



# Supporting the future of Syria and the region

Brussels II Conference 24-25 April 2018

## Syria Conference – NGO online consultation results

Ahead of the second Brussels Conference on Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, the European Union ran an online consultation in February 2018 to seek the views of organisations working in Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan. The consultation sought partners' views on potential themes for the conference, key challenges, lessons learned and best practice, and included a separate question on social cohesion between refugee and host communities.

108 responses to the consultation were received. A qualitative analysis of responses was undertaken, considering responses from Syria and host countries separately before comparing the results to identify cross-cutting issues. This document is a summary of the key findings of this analysis.

### Key themes and challenges

The consultation sought views on themes for conference events, proposing possible themes for consideration: protection, health, education, access, resilience, transitional justice, and livelihoods.

#### **Refugee-hosting countries**

**Protection, education and livelihoods** emerged as the three most prominent themes in responses from Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

Respondents reported a range of significant **protection** challenges, including around refugees' legal status, legal residency, registration, work permits, and exposure to violence, exploitation and abuse.

Respondents emphasised the vital importance of **education** for the future of young Syrian refugees. Two key issues emerged across all three hosting countries: low school attendance among refugee populations, linked to protection issues, and poor quality education. A lack of adequate adaptation processes was highlighted, particularly in Lebanon, with refugee children attending schools where they do not speak the language of tuition, preventing them from learning effectively and increasing drop-out rates.

Many respondents noted **livelihoods** as an important theme, particularly in Jordan and Turkey. Respondents reported a continued deterioration in refugees' material circumstances, risking the adoption of negative coping strategies such as child labour. In Jordan, this is compounded by administrative difficulties in obtaining work permits. Respondents stressed the need to support the creation of opportunities for refugees to improve their levels of income, not just relief.

Restrictions on humanitarian organisations by some governments in the region were reported, as was a **lack of awareness of resources and support among refugee populations, which prevents them from gaining access to services.**

#### **Inside Syria**

Respondents operating inside Syria favoured mainly **resilience, protection, education and livelihoods** as themes to be addressed.

A majority of the responses from participants operating in Syria highlighted **resilience** as an important theme for consideration at the conference. Respondents stressed the need for a stronger focus on more sustainable solutions to maintain services without continuous external support.

Nearly half of respondents within Syria thought that **protection** should be addressed at the conference, reporting systematic violations of international humanitarian law provisions. Respondents also highlighted significant **security and safety challenges** in delivering assistance.

A large number of respondents considered that **education** is a key and strategic cluster and should also be included in the conference programme. Many respondents noted that the lack of **livelihoods** for Syrian people increases their vulnerability, and felt that this theme should be discussed.

Organisations working inside Syria noted difficulties around **access** to the population, in particular to the most vulnerable segments. Some respondents thought that **transitional justice** should be discussed, and many argued it was missing from current aid mechanisms.

In both Syria and the refugee-hosting countries, respondents reported a range of difficulties in accessing adequate **healthcare**, with refugees often excluded from national healthcare systems in hosting countries.

Respondents **in all countries** also highlighted a range of **cross-cutting challenges**. These include **bureaucratic obstacles**, such as reluctance from some public authorities to co-operate with NGOs, lengthy approval processes for projects and difficulties obtaining work permits for staff. Respondents also reported **funding challenges**, with slow approval processes, a lack of flexibility and short-term funding hindering the implementation of longer-term projects. The need for gender mainstreaming in all programmes was also emphasised.

### Lessons learned and best practice

Respondents highlighted a range of lessons learned and examples of good practice. The creation of a **culture of dialogue** was mentioned by many respondents as vital, in particular involving local partners and communities in programme development to improve service provision, foster social cohesion, build resilience and trust, and improve access to hard-to-reach areas. Another key lesson learned was the **need for effective coordination** among partners, as well as with institutions, donors and stakeholders, both at local and central level. Respondents also stressed the **importance of effective monitoring, governance and evaluation**, including ways to seek feedback from beneficiaries.

### Social cohesion

Among respondents to the question on social cohesion, there is a general agreement that **improving resilience and livelihood opportunities** will improve social cohesion. To this end, some respondents suggested that **conflict sensitive programming** components should be mainstreamed.

A number of respondents stressed the importance of **distributing aid on the basis of need** regardless of the status through a **vulnerability criteria assessment** to mitigate inter-community tensions. Some emphasised the importance of **bringing together host and refugee communities**, by including refugees in local dialogues and events, and running joint programmes. Programmes that solely target the needs of host communities are also in place.

Others urged the donor community to allow the **inclusion of people concerned**, in particular within host communities, in the design, implementation and evaluation of intervention programmes. Moreover, respondents highlighted how **bringing refugees and host communities working together** in camps and outside is effective in fostering social cohesion. Several respondents emphasised the **important role played by municipalities and local authorities**, urging greater international support for these bodies.