refugee crisis is no longer just a regional one; rather, it is increasingly a global crisis, and requires greater international responsibility sharing to avoid spill over of conflict and instability. While many countries around the world have responded with additional resettlement opportunities in 2015, this remains small compared to the sheer numbers of refugees living in very difficult circumstances in neighbouring countries in which host communities are also vulnerable. Support to neighbouring governments does not replace the need to share in the responsibility through third-country resettlement commitments. Such commitments would also discourage refugees from seeking resettlement through irregular, and often dangerous, means.

Resilience and livelihoods

● **The EU should encourage Syrian refugees' right to work.** The right to work is perhaps the most contentious issue in all three countries hosting refugees, and where possible the EU should provide incentives to host countries to permit Syrians to work in the formal labour market. If full work permits are not politically feasible, Syrian refugees could be given work permits in specific industries based on national priorities that would support economic growth and development for host communities.

● **The EU should encourage Gulf Cooperation Council countries to open their labour markets to Syrian workers.** The GCC could play a positive role in generating employment for Syrian refugees through temporary work visas that would ease the burden on labour markets in neighbouring countries like Lebanon and Jordan.

● **The EU should promote Syrian investments and entrepreneurship in host countries.** The common perception is that all Syrians are vulnerable refugees working in low-income positions. However, the reality is more complicated than that, and indeed, with the conflict in Syria, many Syrian businesses have relocated to neighbouring countries, which has not only boosted economic growth in these countries but has also created jobs and employment opportunities for both refugees and host communities. More can and should be done to encourage Syrian businesses and entrepreneurs to invest in host communities.

Strengthening governance structures

- **The EU should strengthen local governance structures.** In addition to support to infrastructural development, the EU should also provide support to municipalities, who are often on the frontlines of response efforts. Such support includes training staff in service delivery, project management and conflict resolution, in addition to the necessary infrastructural, technological and informational management support.

- **The EU should support coordination mechanisms at the local and national level.** The EU should strengthen coordination mechanisms between local authorities, national-level ministries, and civil society organisations. In all three contexts, weaknesses in communication and coordination between local actors (both public and private) as well as between local, national and international actors has contributed to tensions at the local level. Lack of communication and coordination between local and national authorities – largely driven by fiscal centralisation – is often reflective of deeper structural issues that existed prior to the crisis. While the influx of refugees strains and exposes existing problems, it can also be an opportunity to address some of these deep-rooted issues that existed prior to the refugee crisis.

- **The EU should encourage international actors to reinforce and strengthen, rather than sideline and replace, local response capacities.** The EU should continue to encourage international actors to engage directly with local municipalities and other local actors (e.g. development agencies and chambers of commerce), as well as local governance structures and mechanisms in needs assessments, project design and implementation, and evaluation. INGOs should apply conflict-sensitive approaches to their operations, from needs assessment to implementation and evaluation, including through practical steps like engaging local actors (CSOs and municipalities), and building on their initiatives, knowledge and expertise.

Social cohesion and integration

- **The EU should support initiatives to change the narratives around Syrian refugees in each country.** An integral aspect of social cohesion and integration involves changing the narrative around refugees – from how to ease the burden of refugees in host communities to how refugees could be an asset to the growth and development of host communities. This can be done through media, community-level projects, national campaigns, and conflict sensitivity training for media and journalists.

- **The EU should ensure accountability to beneficiaries.** Accountability to beneficiaries – both refugees and host communities – should be prioritised in both humanitarian relief and long-term development support. This includes home visits, town hall meetings and feedback mechanisms at all stages of the project cycle. Additionally, this must come with an awareness that there is no single refugee 'community'; rather, Syrian refugees are made up of diverse communities with their own unique perspectives and needs, and further work needs to be done to identify and consult with the wide range of refugee perspectives.

- **The EU should support initiatives bringing together Syrian and domestic actors to address social cohesion challenges and opportunities.** Civil society organisations (both Syrians and domestic) can play a role to facilitate dialogue processes at local and national levels. They can also be the channels to inform decisions and programmes taken by other national and international actors.

About Capacities for Peace

'Capacities for Peace' is a global project undertaken by Saferworld and Conciliation Resources funded by the EU under the Instrument for Stability. The project involves working with local actors to enhance the effectiveness of local analysis, early warning and early action in 32 countries around the world.

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For more information on Capacities for Peace, and other briefings produced in the framework of the project, please visit the respective Saferworld and Conciliation Resources websites.

Saferworld is an independent international organisation working to prevent violent conflict and build safer lives. We work with local people affected by conflict to improve their safety and sense of security, and conduct wider research and analysis. We use this evidence and learning to improve local, national and international policies and practices that can help build lasting peace. Our priority is people – we believe that everyone should be able to lead peaceful, fulfilling lives, free from insecurity and violent conflict.

Conciliation Resources is an independent organisation working with people in conflict to prevent violence and build peace. We provide advice, support and practical resources to help divided communities resolve their differences peacefully. In addition, we take what we learn to government decision-makers and others working to end conflict, to improve policies and peacebuilding practice worldwide.

Notes

1 http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php
2 Figures from UNHCR website as of 12 February 2016.
3 "Regulation on Work Permit of Refugees Under Temporary Protection", Official Journal No. 2016/8375, 15 January 2016.
4 As of October 2015 according to UNHCR, See Human Rights Watch: *When I Picture My Future, I See Nothing, Barriers to Education for Syrian Refugee Children in Turkey*: November 2015.
5 *Agreement establishing the European Union Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian crisis, the 'Madad Fund', and its internal rules*, Annex 1, December 2014.