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Qudra 2
Resilience
Dialogues

PROMOTING SOCIAL COHESION: WHY AND HOW?

January 20th 2022

Summary report

“Promoting social cohesion: why and how?” is the fourth of a series of web dialogues, hosted by the Qudra 2 Programme, that brings together practitioners from local and international implementing partners as well as donor representatives to share good practices in the protracted Syrian and Iraqi crises.

Introduction

Ten years into the Syrian crisis, the neighbouring countries of Syria continue to host large numbers of refugees. **Many are caught between the prospect of returning to Syria and the need to make a decent life for themselves and their families in their new countries.**

In Iraq, decades of conflict and most recently the fight against ISIL have left deep social fissures, while internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees continue to seek refuge or a new start within the country.

Communities in all four Qudra 2 partner countries have been exceptionally generous in their efforts to host those displaced by violence. **But real and perceived competition over jobs, healthcare and education as well as cultural clashes – among many other factors – create tensions that can spill over into conflict.**

“Promoting social cohesion” has gained popularity in recent years, not least because in the context of a refugee crisis, addressing basic needs such as education, health and livelihoods is not enough. The presence of perceived “outsiders” requires special attention to the dynamics between host communities, refugees, IDPs and returnees.

But what does this actually mean in the everyday lives of people in the communities affected by the Syrian and Iraqi crises? What drives social conflicts? And what can be done to promote cohesion? To answer these questions, Resilience Dialogue #4 brought together partners from all four programme countries with a unique perspective on the phenomenon of social cohesion.

Moderator



Sami
HOURANI

Founding CEO of FORSA online portal. Member of board of trustees of the National Center for Human Rights and the National Commission for Women

Speaker



Shiyar
MOHAMMED

Zhingezan (NGO),
Iraq

Speaker



Najla
CHAHDA

Country Director,
Lebanon & Syria,
Tabitha/Dorcas,
Lebanon

Speaker



Önder
YALÇIN

Director, Migration
Office, Gaziantep
Metropolitan
Municipality,
Turkey

Speaker



Oryana
AWAISHEH

Executive Manager,
Jerash Garments &
Fashions, Jordan

Speaker



Onur
ARINER

Senior Advisor,
Promoting economic
prospects for the
refugees and the host
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Objectives

Identifying what works, what does not and why?

- What factors create tensions and conflict between refugees and communities of host countries?
- What does this actually mean in the everyday lives of people affected by the Syrian and Iraqi crises, be it in the community or at the workplace?
- What can be done to promote cohesion?

Outcomes

Challenges to social cohesion

- Economic, political, and health crises add strain on communities already affected by the Syrian and Iraqi crises. Real competition over scarce resources may be exacerbated by misinformation which sows division between refugees and host populations. Local communities may feel that they are being treated unfairly if refugees receive aid that they, themselves, need but cannot access.
- Competition over jobs is a key reason for tensions, as most refugees work in the informal labour market.
- The actions taken by local decision-makers matter. Some municipalities, by restricting access to their villages and jobs, reinforce the segregation of refugee populations, and a negative perception of refugees among host communities. Politicians, in electoral times, may further stoke division for political gain.
- Some social cohesion activities are inappropriately designed. Social cohesion projects may not be funded long enough for local public institutions to take over. Social cohesion activities involving mixed-gender projects may be unacceptable to conservative populations. Ad hoc and one-off social cohesion activities may not have sufficient impact.

Recommendations for promoting social cohesion

- Projects and aid should target both refugees and host communities equitably.
- Regular and sustained interactions between refugees and host communities should be promoted as much as possible at professional and community levels.
- Regulations should be implemented to protect local markets affected by the development of the informal market.
- Jobs that can create long-term professional interactions between refugees and host communities should be promoted.

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Result of audience polls conducted during the web dialogue

Although promoting social cohesion is more important than ever in countries affected by the Syrian crisis, tools and programmes meant to promote social cohesion are still experimental and the issue does not garner the required attention.

Which best describes the current situation in countries affected by the Syrian crisis?	Participants' choice
The state of social cohesion has decreased in the last two years	62%
The state of social cohesion has not changed in the last two years	14%
The state of cohesion has improved in the last two years	7%
Can't say - too context-specific	17%

Which statement best describes most crisis-response programmes that you are aware of?	Participants' choice
Social cohesion is ignored	17%
Social cohesion receives too little attention	42%
Social cohesion receives the required attention	29%
Too much emphasis is put on social cohesion	12%

Which statement best describes most crisis-response programmes that you are aware of?	Participants' choice
Social cohesion is a black box - we don't know what we are doing	21%
When it comes to social cohesion, we are in a phase of experimentation and evaluation	71%
We know what works to promote social cohesion	8%

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COMPOUNDING CRISES IN LEBANON NAJLA CHAHDA



What is the situation in Lebanon?

Because of the dire economic and political situation in Lebanon, relations between Lebanese communities themselves are already greatly deteriorated. The influx of refugees has made this fragile situation even worse. This has had an impact, especially, on the most vulnerable populations. Social cohesion is important to create resilience in the face of escalating conflict. We need more social cohesion to avoid further segregation and tensions that could result in violence.

What challenges do you observe in the field?

Some municipalities impose constraints on refugees: they are unable to go out after a certain hour for example. Sometimes they are even refused access altogether to villages. Some local authorities also restrict projects that are supportive of refugees and not Lebanese nationals. Some social cohesion projects are not as effective as they could be because conservative families may not accept mixed-gender activities. And, finally, too many projects end before local partners have the time and capacity to take over.

SOCIAL COHESION AND THE LABOUR MARKET IN IRAQ SHIYAR MOHAMMED



What is the main challenge to social cohesion you have observed in Iraq?

The biggest threat to social cohesion comes from the strain on the labour market. With the influx of refugees and IDPs, everyone is fighting for an opportunity to work. On top of that, many Syrian students have been accepted in local universities, which added to the number of graduates seeking employment.

What solutions have you found?

One of our projects brought refugees, IDPs and local communities together in a shared vegetable garden. Not only did it generate stable incomes, it also provided a space for refugees and local community members to meet. By spending quality time together, and engaging in common activities, social cohesion increased. On top of that, refugees and IDPs, by providing their agricultural expertise, brought real value to agricultural businesses in the region. This, in turn, helped change the perception of the host communities for the better. Although some of these projects are on a small scale, they bring people together and foster cohesion.

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SOCIAL COHESION THROUGH WORK IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR ORYANA AWAISHEH



How difficult was it to create job opportunities for refugees?

We had several challenges to overcome. First was the question of regulations. How could the refugees get permission to leave their camp to come work? We managed to tackle this challenge thanks to the help of the International Labour Organisation. Then, we had to find solutions to logistical problems: how do we get the workers to the company? How can mothers work if there is no daycare for their young children? How can we train these new workers? And so we provided free transportation, we built a daycare center where mothers and fathers can drop their children off, and we developed our own training centre.

How would you describe the social cohesion in your company?

All of our workers have the same working conditions, receive the same salaries and work on the same production lines. There is no competition on that front. On top of that, we employ many different nationalities: Indian, Bangladeshi, Burman, Nepalese, Pakistani, Chinese... We have quite the experience in hosting different cultures on the same site. I would also like to add that the refugees who work for us are very loyal and highly productive. So from both a business and a social cohesion points of view, it is a win-win situation.

A MUNICIPALITIE'S PERSPECTIVE IN TURKEY ÖNDER YALÇIN



What main challenges do municipalities face regarding social cohesion?

The first step towards social cohesion is ensuring that everyone has access to a decent life. This means that local authorities must provide social services, infrastructure, waste management etc. If any basic service is missing, tensions will arise. The refugee influx increased our population in Gaziantep by 22%, meaning we had to bring forward significant investments and adapt our strategic planning to adapt.

How can you foster social cohesion?

The key is responsibility-sharing. We know that refugees can greatly contribute the community. As an example, a community center in our city is run by refugees. They provide services for refugees as well as Turkish people, who can then see the refugees' contribution to the community. As a municipality, we are opening spaces to bring everybody together. This way they can realise they are not too different one from another. They share the same fears. They share the same hopes. Empathy can then replace feelings of threat or anger.

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FIXING STRUCTURAL PROBLEMS IN TURKEY ONUR ARINER



What are the major hurdles to promote social cohesion?

One of our main challenges is the informal labour sector. In Turkey, 30% of Turks were already informally employed when the refugee crisis began. And around 90% of Syrians work in the informal sector. This, and the economic crisis exacerbate social tensions. On top of that, politicians are stoking division for political gains by pinning the country's economic woes on refugees.

How can Turkey move forward on the issue of social cohesion?

Social cohesion will follow the economic integration of Syrians into Turkey. This is why we need to focus on employment skills and development, strengthening our business environment through the formalisation of informal businesses and ensuring proper vocational training in line with market needs.

RESILIENCE DIALOGUES SERIES

JOINT LEARNING FOR A BETTER RESPONSE TO THE SYRIAN & IRAQI CRISES

Qudra 2 is organising six web-based "Resilience Dialogues" that will bring together practitioners from local and international implementing partners as well as donor representatives in order to share good practices in the protracted Syrian and Iraqi crises.

What works? What does not? And why?

In line with its objective of strengthening the resilience of refugees, IDPs, returnees and host communities, the Qudra 2 Programme has always underlined the need for the practical sharing of experience among its wide network of international and regional partners.

Exchange leads to innovation.

These online discussion panels will underline practical solutions and exchange on best practices that could be scaled up in specific locations in the region. By providing concrete proposals and recommendations to inform future actions of donors, implementing partners and other stakeholders, Qudra 2's Resilience Dialogues will help ensure that the European Union and its member states provide the best possible support to the countries and communities affected by the Syrian and Iraqi crises.

**5.6 million
Syrian refugees**

are registered in Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, straining resources and the social fabric of host countries.

source: UNHCR, 2021

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