

# REBUILDING SOCIETIES

## STRATEGIES FOR RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY IN TIMES OF CONFLICT

CONVENER

Manal Omar

CO-CONVENER

Elie Abouaoun

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## FOREWORD

The Middle East is seeing a century-old political order unravel, an unprecedented struggle for power within and between states, and the rise of extremist elements that have already exacted a devastating human and economic toll that the world cannot continue to bear. That is why we, in partnership with the Atlantic Council, have undertaken an effort to seek to advance the public discussion in the direction of a global strategy for addressing these and other, longer-term challenges confronting the region.

To that end, we convened in February 2015 a Middle East Strategy Task Force to examine the underlying issues of state failure and political legitimacy that contribute to extremist violence, and to suggest ways that the international community can work in true partnership with the people of the region to address these challenges. Our emphasis is on developing a positive agenda that focuses not just on the problems of the region, but recognizes and seeks to harness its vast potential and empower its people toward a constructive and solutions-based approach.

Drawing on previous successful bipartisan initiatives, we are pleased to serve as Co-Chairs for this project. We have undertaken this effort together with a diverse and high-level group of senior advisers from the United States, Europe, and the Middle East, underscoring the truly international approach that is necessary to address this global problem and the need, first and foremost, to listen to responsible voices from the region. We all approach this project with great humility, since the challenges facing the region are some of the most challenging and difficult that any of us have ever seen.

Engaging some of the brightest minds in the region and beyond, we organized five working groups to examine the broad topical issues that we see as essential to unlocking a more peaceful and prosperous Middle East. These issues include:

- Security and Public Order
- Religion, Identity, and Countering Violent Extremism
- Rebuilding Societies: Refugees, Recovery, and Reconciliation in Times of Conflict
- Governance and State-Society Relations
- Economic Recovery and Revitalization

Over the course of 2015, each of these working groups discussed key aspects of the topic as they saw it, culminating in each case in a paper outlining the individual working group convener's conclusions and recommendations based on these discussions. This paper is the outcome of the working group on Rebuilding Societies, convened by Manal Omar, the United States Institute for Peace's (USIP) acting Vice President for the Middle East and North Africa. We are extremely grateful to Manal for the time and dedication she offered to this project, as well as to Elie Abouaoun, USIP's Director for Middle East Programs, who served as Co-Convener. We also wish to extend warm thanks to USIP for its collaboration and partnership.

This paper represents Ms. Omar's personal conclusions in her capacity as Convener. While the content and conclusions were greatly informed by the debates within the working group, it is not a consensus document and does not necessarily represent the views of each individual group member. Nor does it necessarily represent our views as Co-Chairs, or those of the Senior Advisers to the project. Instead, this paper is intended as a think piece to spur further discussions of these matters.

In addition to being a technical resource for policymakers working on issues of resilience, refugee assistance, and social cohesion in conflict-torn societies, we greatly appreciated the constructive tone of Ms. Omar's conclusions.

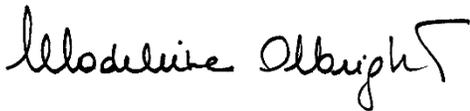
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In particular, we found her point that refugees should be seen as an economic opportunity rather than as a burden to be a powerful and intriguing counter to the prevailing public narrative. We also valued her warning against “sequencing” crisis response, and agree that rebuilding societies cannot wait until a “day after” that may never come. The seeds for the future of conflict-torn societies must be planted even before the fighting has stopped. Furthermore, the paper’s emphasis on education as a cornerstone of rebuilding war-torn societies and combatting violent extremism is very much in line with our own thinking.

Some of this paper’s conclusions are sure to be apparent to those operating in the field, but we feel that this working group has done the policy community a great service by capturing this accumulated practical wisdom and making a highly technical subject both accessible and relevant to decision-makers.

We have embraced a number of the ideas presented here and will build upon them in our concluding Co-Chairs’ report. It is our hope that this final report will represent a constructive, considered, and above all, solutions-oriented approach to a region that we see as vital to American interests, global security, and human prosperity. We hope that the broad, collaborative approach we have emphasized throughout this project can serve as a model for future problem-solving on issues of the Middle East. We also hope that our final report will not be an end point, but instead will be the first part of an ongoing conversation amongst the global network of stakeholders that we have assembled for this Task Force.

The situation in the Middle East is difficult but progress is not impossible. It is our desire that this Task Force might serve as the first step toward better international cooperation with the people of the Middle East to set the region on a more positive trajectory, and to realize its incredible potential.



**Madeleine K. Albright**  
Co-Chair



**Stephen J. Hadley**  
Co-Chair

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The forced displacement of unprecedented numbers of people (many of them unregistered, hard to track, and thus hard to help) within and beyond national borders has become an enduring yet fluid phenomenon across the Middle East and North Africa over the past decade. The increased risks being taken by refugees and asylum-seekers, including those who are crossing the Mediterranean in very dangerous conditions, and the sharp increased flow through the Balkans and Europe illustrate their level of desperation. They are also a reflection of the failure of both national leaders and the international community to address the violent conflicts as well as the elements of fragility that lead to them in a sustainable way.

Several overlapping violent conflicts within the region have not only triggered massive exoduses but also killed and injured hundreds of thousands, destroyed huge amounts of civilian infrastructure, undone decades of progress, and threatened the welfare and security of generations to come. Along with individual lives, the web of social relations that connects individuals, groups, and communities is a casualty of these violent conflicts.

In the midst of this tremendous tragedy, there is an opportunity to mobilize the international community to do more and to do it in a different way. Current responses are not only frequently inefficient and unsustainable; they also run the risk of producing further fragmentation of local societies and fueling more violence. Furthermore, they too often focus on the immediate symptoms, giving very short-term answers to situations that require long-term commitments.

The report asks what can be done *now* to plant the seeds for a full recovery and social cohesion in societies that are in the midst of protracted violent conflicts, and provides more sustainable, coherent, and substantive answers to the ongoing refugee crisis. It explains why the fates of refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and other impacted communities across the region (i.e., people who have remained home, those who have returned, and the millions of vulnerable people living in communities hosting refugees and displaced persons) are, and will remain, so closely interconnected. Their situations may present distinct sociopolitical as

well as legal characteristics (in particular, whether people cross borders or not), but the dynamics that force those people to move are similar. Moreover, what people are experiencing today (whether they are refugees, IDPs, or have remained at home) is shaping how they will be able to live together tomorrow.

Much of the literature on post-conflict recovery, and a great deal of practical experience, has highlighted the importance of creating conditions that set the stage for long-term peacebuilding while violent conflict is ongoing. The longer local populations stay in survival mode, the smaller the chance of them becoming resilient later in the process. Peacebuilding is not an end point; it is a process that needs to be started very early on and supported at every stage. This report calls for a radical shift in how we operate in the realm of international aid to the region. This shift is based on five key imperatives:

- better integrating the cross-border dimensions of ongoing crises in all programming
- looking beyond the sequential view
- focusing more on sustainable aid (beyond shelter and food)
- supporting people's ownership in revitalizing their own communities
- reintroducing the conditions for future social cohesion

In a context where funds are limited and aid programs for the region are short on money, efforts should center on a few priorities geared toward supporting long-term resilience and the restoration of hope and dignity. Local communities often lack basic supplies and services, but members of the working group who are from the region and work with those communities have also stressed the need for international aid that goes beyond food rations and blankets to include

- sustainable economic aid to enable resilience;
- psychosocial support with the aim of supporting resilience and laying the groundwork for long-term reconciliation processes;

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- education so that no generation is lost;
- community dialogues, local conflict mediation, and local security mechanisms; and
- identity papers and birth registration.

The report highlights very concrete projects and offers practical suggestions in each of the five sectors of intervention. It also presents two series of considerations the international community must bear in mind. The first concerns the way in which international aid agencies interact with local actors. Truly supporting them and their ownership of the recovery process presupposes not only that we comply with a “do no harm” policy, but also that we pay more attention to what local actors need and are asking for, what they already do, and the ways in which they have organized themselves. This requires better targeting and organizing support for local organizations.

The second series of considerations focuses on the support that should be given to countries hosting a large number of refugees in the region. Host countries are shouldering a huge and growing burden, and violence has already spilled over their borders from the countries in conflict. Host country governments are facing an extremely difficult political reality. Yet so

far, the international community has largely addressed the refugee crisis on a temporary, emergency basis. International and regional organizations and their partners, starting with the European and the United States governments, need to acknowledge that the refugee crisis in the Middle East is not a passing regional matter. It is a long-term international problem, of a magnitude not seen since World War II, and it demands a much more ambitious solution, starting with much greater support to host country governments and communities.

It is also time for the donor community, including the Gulf countries, the European Union (EU), and the United States, to exercise political leadership by example regarding refugee burden sharing, to commit to supporting people’s resilience in the long term, and to reaffirm their commitment to the international norms of transparency and accountability.

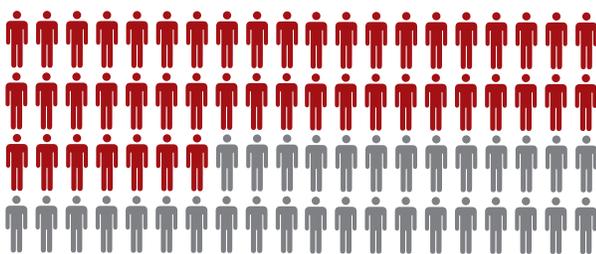
The failure to invest now in the future of entire societies would lead to greater problems and more costs down the road. Supporting people’s resilience now is not only a sound political strategy; it is a good economic investment that may save taxpayer money in the future, while planting the seeds for long-term peace and stability.

## INTRODUCTION

The forced displacement of unprecedented numbers of people (many of them unregistered, hard to track, and thus difficult to help) within and beyond individual nations has become an enduring yet dynamic phenomenon across the Middle East and North Africa over the last decade. The region's multiple overlapping violent conflicts have triggered major exoduses, killed and injured hundreds of thousands, decimated large amounts of civilian infrastructure, undone decades of progress, and threatened the security and welfare of future generations.

As of February 2016, the Syrian conflict has forced half of the country's population from their homes: More than 6.6 million people are internally displaced, and 4.6 million have sought refuge in other countries.<sup>1</sup> Today, Syrians form the largest refugee group under the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees mandate, the vast majority of whom have gone to Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, or Turkey, with a smaller group in Egypt and other North African countries, and now Europe. With no resolution to the conflict in sight, this displacement seems likely to continue for years.

Figure 1. Syrians Internally Displaced or Having Fled the Country



**6.6 MILLION SYRIANS ARE INTERNALLY DISPLACED**

**4.6 MILLION SYRIANS ARE REFUGEES IN OTHER COUNTRIES**

The Syrian war and exodus have made life yet harder for the large number of Palestinians who have lived as refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria for almost seven decades. Fifty percent of the Palestinians who have resided in Syria are now being displaced but are unable to cross international borders legally. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, founded in December 1949, is providing assistance and protection for some five million registered Palestine refugees.<sup>2</sup> The mere existence of a special agency, whose mandate has been repeatedly renewed by the General Assembly, is a symbol of a situation that has not found any durable solution.

Iraq—which, together with the Palestinian Territories and Israel, has been at the center of regional unrest since the Iraq-Iran war (1980–88) and the first Gulf War (1991)—has been swept by successive waves of population displacement for nearly three decades. As of late February 2016, Iraq was coping with more than 3.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs).<sup>3</sup> Many of them have been forced to move not just once but multiple times. Almost one in two of these IDPs and a quarter of a million Syrian refugees fled in 2014 to the Kurdish region of Iraq, swelling its population by nearly 30 percent in just a few months.<sup>4</sup> Entire groups of IDPs in Iraq (many of them Syrians and Palestinians) are refugees fleeing other conflicts, making them doubly displaced. The number of Iraqis seeking refuge in other countries has also been rising substantially. An estimated 2 million are living as refugees across the region; half of them were residing in Syria before the beginning of the civil war, and a majority of the remainder are seeking asylum in Jordan.

Yemen has long been a country of mixed migration flows, including asylum-seekers and migrants. The stream of refugees from the Horn of Africa to Yemen, which has intensified since the early 1990s, has brought almost all of the 250,000 refugees registered in the country, but the recent resurgence of violent conflict in

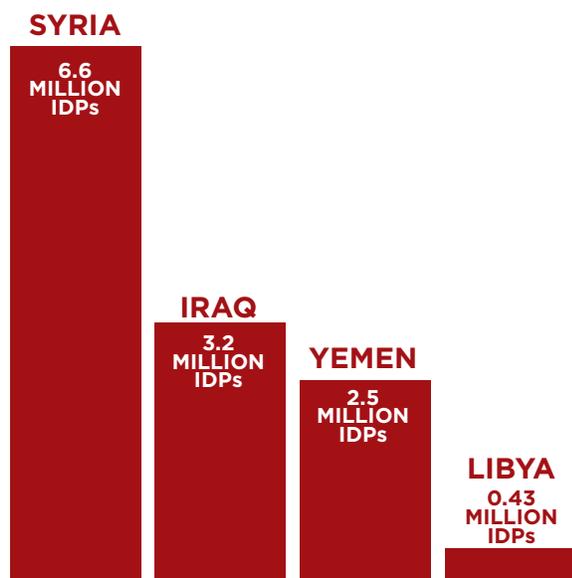
1 "Syrian Arab Republic," United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), <http://www.unocha.org/syria>; "Syria Regional Refugee Response," Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

2 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, <http://www.unrwa.org>.

3 International Organization for Migration, Displacement Tracking Matrix as of November 24, 2015, <http://iomiraq.net/dtm-page>.

4 *Ibid* and "Iraq," UNOCHA, <http://www.unocha.org/iraq>.

Figure 2. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) per Country



Yemen has reversed the flow, with people now crossing the Gulf of Aden from east to west and heading for Djibouti, Somalia's Puntland, and Somaliland.<sup>5</sup> Those fleeing Yemen include people who had first fled from Africa (particularly Somalia) to Yemen as well as Yemenis now escaping their own country. In addition, as of February 2016, over 2.5 million Yemenis were internally displaced.<sup>6</sup>

In Libya, amid renewed violent conflict, nationwide political rifts, and a breakdown in the rule of law, hundreds of thousands of refugees and asylum-seekers living in or transiting through Libya, many of them Syrians, are risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean in overcrowded smugglers' ships. The instability in Libya has transformed the country into an exit door for many African and Middle Eastern migrants, in particular those from the Sahel region. Meanwhile, the number of Libyans seeking refuge outside the country is also on the rise. The number of people displaced within the country has almost doubled since September 2014, reaching an estimated 434,000 in July 2015; the number may even be higher today. One in four IDPs lives in the eastern city of Benghazi.<sup>7</sup>

5 "UNHCR Braces for Refugees Fleeing Yemen by Boat to Africa," UNHCR News Stories, April 10, 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/5527c16a9.html>.

6 "Yemen," UNOCHA, <http://www.unocha.org/yemen>.

7 "Numbers of Internally Displaced in Libya Double since September," UNHCR, Briefing Notes, June 30, 2015; "Libya IDP

Everywhere, the situation remains extremely volatile. Massive waves of people are likely to continue to become displaced as long as violence persists. As daunting as they are, the estimates produced by international organizations of how many refugees and IDPs are fleeing the region's conflicts do not tell the whole story. Large groups of unregistered migrants are hard to track, and intergovernmental organizations do not have access to large areas, especially areas where many people are trapped by the violence. Moreover, numbers alone cannot convey the full scale or nature of the human suffering that is taking place.

Along with individual lives, the web of social relations that connects individuals, groups, and communities is a casualty of the violent conflicts. The ongoing displacements are symptomatic of a deeper fragmentation of many societies throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Increasing ethnic, sectarian, and ideological divisions are affecting the fabric of entire societies, a fabric that had evolved over centuries in most cases. This reality demands more than a humanitarian response. The scale of forced displacement in the region is unprecedented and calls for a paradigm shift in the way that we approach the situation. The millions of people directly impacted by the unfolding and seemingly unending tragedy need the support of the international community now, not at some indeterminate date in the future when peace has been restored. If we wait before providing support, we will be standing by as the conflict grows more complicated and changes in nature. If nothing is done to assist the refugees and IDPs in a more systematic fashion, we may see a rise in revenge killings targeted at IDPs, or committed by IDPs, at the community level, complicating the conflict dynamics. At the same time, we will be missing the opportunity to help IDPs, refugees, and other affected communities lay down the foundations for future reconstruction. In the midst of what is a tremendous tragedy, there is an opportunity to mobilize the international community to do more and to do it in a different way.

What can be done *now* to plant the seeds of full recovery and social cohesion in societies that are in the midst of protracted violent conflicts? What are the conditions needed to enable the populations affected by the violence across the Middle East and North Africa (including those who have been forced to flee their homes) to move beyond immediate day-to-day survival and build resilience? (In this context,

Figures Analysis," Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, <http://www.internal-displacement.org/middle-east-and-north-africa/libya/figures-analysis>.

“resilience” is broadly understood as the ability of individuals, households, communities, and institutions to anticipate, withstand, recover, and transform from shocks and crises.<sup>8</sup>)

These are difficult questions that require pragmatic and creative solutions. Existing approaches to protracted displacements are not working. They are unsustainable and inefficient, using short-term measures to address long-term problems, and they lead to dependency and more fragmentation of local societies. Defining durable strategies for those displaced by violent conflicts is also critical to building sustainable peace. The complex relationship between, on the one hand, population displacements and, on the other hand, peace and security has received increased attention, as underscored in several reports by the UN Secretary-General. Unfortunately, in practice, organizations that focus on displacement and actors that work on peacebuilding, security, and conflict resolution continue to work separately; their initiatives seldom overlap significantly, and they rarely seek to develop a combined strategy.

This report not only calls for a paradigm shift in how international aid organizations have been operating but also offers very concrete suggestions for how to make this transition. One of the main premises of the report is the danger of assuming that a brighter, post-conflict future (an illusory “day after”) is coming; such an assumption distracts the international community from introducing programs that are needed now, even in the midst of violent conflicts. The report underplays neither the magnitude of the current humanitarian emergency nor the donor fatigue that is jeopardizing entire existing aid programs to the region. It argues that these grim realities can be addressed only if action is framed

**Defeating ISIS and, more importantly, preventing other iterations to appear, requires a holistic strategy to rebuild societies torn by conflict.**

within a clear, long-term strategy for enhancing the resilience of local populations and helping them create the bases on which societies can be built. This shift also means seeing displaced communities as potential opportunities for host communities and local economies, not just as burdens.

This report presents the main recommendations developed by the Working Group on Rebuilding Societies: Refugees, Recovery, and Reconciliation in Times of Conflict, convened as part of the Atlantic Council Middle East Strategy Task Force (MEST). MEST seeks to examine, through dialogue among partners in the Middle East and the rest of the international community, how the United States and other key actors can better collaborate to rebuild a stable, prosperous regional order based on legitimate, well-governed states. Regional experts have repeatedly emphasized that defeating the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and, more importantly, preventing other iterations to appear, requires a holistic strategy to rebuild societies torn by conflict. The task force, working in partnership with local stakeholders, has convened a series of public hearings, off-the-record discussions, and expert working groups to explore these issues in greater depth. A list of the Rebuilding Societies working group members can be found at the beginning of the report. This report is based on discussions during the working group meetings, interviews

with members of the working group, exchanges with different actors in the field, and extensive desk research.

This report focuses on the shared fate of refugees, IDPs, and the wider societies in the Middle East and North Africa. It should be seen as complementing other MEST working group reports that deal with different dimensions of a rebuilding strategy (security,<sup>9</sup> governance, religion, and economic issues<sup>10</sup>). Indeed, rebuilding societies in times of conflict requires not

<sup>8</sup> This definition is consistent with those followed by major international organizations, including in the context of the Middle East crisis. See “A Resilience-Based Development Response to the Syria Crisis,” United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Position Paper, December 2013; *Guidelines for Resilience Systems Analysis: How to Analyze Risk and Build a Roadmap to Resilience*, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), OECD Publishing, 2014; Béatrice Pouligny, “The Resilience Approach to Peacebuilding: A New Conceptual Framework,” *USIP Insights Newsletter*, Summer 2014, <http://www.usip.org/insights-newsletter/the-resilience-approach-peacebuilding-new-conceptual-framework>.

<sup>9</sup> Kenneth M. Pollack, *Security and Public Order*, Middle East Strategy Task Force, Atlantic Council, February 2016, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/security-and-public-order>.

<sup>10</sup> Sherif Kamel and Christopher M. Schroeder, *Economic Recovery and Revitalization*, Middle East Strategy Task Force, Atlantic Council, February 2016, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/reports/economic-recovery-and-revitalization-report>.

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only a strongly coordinated long-term and multi-sectoral approach, but also an articulation of and an ability to link bottom-up and top-down dimensions. Community- and local-level approaches, which are often the only ones possible when the conflict is still underway, ultimately need to be interwoven with broader-level structural changes in the relationship between society and state. Among other elements, this process requires broader political settlements of the violent conflicts. However, it cannot wait for ideal circumstances to be initiated. Peace and reconciliation must start now. This report articulates a *pragmatic strategy* for launching that process.

More broadly, and as part of the overall MEST project, this report is meant to serve as a policy reference by which the United States and the global community of stakeholders, including Middle Easterners themselves as the principal

actors, can best collaborate toward a shared goal of building a stable, peaceful order in the region.

The first section of the report explains why the fates of refugees, IDPs, and other impacted communities across the region are interwoven. The second section explains the key principles that should govern international aid to the region to make sure that it goes beyond humanitarian relief and contributes to long-term recovery for the societies concerned. The third section suggests key sectoral priorities, given the limitations of current funding. The fourth section presents key recommendations for implementing, on the ground, the principles laid out in the second section and for ensuring that international programs actually contribute to societal resilience. The fifth and final section calls on the donor community to make a series of clear commitments.

# I. REFUGEES, IDPS, AND AFFECTED POPULATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: A DIFFERENT FUTURE?

The fates of refugees, IDPs, and other impacted communities across the region (i.e., the millions of vulnerable people living in communities hosting refugees and displaced persons as well as those in war-torn areas who have stayed or returned home) are inseparable. While their status is governed by distinct legal and political parameters, depending on whether they cross the borders or not (with a special international refugee protection regime, for instance), their situations are connected. Moreover, what they experience today will shape how they envision the ways in which they might live together tomorrow.

Four trends currently exacerbate their situation:

- Ongoing cycles of violence and instability have spawned recurrent displacements, uprooting individuals multiple times, and forcing them to cross several frontiers. These movements are often large in scale and encompass the whole region.
- Displacement situations in the region have also become increasingly protracted, with people being displaced for many years, both internally and across borders. The Palestinians are the world's oldest and largest group of protracted refugees, millions of Palestinians having now spent almost seventy years in camps outside their homeland. The majority of displaced Iraqis and Syrians have already spent several years in intractable states of limbo. We know, from experiences in other regions, that the longer people are displaced, the less likely they are to return to their homes. Today, worldwide, the average time a refugee spends in exile is seventeen years.
- Massive displacements are affecting the demographics of entire regions. In Lebanon and the Kurdish region of northern Iraq, in particular, the proportion of refugees is so high compared to the local population that it jeopardizes social cohesion.
- Refugees are mostly an urban phenomenon: 85 percent of Syrian refugees live in urban and peri-urban private settings (on private land or in private homes) dispersed across large geographic areas; only 15 percent live in camps. The percentage of

refugees living outside of camps is even higher in Iraq, Libya, and Yemen. Most IDPs in the region also live outside of camps, hosted in urban and rural communities. The fact that refugees and IDPs are dispersed throughout communities makes outreach to those populations particularly difficult. It also means that the expected rise in the number of IDPs and refugees in 2015 will impact a growing number of local communities, which will become hosts for these new additions to the ranks of refugees and displaced persons.

This reality explains the need to approach the situation of refugees, IDPs, and host communities as interconnected, in particular through community-based projects that jointly address issues faced by the different categories of populations. It also requires more courageous initiatives to facilitate some forms of “return” and to establish settlements in areas that become liberated and stabilized. Last but not least, any strategy in the region needs to reflect larger demographic trends in the region.

## Approaching IDPs and Refugee Issues as Connected Realities

Strategies are needed to enable the international community to approach the dynamic refugee and IDP situation in an integrated manner. Devising such strategies first requires a more nuanced and empirically based understanding of three facets of the problem:

- *The dynamic micro-level processes that drive IDPs to cross borders and become refugees, and the key factors that keep people from returning to their places of origin.* The lack of safety and the impossibility of continuing to live materially in widely destroyed areas are known to be decisive parameters. Beyond them, however, other factors also play influential roles. Micro-level analyses are needed to better understand how the fear of the future in the absence of guarantees for adequate protection by the state and inclusive political governance plays a role in decisions to stay or leave. A more nuanced understanding of the contradictory effects of aid on IDPs' decision to move or stay is also needed. In some areas, a

number of people may move back and forth across borders until they no longer have a choice.

- *The role local forms of governance can play in supporting IDPs.* This support includes ensuring their access to basic services, replacing documentation, and preventing discrimination against those displaced from another part of the country.
- *The interactions between displaced populations and host communities within and beyond national borders.* Understanding these interactions will facilitate better understanding of the negative effects of both refugees and IDPs on host communities and how to mitigate them, as well as the conditions needed to create opportunities for both displaced and host communities, and help put in place mechanisms so that they can discuss their differences and find solutions to their common issues. Here, the end point is not necessarily to increase international assistance per se but to better contextualize the micro-dynamics that characterize the contexts in which it is given.

### Designing Joint Community-Based Projects

In countries that already experience considerable poverty—in 2015, Jordan had an estimated poverty rate of 14 percent, Egypt a rate of 26 percent, and Lebanon one of 28.5 percent—refugees are crowding poor and vulnerable areas where livelihoods, housings, and social services are already limited. Communities hosting IDPs in the midst of violent conflicts face challenges that are even more acute.

Along with mechanisms to allow refugees and IDPs access to legal work (see sections about sustainable economic aid and support to countries hosting a large number of refugees), joint projects might be the best way to encourage the integration of the displaced populations within the existing economic cycle of their hosting communities. Examples of projects that bring different groups together to work for a common goal include those providing electricity, water, and other basic services in the Idlib governorate in Syria; and those providing drinking water and waste water treatment in Yemen and Lebanon. In Yemen's Al-Hodeidah governorate, facilitators at Search

for Common Ground (SFCG), a nongovernmental organization (NGO) based in Washington, DC, mobilized local youth and community members to help collect and remove trash from public spaces. By organizing community trash collection groups, SFCG has helped create a safe space for collaboration on common needs that bring people together while making communities safer. In Jordan, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has reached out to school children through its "Makani" initiative, which targets vulnerable children, refugees, and Jordanians alike (see text box, p. 21). Here again, better research measuring the actual effects of joint community-based projects in different contexts is needed.

These joint community-based projects have an important point in common: They highlight how refugees and IDPs can bring added value to their host communities, even if it is only on a short- to medium-term basis. Joint projects can also limit the risk of conflicts arising from assistance projects focusing on different categories of populations. Community centers can serve as "platforms for the delivery of services, supporting community-based protection and response networks, as well as other community initiatives."<sup>11</sup>

Joint community-based projects . . . highlight how refugees and IDPs can bring added value to their host communities.

### Facilitating Smaller Settlements in Liberated and Stabilized Areas

Today, few, if any, agencies are designing programs to support return; most initiatives focus on arrival. This presents the risk of creating (in particular, for Syrians and Iraqis), by default, a category of semi-permanent refugees and resettlers with second-class status in their host communities, no hope for the future, and immense unmet needs. The case of the Palestinian refugees, one-third of whom have been living in camps or settlements in Jordan, Lebanon, or Syria for almost seventy years, springs immediately to mind. When possible, voluntary return to, or settlement in, liberated areas should be supported, with appropriate security and community-based programs put in place that support local governance mechanisms. We do not have to wait for a formal peace agreement to be signed and for security to be clearly reestablished in a country before returns can take place. Refugees usually have a much more accurate view of when is a good time

<sup>11</sup> *Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in Response to the Syria Crisis*, Regional Strategic Overview, 2015-2016, 3RP, p. 21.

for them to return than internationals do. Outsiders need to develop a better understanding of how at-risk populations themselves seek to mitigate the risks they face. It is important to reaffirm that return should be voluntary for those who wish to go home once they feel it is safe to do so, and that any return should be in accordance with international refugee law, particularly the principle of *non-refoulement*,<sup>12</sup> as well as the guiding principles for IDPs and international humanitarian law that prohibit forced population movements. Inducing refugees and IDPs to return to their places of origin or their country too early may further expose them to serious protection risks or renewed displacement.

### **Integrating Demographic Issues in Programming Early On**

Partners in the Middle East are acutely aware of how current crises and the forced displacement of

populations that these crises generate happen in a broader context in which the current population growth rate remains among the highest in the world. No development program can be sustainable unless it adopts a clear population growth policy. Developing such a policy requires conducting a concerted political effort in the region that acknowledges the effects of forced migrations on social cohesion, identity, and ethnicity issues. Land tenure and, more broadly, the management of natural resources are also long-standing issues in the region that should be explored and factored into any discussion. Closely tied to identity and property issues, they have been exacerbated by the most recent wave of violent conflicts. These issues are rooted in distinct national historical, cultural, and legal contexts, and require country-focused efforts but would also greatly benefit from the leadership and support of the region as a whole, in the form of a regional conference on the topic.

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<sup>12</sup> *Non-refoulement* is the international legal practice of not forcing refugees or asylum seekers to return to a country in which they are liable to be subjected to persecution.

## II. KEY PRINCIPLES FOR INTERNATIONAL AID TO HELP REBUILD SOCIETIES

Much of the literature on post-conflict recovery, and a great deal of practical experience, has highlighted the importance of creating conditions, while the violent conflict is still underway, that set the stage for long-term peacebuilding. The longer that local populations remain in survival mode, the smaller the chance of them becoming resilient later in the process. Indeed, many interventions end up doing more harm than good if the conditions for a sustainable recovery are not fully taken into consideration early on. This also entails planting the seeds for a radical shift from a culture of violence to a culture of peace, with the aim of fostering social cohesion.

This need to think long term from the very beginning of an intervention has been acknowledged by those who advocate for a shift toward resilience-based interventions that would generate greater coherence between humanitarian and development approaches. Resilience-based interventions are meant to go beyond humanitarian relief and invest, from day one, in local capacities and resources so that the affected communities and institutions can deal with both their immediate and long-term needs, creating the potential for a viable path toward sustainable human development and prosperity. The Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) launched by the United Nations as a response to the Syria crisis is an illustration of this evolution, even though, in this plan, resilience is conceived of as a set of separate activities (representing 28 percent of the overall appeal, with only 14 percent of the funds received as of September 2015) instead of as an imperative across all programs. For the majority of international aid programs, the transformational potential of the concept of resilience has yet to be realized in practice. The resilience projects that have been undertaken remain underfunded across sectors and tend to be launched outside of mainstream humanitarian or development analysis and planning.

Practical experience has highlighted the importance of creating conditions, while the violent conflict is still underway, that set the stage for long-term peacebuilding.

This state of affairs is not confined to aid programs that target the Middle East and North Africa. In many ways, the international community has already recognized the pressing challenges that the international humanitarian and development systems face, as illustrated by the discussions prior to the UN-initiated World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016.<sup>13</sup> But the scale and intensity of the refugee and IDP crisis in the Middle East make the need for a paradigm shift even more urgent.

Beyond the factors mentioned below regarding the persistent dichotomy between emergency and medium- to long-term aid, the obstacles to deeper reforms to the existing global aid architecture are well-known:

- The centralized, top-down nature of an architecture largely focused on the United Nations system, which continues to largely reflect another world, the one we inherited from World War II. To be fair, the current international humanitarian response mechanisms were established in 1991 with UN Resolution 46/182, with the creation of a few key institutions.

This structure has since been updated and adjusted, especially via the 2005 Humanitarian Reform Process and the subsequent Transformative Agenda in 2010.<sup>14</sup> But the power structure between member states explains that none of these reforms has been able to fundamentally reshape the whole. Inside the system, some agencies—in particular the High Commissioner for Refugees—have seen drastic changes in the crises they face, with a structure that has not evolved proportionately.

<sup>13</sup> See World Humanitarian Summit, <https://www.worldhumanitarianissummit.org> and *Cracking the Code: Enhancing Emergency Response & Resilience in Complex Crises*, Mercy Corps, 2015, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Cracking%20the%20Code.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> See “IASC Transformative Agency,” Inter-Agency Standing Committee, <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda>; *Cracking the Code*, Mercy Corps, p. 6, op. cit.

- Beyond the UN itself, the asymmetrical nature of the structure of international cooperation explains that any effort at reforming gets caught up in battles between actors of very different power, or widely monopolized by a minority of actors, including in the nongovernmental sector. While coordination and dialogue have improved drastically over the last two decades, they often fail to engage and link with local levels, including with those who might be the most innovative or might have more interest in changing the system.
- The international aid system is constantly overstretched and chronically underfunded to such a degree that everybody seems to have gotten used to it. Along with the lack of resources, the time constraints imposed by donors on humanitarian agencies and the centralization of most procedures (except for limited funds) explain why humanitarian and development actors alike often lack the flexibility to adjust to rapid changes in highly volatile contexts. Even in contexts where funding is inadequate, implementers need to show that they are able to disburse funds quickly, with a general lack of budgetary flexibility. This leaves very little room to adjust the way the work is done on the ground, as contexts evolve.
- Funds are also more willingly allocated to quantifiable results based on traditional approaches than they are to substantial expenditures and activities such as monitoring or conflict-sensitive research that could nurture innovation.
- Donors (and therefore agencies alike) are inherently risk-averse. They need visible, easily verifiable, and quick results. Operating remotely through local partners, in a highly volatile environment, for instance, is among the risks most would not take. The same is true for innovative or often hard-to-measure approaches that link short- and long-term initiatives.
- The core needs of those on the ground often conflict with what is politically expedient, and humanitarian relief is often used as a way to avoid deeper political or diplomatic engagement in difficult contexts.
- The extremely competitive nature of the humanitarian aid market shows that there is a relatively low incentive for those who currently benefit from the system to change it. Good intentions are not lacking; neither are the initiatives. However, when resources are scarce and one needs to constantly promote one's work to be able to survive, practical critical thinking is not the most favored. International and national aid systems also lack incentives for staff to work across functions and departments, a pre-condition for any substantial shift to happen.
- Change and change management are very challenging for individuals and institutions alike. They don't happen on their own, unless they are actively promoted. In the business sector, the firms that innovate are those that invest heavily in creating an environment that encourages their staff members to do so. Comparatively, the aid industry, in part because of its nature, doesn't do enough. It is not the best at developing and managing knowledge that can directly nurture such innovation in the field either.

Conditions on the ground in the Middle East call for humanitarian and development communities to take the opportunity to change and embrace the following five key principles.

### **Better Integrate the Cross-Border Dimensions of Ongoing Crises in All Programming**

Both analyses and intervention programs should be conflict-focused, not country-focused. The United Nations' 3RP is an example of a move in that direction as the UN aims to present a strategy that is both state-led and regionally integrated.<sup>15</sup> It builds on the national response plans of the five neighboring countries most affected by the crisis in Syria (Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt) while seeking to support the rebuilding of Syria's societal structure. Similar approaches are needed for Iraq, Yemen, and Libya, together with an acknowledgement of the dynamics that interconnect those crises. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-led regional coordination platform for both UN and non-UN agencies is also a positive sign of movement in that direction. Coordinating efforts at a regional level is only part of the solution, however; transborder as well as country-specific dynamics have to be factored into plans and budgets, with funding allocated for activities that might not only be country-centered.

### **Do Not Conceive of the Work as Sequential**

Despite a general consensus among international aid agencies that the idea of a sequential process

<sup>15</sup> See "Co-hosts Declaration from the Supporting Syria & the Region Conference, London 2016," 3RP, <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org>.

stretching from emergency relief to recovery and development is inappropriate for ongoing conflicts—and some international organizations and NGOs have made noticeable efforts to move in that direction—a majority of the aid in the region continues to function on that previous model. The factors slowing down the evolution are well-known. A recent publication by the United Kingdom-based think tank Overseas Development Institute summarized them as follows:<sup>16</sup>

- enduring conceptual divides between humanitarian and development actors
- disjointed strategies, decision-making processes, and budgets across different structures that inhibit comprehensive planning and action
- a lack of employment incentives across functions and departments
- low tolerance for the risks associated with innovative and often hard-to-measure approaches that link short- and long-term initiatives
- political pressure conflicting with the needs of the people on the ground, or the inducement to use humanitarian assistance as a way to avoid more meaningful engagement on challenging issues

These factors show that the dichotomy between what would fall under the categories of “emergency aid” or “development aid” is still very prevalent in the way aid today is being conceived, budgeted, and delivered. To that extent, observations made about the response to the current crisis in the Middle East are not fundamentally different from what has been observed in the past in other parts of the world. We know from experience that the continuing urge to draw unnecessary distinctions and create unhelpful divisions is not only inefficient, but also creates frustrations among local partners and risks jeopardizing their future. The specter of a massive and long-term displacement crisis in the Middle East should prompt donors and aid agencies alike to renew their efforts to devise solutions that engage different types of aid concurrently. Improvements have been made to aid

practices but we need to look more decisively beyond short-term solutions, so that our local partners can start thinking long term themselves.

### **Focus More on Sustainable Aid (Beyond Shelter and Food)**

People in the region are not asking for charity. They are asking primarily for help to restore their hope and dignity. They know how vital their immediate needs are but would like support for developing durable solutions: livelihood projects, material to help them improve and revitalize agriculture, support for their ideas for sustainable aid, and ways to offer their children a brighter future. This report calls for increased attention to currently underfunded programmatic priorities that would help local communities move in a sustainable direction. Thinking in terms of sustainability requires a fundamental shift in the way aid is conceived and delivered. Even life-saving assistance should support

long-term resilience; it is well-established that such choices are more successful and cost-effective. This also requires, on the part of international donors and governments of the host countries, more coordinated and constructive engagement to ensure that refugees are able to go on with their lives, not just survive. A series of recommendations regarding how to make aid more sustainable are presented in the third section of this report.

Thinking in terms  
of sustainability  
requires a  
fundamental shift  
in the way aid is  
conceived and  
delivered.

### **Support People’s Ownership in Revitalizing Their Own Communities**

A constant complaint voiced by community actors in the region is the feeling that their initiatives are either not supported or are stopped from being able to flourish. The resilience approach, on the other hand, recognizes local communities as active and creative agents shaping their own lives. Professional standards for international aid actors call for constant consultation with local community-based organizations and integration of their own needs assessments. However, recent field research in the region continues to show that, in most cases, local interlocutors are brought in only at the back end of a humanitarian response, and then are expected to do what they are told, whether the response is appropriate to the situation on the ground or not. In other words, local communities continue to be perceived as victims, not as actors or as parts of the solution. Of course, in any given community, the population includes a

<sup>16</sup> Christina Bennett, “The Development Agency of the Future: Fit for Protracted Crises?” *ODI, Working Paper*, April 2015, p. 5, <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9612.pdf>.

web of disparate actors with complex relationships, including armed groups or other weapons-bearers, political actors, and ordinary citizens. Intervening in that reality requires a careful, realistic analysis of the fluid local environment.

Another key dimension is the way in which existing capacities, knowledge, resources, and technology available in the region are mobilized. Donors and international agencies know from experience in other parts of the world that mobilizing local resources is essential to the sustainability of the response to any crisis. Compared with other regions exposed to crisis, the Middle East has significant domestic resources that—although they have not always been used for the benefit of the people of the region—need to be supported and used for sustainable responses. This should convince any outsider to approach the formulation and delivery of aid to the region differently. This report's fourth section makes concrete suggestions about how to move in that direction.

### **Reintroduce the Conditions for Future Social Cohesion**

Peacebuilding components are too often either missing from the current aid programs to the Middle East or geared towards the preparation of an illusory “day after,” disconnected from the short-term imperatives. Instead, peacebuilding efforts should inform the processes of any program to make sure that it contributes to (re)building relationships based on trust and mutual understanding. It would be unrealistic to expect this alone to deliver social cohesion in the short term. However, decades of peacebuilding and development practices have demonstrated that micro-level dynamics are key to repairing intra-societal relationships and will, therefore, be crucial to the success or failure of national-level peacebuilding efforts.

### III. KEY LINES OF EFFORTS GIVEN AVAILABLE RESOURCES

In a context where funds are limited and aid programs for the region are short on money, efforts should center on a few priorities geared toward supporting long-term resilience and the restoration of hope and dignity. Local communities often lack basic supplies and services, but they also need, and have repeatedly asked for, international aid that goes beyond food rations and blankets to include

- sustainable economic aid to enable resilience and market-based approaches to programming;
- psychosocial support with the aim of supporting resilience and laying the groundwork for long-term reconciliation processes;
- education so that no generation is lost;
- community dialogues, local conflict mediation, and local security mechanisms; and
- identity papers and birth registration.

Such concrete measures, it should be remembered, cannot substitute for more structural ones, in particular in the areas of security, rule of law, and governance. But both near-term concrete steps and longer-term structural reforms will play vital roles in fostering social cohesion and sustainable peace.

#### **Sustainable Economic Aid to Enable Resilience**

Among the top requests from the region are materials to help improve and revitalize agriculture. Recent World Bank programs in Lebanon are a good example of programs that contribute to such revitalization. This is also a top demand of IDPs and hosting communities in rural and peri-urban areas in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen.

Generally speaking, livelihood responses need to be substantially ramped up.<sup>17</sup> Currently, their extent varies greatly from country to country, and they tend

to be limited and insufficiently focused. The following changes are needed:

- Vocational programs and training, particularly those offering training in reconstruction skills, should be prioritized. Market analyses are also needed to highlight skills that individuals might be able to use for other markets.
- Basic service rehabilitation efforts (e.g., repairs of electricity and water systems and schools, restoration of solid waste and trash removal systems, reopening of markets) in countries in conflict should be undertaken where there is no immediate fighting or where fighting has ceased, efforts that would also contribute to the restoration of social institutions. In all cases, local contractors and local labor should be favored in reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. Organizations supporting these efforts should follow scaling-up methodologies and guidelines to ensure local accountability of the work done. They should also follow monitoring and evaluation/third-party verification best practices to ensure local accountability of the work done. In the past, excessive funding with no verification system has created more harm than good in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Market and feasibility studies need to be financed quickly to develop more opportunities for IDPs and refugees alike, and match them with the resources and needed skills in the local labor market. Interventions that aim to promote refugees' sustainable livelihoods must be based on "a sound and comprehensive understanding of existing markets and the private business sectors within which refugees are making a living" as well as host country policies.<sup>18</sup> Here again, the situation of displaced populations cannot be isolated from the socioeconomic situation of host communities. In March 2014, a value chain analysis

<sup>17</sup> Livelihood responses are generally conceived as programs aimed at supporting the capabilities, assets—including both material and social resources—and activities required for a means of living. See *Guidance Note on Recovery: Livelihoods*, UNDP/International Recovery, 2005, pp. 1-3.

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Betts, Louise Bloom, Josiah Caplan, and Naohiko Omata, *Refugee Economies: Rethinking Popular Assumptions*, Humanitarian Innovation Project, Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford Department of International Development, University of Oxford, June 2014, <http://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/publications/other/refugee-economies-2014.pdf>.

conducted in Egypt by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Labour Organization revealed the potential job creation opportunities for refugees in the food service sector.<sup>19</sup> In Kilis, Turkey, an organic olive oil processing and warehousing facility has allowed the creation of new jobs.<sup>20</sup> More initiatives of this type need to be developed quickly and matched with local community projects.

A key question regarding livelihood and employment programs is the population to be targeted: Many actors on the ground point to the importance of adult males, particularly father figures who can no longer provide for their families and need to see their authority restored. Youth, male and female, constitute a second priority group. Experiences and existing field research tend to present contrasting perspectives of the drivers of youth recruitment by extremist groups. Unemployment and the need to provide for their families are certainly not the only factors but they can make them easier targets.

Employment rights for refugees need to be given more attention in the refugee response agenda. Legal work opportunities for urban refugees, in particular, are extremely limited and language barriers often exacerbate the difficulty of finding a job. The highly politicized and sensitive nature of this issue in socioeconomic contexts where poverty and unemployment are already a challenge presents further difficulties for host countries.

But informal labor is creating enormous problems in all countries. In Turkey, business groups and unions have called on the government to formalize informal arrangements so that working Syrians pay taxes and are protected from exploitation. In several countries, the absence of trade unions or other types of worker associations is also of concern. The lack of a legal framework that protects workers' rights is also particularly acute for children, who are often forced to work from a very young age in conditions that violate their basic rights. In all cases, the process of legalizing the right for refugees to work requires gradual implementation. Pilot projects could be initiated in regions of high refugee concentration to carefully assess the impact of proposed refugee

workers' rights legislation on host communities. These pilot schemes should also be paired with programs designed to provide training, vocational services, financial products, and services for refugees. Specific suggestions for host countries are put forward in the fourth section of this report.

### **Psychosocial Support: Supporting Resilience and Laying the Groundwork for Long-Term Reconciliation**

Psychosocial support is the least funded of all interventions in the region, so far. Experiences documented by the World Health Organization and other agencies over the years have shown that mental health and psychosocial support are essential parts of recovery from conflict. It is crucial not only to an individual's well-being but also to the functioning and resilience of a society as a whole, directly impacting its social capital and the possibility of achieving social cohesion. At the individual level, the combination of trauma, anger, and despair makes young people more vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by extremist groups. Many experiences in conflict environments have shown how blindness to the mental health and psychosocial needs of a group can sabotage other interventions, in particular livelihood programs. This explains why an organization such as the World Bank is now working to mainstream psychosocial support by increasingly offering it in the context of sectoral operations (for instance, in livelihood projects targeting displaced people in Azerbaijan and Eastern Africa). Several youth employment projects have adapted their "life skills" training to include psychosocial support in the form of group-based cognitive behavioral therapy aimed at improving skills for concentration, emotional regulation, and interpersonal skills. Many of the World Bank projects for survivors of gender-based violence, and now some targeting perpetrators as well, include cognitive behavioral therapy-based support.

Numerous interacting social, psychological, cultural, and personal biological factors influence whether individuals develop psychological difficulties or, conversely, demonstrate resilience in response to hardship, and how they conceive of trauma.<sup>21</sup> The combination of exposure to multiple extreme stressors and the effects of transgenerational transmission of trauma in contexts where the most recent experiences

19 "The ILO Response to The Syrian Refugee Crisis," International Labor Organization, October 2015 Update, pp. 18-19, [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---exrel/documents/genericdocument/wcms\\_419408.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---exrel/documents/genericdocument/wcms_419408.pdf).

20 "Kilizi Integrated Organic Olive Oil Facility to Be Opened in Kilis," UNDP, January 23, 2015, <http://www.tr.undp.org/content/turkey/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2015/01/23/kilizi-integrated-organic-olive-oil-facility-to-be-opened-in-kilis.html>.

21 *IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2007, p. 1, [http://www.who.int/mental\\_health/emergencies/guidelines\\_iasc\\_mental\\_health\\_psychosocial\\_june\\_2007.pdf](http://www.who.int/mental_health/emergencies/guidelines_iasc_mental_health_psychosocial_june_2007.pdf); Béatrice Pouligny, *Resilience, Trauma and Violence*, World Bank SDV Flagship Societal Dynamics and Fragility, July 2010, p. 18.

## REBUILDING SOCIETIES

of violence happen within a long history of abuse and violent repression can be a potent contributor to societal fragility. Today, in much of the Middle East, many people with a history of exposure to trauma and loss live in situations where violence and stresses of all kinds continue to characterize their daily reality. Psychological distress can take different forms, not just post-traumatic stress disorder.

Certain forms of violence, such as sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), put survivors at psychological, social, and physical risk of harm. The crises discussed in this report present special complexity regarding the underreporting of SGBV, including cultural taboos and many women's inability or unease to venture outside their homes.<sup>22</sup> The increasing number of cases of children born out of rape, and the stigma associated with the situation, also requires special attention, both for the mothers and for their children.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, engaging with men and boys who have survived SGBV remains extremely difficult. At a time when all reports show an increase in incidents of SGBV, in particular in the context of the Syrian crisis, the international community needs to do more to prevent SGBV and to support survivors. Providing access to safe, confidential, and high-quality multi-sectoral services tailored for age and gender; building basic mental health services; strengthening community-based protection mechanisms; and supporting equitable gender representation in the leadership of both refugee camps and refugee groups in urban settings are among the key priorities of the UN's 3RP strategy. They should be for all international actors.<sup>24</sup>

The expansion of the quality and quantity of child-protection activities also remains a high priority in light of the destructive consequences of the combined crises for children and adolescents. Key concerns identified by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Syria include "recruitment and use of children and adolescents by armed groups; SGBV; child labor; forced marriage (especially of adolescent girls); psychosocial distress; family separation (with the Middle East and North Africa now being home to an unprecedented number of unaccompanied minors); children born out of rape; and exposure to explosive

remnants."<sup>25</sup> Those priorities are consistent with what has been observed by practitioners across the region.<sup>26</sup> Key activities highlighted by the UN's 3RP strategy in response to these concerns have been largely endorsed by all organizations present on the ground and are consistent with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as well as WHO guidelines regarding psychosocial support in emergency settings; they include the following:<sup>27</sup>

- expand psychosocial support services through both static and mobile child and adolescent friendly spaces, integrated with education services to facilitate the return to some form of normality
- improve outreach for the most vulnerable groups in areas deemed safe, as well those residing in geographically distant or otherwise hard-to-reach areas
- raise awareness of child protection concerns (e.g., the dangers posed by mines, the risk of recruitment by extremist or armed groups)
- support community-based child protection initiatives to assist children, adolescents, and their families
- provide comprehensive services to at-risk boys and girls and survivors of violence, including, when possible, through reintegration support programs
- establish and develop existing case management systems and referral mechanisms
- collect evidence-based data through assessments
- mainstream the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (adopted by the Child Protection Working Group led by UNICEF)
- enhance the capacity of child protection actors through trainings

22 *Joint Assessment Review of the Syrian Refugee Response in Jordan*, UNHCR, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme, January 2014, p. 9.

23 Lisa Davis, "Why Are So Many Syrian Children Being Left Stateless?" *Open Democracy*, July 1, 2015, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/lisa-davis/why-are-so-many-syrian-children-being-left-stateless>.

24 *Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in Response to the Syria Crisis*, Regional Strategic Overview, 2015-2016, 3RP, p. 24, op. cit.

25 *2015 Strategic Response Plan: Syrian Arab Republic*, UNOCHA, December 18, 2014, p. 15, <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/syria/document/2015-syrian-arab-republic-strategic-response-plan>.

26 Observations by members of the working group; Sarah Bailey and Veronique Barbelet, "Towards a Resilience Based Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis: A Critical Review of Vulnerability Criteria and Frameworks," UNDP, May 2014, pp. 17, 19.

27 *Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in Response to the Syria Crisis*, Regional Strategic Overview, 2015-2016, 3RP, pp. 21-23, op. cit.; *Child Protection: Syria Crisis Regional Interagency Workshop Report*, A UNICEF-UNHCR regional initiative in consultation with child protection partners, May 20-21, 2015, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/InteragencychildprotectionSyriaworkshopreport.pdf>; *IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2007, op. cit.

One key principle of any psychosocial support intervention is to follow the ethical guidelines developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, starting with a fundamental “do no harm” imperative.<sup>28</sup> Mental health and psychosocial support initiatives, if improperly implemented, can potentially cause even greater harm than any other humanitarian intervention, because they often deal with highly sensitive issues. A do-no-harm approach requires a culturally embedded methodology and an attention to all individuals’ rights, including an attention to the risk of creating stigma. The risk of stigmatization can be reduced if mental health and psychosocial support are integrated into broader systems (e.g., general health services, formal and informal school systems, existing community support mechanisms, social services). The multiplication of stand-alone services, such as those serving only sexual assault survivors, not only creates a highly fragmented, unsustainable care system but also tends to reinforce stigma and contribute to exclusion.

Here, again, we can learn valuable lessons from past experiences. Professional guidelines for mental health and psychosocial support strongly advocate comprehensive multilayered assistance focused on a community-based approach. They call for prioritizing support for self-care (for which the World Health Organization has developed new tool kits specifically for the Syrian crisis—see the accompanying text box for one example) and the strengthening of the resources and capacities (both formal and informal) already present and active in the affected communities. These local resources may include religious and tribal leaders, as well as mental health professionals from the diaspora. The training, mentoring, and supervision of the staff are essential and require donors’ long-term engagement.

Community-based interventions may also include art and cultural programs that enable and encourage the community to express itself, thereby contributing to the need to give a voice to diverse and at times contradictory individual and collective memories. These initiatives also participate in the attempt by local communities to create meaning, an important dimension of healing and preparing for the future. Experiences in other war-torn situations, including in the region (e.g., Iraq, Afghanistan, and the West Bank and Gaza Strip), show that even in the worst circumstances community-based programs of this sort can have a significant impact both in the short term and over the long term.

28 *IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2007, op. cit.

### BOX 1: SELF-HELP PLUS (SH+) FOR MANAGING STRESS AND COPING WITH ADVERSITY

The World Health Organization is in the process of developing a package called Self-Help Plus (SH+) for Managing Stress and Coping with Adversity. This package is designed as a low-intensity intervention that will be appropriate for a broad range of people. It is intended to be relevant for any type of adversity, applicable across a range of mental health problems, easily adaptable to different cultures and languages, and meaningful and safe both for people with and without mental disorders.

Importantly, SH+ does not need to be implemented by highly trained facilitators. Guided self-help can be delivered in the form of prerecorded audio material to be used across five group sessions, accompanied by an illustrated book (which has already been translated into Arabic and is now undergoing preliminary qualitative assessment) covering all essential concepts and content.

The package is still being tested, but the intention is to pilot it in Syria, and in Turkey with Syrian refugees.

The package’s design is based on the research that found self-help programs to produce better results than “pure” (unguided) self-help, and guided self-help to produce effects that are surprisingly similar to those achieved through face-to-face psychological treatment. The package is also informed by randomized controlled trials showing that this kind of help is beneficial for a wide range of problems.

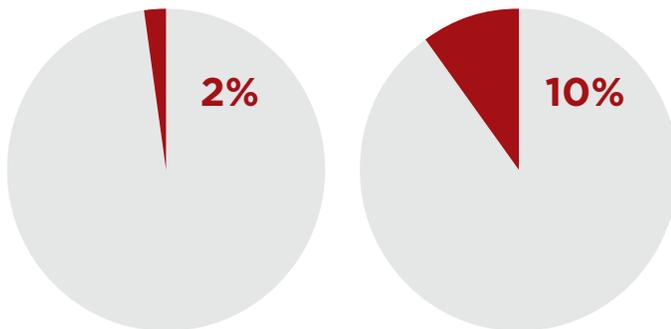
### Education: A “No Lost Generation” Emergency

Education is another major concern for the future. More than 50 percent of the registered refugee population in the region is under eighteen.<sup>29</sup> The percentage of those who receive some form of education varies from country to country but the regional average is very low, particularly for Syrian refugees.<sup>30</sup> This means that a large part of an entire generation is growing up without proper education; missing out on key life

29 “Worldwide Displacement Hits All-Time High as War and Persecution Increase,” UNHCR New Stories, June 18, 2015, <http://www.unhcr.org/558193896.html>; UN Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal, Syria Regional Refugee Response, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

30 *3RP Regional Progress Report*, 3RP, June 2015, pp. 19-20; Save the Children, “The Cost of War,” 2015, [http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/The\\_Cost\\_of\\_War.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/The_Cost_of_War.pdf).

Figure 3. Percentage of International Aid Dedicated to Education



### ONLY 2 PERCENT OF HUMANITARIAN AID AND 10 PERCENT OF DEVELOPMENT AID GOES TO EDUCATION

milestones; and becoming at risk of abuse, prostitution, and trafficking, or radicalization from a very young age. We should view youth in the Middle East as an asset for the future in the region, instead of as a threat, and they should be supported and protected as such.<sup>31</sup>

Refugees' limited access to education constitutes an immediate emergency, with daunting consequences for decades to come. Yet, so far, the response of the international community has been extremely limited: As an average across the region, only 2 percent of humanitarian aid and 10 percent of development aid goes to education. Although some development funds for education and child protection have been made available to host countries under the No Lost Generation initiative (a global coordinated effort launched by UNICEF and its partners to help children and adolescents affected by the war in Syria), the initiative remains critically underfunded.<sup>32</sup> General principles and targets for increased funding include the following:

- A higher percentage of current aid should be spent on formal and informal education systems, both general and vocational. Increased funding should be considered an integral and crucial part of efforts to prevent extremism and should receive budget allocations as such.
- Support for local curriculum development and revisions is also a priority, in particular with regard

to civic education and pedagogic methods that support critical thinking. School is not only the place where children learn to read, write, and count; it is also an important socialization space that should model what a peaceful, democratic, and pluralistic community looks like. Accomplishing this requires, among other things, the adoption—particularly by the nonprofit sector—of higher standards and improved training programs for teachers.

- The question of religious education needs to be an integral part of the interfaith dialogue, and local educators should participate directly in such dialogue.
- The integration of displaced and refugee children in host schools presents specific challenges in terms of space in existing schools. The Lebanese government has introduced a double-shift system in the country's schools. Language barriers and completely different curriculums are among the factors that dictated that choice in the Lebanese context. Such decisions, however, should be weighed carefully. Past experiences in other regions, in particular in the Balkans, have shown the problems created by the introduction of a double-shift system and have underlined the importance, for all children, of experiencing plurality in the classroom. Innovative programs such as "Rainbow of Hope" in Lebanon and "Makani" in Jordan are modeling promising alternatives, even though they can face scaling-up difficulties if appropriate methodologies are not integrated from the early stages of the programming (see box 2).
- High school and university students are a critical group. Life does not stop during conflicts, and many young people continue to demonstrate considerable commitment to their education despite the violence around them. Waiting until the guns fall silent to address their educational needs is not an option. For them, school is not only a place to learn; it also provides a space for dialogue and inquiry, thereby preparing them to become tomorrow's societal leaders while reducing the chances that they will be driven into the hands of violent groups. Yet, aid programs too often forget high school and university students.

Several avenues need to be explored to find ways of better serving this group:<sup>33</sup>

31 "Humanitarian Aid for Education: Why It Matters and Why More Is Needed," UNESCO, Education for All Global Monitoring Report, Policy Paper, June 21, 2015.

32 Only a third of the required funding is effectively delivered. See "Situation Today," #NoLostGeneration, <http://nolostgeneration.org/situationtoday>.

33 See, for instance, Sultan Barakat and Sansom Milton, *Houses of Wisdom Matter: The Responsibility to Protect and Rebuild Higher Education in the Arab World*, Brookings Doha Center, Policy Briefing, July 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/-/media/Research/Files/Papers/2015/07/08-higher-education-barakat-milton/En-Higher-Ed-Web.pdf?la=en>.

**BOX 2: CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO LEARN TOGETHER****Rainbow of Hope (Lebanon)**

In October 2014, Search for Common Ground started “Rainbow of Hope,” an educational program targeting economically disadvantaged Lebanese and Syrian children, aged six through eleven, in two dozen Lebanese communities hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees.

Lasting one academic year, Rainbow of Hope uses storytelling to teach English and, in parallel, promote conflict transformation principles such as active listening, collaborative problem solving, acceptance of the other, tolerance, and diversity. Recreational activities during the weekend further strengthen these life skills. The program is being implemented in collaboration with seven local partners in twenty-five educational and cultural centers across north and south Lebanon, and Bekaa. Project partners report increased social cohesion among the youth, and have even seen the impact spread to participants’ parents. One teacher in Ter Debba noted that if a student happened to miss class, other students went to the student’s house to retell the story from that day and ensure that their friend did not miss the lesson.

In addition to giving children educational opportunities, Rainbow of Hope modules offer a constructive outlet for children to express their differences, mitigate tensions between youth and their families in increasingly struggling communities, and reduce the strain of childcare on Lebanese and Syrian families. The project provides a unique opportunity for out-of-school children, especially from informal tented settlements, to catch up with the English curriculum used in Lebanese schools, thus better preparing them for reintegration into formal education. By bringing together youth, families, and communities to celebrate the collaborative successes of their children, the project promotes greater social cohesion and unites refugee and host communities across potentially destabilizing dividing lines.

**Makani (Jordan)**

The “Makani” initiative (makani means “my space”) is a holistic UNICEF program that provides alternative education, as well as psychosocial support and life skills, under one roof. It aims to reach out-of-school children and adolescents aged six through eighteen who are at high risk of child labor, exploitation, and early marriage. The Makani program serves both Syrian refugees and Jordanian children. It builds upon an existing network of national and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and their community-based partners that provide alternative education to children throughout Jordan; this network includes two hundred centers that are currently delivering life-skills training, psychosocial services, and various forms of learning. The services that are offered by those centers are being broadened to include the delivery of quality alternative education.

Because it is important for children’s learning achievements to be recognized by the government (recognition enables them to access the formal school system in Jordan or elsewhere as opportunities arise), UNICEF is supporting the Jordanian Ministry of Education in assessing what the children in the Makani centers are learning and in issuing “letters of equivalency” that acknowledge their learning achievements. Performances are also monitored to promote adherence to minimum standards, using innovative information technology (IT)-enabled platforms, including mapping and real-time monitoring. Facilitators of participatory and blended (IT-enabled) learning are also being trained and supplied with high-quality learning materials.

Each center provides child protection-related services, including psychosocial support training, and integrates the concepts of psychosocial support into academic subjects. In parallel, youth engagement through life-skills training and youth-led initiatives are being expanded, with a focus on social cohesion.

The program also supports community involvement through child protection committees to expand outreach activities; strengthen the link between the Makani centers, caregivers, and children; and focus on the most marginalized, vulnerable, and at-risk young people.

- Turkey has started a bridge program for accepting Syrians into the country's university system. More needs to be done at the regional level to offer university preparatory programs, facilitate accreditation of educational credentials, and deliver equivalency for all refugee students. UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, should support such steps, which should be relatively easy to implement.
  - Universities throughout the region could sponsor a larger number of scholarships for Syrian and Iraqi refugees.
  - The Arab region has suffered some of the worst forced displacements of educational communities in recent history, with conflicts in several countries disproportionately affecting academics. Limited international engagement to help academics has focused primarily on "scholar rescue" schemes. These plans have supported some of the region's most academically talented and threatened individuals, and have enabled them to develop new skills while in exile. While such programs are invaluable, they are limited, rescuing small numbers of scholars for short periods of time by finding them a temporary academic home at a university outside the conflict zone. Even though each scholar is originally "rescued" for only a limited time, the protracted nature of the conflicts in the region means that there is a real risk of a brain drain. Regional entities such as the Association of Arab Universities, the Arab League, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation need to become more involved so that a more regional approach can be found.
  - More initiatives drawing on regional capacity are also required to pool existing resources. The recent "From Camps to Campus" pilot project conducted by the Institute of International Education—an innovative response that offers scholarships for young refugees to attend nearby universities, thereby preserving academic communities within the region as a whole—provides an interesting model. Among its other advantages, the project does not hinder students and faculty from integrating into the international network of universities. This is precisely the limitation of the jointly funded Qatari-Turkish project to establish a "university in exile" in Gaziantep, Turkey, to educate refugee students and employ refugee scholars. Some Libyan universities have moved faculties to Cairo, Egypt, and continue operating there, situated within Libyan communities—and risking the backlashes that such enclaves can generate.
- Online education programs offer opportunities for IDPs and refugees at all levels of education, particularly in situations where people are dispersed and have difficulty accessing services. Yet, very little has been done to allow refugees, IDPs, and affected communities to access online programs for themselves and their children. The programs put in place by the Qatar Foundation to provide distance learning at different levels of education present a promising example that should be scaled up. This would not require huge additional investments but could make an enormous difference on the educational opportunities available to the youth in the region.
  - Libraries, including mobile libraries, can provide Internet access to other libraries around the world, as well as access to information (e.g., about housing, health care, social support, job opportunities) that can be crucial for refugees and IDPs. In eastern Ukraine, libraries that still have electricity have been centers for community gatherings, enabling those who have not evacuated to communicate with relatives via Skype, scan and send documents such as identity papers to those who have fled, and gather information about the state of the situation outside the city. Mobile libraries can also be an important resource, as shown by a recent experience with IDP camps near Kabul, Herat, and Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan. Such programs require the proper training of and support for reading assistants, library assistants, and storytellers, and the use of a variety of media with children. Several networks of organizations have had experiences in other regions that could be drawn upon.

### Community Dialogues, Local Conflict Mediation, and Security Mechanisms

Finding an end to the ongoing violent conflicts in the region is far beyond the scope of this report. But local communities do not wait for a comprehensive peace agreement before trying to address their safety concerns, and they need support in their efforts. While states are weighing whether or not and how to engage with armed groups, populations living alongside those armed groups may already be in contact with them.<sup>34</sup>

34 Wisam Elhamoui and Sinan al-Hawat, "Civilian Interaction with Armed Groups in the Syrian Conflict," in *In the Midst of Violence: Local Engagement with Armed Groups*, Accord Insight/Conciliation Resources, May 2015, pp. 30-34, <http://www.c-r.org/accord/engaging-armed-groups-insight/syria-civilian-interaction-armed-groups-syrian-conflict>.

Personal links, such as those deriving from kinship, tribal affiliation, and solidarity between friends and neighbors, play a key role in how communities reach out to armed groups. In Syria, the tactics of nonviolent resistance used against the regime have been adapted to engage with armed groups with varying success.

As the front lines in Syria (and in Iraq, Yemen, and Libya) grow increasingly numerous, sinuous, and fragmentary, civilians may find it harder to engage armed groups in dialogue or to resist their demands. In the face of extreme and sustained violence, local populations have undoubtedly struggled to assert their peacebuilding agency to influence conflict dynamics and the behavior of armed actors. Relationships between communities and Islamist armed groups are particularly complicated. Nevertheless, where local conditions make it possible, civil society and community actors try to negotiate and then participate in dialogues with armed groups, so that they can be brought under some umbrella of accountability. Those efforts are crucial in the short term and for longer-term peacebuilding. Past experiences in Nigeria, Kenya, Libya, and Iraq have shown that what emerges in post-conflict spaces are hybrid security systems whose sustainability, under the rule of law, depends on the earlier capacity to develop local accountability and ownership.

This is also true for the myriad methods of community self-protection that have been put in place by refugees and IDP. Current frustrations with the absence of basic safety and law enforcement, including in refugee camps, feed into risks of radicalization and retribution. Today, we are witnessing a dangerous cycle involving a lack of security, increased vulnerability, and militarization of some communities. For example, in Iraq, minority communities, such as Christians, Shabaks, and Yazidis, are taking up arms, which they see as the only way to defend themselves. In the south, Sunni IDPs have come under social (and political) pressure to fight to liberate their areas. While taking up arms to help defeat ISIS is a pragmatic response to an acute threat, it also pushes IDPs into a process of militarization. Experiences in Libya have shown that when youth and disadvantaged communities are pushed toward militarization with a specific enemy, it is hard to demilitarize them, even long after the enemy is defeated.

A significant deficiency of current international aid to the region is the lack of support for mechanisms that would help communities mediate those risks while lowering tensions at the local level. Dialogue and mediation skills are invaluable in improving relationships between refugees, IDPs, and host

communities, as well as between local communities and local/municipal governments. Many communities lack the ability to reach consensus or to problem solve. They have been accustomed to decisions being made and disagreements resolved by centralized and authoritarian forms of power. Investing in local mechanisms for community dialogues and conflict mediations will not replace the need for comprehensive resolution of violent conflicts but will help prevent some more localized forms of violence, facilitate the development of better relationships between refugees or IDPs and host communities, mediate difficult conflicts over property rights, provide some negotiated forms of security, and support social cohesion before “liberation” occurs or formal peace processes gain traction. Dialogue and mediation at the community level can also be powerful methods of checking the influence of radical movements.

Support for these mechanisms needs to be carefully designed:

- Trainings require careful design if they are not to disappoint those who participate in them. People in the region are tired of participating in countless workshops that often do not offer anything new or useful and that are not followed by efforts to develop the skills taught in the initial workshop. Trainings must be followed by mentoring systems and concrete material support, and geared towards the development of locally owned dialogue mechanisms. Special trainings should also target youth mediators.
- An important dimension of trainings is articulating values that are to support dialogue mechanisms. A culture of acceptance, based on a shared citizenship, as well as interfaith values are important dimensions to be considered.
- Some international actors have supported the creation of community-based mechanisms of various kinds (e.g., dialogue and mediation forums, peace committees) and have continued to support them for a protracted period (for instance, the United States Institute of Peace established a network of facilitators in Iraq—see text box on next page). This model should be emulated by other international actors, especially because community-based mechanisms can play a crucial role in mitigating immediate tensions while starting to address more structural causes of violence. These mechanisms typically perform several functions:

### BOX 3: IRAQ RECONCILIATION WORK HELPS IDPS RETURN HOME

The June 2014 massacre of 1,700 unarmed Iraqi air force cadets and soldiers, overwhelmingly Shia Muslim men, at Camp Speicher in Tikrit, was one of the deadliest single atrocities of recent years in Iraq. The victims were from some twenty tribes from nine southern provinces. The massacre worsened the already acute tensions between Sunnis and Shias. Angry Shias accused Sunnis who lived near the camp of encouraging or even joining the Sunni ISIS fighters. Young men related to the Camp Speicher victims joined Shia militias (known as the Popular Mobilization Forces) to avenge those deaths. Thousands of Sunni families from near the camp fled their homes in fear of their lives.

For months, guided by its Iraqi partner organizations, the United States Institute of Peace has supported dialogue and reconciliation between Sunni and Shia tribal leaders. In June 2015, hundreds of Sunni families who had fled were able to begin returning home. They were escorted safely by the very Shia militiamen who might have sought revenge, if tensions in the area had not been reduced. This was a crucial test of the Shia-dominated central government's ability to stabilize and peacefully reintegrate Sunni regions as they are recovered from ISIS's control.

USIP worked with two local partners, Sanad for Peacebuilding and the USIP-initiated Network of Iraqi Facilitators (NIF), to conduct dialogues among Sunni and Shia tribal leaders, government officials, and others. USIP and its partners formed a Speicher Intervention Team, which worked with sixteen tribal sheikhs from Sunni tribes of Salahuddin province (of which Tikrit is the capital) and Shia tribes from the southern provinces that are home to most of Iraq's Shia militiamen. The NIF facilitated a dialogue between the Sunni and Shia tribal leaders, who agreed to work concretely toward peace. A key step was a public statement in April by leaders of two Sunni tribes from the Tikrit area that their tribes had not committed the massacre; the leaders vowed to help bring justice to any of their members who had participated in the massacre.

- early detection and prevention (to accomplish this successfully, the community will need training on local conflict analysis and monitoring processes)
- negotiation with armed nonstate actors

- community deliberation (the mechanisms act as forums in which members of the community can jointly address conflict consequences such as access to aid, exchange of prisoners, or property issues)

- local conflict resolution

- The support to community-based mechanisms does not necessarily require the creation of new infrastructure. Multipurpose community centers in places such as Turkey as well as community spaces that currently serve as vocational training or language classes can provide opportunities to embed conflict resolution skills in the programs, as long as additional training is given to the staff. Inside war-torn countries, existing community networks constitute a good basis on which to build this capacity. In some cases, additional investment might be needed to help local communities create safe spaces where people can meet in person.

### Identity Papers and Birth Registration

The absence of identity papers for many IDPs and refugees is a huge problem that urgently needs solving. The number of unregistered refugees varies considerably from country to country. Many Syrian refugees, especially in Lebanon, are unregistered. These people are almost out of the reach of international assistance; considered "illegal" by all authorities, they cannot make a living or integrate into society and their basic rights are not protected.<sup>35</sup> Condemned to be legal ghosts and consequently unable to access even international aid, they are very vulnerable to being recruited by militant organizations. The IDPs' situation is of equal concern, with many of them having lost all identity papers.

Were a variety of technological tools more widely available, more people could be registered and thus escape becoming legal ghosts. The increasing use of iris-scanning technology, for example, could facilitate the process of registration, thereby giving more people a better chance of getting some form of protection and accessing aid and services.

A baby without a birth certificate begins life with no nationality. A large number of Syrian babies, for example, are being born in exile without citizenship and identity,

35 Marc Pierini and Jonathan Hackenbroich, "A Bolder EU Strategy for Syrian Refugees," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 15, 2015, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/07/15/bolder-eu-strategy-for-syrian-refugees/ided>; Lebanon Humanitarian INGO Forum, Background Paper on Unregistered Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, July 15, 2014, [http://lhif.org/uploaded/News/d92fe3a1b1dd46f2a281254fa551bd09LHIF%20Background%20Paper%20on%20Unregistered%20Syrian%20Refugees%20\(FINAL\).pdf](http://lhif.org/uploaded/News/d92fe3a1b1dd46f2a281254fa551bd09LHIF%20Background%20Paper%20on%20Unregistered%20Syrian%20Refugees%20(FINAL).pdf).

in violation of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and of the fundamental right of any child to a name and nationality. These numbers will continue to rise as the civil war continues. Marriage registration is generally a prerequisite to registering a new birth in the region, but there has been a significant increase in the number of informal and unregistered marriages, including early marriages.<sup>36</sup> Many women give birth in the absence of the father, who is dead, missing, or fighting in the civil war. And an increasing number of children are born out of rapes. In the case of Syrian refugees and IDPs, registration with the regime authorities terrifies many parents. Even if a birth is recorded, according to Syrian nationality law, only fathers may transmit citizenship, with very few exceptions. Furthermore, none of the neighboring countries hosting Syrian refugees, including Turkey, provides birthright citizenship to children born within their territory. A protection-sensitive approach is needed to ensure that births are promptly registered and documented. In the case of refugees, agreements are needed with host countries to ensure that those children's rights be guaranteed and birth certificates delivered.<sup>37</sup>



#### BOX 4: FACILITATING COMMUNITY DISCUSSIONS TO SUPPORT IDPS IN YEMEN

In Yemen, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) facilitators have held community-level outreach and dialogue sessions as part of SFCG's Dutch-funded The Team project, a television series that portrays youth coming together across identity lines (sectarian, regional, gender) to win soccer tournaments. SFCG has shifted content to be more relevant to the current context, and episodes grappling with security, local resource management, and social responsibility to the poor have been particularly resonant. A number of local initiatives have been cultivated through these sessions, including conducting community cleaning campaigns, raising awareness of effective safety procedures during air strikes, and fostering community support for IDPs and other at-need families.

In the city of Al-Mukalla in Hadramawt governorate, the community gathering was the opportunity for an inclusive conversation about IDPs and how the community could help them. Participants decided to donate food, clothing, and money to IDPs coming to Hadramawt from Shabwa, Aden, and Lahj governorates. Utilizing their social networks within these communities, facilitators ensured that donations went directly to the IDPs, many of whom were staying with family and friends.

In Hadramawt and across the country, SFCG has been holding conversations among a diverse group of participants—including men and women of all ages, people from different political ideologies, and IDPs themselves—to enable IDPs to build their support system. For members of the local communities, hearing directly from IDPs about their situation has helped mitigate tensions and has encouraged a readiness to support the IDPs.

36 *Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in Response to the Syria Crisis*, Regional Strategic Overview, 2015-2016, 3RP, p. 23, op. cit.; Sarnata Reynolds and Tori Duoos, "A Generation of Syrians Born in Exile Risk a Future of Statelessness, Refugees International, July 15, 2015, <http://www.statelessness.eu/blog/generation-syrians-born-exile-risk-future-statelessness#sthash.qRqe3t1y.dpuf>.

37 "Child Protection Syria Crisis Regional Interagency Workshop Report," A UNICEF-UNHCR regional initiative in consultation with child protection partners, May 2015, p. 20, op. cit.; Sarnata Reynolds and Daryl Grisgraber, *Birth Registration in Turkey: Protecting the Future for Syrian Children*, Refugees International, April 30, 2015, [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/150430\\_turkey\\_birth\\_registration.pdf.2015](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/150430_turkey_birth_registration.pdf.2015).

## IV. KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

This section highlights two series of considerations that must be borne in mind by the international community as it seeks to enable IDPs and refugees and the populations affected by the violence across the Middle East and North Africa to move beyond their immediate day-to-day survival and start laying the foundation for a future life together. One series of considerations concerns the way in which international aid agencies interact with local actors; the other series focuses on the support that should be given to countries hosting a large number of refugees in the region.

### Truly Support Local Actors' Ownership

International aid practices continue to fail to adequately reflect the many guidelines and official commitments to support local ownership, particularly in humanitarian emergencies. Yet, both experience and numerous evaluation reports have shown the value of a sense of ownership, not because it is “politically correct,” but because it is a decisive condition to increase the adequacy, efficiency, sustainability, and accountability of humanitarian aid. It is also in line with international standards to support the rights and dignity of local populations.

### Do No Harm

Ensuring that one is sensitive to the context and the conflict is the starting point for any ethical intervention, yet many interventions seem decidedly insensitive. One of the fundamental lessons learned from the past, and analyzed by communities of practice, is simply that context matters. Recognizing that context matters involves, among other things, rejecting the imposition of outside models and making sure that aid is not feeding the grievances that started the conflict in the first place. As obvious as this may seem, this do-no-harm principle (which is also part of the professional standards of humanitarian agencies) does not seem to inform the way local communities are supported in the Middle East today. A peace and conflict assessment

should be a prerequisite of all projects, along with the appropriate training of aid providers. Western donors also need to increase their conversation with Gulf donors on those topics.

### Pay More Attention to Local Actors

Perhaps the complaint most often voiced by actors on the ground in the Middle East is that international interveners pay insufficient attention to local people and the ways in which they have organized themselves. Identifying local needs is important, but identifying local actors might be even more important. Affected

All too often . . . international aid agencies see local “partners” merely as subcontractors, not as those in the driver’s seat.

communities include both displaced people (refugees and IDPs) and host populations, all of whom need to be acknowledged as parts of the solution, as actors with agency in their own lives, and not just as victims. According to the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Mental Health, participation in an intervention should enable different subgroups of local people “to retain or resume control over decisions that affect

their lives, and to build the sense of local ownership” that is important for achieving program quality, equity, and sustainability.<sup>38</sup> The guidelines also note that “from the earliest phase, local people should be involved to the greatest extent possible in the assessment, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of assistance.”<sup>39</sup> All too often—and Libya, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen are no exception—international aid agencies

38 *IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2007, op. cit.; see also Béatrice Pouligny, “Supporting Local Ownership in Humanitarian Action,” in *Raising the Bar: Enhancing Transatlantic Governance of Disaster Relief and Preparedness*, Policy Paper no. 1, Global Public Policy Institute and Center for Transatlantic Relations at Johns Hopkins University, May 2009, [http://www.disastergovernance.net/fileadmin/gppi/GPPiPPR\\_local\\_ownership\\_2009.pdf](http://www.disastergovernance.net/fileadmin/gppi/GPPiPPR_local_ownership_2009.pdf); “Trapped in Conflict: Evaluating Scenarios to Assist At-Risk Civilians,” Outcome Report, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and InterAction Roundtable, July 2015, p. 4.

39 *IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings*, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2007, op. cit.

see local “partners” merely as subcontractors, not as those in the driver’s seat.

A few aspects of this problem require attention:

- The notion of local civil society needs to be separated from the anticipation of certain types of formal institutions or specific forms of NGOs on the ground. In the Middle East, like everywhere else in the world, donors and international agencies continue to pay too much attention to the forms they expect local organizations to take. Those international actors must accept that local actors might not correspond entirely to the image the formal system might have of its ideal partner. Concerns over absorption capacity, risks of corruption, and nepotism are legitimate, but need to be answered by developing innovative models for local organizational support (see below), not by ignoring important actors on the ground.
- The role of tribal and religious leaders requires nuanced and contextualized attention, especially in light of growing concerns regarding religious extremism. Local actors in the region repeatedly complain that international organizations frown on all expressions of religiosity. Yet, in some areas, these actors play a crucial role. They are often involved in negotiating the exchange of prisoners, opening access for humanitarian aid, and resolving disputes between neighboring villages. They can also play a key role in fostering social cohesion. They should be encouraged to continue to play a positive role, but also to be more tolerant of other actors, especially from other tribes or religions, and to take to heart broader lessons learned in other contexts about the value of the checks and balances that need to be provided by other actors from local civil society.
- International actors must identify and pay attention to those who might be the most vulnerable to abuse, in particular, youth and women. But just because they are vulnerable does not mean they should be left out of discussions and decision-making processes or treated solely as passive aid recipients, because they have much to contribute. International actors must keep in mind that there is a continuum between resilience and absolute helplessness and that those individuals who are vulnerable are not defined solely by that characteristic. They are also survivors and actors with agency in their own lives and should not be stigmatized.

- In some places, an embryo of local governance structures exists, in particular at the municipal level; at times, those structures may have even benefited from international aid (as in Syria and Iraq). Aid organizations need to stop bypassing them, to better leverage existing and evolving governance capacities, and to invest in long-term solutions by supporting them. Situations with fragmented authorities require multilevel approaches. For example, in Syria, a multilevel approach could mean employing different strategies in various areas throughout the country, because the situation in northern Syria differs greatly from the situation in the south. This reality is common to conflict zones, yet international aid still lacks the flexibility to adapt to different levels and types of engagement. At a time when ISIS is showing its capacity to put in place forms of governance and run services, international aid organizations need to ramp up their efforts to support alternative local forms of governance that already exist, albeit in imperfect circumstances.

#### Better Target and Organize Support to Local Actors

Funding flows to local organizations continue to be extremely modest given the importance of local responses. Considerable research into the role of local actors in major crises confirms the crucial role played by local organizations and communities in protection, survival, and recovery. In the case of Syria, for instance, there is wide recognition among international aid agencies that local Syrian groups operating inside the country deliver most of the assistance.<sup>40</sup> Such recognition needs to be translated (urgently, in the case of the Middle East) into increased funding for local actors—an idea that is generating growing interest in the run-up to the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016.<sup>41</sup>

This increase must be accompanied by several measures:

- *The development of different funding models for local organizational support:* Donors need to be willing to take more risks with local organizations, and to stop imposing conditions that may not be feasible under given circumstances. More flexible models have already been put in place in a few cases. For instance, the Humanitarian Pooled Fund in Gaziantep initiated by the UN Office for the

40 See for instance Daryl Grisgraber and Sarnata Reynolds, “Aid Inside Syria: A step in the right direction?” (Refugees International, May 2015).

41 See for instance Christian Els and Nils Carstensen, “Funding of Local and National Humanitarian Actors” (Local to Global Protection, May 2015).

### BOX 5: UNOCHA'S COUNTRY-BASED HUMANITARIAN POOLED FUND IN TURKEY: PRIORITIZING CAPACITY BUILDING FOR SYRIAN NGOS

Between July 2014, when it was created by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and July 2015, the Country-Based Pooled Fund (CBPF) allocated 33.1 million dollars, funding seventy projects of thirty-six partners.

The CBPF in Turkey is dedicated to funding cross-border operations inside Syria. One of its main priorities is strengthening the capacity of Syrian NGOs. So far, they have received 70 percent of the funding (versus 21 percent to international NGOs and 9 percent to UN agencies) in line with the CBPF priority of building national capacities.

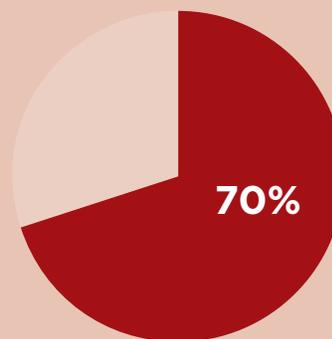
This capacity is supported in three ways:

- providing direct funding to Syrian NGOs through an allocation process that includes coaching by technical review committees
- applying participatory capacity assessment methodologies to identify and address capacity needs of the partners
- funding projects of UN agencies and international NGOs with distinct capacity building components targeting Syrian NGOs

The objective of the capacity assessment is to systematically review the institutional, technical, management, and financial capacities of partners. Eligible partners, based on the individual score obtained during the assessment, are categorized in three risk-level categories—low, medium, and high—which determine a partner's operating modalities. In the first round of capacity assessments, sixty-nine organizations were assessed. Fifty-six of them passed, including twenty-eight that scored as high-risk partners. The thirteen organizations that did not pass will receive coaching and additional support. The analysis of a partner's capacity assessment score helps identify where capacities need to be built. It also determines the appropriate operational modalities and control mechanisms for the administration of funding contracts. A second round of capacity assessments was finalized in the summer of 2015.

Moving forward, the fund needs to be able to grow and secure multi-year commitments from donors to allow it to continue to channel aid to Syrian NGOs and, as importantly, to support their capacity development. This also requires increased capacity on the part of the CBPF team in risk management and communications as well as developing a number of existing tools in Arabic.

Figure 4. Percentage of CBPF Funding Allocated to Syrian NGOs



**SYRIAN NGOS HAVE RECEIVED 70 PERCENT OF CBPF FUNDING IN TURKEY**

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) has flexible criteria that make it easier to fund Syrian NGOs operating across national borders (see box 5). The US Agency for International Development's Office of Transition Initiatives' swift programming model funds small, quickly released grants. But those funds need to be given higher priority, with longer-term frameworks (two years or more), and adequate mentoring and capacity development support to the organizations concerned. "Hub and spoke" models have been discussed and implemented in some instances; they need to be put in place more systematically.

Identification of different funds operating in specific areas (for instance, in northern Syria) would help in the coordination and implementation of funding strategies to target actors and projects. As pointed out by Refugees International, donor governments and UN agencies should also establish standardized forms for reporting so that local organizations do not have to complete different forms for multiple agencies whose funds may all originate from the same source.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Daryl Grisgraber and Sarnata Reynolds, "Aid Inside Syria: A step in the right direction?" (Refugees International, May 2015), p. 3.

- *Increasing investment in capacity support, knowledge, and skills transfers for local organizations*, including in the following areas:

- conflict resolution training for host community leaders to help them manage relationships between host communities and IDPs or refugees
- development of leadership skills, such as how to work with a group and how to execute things for and with the community

The education offered must be tailored to the stated needs of local groups, and not be determined by what donor governments and international NGOs think local groups should know. For instance, for four years some Syrian groups have been receiving training and capacity building, but this assistance has not been systematic or based on needs. If a local group has already been taught, for example, how to write an effective grant proposal, further training should focus on other skills, thereby building on, rather than replicating, the group's knowledge base. Mentoring also needs to be systematically planned and budgeted for, as an integral part of each training. Recent field research has revealed widespread dismay about how little follow-up occurs in the wake of a training session. Staff members of local groups want mentoring, ongoing discussions with point people, and even small grants that allow them to practice what they have learned.

- *The incorporation of scaling-up methodology into all pilot programs*: Every project with the potential to achieve impact should incorporate scaling-up techniques that build the potential to scale directly into the project design. Existing methodologies used by the MacArthur Foundation, among others, should be disseminated by donors to all implementers, allowing the rapid expansion of projects that have come through an impact evaluation with impressive results.
- *Support for networking among local actors*: Cooperation among local-level actors is just as important as that across international, national, and local divides.<sup>43</sup> Local linkages do not necessarily emerge naturally; sometimes, they must be consciously planned and sustained. They also entail the development of relationships of trust and support with individuals who can bridge and

connect different levels, communities, and even narratives within the wider conflict.<sup>44</sup>

- *Support for information/data management and communications systems*: In the absence of reliable information, rumors and conspiracy theories abound, creating space for corruption, suspicion, and fear, especially in contexts of widespread violence. Access to high-quality information is also a major concern among transient populations, and is crucial for reestablishing contacts between separated groups. Efforts should be focused on the following priorities:

- More resource and information centers for IDPs and refugees are needed to give them access to all types of information.
- Better use could be made of social media, local radio, and texting, including to connect people with local authorities.
- Education programs are needed—and could be provided through local schools and community organizations—that teach people how and where to access high-quality information and how to be an educated consumer of information.
- More generally, “humanitarian innovation” has been the subject of an emerging debate, which has so far focused chiefly on improving organizational responses. But “refugees and displaced populations themselves innovate and use technology in their daily lives. Facilitating this form of bottom-up innovation may offer a nontraditional way of enhancing refugees’ own capacity to develop sustainable opportunities.”<sup>45</sup> Fostering innovation could range from simple steps such as improving refugees’ access to information and communications technology to less conventional measures such as creating opportunities for business incubation and transnational mentorship.

- *Support for local accountability systems*: Different accountability standards have been developed by humanitarian agencies in the past decade; they simply need to be effectively applied on the ground. Experiences where these mechanisms have actually been put in place (e.g., in Indonesia and Pakistan) have shown their impact in

<sup>43</sup> See Erin McCandless, Eric Abitbol, and Timothy Donais (ed.), “Vertical Integration: A Dynamic Practice Promoting Transformative Peacebuilding,” A Special Issue of *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, pp. 4-5.

<sup>45</sup> Alexander Betts, Louise Bloom, Josiah Caplan, and Naohiko Omata, *Refugee Economies: Rethinking Popular Assumptions*, Humanitarian Innovation Project, Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford Department of International Development University of Oxford, June 2014, p. 40.

## BOX 6: LOCAL ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISMS: SUCCESS STORIES IN AFGHANISTAN, IRAQ, AND PAKISTAN<sup>1</sup>

Spin Boldak is a small town on Afghanistan's southern border with Pakistan. Tearfund's Disaster Management Team had been working there for the past two years with IDPs displaced from within Afghanistan and with refugees on the Pakistan side of the border. As the Afghan government was closing down the IDP camps in Spin Boldak, the project was supporting the integration of IDPs into the host community in Spin Boldak for those IDPs who did not want to move back toward Kandahar. As part of this support, the local school was to be extended and renovated, which would benefit both the host community and the IDPs. When it came to project implementation, the building and renovation work being carried out was above the specifications planned for and budgeted in the project proposal. When it became clear that the project was overspending, the project manager halted the project to carry out a review. As part of the discussions with the community, the budget for direct project costs was provided to the school authorities, something that had not been done previously. As a result of sharing the budget information, the community, which had a distrust of NGOs because of negative experiences in the past, was able to see that Tearfund was being transparent and saw for the first time that only finite sums of money had been budgeted for the project. The community more clearly understood that if the specifications for the classrooms increased, savings would have to be made in other areas. Tearfund also discovered that one of its own staff had been involved in fraud through the procurement process. The amounts were small but were probably known by suppliers in the town. Disclosure of budget information meant that the school authorities were able to see costs and challenge them when they looked inappropriate compared with the actual local costs of materials.

The refugee charity Ockenden International has also discovered the advantages of providing financial reports to beneficiaries. In Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq, Ockenden International has found that sharing the reports has positively impacted its relationship with beneficiaries, who have felt that the charity was displaying both honesty and respect for the local community. Through an open discussion of what money was needed for schools to operate, communities better understood how they could help their schools continue running. Since this exercise, communities have increased their own contributions—financial and in-kind—to the schools. Nurturing trust and open communication in this way makes it more likely that the projects will be sustainable.

<sup>1</sup> Sources: David Bainbridge, Eleanor Tuck and Kate Bowen, "Beneficiary Accountability" (Tearfund, Second edition, February 2008, p. 29); Alex Jacobs, "Finance and Governance - Outlook - Let beneficiaries see the figures too," 14 June 2006. More details are available at [www.whocounts.org](http://www.whocounts.org) and [www.mango.org.uk](http://www.mango.org.uk).

supporting transparency and nurturing trust, and fighting against mismanagement and corruption on the part of outsiders and insiders alike (see box 6). This three-way form of communication between service providers, IDPs and refugees, and local communities is vital. Opportunities for feedback such as suggestion boxes, hotlines, and complaint desks do much to restore the dignity and agency of the communities concerned and lay the groundwork for future social cohesion and better governance. As brutal and totalitarian as it is, the regime put in place by ISIS in the areas it controls includes a consumer protection authority with complaint mechanisms. Yet, such mechanisms, although tried in other contexts, are insufficiently found where international aid is currently being delivered in the Middle East.

### Carefully Involve the Diasporas

In all four of the conflicts that are the focus of this report (Libya, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen), diasporas

have been, and remain, very active in supporting the populations affected inside and outside of the country. Members of the diaspora not only provide invaluable financial resources, but also ideas and skills useful for the future. The exiled middle classes have often left spaces filled by "entrepreneurs in violence;" harnessing the exiled middle classes' contributions is crucial both for the immediate future and for the long term.

When a diaspora engages with its homeland, however, the results are not always positive. Experiences from Iraq to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and Somalia have produced mixed results and many unintended consequences. Divisions within the diaspora are often stronger than those among the communities in the middle of the fighting. Furthermore, there is generally a disconnect between expatriates and local communities not only at the political level but also at socioeconomic and cultural levels. Skilled expatriates recruited as consultants by aid projects, or those who return temporarily to their home countries for professional or personal reasons,

become caught up in local power dynamics. The expatriates may well be perceived as outsiders and competitors (e.g., for jobs, housing, and patronage), and suffer the associated side-effects.

Diaspora groups significantly contribute to getting humanitarian aid inside the countries in conflict (particularly in the case of Syria). And, in addition to members of the diaspora serving on the staffs of diaspora-funded projects, they often act as intermediaries between donors and local groups on the ground. But their intermediation can create problems with local organizations and does not always reflect the real needs of the local population.

One way to navigate these complexities is to make sure that the engagement of members of a diaspora always goes hand in hand with the involvement of local community organizations that, ultimately, need to own the projects. There are examples of partnerships of this sort, and donors should encourage them. On their side, members of the diaspora need to be aware of the potentially unintended consequences of their actions, especially in the encouragement of divisions along religious or ethnic lines. Lessons learned from experiences in other parts of the world should be digested and disseminated among diaspora organizations, including through targeted trainings.

## Support Countries Hosting a Large Number of Refugees

### Acknowledge a Difficult Political Reality

With Palestinian refugees, the region already has the longest protracted refugee population in the world. As the situations in Libya, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen continue to deteriorate and new displacements occur, the region is now facing a crisis of a magnitude unprecedented since World War II. Host countries are shouldering a huge and growing burden, and violence has already spilled over their borders from the countries in conflict. Lebanon is submerged under its third wave of refugees. As of November 2015, almost 1.3 million refugees had entered the country since the beginning of the Syrian crisis, before which Lebanon had a total population of 4.3 million.<sup>46</sup> Refugees now represent 30 percent of the country's original population, giving Lebanon the highest number of refugees per capita of any country in the world.<sup>47</sup> Criminal activity is on the rise, and the economic strain is becoming tangible

Figure 5. Percentage of Refugees in Lebanon



in many communities.<sup>48</sup> Turkey has taken in more refugees than any other country in absolute terms: 2.3 million registered Syrian refugees as of November 2015. Jordan has received significant contingents of both Syrian and Iraqi refugees.

As the number of refugees continues to grow, no prospect of any major return or resettlement has yet to appear on the horizon. Following a trend that is observable worldwide, the refugee crisis in the Middle East and North Africa seems destined to become protracted. Moreover, whereas in the past displaced communities were usually kept apart from their hosts, 85 percent of the refugees in the region reside in non-camp settings. This leaves local integration as potentially the most feasible near-term option for refugees, along with voluntary return to safe areas. Yet, for local governments, acknowledging that the refugees may never leave and should be integrated is politically dangerous, if not impossible. The introduction of any measure to facilitate the refugees' integration could very well provoke a backlash. Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan have started to develop national response plans, but these fall short of calling for integration.

In its final communiqué, in October 2014, the Berlin Conference on the Syrian Refugee Situation Supporting Stability in the Region referred to donors' commitment to supporting host countries.<sup>49</sup> But so far, the international community has largely approached the refugee crisis as a temporary emergency. International and regional organizations and their partners, starting with the European governments, need to acknowledge

<sup>46</sup> Source : UNHCR. However, in May 2015, UNHCR Lebanon has temporarily suspended new registration as per Government of Lebanon's instructions, which means that recent numbers are estimates, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Marc Pierini and Jonathan Hackenbroich, "Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 15, 2015): <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/07/15/bolder-eu-strategy-for-syrian-refugees/ided>.

<sup>49</sup> "Conference on the Syrian Refugee Situation - Supporting Stability in the Region," Communiqué, October 28, 2014, <http://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/berlin-communiqu-conference-syrian-refugee-situation-supporting-stability-region-28>.

that the refugee crisis in the Middle East is a long-term global challenge that demands a coordinated response.

### Give Priority Support to Host Country Governments

Support from the international community to host country governments should address the following priorities:

- Host governments need incentives to cooperate on these issues (including from a regional integration perspective). Regional organizations and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) need to show leadership by ensuring adequate resource flow to those countries in the region hosting a large number of refugees.
- Policy support should start with planning at the ministry level, which implies that donors encourage and support host country governments to address displacement in their national development planning. Support is also needed in risk assessment and monitoring capacities, as the humanitarian and security situation seems likely to further deteriorate in 2015 and cause new displacements.
- Subnational and municipal authorities need to be involved and supported as well, as they often are on the front line of the response but seldom have the resources needed to absorb the flow of refugees in their respective areas. Inside the countries in conflict, early investments are needed to support emergency response units at the community level, including units in communities to which former refugees are returning, as is the case in Iraq.
- National and local service delivery systems need financial support, as well as support for programs geared toward the creation of livelihoods and employment opportunities.
- Financial assistance should also be used as an incentive for host countries to better integrate refugees into local systems. This can be particularly important for refugee children's access and integration into local schools and extracurricular activities. Some encouraging evolutions have been observed in that regard but more is needed.

Refugees . . .  
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host country.

- Work rights (and particularly access to legal work) need to be part of host government refugee response strategies. This topic remains extremely sensitive everywhere. However, refugees engage in local markets, contributing to the expansion of existing markets and the creation of new ones, impacting the local economy in ways that can lead to job growth and economic expansion in the host country. Denying refugees access to formal labor markets only pushes them into the informal market, eroding wages for both refugees and nationals, and contributing to illegal economic systems. The legal right to work can be implemented gradually and should be paired with programs designed to provide the support system refugees need (including, at times, training, vocational services, and financial products).

### Support Creative Ways of Addressing Refugee, IDP, and Local Community Needs

These efforts need to be paired with community-based efforts that contribute to transforming the perception of refugees and other displaced people from a burden to an added value. What can they contribute economically to their host community? What needs and interests do they share with their host community? As scholars have pointed out, "Refugee economies remain under-researched and poorly understood."<sup>50</sup> Little quality

data is available on the economic activity of displaced populations. Yet, as researchers at the University of Oxford note, "understanding these economic systems may hold the key to rethinking our entire approach to refugee assistance and turn humanitarian challenges into sustainable opportunities."<sup>51</sup>

Three main tools can be used to imagine new ways for host communities and displaced people to work together for their economic development:

- *Market research* in order to
  - better map out the complex market networks existing in areas with high concentrations of refugees;

50 Alexander Betts, Louise Bloom, Josiah Caplan, and Naohiko Omata, *Refugee Economies: Rethinking Popular Assumptions*, Humanitarian Innovation Project, Refugee Studies Centre Oxford Department of International Development University of Oxford, June 2014, p. 4.

51 Ibid.

- allocate refugees to areas in need of population or workforce; and
- find markets for the distribution of goods produced by refugee populations.
- *Dialogue mechanisms* to offer space for discussing common problems and finding common solutions. Training people to conduct dialogues and supporting those dialogue processes is not enough: Local communities also need the financial resources to put those projects in place. These mechanisms can be based on shared identities (e.g., groups of mothers, youth groups) or common issues (e.g., in north Lebanon, the rehabilitation of a sewage system of a market included and benefited both refugees and host communities; another project brought Israelis, Palestinians, and Jordanians together to clean up water sources).
- *Joint monitoring* of projects to make sure that projects are helpful for both host communities and refugees or displaced people in the short term as well as the medium to long term.

## VI. CLEAR COMMITMENTS BY THE DONOR COMMUNITY

Embracing the principles and implementing the practical recommendations laid out in this report require clear commitments on the part of the donor community. The magnitude of this crisis has forced the international community to reevaluate its response. So far, however, the shifts in thinking and new ways of doing things have remained insufficient, questioning the ability of existing aid architecture to actually face the current crisis in the Middle East. It is time for the donor community, including the GCC countries, the EU, and the United States, to make bold choices.

### Make a Clear Commitment to Refugee Burden Sharing

In the past year, unprecedented numbers of refugees have taken increasingly desperate measures to flee the conflict, using smuggling networks of all kinds. A sharp increase in the flow of refugees to Europe as well as shocking images in the media of the refugee lives lost have forced the international community to face the need to “share the burden with countries hosting refugees in the region by offering opportunities for resettlement or other forms of admission,” in particular for Syrian refugees.<sup>52</sup> Until recently, the number of admissions had been a record low. Commitments need to be made by the GCC countries, the EU, and the United States to exponentially expand their programs, including humanitarian admission programs, individual sponsorships, medical evacuations, admission of relatives beyond those covered by existing family reunification programs, labor mobility and private investor schemes, and student scholarships. The countries in each region need to increase their efforts in a variety of ways:

- Increasingly desperate refugees fleeing the conflicts in the region (in particular, Syrians) have been attempting to reach the EU through exploitative smugglers operating in Turkey, the Balkans, Greece, and Libya, adding to a wider migration. European policymakers need to recognize the specificities of the situations of populations fleeing war and persecution, and to uphold basic standards of refugee protection for those groups, particularly the principle of *non-refoulement*, in compliance with Article 33 of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. A more accommodating approach toward Syrian refugees, in particular, would bolster European credibility in the region, recalling the EU’s generosity when it provided refuge to hundreds of thousands of people escaping the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina and then the Kosovo war in the 1990s. At the time, local communities mobilized across Europe to welcome those refugees until they were able to go back to their countries. The application of a system of “temporary protection” in the case of Bosnian refugees was

The application of a system of “temporary protection” in the case of Bosnian refugees was not without flaws, but it showed that options were possible when large numbers of refugees were in need.

not without flaws, but it showed that options were possible when large numbers of refugees were in need. In the case of Kosovo, help was mobilized in a way that was closer to the spirit of burden sharing. In both cases, the mobilization involved not only European governments but also municipal authorities and local civil societies. Today, beyond the official announcements made by the European Commission and national governments, at the local level, thousands of ordinary citizens and grassroots organizations as well as municipal and regional authorities have mobilized to provide round-the-clock support to refugees from the Middle East (in particular Syria, but also Afghanistan and Pakistan). Critical aspects of the European effort are the equitable

<sup>52</sup> *Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in Response to the Syria Crisis*, Regional Strategic Overview, 2015-2016, 3RP, p. 13, op. cit.

distribution among EU countries of those Syrians who qualify for asylum and the practice of quotas that might quickly reach their limits. The large differences among member states' policies in this regard are unsustainable. Furthermore, existing policies and procedures (including in terms of registration), with the full involvement of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, should be employed when determining refugee status. This crisis may present a rare opportunity for Europe to reshape its immigration policy and make courageous choices.

- The GCC countries host millions of migrant workers coming from low-income countries, but they have received very few refugees forced from their home countries by war. The GCC countries should adopt a more generous policy toward the refugees in view of the unprecedented flows in the region. If they do not move in that direction, the result will be an increase in illegal, and hard-to-control, migration.
- The United States also needs to take its share of refugees. The success stories of Iraqi refugees resettled in the United States in the past decade, as well as the precedent of the large contingent of Vietnamese refugees admitted in the 1980s, show that it is possible to promote a different policy in exceptional circumstances. Those individuals, because of their valuable skills, have become assets for the US economy. A much more robust resettlement program is needed if the United States wants to demonstrate credible leadership in the Middle East.

### **Make a Long-Term Commitment to Supporting People's Resilience**

The humanitarian question of refugees and asylum-seekers cannot be separated from the situation of millions of IDPs and people trapped by violent conflicts. The current humanitarian crisis is, to a large extent, the symptom of a failure to solve those conflicts and to provide sustainable responses to the needs of the local populations.

So far, the international response has failed to address many of the region's needs. As of November 2015, about 45 percent of the United Nations' calculated requirements for humanitarian assistance in the region for the whole year have been funded, likely leaving around half of the estimated needs for the year unmet.<sup>53</sup> Donor fatigue could also complicate efforts in

the near future. Emergency humanitarian assistance is typically easier to mobilize than a sustained long-term effort. However, the sort of long-term commitment that can prepare the future is not optional—it is indispensable. It requires a different aid modality that is truly embedded in a resilience strategy, allowing even the most basic minimum services to be delivered in a way that prepares for the future. This includes, for UN agencies and other donors, the need to expand their funding of multi-year programming; this measure alone would be a huge step forward in actually changing the paradigm. More funding of accounts like the Economic Support Fund by the US Congress is needed to invest in host communities and resilience building in the region; currently, these funds are threatened to be drastically reduced or eliminated in the current FY 2016 budget cycle. Such medium- to long-term investments should be seen as an obvious choice for the future. If they are not made today, it will cost more to the taxpayers in the medium to long term. If the seeds for a future in which today's refugees and IDPs become integral and valued members of their societies are not planted now, what is at stake is not only the lives of the millions of people currently exiled and displaced but also the opportunity for future generations in the Middle East and North Africa to live in peaceful, prosperous, inclusive, and cohesive societies. The regions in the immediate proximity, in particular Europe, will suffer, too—indeed, so will the world at large.

To generate a long-term commitment, traditional donors (notably, members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee) must engage with donors from the Gulf as equal partners. Substantial efforts have been made to do so over the last four years. The conversation needs to continue, including for strengthening the principles of impartial and independent humanitarian aid that is based on needs and not political considerations.

### **Reaffirm International Commitment to International Norms, Transparency, and Accountability**

Today, international humanitarian law and international human rights law are violated on a daily basis in the Middle East. In Syria and other challenging crises, the United Nations and its member states need to use the tools available to them to ensure respect for international humanitarian law and secure access to and protection of at-risk civilians.<sup>54</sup> The violations of

<sup>53</sup> Source: UNOCHA, [https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/ROMENA/Funding\\_Update\\_EN\\_Sept\\_OCT\\_2015\\_Final.pdf](https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/ROMENA/Funding_Update_EN_Sept_OCT_2015_Final.pdf).

<sup>54</sup> "Trapped in Conflict: Evaluating Scenarios to Assist At-Risk Civilians," Outcome Report (An International Committee of the Red Cross and InterAction Roundtable), July 2015, <https://>

## REBUILDING SOCIETIES

those international provisions by the perpetrators of the conflict are driving increased displacements of populations. More political will to end the targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure in places like Syria is the first front on which the international community needs to show its commitment. This commitment to ensure the protection of local populations first concerns the governments, but also all the international workers who intervene in the field. In all interactions with local actors, it is critical to operate carefully so that those actors are not put at further risk.

In addition to this commitment to the protection of local populations, professional standards that have

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[www.interaction.org/document/trapped-conflict-roundtable-outcome-report](http://www.interaction.org/document/trapped-conflict-roundtable-outcome-report).

been developed for humanitarian and development aid agencies need to be observed in practice if we want to make sure that what is done on the ground is both ethical and sustainable. Principles of transparency and accountability need to apply to all: local actors and governments hosting a large number of refugees, but also international agencies and their staff operating on the ground. Instances of corruption and the violation of human rights standards by aid workers are unacceptable and need to be addressed, denounced, and sanctioned. International aid organizations need to recommit publicly to these standards, so that they can be held accountable and their work in the Middle East can become more transparent. Donors also need to make such compliance an explicit prerequisite for the funding of any project or program.

## CONCLUSION

What is happening in the Middle East today requires a far more robust humanitarian response than it has received so far, as illustrated by desperate cries for funding by UN agencies and international NGOs. But it also requires something more profound: a radical paradigm shift in the international response.

The forced displacement of millions of people who are now living in conditions in which basic survival is a constant challenge threatens the future peace and stability of an entire region and, as a consequence, of the world as a whole. The increased risks being taken by the refugees, including those who are crossing the Mediterranean in very dangerous conditions, illustrate the level of desperation of millions of Syrians, Iraqis, Libyans, Yemenis, and Palestinians fleeing violent conflicts. Radically changing the way in which the international community has been supporting them is not only a matter of humanity; it is good politics. Indeed, what is being played out today will shape not only the future of millions of individuals, but also the social cohesion of entire societies, directly and indirectly threatened by the violence and the massive displacement of populations within and beyond national borders.

We know from hard-won experience that there are never clearly delineated lines between conflict and post-conflict stages, and that any sustainable peace needs to be prepared very early on. We have also learned that early intervention ultimately reduces the cost of future aid and gives it a better opportunity to succeed, with vital partnerships and trust relationships being forged in hardship. By not acting now we are jeopardizing the chance of having functioning local societies and sustainable peace in the region for a long time to come. If nothing is done to assist more systematically the refugees and IDPs, and the communities hosting them, we are likely to see other violent conflicts erupting while doing nothing

to encourage local peacebuilding processes to grow. We will also be missing important opportunities to help show the path to future reconstruction, a crucial dimension in any effective strategy to defeat ISIS and prevent additional forms of violent extremism from appearing.

Helping people move beyond their day-to-day struggle for survival requires a long-term commitment on the part of the international community. There will be no reconstruction and no development tomorrow if we don't start investing in people's resilience now. Supporting resilience has to be an approach that infuses all interventions, rather than being conceived of and designed as a series of stand-alone projects. It requires doing things differently so that the economic aid provided is sustainable, an entire generation can have access to education (including higher and professional education), people can receive the psychosocial support they need to face the multiple consequences of complex traumas and lay the groundwork for long-term reconciliation processes,

communities are supported in their efforts to mediate more localized conflicts, and dialogue among groups can be maintained. Supporting resilience also requires shifting from relying on international staff and resources to using local capacity and local economies from very early stages, engaging local actors and fostering their ownership, and expanding the funding of multi-year programming so that local communities can actually start thinking past the short term and be able to address their needs in a more sustainable manner.

The shift this report is calling for entails seeing displaced communities as potential opportunities for host communities and local economies, not just as burdens. It also means that the international community (particularly the GCC, the EU, and the United States) has to drastically increase the possibility of refugee

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burden sharing (including resettlement possibilities). Facing a growing flow of refugees, some European countries have started to make courageous political decisions, but a more systemic answer is needed to give this refugee crisis the emphasis it deserves: as a long-term international problem of unprecedented magnitude since World War II. Refugee burden sharing is the right thing to do from a humanitarian perspective. It is a collective responsibility enshrined in international laws. And it signals a choice: a decision to support international peace and stability instead of submitting to a vision of a world torn by perpetual, inevitable conflicts among cultures, countries, and regions.

The ongoing crises in the Middle East might seem far away to many decision-makers, particularly those in the United States. But our ability to answer, now, the challenges the crises present, including in terms of massive displacements of local populations, will shape

our prospects of winning peace and defeating violent extremism. Ultimately, the unfolding of the events in the Middle East and their echo in Europe and beyond are symptomatic of the international community's inability to support a solution to the violent conflicts in the region. Several international voices have long advocated for an urgent paradigm shift in funding and response mechanisms to better address crises like the ones plaguing the Middle East. Beyond that, we need a more systemic and sustainable peacebuilding process, as well as a new aid architecture truly able to support such a project, over the long term. The current crisis is an opportunity to make that choice. This report offers concrete suggestions to start implementing that vision in the Middle East today, by concretely investing in local communities, and empowering them in their desire to give their children a brighter future. This is the best choice we can collectively make in favor of peace. And it has to be made today, not tomorrow.





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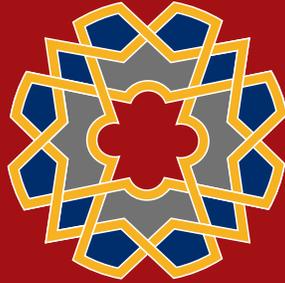
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