

SYRIAN CRISIS
DISCUSSION PAPER
SERIES

REGIONAL TRENDS AND PATTERNS IN SOCIAL COHESION

THE IMPACT OF THE SYRIA CRISIS
ON THE SOCIAL STRUCTURES
OF COUNTRIES AFFECTED



OCTOBER 2015



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FOREWORD

The vast displacement of people caused by the Syria crisis is unprecedented in recent decades. As of June 2015, over 3.9 million Syrian refugees have been forced to flee to neighbouring countries and further afield, and 7.6 million have been internally displaced within Syria. As the crisis stretches into its fifth year, host countries affected by these massive demographic shocks have generally maintained restrictive practices and legislation regarding residency, access to employment and services, and inclusion in national or sub-national social safety-nets.

The varied policies and practices towards refugees have political and socio-economic consequences for host countries. These require careful attention. With 84 percent of Syrian refugees living in host communities, the resulting pressure on resources, labour markets and social services threatens to cause community relations to fray. With the prolonged nature of the crisis, and resources for accommodating refugees being limited, the risk is that tensions in communities hosting refugees will rise and lead to new crises, local or wider.

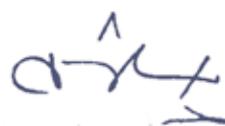
The UNHCR-UNDP Joint Secretariat has launched a discussion paper series, which tackles questions about legal and policy frameworks, economic and demographic analysis, and livelihoods and social cohesion. These are questions and issues, which directly concern communities dealing with the consequences of the Syria crisis. The series is an opportunity to discuss the issues and share insights. Each discussion paper presents an in-depth exploration of a particular issue or set of issues, supported by research and analysis.

This discussion paper – *Regional Trends and Patterns in Social Cohesion: The Impact of the Syria Crisis on the Social Structures of Countries Affected* – tackles the issue of social cohesion in the regional impact of the Syria crisis. It explores how the crisis is affecting community relations and social cohesion, and how the challenges can best be addressed, so that resilience is built in host communities and social peace is strengthened. Finding answers to these questions is an essential part of delivering a successful humanitarian and resilience response, as in this way we can better plan actions and interventions to alleviate and reduce the risk of tensions and discord. Through consultations with experts and government officials, and research on recent data and experience from the field, our authors bring evidence to the debate about these questions. Their recommendations show how practical action can optimize the response for both the Syrian refugees and their host communities.

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1. | OVERVIEW

A discussion focused on social cohesion is an important approach to understand the societal dynamics 'within' as well as 'across' the neighboring countries affected by the Syrian crisis. Direct and indirect cross-border variables seem to have a significant effect on societal structures as well as on behavior and attitudes.¹ Understanding the challenges of social cohesion is also a way of framing issues stemming from the increasing likelihood of further conflicts in the region. **The main argument put forth here is that if not properly addressed, fissures in the social, economic and political fabric risk to further worsen, leading to radicalization and making the use of violence to solve conflicts more probable and widespread.** This is particularly true in a conflict-prone region, where everyone is in close proximity, which makes spillover easier and more likely. Both Lebanon and Iraq are still recovering from their own turbulent transitions, in which the Syrian crisis, due to its apparent sectarian nature, is having an impact already. More recently, the declaration of a new Islamic state by ISIS militants in eastern Syria and western Iraq in late June 2014 brings another dimension to the complexity. It increases the potential for tearing away at the social fabrics in Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq.

HOW IS THE SYRIAN CRISIS IMPACTING THE SOCIAL STRUCTURES OF ITS NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES?

The conflict in Syria, which will be 4 years old in March 2015, shows no signs of abating. It has caused the largest refugee displacement crisis in recent times, and has severely strained the economic and social systems and related institutions in neighboring countries. With over 3.2 million refugees registered from Syria hosted in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt, conditions in Syria continue to deteriorate. Mounting demands for municipal government services and support are resulting in additional economic, social and political pressures the region's fragile local communities.

Unlike other conflicts, more than 80 percent of the Syrian refugees live amidst communities in the host countries and not in designated camps (mainly in Turkey and Jordan).² In these countries, the large refugee influx is not only changing the demographic balance, which threatens to heighten social tensions, but it is also causing increased competition leading to limited resources and opportunities, such as land, water and jobs. The enormous influx of refugees in host communities is understandably not being matched by an equal expansion of municipal and social services, such as health, education, sanitation, housing and socio-economic infrastructure.³ Water availability is increasingly critical in a region that has the least water per capita in the world. Additionally, a collapse in scarce economic opportunity and increased competition for jobs is driving a spike in poverty and unemployment among the most affected host communities, which are already poor and vulnerable. As a result, these compounding tensions threaten social cohesion and the rule of law.

Most contemporary violent conflicts occur within, not among, states and they have complex and deep-rooted causes. Besides Syria, the neighboring region faced conflicts in Lebanon that has endured a history of violent conflict, and Iraq which risks to relapse into another violent period. Yet, these conflicts are rarely "internal" wars. In many cases, their causes and ramifications cross over national borders and create a complex web of cause and effect that is difficult to

¹Levitt, P. and Schiller, N. (Fall 2004). Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society. IMR Volume 38, Number 3: 1002-1039. Center for Migration Studies of New York.

²Resilience-based Development Response to the Syrian Crisis. United Nations Development Program, December 2013. http://www.eisa-net.org/be-bruga/eisa/files/events/stockholm/Panel7-12_Fuerstenberg.pdf

³2014 Syria Regional Response Plan - Strategic Overview. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Retrieved here. <http://www.unhcr.org/52b170e49.pdf>

⁴Dincer, O., Federici, V., Ferris, E., Karacas, S., Kirisci, K., and Carmikli, E. (November 2013). Turkey and Syrian Refugees: the Limits of Hospitality. Brookings. Retrieved here: [http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2013/11/18%20syria%20turkey%20refugees/turkey%20and%20syrian%20refugees_the%20limits%20of%20hospitality%20\(2014\)](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2013/11/18%20syria%20turkey%20refugees/turkey%20and%20syrian%20refugees_the%20limits%20of%20hospitality%20(2014))

⁵We have found that 'cross-border ethnic networks' can be defined as both times among expatriates and those that are at home (Saxenian, A. 2005. "From brain drain to brain circulation: Transnational communities and regional upgrading in India and China." Studies in Comparative

address at the level of a single state. Even though political relations between Syria and Turkey deteriorated over the recent years, Turkish-Syrian trade continues.⁴ Syria's intra-state conflict is already experiencing far-reaching regional and transnational dimensions including refugee movements, cross-border ethnic networks⁵, flow of resources and arms and financial transactions. From a regional perspective, intra-state conflicts have "spill-in" or "spill-out" effects and generate high risks of "contagion" or "diffusion" across borders to create "bad neighborhoods." Violent conflicts which engulf sub-regions are more than simply an aggregation or the domino effects of internal conflicts. Indeed, conflicts like the Syrian crisis merit to be viewed from a regional or transnational perspective that go beyond the so-called "spillover phenomenon." Recent research shows that contagion effects or potential cross-border means for diffusion like direct spillover effects, refugees international diasporas or demonstration effects transmitted by ethnic linkages.⁶ A set of cross-border variables have a significant effect on the risk for conflict onset in a given country. Factors are refugee population, refugee flows, transnational ethnic linkages, extra-territorial safe havens of rebel groups, regional trade, or regional state weakness. In comparison, transnational dimensions can be at least as important as the profile individual states, although their effect is greatly mitigated by state capacity.⁷ Moreover, research also demonstrates that so called "bad neighborhoods" which comprise low levels of democracy, instability of state apparatuses and weak economic growth are mutually reinforcing, making states structurally prone to a domestic outbreak of civil strife as well as to an infection from a neighboring civil war.⁸ Because they feed each other, conflicts in neighboring countries become interlocked and much more difficult to solve. Regional conflict formations are dynamic entities and are comprised of a plurality of overlapping transnational networks (political, military, economic and social). The recognition of the transnational character of the Syrian crisis is not to deny the importance of deep-rooted domestic factors that continue to fuel the conflict. Conflicts that are rooted in historical grievances such as culture, ethnicity or religion are inevitably affected by regional dynamics.

The risk of instability in the Middle East has increased as Syrian refugees continue to flee to neighboring countries in order to escape the civil war at home.⁹ These countries are experiencing economic and political pressure due to the massive refugee influx that has dramatically increased their population sizes and strained their resources. Syria's neighboring countries are reaching their limits. They may no longer be able to accommodate the flow of refugees, having already placed themselves at risk for political violence and economic decline. The refugee crisis has caused severe overcrowding in hospitals and schools, increased unemployment and poverty levels, weakened infrastructure, and social and political instability.¹⁰ Syria's neighboring countries have experienced an over-exhaustion of their social and health services, and water, sanitation, and energy shortages are affecting all areas of life. Unsurprisingly, resentment and discrimination toward Syrian refugees is rapidly increasing. International experience learns that hosting refugees from neighboring states increases the risk of armed conflict. First, while the vast majority of refugees never directly engage in armed conflict, refugee camps are often used by militants as a source of supplies and recruits. Along with the refugees come fighters, arms, and ideologies, which can facilitate the spread of conflict. Second, refugees can disrupt the local economy and put a financial burden on host communities.¹¹ Finally, refugee flows may upset the ethnic and sectarian balance in their host countries, leading to increased tension. From the Democratic Republic of Congo, to Chad, to Macedonia, to Pakistan, refugee hosts have often succumbed to violence. Many of these dynamics are unfolding in Syria's neighbors, but it is worth noting that this would not be the first time.

International Development, 40:2, pp. 35-61) or as in the case in which is being described here, networks of conducive collaboration among militants particularly within failed or failing states (Prezelj, I. (January 2008). *The Fight against Terrorism and Crisis Management in the Western Balkans*. IOS Press Publishing.

⁶Furstenberg, M. (September 2010). *Conflict Beyond Borders -Conceptualizing Transnational Armed Conflict*. http://www.eisa-net.org/be-bruga/eisa/files/events/stockholm/Panel7-12_Fuerstenberg.pdf

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Pedram, S. (August 12, 2014). *Syrian Refugee Crisis Threatens Stability for the Middle East*. Center for American Progress.

¹⁰Comprehensive Regional Strategic Framework for the Syria Crisis. UNOCHA, May 8, 2014. Retrieved here: <http://syria.unocha.org/sites/default/files/CRSF%20-%20Background%20Document%20%20May%208.pdf>

¹¹Social and Economic Impact of Large Refugee Populations on Host Developing Countries. UNHCR Standing Committee, January 6, 1997.

During the 1970s and 80s Palestinian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon contributed to unrest and turmoil in their hosts. Now we are seeing the potential for renewed conflict spillover in the region. According to recent reports, there have been heightened tensions and security incidents in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq as a direct result of the protracted refugee crisis. Perhaps most troubling is the situation in Lebanon and Iraq — two countries with a recent history of ethno-sectarian strife that mirrors the turmoil in Syria^{12,13}. Moreover, the particular history between Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, with transnational militants that span their borders can increase the risk of conflict even further.

In addition to the influx of refugees and the weakened state of the host societies, there is also the perception of regional politics by the host societies which is through a sectarian lens. As a result, their policies of supporting particular social groups in Syria and in neighbouring countries based on sectarian identities, encourages those particular sectarian divisions. Primarily, this involvement has taken the form of financial and material support to groups seen to be aligned to regional actors' interests. With sectarian overtones, this has manifested as support for organisations that also represent sectarian or communal currents. For example, the more money and power given to groups which distinguish themselves based on being Sunni or Shi'a rather than on other bases, the more the rest of society reacts by thinking in those terms as well.¹⁴ This is particularly true in Iraq since the 1980s, but especially since 2003.

In Lebanon, the Syrian crisis has stoked a resurgence of sectarian violence with Lebanon's Sunni Muslims mostly supporting the rebels in Syria, while Shi'ites largely supporting the Syrian government. There have been many instances of violent conflict in Lebanon as a result. While in Jordan, the Jordanian government and society at large have not yet reached the level of uncertainty that would prompt a political and military overreaction to the Syrian civil war. However, there does exist the risk of gradual wear and tear on the country's already struggling economy and infrastructure. If the war continues indefinitely as the result of a stalemate, then the degree of uncertainty and the pressure on the attitudes of the people may lead to resentment and oblige the Jordanian government to take measures to abruptly stop the influx of Syrian refugees and restrict government benefits for those already in Jordan.¹⁵ This type of resentment and government action (and perhaps overreaction) could play into the hands of the extremists on both sides of the fight and on both sides of the border. Thus, these regional dynamics are quickly leading to an increased likelihood for a regional deterioration and a potential shift in the balance of power within the region. The combination of the continued Syrian crisis and the growth of sectarianism could ignite larger regional hostilities between different sects which could potentially reshape the political geography of the region.

REGIONAL PATTERNS OF IMPEDIMENTS TO SOCIAL COHESION

The Syrian crisis and the influx of refugees into poor communities in the region has imposed enormous challenges on the host communities. Recent reports exploring the impact of the Syrian crisis on the region, show that there are patterns which appear to be working against a socially cohesive society. Prevalent causes for such societal tensions are predominantly associated with competition for already limited resources and perceptions between host communities and refugees which exacerbate discrimination. These patterns are outlined in details as follows

¹²Understanding Social Cohesion and Resilience in Jordanian Host Communities. REACH Assessment Report, June 2014.

¹³Seeking Stability Evidence on Strategies for Reducing the Risk of Conflict in Northern Jordanian Communities Hosting Syrian Refugees. MercyCorps, November 2014.

¹⁴Cordesman, A., and Khazai, S. (July 3, 2012). Iraq After US Withdrawal: US Policy and the Iraqi Search for Security and Stability. Center for Strategic and International Studies. Retrieved here: http://csis.org/files/publication/120702_Iraq_After_US_Withdrawal.pdf

¹⁵Young, W., Stebbins, D., Frederick, B. and Al-Shahery, O. (2014). Spillover from the Conflict in Syria: An Assessment of the Factors that Aid and Impede the Spread of Violence. Research Report, Rand Corporation.

¹⁶Jenson, J. (1998). Mapping Social Cohesion: The State of Canadian Research. CPRN Study No. F/03. Ottawa: Renouf Publishings.

utilizing a conceptual framework, which analyzes social cohesion through the concepts of “belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition and legitimacy.”¹⁶

First, there appears to be a lack of legitimacy in public institutions within the region. Public institutions are there to act as protectors of the rights and interests of their societies as well as fulfill their responsibilities in a prompt and efficiently responsive manner. They are also expected to act as mediators of conflicts. This in turn breeds confidence in public institutions by its subjects leading to increased levels of participation and inclusion. The evidence from the region however clearly depicts a considerable absence of confidence in its public institutions. As a result of already established mistrust in governmental institutions, and the ability (or inability) of institutions to deliver services to the host communities, the added element of the Syrian refugees within host societies has produced an added negative impact on confidence levels of key societal institutions as well as having unfavorable perceptions of safety. Insecurity and instability of governance (more notably in the cases of Iraq and Lebanon) are drastically impacting trust among various communities, particularly communities made up of different sects. In the case of Iraq, levels of trust between societal groups have progressively decreased and communities have sought protection in identities other than in the Iraqi nation.¹⁷ In other words, strong patronage networks exist within such communities which strengthen communal ties and weak networks exist between differing communities and between communities and government. At the same time, a lack of safe public common space in which members of different communities can peacefully interact with one another, combined with the high levels of distrust resulting from insecurity, has hastened the process of communal segregation. This is a pattern also visible in Lebanon where although there exists a solid sense of national identity, it is contrasted with a confessional, familial and communal-based sense of identity, thus increasing a hurdle that needs to be overcome to achieve social cohesion. Regions with ongoing security issues and sectarian diversity are most prone to such social instability and to negative perceptions of Syrian refugees.¹⁸

An essential component in building legitimacy within a society is the role of the media. Appropriate representation in the mass media can encourage social cohesion. Unfortunately, the role of media in the region has negatively impacted social cohesion. In Iraq, almost all media outlets demonstrate a strong party-political bias and frequently allow for intolerant and discriminatory opinion of different communities to be expressed, negatively impacting public attitudes. While in Lebanon, there has been a convergence of some Lebanese media attempts to present the Syrian refugee problem as a real threat to Lebanon’s security and economy.¹⁹ Media can be a strong mechanism for spreading understanding and tolerance, however, with the exception of odd programs, this is not something currently observed.

Second, the **lack of equal opportunities** for all members of society is creating even wider rifts between the haves and have-nots or even those who ‘belong’ and ‘the others.’ In other words, the lack of delivery and access to basic services has led to an intensifying competition over resources due to the influx of Syrian refugees exacerbating tensions within host societies and between host societies and refugees.²⁰ Competition over employment and the negative effects of the Syrian crisis on the economic situation in the region can be deemed as one of the main causes of tensions among the host and refugee communities. In Lebanon, the data is quite conflicting in terms

¹⁷UNESCO - United Nations Development Assistance Framework: Iraq 2015-2019. The Development Strategy of the National Authorities and People of Iraq and the Agencies, Funds, Programs of the UN System. Retrieved here: http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Iraq/Iraq_UNDAF_2015-2019.pdf

¹⁸Lebanon: Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Syrian Conflict. UNDP and World Bank, September 2013. Retrieved here: <http://www.tr.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/SyriaResponse/Lebanon%20Economic%20and%20Social%20Impact%20Assessment%20of%20the%20Syrian%20Conflict.pdf>

¹⁹Al-Saadi, Y. (September 16, 2014). Attack of Syrians in Lebanon: Spacegoating, Par Excellence. Al-Akhbar English.

²⁰Understanding Social Cohesion and Resilience in Jordanian Host Communities. REACH Assessment Report, June 2014.

of whether the crisis has really increased unemployment amongst Lebanese or resulted in the slowness of the Lebanese economy is still an ongoing debate with many contradictory findings and a few conclusive reports. Further, throughout the region, reports from the field indicate growing policies of segregation, which have been exacerbated by the Syrian refugee crisis. Segregation is increasingly being manifested by governmental policies as well as in other fields including education, health, and residence. Societal inequalities that inhibit fair access to political, social, and economic opportunities foster resentment and fissures between communities.²¹ This is a significant matter in that fairer opportunities are a key indication of participation for the working-age population, which in turn leads to increased social cohesion. However, the current prevailing narrative within the region is that there has been a significant reduction in access to basic social services and economic opportunities, which is challenging social cohesion and resilience of host societies. This lack of equal opportunity is the result of the lack of structural support, limited resources, and the increase in targeted discrimination. A case in point is in Iraq's educational system which has alienated students being that it is based along communal lines which encourages divisions within society. Whereas in Lebanon, there have been restrictions placed on registering Syrian students to study alongside their Lebanese peers. Second (afternoon) shifts have been proposed as a solution to the inability to absorb the number of Syrian students in the morning shifts in public schools. Such policies were meant to avoid tensions and clashes between Lebanese and Syrian students which has been the case within Jordan as a result of its policies of immersing Syrian children into its school system.²² However, in the case of Jordan, despite its host and refugee communities having relatively good access to education, the educational sector is still plagued by challenges to social cohesion, such as overpopulation of the schools and misperceptions among the two communities. Such challenges within the educational system are likely to have ripple effects within the communities at large.²³

Further, the combination of the lack of confidence in governmental institutions and the scarcity of the resources, has led to a shift in societal allegiances which are hindering social cohesion. For instance, tensions within Jordan are connected to limited resources and opportunities. As a result, the significance and nature of intergroup tensions continue to correlate with tribal identities in addition to national identities, compounding the resource-based tensions, challenges of obtaining housing and securing jobs.²⁴ In Iraq, within areas of minimal access to services, communities in some cases have become the primary providers of social services, social protection, and security. This situation however has only contributed to increased social tensions as the service delivery is mostly limited to certain communities. Additionally, what has also been evident within the region is the perceived fear by the host societies that the Syrian refugees are benefiting disproportionately by national and international humanitarian responses to the detriment of host societies. of a reduction in goods and services due to the influx of the Syrian refugees. This added element to the circumstances has been a root cause of the deterioration of social relations between host societies and refugees.

Third, there is a general lack of recognition of diversity (respect to diversity) within the region which is regressing with the continued influx of Syrian refugees within host nations. The recognition of diversity is essential in building common feelings of membership and unity.²⁵ It incorporates a general trust among the refugees and

²¹World Bank – Lebanon, Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Syrian Conflict. (Beirut 2013)

²²Shuayb, M., Makkouk, N. and Tuttunji, S. (September 2014). Widening Access to Quality Education for Syrian Refugees: The Role of Private and NGO Sectors in Lebanon. Centre for Lebanese Studies. Retrieved here: <http://daleel-madani.org/sites/default/files/Widening%20Access%20to%20Quality%20Education.pdf>

²³Understanding Social Cohesion and Resilience in Jordanian Host Communities. REACH Assessment Report, June 2014.

²⁴Understanding Social Cohesion and Resilience in Jordanian Host Communities. REACH Assessment Report, June 2014.

²⁵Spoonley, P., Peace, R., Butcher, A., and O'Neill, D. (April 2005). Social Cohesion: A Policy and Indicator Framework for Assessing Immigrant and Host Outcomes. Social Policy Journal of New Zealand, Issue 24.

host communities and includes cohesion among individuals as well as cohesion among different social groups. Further, recognition involves more equal opportunities between genders and different social strata and groups while encouraging protection from discrimination and harassment and providing a sense of safety. Higher levels of recognition of differing communities, particularly of the Syrian refugees, encourages integration as well as societal perceptions of the legitimacy of the social institutions. Independent of the current Syrian refugee crisis, the region has endured significant problems associated with the lack of diversity. Political instability, crisis, displacement and change often have a high cost on women and girls lives. Women and girls experience conflict and resulting displacement differently than men, and differently from each other depending on their class, religion, location and other factors. Women's equal participation in transition is crucial not only because it is a human right, but also because there is a clear link between women's participation and the success and stability of peacebuilding, social cohesion efforts and governance reforms. The perceived patterns within the region however represent a lack of value for diversity which has translated into a shortage of equal opportunities which is affecting boys and girls, particularly through early marriages and increased gender-based violence. For instance, in Lebanon, both women and men cited various forms of sexual and gender-based violence as taking place. Further, economic imperatives and deprivation stoked by the Syrian refugee crisis may have reportedly enhanced the exploitation of women in the form of increased rates of prostitution.²⁶ The most prominent types of discrimination against women as individuals and as members of families included: deprivation of personal independence in issues like legal capacity and the need for a custodian; discrimination with regard to marriage contracts, requests for divorce and compensation resulting from divorce; discrimination with regard to relations with children, in issues of child custody, right of the Lebanese woman to give nationality to her children and husband. In Iraq, the problems faced by women as a result of their gender in Iraqi society have had clear impacts on social cohesion. Given the role of women in educating children, particularly with regard to values, and their centrality to the family unit in Iraq, women play an integral role in spreading ideas of tolerance and respect for diversity or, indeed, their opposite. Thus, a socially cohesive society requires fair representation and opportunity for all members of its society and women constitute roughly half of the population of the region.

Additionally, in exploring the behavioral dimension of fissures in the region's social cohesion, we can see a number of patterns emerge that incorporate elements of social vitality (belonging) and participation.²⁷ A sense of belonging is essential for a cohesive society as it is correlated to participation in all aspects of political, socio-cultural, and economic life. A good measure of social cohesion is the level to which a members of a society feel that they belong to the society as a whole. However, reports from the field indicate that cultural differences have intensified the lack of social affinity between host communities and refugees. For instance, in Lebanon, there are differences in lifestyles, customs and traditions between the host society and refugees that further undermine communal harmony. There is a feeling of "estrangement in their own country" owing to the large presence of refugees, as well as a dilution and erosion of their socio-cultural landmarks and points of reference.²⁸ Additionally, perceptions of each other have also had a negative impact upon social relations thereby impeding the sense of belonging within society. There is a growing perception among the Lebanese that Syrian refugees have brought higher levels of criminality (robberies,

²⁶Human Rights Watch. Lebanon: Women Refugees from Syria Harassed, Exploited, November 27, 2013.

²⁷Spoonley, P., Peace, R., Butcher, A., and O'Neill, D., et. al. (April 2005).

²⁸World Bank – Lebanon, Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Syrian Conflict. (Beirut 2013)

violent assaults) and that they are a threat to host communities. In Jordan, tensions are exacerbated by widely held beliefs that refugees are responsible for the deterioration of living conditions within the society.²⁹ This attribution instills more negative feelings toward the Syrian refugee population in general, hindering social cohesion. As a result, social contacts between the two communities are diminishing which contributes to reduced social vitality.

The region's levels of social cohesion have also been affected by lower levels of **participation**. Participation in formal and informal social networks is important in that it helps to generate beneficial forms of social capital.³⁰ Just as with a society's feelings of belonging, participation is correlated to the assurance that people feel their voices are heard as part of an inclusive political process contributing to a broader idea of social inclusion. However, the region is currently affected by low levels of participation which undermine political systems and decrease the responsiveness of government while reducing inclusion of different groups within society, thereby weakening social contract. It is further worsened by the fact that many people do not have an opportunity to engage with political actors and do not feel that their governments are interested in responding to their needs.

2. | SOCIAL COHESION RATIONALE AND SCOPE OF WORK

A lack of social cohesion can contribute to increased social tensions, violent crimes, targeting of minorities, sexual violence, trafficking, early marriage, human rights violations, and ultimately violent conflict. Social cohesion is about tolerance of, and respect for, diversity (in terms of religion, ethnicity, economic situation, political preferences, sexuality, gender and age) - both institutionally and individually.³¹ It is a necessary component in order for a society to build its trust and foster a sense of belonging and participation. Prior to the Syrian refugee crisis, this region was especially vulnerable because of its fragile economic conditions and the potential political impact of demographic changes within its society. The growing arrival of additional Syrian refugees has led to a weakening of the host communities' capabilities of handling the population growth and increasing competition for its resources. Social cohesion relates to the Syrian refugees and their host communities and host societies as a whole.

Based on the data that we've seen in the region regarding impediments to social cohesion, we have utilized a number of international indicators affecting social cohesion to guide us in exploring patterns.³² For purposes of this discussion, we have summarized and narrowed down a number of indicators from the data which are applicable to our framework for measuring social cohesion. The main indicators can be categorized into -, which include access to basic services and economic opportunities; *social factors*, which include understanding and tolerance of all communities; and *participation factors*, which include participation by all communities in political, economic and socio-cultural life.

²⁹Understanding Social Cohesion and Resilience in Jordanian Host Communities. REACH Assessment Report, June 2014.

³⁰Spoonley, P., Peace, R., Butcher, A., and O'Neill, D., et. al. (April 2005).

³¹Community Security and Social Cohesion: Towards a UNDP Approach. Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery. United Nations Development Program, December 2009. Retrieved here: <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/thailand/docs/CommSecandSocialCohesion.pdf>

³²See Annex for detailed descriptions of the international indicator sets.

3. | SOCIAL COHESION DESCRIPTION AND FRAMEWORK

Social cohesion represents the absence of latent conflict whether caused by racial, economic or political reasons, among others; and the presence of strong social bonds, as noted by the existence of trust, reciprocity, associations crosscutting social divisions and the presence of institutions of conflict management.³³ It is the elements that conform to this notion that contribute to the building of communities and strengthening of social bonds, especially under conditions of civil unrest and hardship. Further, the OECD had the narrowest latent definition of social cohesion, focusing almost exclusively on the economic and material aspects of the concept.³⁴ Being that this paper explores the concept of social cohesion on a regional level and in correlation with the Syrian refugee crisis, the concept can be understood within the context of social cohesion within the Arab world which includes the following: a focus on inclusive citizenship; trust between citizen and citizen as well as citizen and state; respect for human rights, economic and social equality and pluralistic acceptance of the other of different faiths, confessions, ethnic background, and political ideologies.³⁵

Working on social cohesion involves restoring fractures within the societal tissue. As such, social cohesion is concerned with relationships between individuals, between individuals and groups/organizations, and between individuals and society/state. Social cohesion is a multidimensional construct: on the one hand, it refers to social connectedness in different life domains, such as political, socio-economic and socio-cultural spheres.³⁶ On the other hand, it covers subjective representations (attitude) as well as behavioral outcomes (involvement). Understanding more about these relationships matters because it is so frequently identified by several studies in the region as the causes of political and social tensions and other challenges in development. Such explanations are logically followed by calls to improve institutions and policies and foster greater participation of citizens without discrimination based on sex, race, or religion, with an implicit assumption that in such calls, realizing them is simply a matter of choice, technocratic skill and/or sheer political will. However institutions, political leaders and citizens appear to experience significant constraints on their actions, which is, in part, shaped by the degree of social cohesion. Therefore it is imperative to shift our understanding of this refugee crisis.

The underlying elements of this crisis require a different approach which explores the components necessary for building a cohesive foundation of societies. Thus, programming based on strengthening social cohesion is important to address the social, political and economic facets of these societies. It is now required for addressing the growing gaps and costs resulting from inadequate support to national and local service delivery systems (health, education, and municipal services) and to the expansion of opportunities for self-reliance, and the consequential risks to social cohesion.³⁷

The aforementioned international indicators of social cohesion are used in the development of a social cohesion framework for assessing outcomes for refugees and host communities at a variety of levels. The objective of the social cohesion framework is to determine the indicators which can be utilized to measure changes in the dimensions seen below over time and in response to cross-government policies and services for both refugees and the host communities. Conceptually, there are five intermediate outcomes/indicators identified below which are divided in the social cohesion framework into two categories:³⁸

³³Berkman, L.F. and Kawachi, I. (2000). Social Cohesion, Social Capital, and Health. *Social Epidemiology*, pp. 147-190. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁴OECD Multilingual Summaries. Perspectives on Global Development 2012: Social Cohesion in a Shifting World.

³⁵United Nations Development Program- Region: Arab States Project Document. Promoting Social Cohesion in the Arab Region (SCAR). (2015-2018).

³⁶Reitz, J.G., Breton, R., Dion, K.K., & Dion, K.L. (2009). Multiculturalism and social cohesion potentials and challenges of diversity VIII, 196. Springer.

³⁷In from the Margins, Part II: Barriers to Social Inclusion and Social Cohesion. Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, June 2013. Retrieved here: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/SEN/Committee/411/soci/rep/rep26jun13-e.pdf>

³⁸Spoonley, P., et. al.,(April 2005).

1. Elements of socially cohesive behavior include:

- **Belonging:** A sense of **belonging (social vitality)** from being part of the wider community, trusting in other people and having a common respect for the rule of law and for civil and human rights. Arguably the most telling indicator of social vitality as it directly considers the connections that individuals have created within their society.
- **Participation** includes involvement in economic and social (cultural, religious, leisure) activities, in the workplace, family and community settings, in groups and organisations, and in political and civic life.

2. Elements that comprise conditions for a socially cohesive society include:

- **Equalization (of opportunities)** involves a reduction in community inequalities and social exclusion. In other words, allows for some increased equity of opportunities and of outcomes, with regard to labor market participation and income and access to education and training, social benefits, health services and housing without negatively impacting the host societies. This provides the refugees with a chance to be valued members of the society and less of a strain.
- **Recognition** involves all groups, including the host country, valuing diversity and respecting differences, protection from discrimination and harassment, and a sense of safety. General trust among the refugees and host communities includes cohesion among individuals as well as cohesion among different social groups. Involves more equal opportunities between gender, different social strata and groups. Racism and discrimination are minimized as there would exist a recognition for diversity.
- **Legitimacy** includes confidence in public institutions that act to protect rights and interests, the mediation of conflicts, and institutional responsiveness. Public institutions encourage social cohesion, generate trust and are responsive to the needs of all communities.

4. | INDICATOR FRAMEWORK FOR MEASURING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL COHESION IN HOST SOCIETIES

The framework for measuring social cohesion within the region involves measuring refugee participation within the host society and comparing this with the host community's response to the refugee population. It would seek to measure the impact of programs and policies designed to provide services to the refugee population at local, regional and national levels and measure the attitudes and responses of the host community towards said groups.

High Level Outcomes:

Host society and the refugee community becomes an increasingly socially cohesive society with a climate of collaboration because all groups have a sense of belonging, participation, equalization of opportunities, recognition, and legitimacy.

Intermediate Outcomes:

Individuals and groups exhibit elements of socially cohesive behavior: belonging and participation.

Conditions for socially cohesive society are demonstrated through: equalization of opportunities, recognition and legitimacy.

REFUGEE COMMUNITY	HOST SOCIETIES
ELEMENTS OF SOCIALLY COHESIVE BEHAVIOR	
<p>Belonging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sense of belonging • frequency of intimate family friend contact/networks • social involvement index • membership of groups • telephone and Internet access <p>Participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participation in education • participation in arts and cultural activities • involvement in sports teams and leisure • civic engagement 	<p>Belonging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • national and local governmental and NGO and civil society programs in place to encourage inter-community contacts, membership of groups and communication access. <p>Participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • governmental assistance and programs for refugee education • programs designed to encourage refugee engagement in arts and cultural activities • programs designed to encourage refugee involvement in sports teams and leisure • programs designed to encourage refugee civic engagement
CONDITIONS FOR A SOCIALLY COHESIVE SOCIETY	
<p>Equalization (of opportunity)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • market income per person • paid employment rate • labor market participation rates • literacy skills • unemployment rates • education and qualification recognition • welfare receipt • occupational distribution • home ownership <p>Recognition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • racism and discrimination • representation in local/national government • own language media • own language use <p>Legitimacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confidence in key societal institutions • perceptions of safety • service delivery to refugee groups • health levels and access to health services • appropriate representation in the mass media 	<p>Equalization (of opportunity)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • governmental services to support refugees into the labour market • numbers of support programs <p>Recognition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • programs to reduce levels of racism and discrimination • resourcing for media <p>Legitimacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • surveys on racism and discrimination • safety protection services • facilitating confidence and trust building processes
BROAD-BASED DEMOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGE ABOUT REFUGEE COMMUNITIES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • numbers of refugees • length of time in host society • previous knowledge of country • existing links to family or friends • educational level • qualifications • health status • languages spoken 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • database for maintaining detailed records of refugees and their status within host communities

5. | SOCIAL COHESION AND RESILIENCE-BASED RESPONSE

HOW TO DIRECTLY ADDRESS CHALLENGES TO SOCIAL COHESION AND BUILD RESILIENCE IN HOST SOCIETIES?

If contemporary conflicts need to be viewed through a prism that recognizes the interlocking nature of domestic and regional factors in creating and sustaining conflicts across borders, so too should resilience-based responses. However, the international peacebuilding toolkit as outlined below, still consists primarily of instruments targeted at the country level. With a few exceptions, the Resilience-based Response which developed a corresponding regional framework, can effectively address the transnational dimensions of conflict or promote regional approaches to peacebuilding and stability.³⁹

Presently, the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) brings together the plans developed under the leadership of national authorities – namely, the Arab Republic of Egypt, the Republic of Iraq, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Lebanese Republic, and the Republic of Turkey – to ensure protection, humanitarian assistance and strengthen resilience.

The 3RP Strategic overview is a summary of the programme priorities and resource requirements of nearly 200 partners responding to the Syrian crisis in support of government priorities. The overview benefits from the analysis of almost 200 national and international partners and reflects an integrated and innovative multi-sector response in support of the resilience and refugee response in the countries of the region. The 3RP has the overarching goals of ensuring protection and humanitarian assistance for refugees fleeing the conflict in Syria and other vulnerable communities, while building the resilience of individuals, families, communities and institutions in the most impacted countries.⁴⁰

The 3RP embraces the notion that the needs and priorities of vulnerable populations, refugees and members of impacted communities alike, must be central to the response. Building upon the success of the current and previous Regional Response Plans (RRP), the 3RP will continue to ensure protection and humanitarian assistance for refugees and other vulnerable communities.⁴¹ This means working together so that refugees have access to asylum and international protection, that they can meet their basic needs in safety and dignity, that those with specific needs and vulnerabilities receive specialized services and support.

However, based on the data elements of threats to social cohesion within host societies, it is clear that a more nuanced response is required hinging upon the aforementioned conceptual framework directly illustrating the fissures impacting the region's social cohesion and thus its needs for support. The region's deterioration of social cohesion is undermining its political stability, economic potential and the realization of its citizens' rights. This highlights the need to address the Syrian refugee crisis not only in terms of a military or humanitarian effort, but in terms of a broader approach towards socio-political stabilization. Without meaningful efforts to address the root causes of conflict in the region, the results of any military engagement will be unpredictable and humanitarian or development efforts will be unsustainable.

³⁹3RP Regional Response and Resilience Plan 2015-2016: In Response to the Syria Crisis.

⁴⁰3RP Regional Response and Resilience Plan 2015-2016: In Response to the Syria Crisis.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

Efforts towards social cohesion must be strengthened in order to be sustainable and effective. Thus, support to resilience building must shift gears towards a longer term approach, and include social, economic and political elements. A Resilience-based Response does not invoke the suggestion that socially cohesive societies are always harmonious, devoid of political conflict or dissent. Rather in the Resilience-based Response, the concept is used to explore the extent to which a society remains functional and peaceful especially during a crisis. It considers how to best manage tensions, build trust and consensus to ensure that they do not deteriorate into violence, increased political tensions or deepened social fissures.

Initially, in the context of a regional response, the 3RP approach to building social cohesion would focus on the following objectives⁴²:

- Enhancing mutual understanding of the fissures within society along social, economic and political lines;
- Enhancing national capacity, processes and mechanism in adjusting and adapting and mitigate any turbulence in society;
- Identifying point of leverage to enable a catalytic effect on the level of resilience of societies;
- Establishing inclusive enough processes that foster participation along social, economic and political lines;
- Accompanying and facilitating confidence and trust building processes through accepted dialogue mechanisms that enable legitimate conflict mitigation, for instance through national reconciliation initiatives to create a safe space for public discussion;
- Institutionalization of progress based on best practices and lessons learned, e.g. through improved law enforcement, promotion of human rights, promotion of principles of equality in constitutions, and laws that guarantee equal rights and power-sharing;
- Establishing legitimate links between national level and local level initiatives;

However, upon gathering and analyzing recent reports on matters of social cohesion within the region, it is evident that a wider regional response is now required. Further, additional emphasis is needed on the prevalence of perceptions of the host communities and stereotyping which contribute to distrust and conflict. Whereas the 3RP approach, outlined above, more intently focused on a country-driven plan which incorporated regional elements, the revised 3RP approach would focus on a wider regional response addressing the problematic circumstances which were prevalent within the reports from the field. The following objectives would be supplemented with the aforementioned 3RP:

- Encouraging efforts to promote national reconciliation, especially at the political level, by building on the work to form new governments along national unity lines. This will help address feelings of exclusion (political, economic and social) amongst certain communities allowing for more power sharing and improving public access to, and the transparency of, political representatives and institutions;
- Encouraging and supporting politically-neutral public discourse on the concept of, and issues regarding, Social Cohesion. Such discussion aims to inform the region's governments' understanding of, and vision towards, the concept of Social Cohesion and particularly the social contract. It should reach out to members of society from all backgrounds and at all levels, including minorities, women, religious and tribal leaders, public intellectuals and the media;

- Support for local governance and municipalities in addressing some of the most urgent community-wide challenges to restore confidence and trust in municipalities, and supporting their role in absorbing the shock of the refugee crisis in a way that fosters social cohesion and resilience. A participatory process allows local stakeholders to work together to identify common problems and solutions, which builds confidence, tolerance, understanding, but also sustainability and ownership of projects that would later be implemented;
- Establishing a solid gender-sensitive response to ensure a) the integration of a gender perspective into the analyses and formulation of interventions, and b) initiatives to enable women as well as men to formulate and express their views and to participate in inclusive decision-making processes.
- Developing a programming activity that promotes engagement and social interaction through various sectors such as in education, health, and the labor market. However, it should be noted that such activities are not solid enough to address the more structural issues causing or contributing to social fissures. As a result of social fissures, there exists a higher awareness in such interventions which would in turn contribute to a conflict-sensitive approach to addressing social cohesion.

In summary, the 3RP is a significant initiative addressing the Syrian crisis from a regional perspective where the underlying societal dynamics within and between countries affected by the Syrian crisis become apparent. The 3RP response is organized from a national response, however from a transdimensional aspect, the response remains a challenge. This policy paper was a great opportunity to zoom further into the underlying societal aspects and dynamics. The team drafting the paper was also confronted with limitations. Whereas there is a general acknowledgment of the importance of the social cohesion challenges in the sub-region, there remains a lack of adequate understanding of the dynamics and how the respective societies are coping and are transforming themselves as a result of the protracted refugee crisis. More systematic and regular regional analysis matter as it will guide the national and international responses. Many different initiatives are currently operational, yet some, if not all of these initiatives prevent a response architecture that is solid enough to address the huge challenges ahead.

In order to address these challenges, the following questions are important to our discussion and response so as to better enable the gauging and strengthening social cohesion within the region. How do we know that the current response is adding to a more resilient society? Which regional infrastructures for peace are (or should be) established to address the transdimensional challenges? Do people trust each other to collaborate and build up a new society? Is it sufficient to work with only a few communities? Where is the point of leverage of the intervention to impact a wider resilience of the society? How do changing social and economic networks affect the continuous process of social cohesion between Syrian refugees and their host societies? How to understand the links between economic disadvantage and cultural exclusion, since many women, and youth suffer from both? Further, the question is not how the spillover from Syria can be prevented, but what should be done now that the crisis has already taken root? These are only a few questions stressing the importance and challenge of making adequate use of the findings of a social cohesion assessment to directly address challenges to social cohesion and to ultimately build resilience in the host societies.

6. | ANNEX

Such a conceptual framework is important to helping us understand the patterns, commonalities and particularities between and within the countries of this region. As previously noted, numerous patterns of fissures within the region's social cohesion were found. Through retrieving data from our various stakeholders within the region, several indicators which help us to explore the levels of social cohesion have come to light.

Utilizing data from the region, we adopted the following key indicators:

- **Demography**- The influx of Syrian refugees has led to demographic changes in local areas and is increasing tensions between refugees and host societies. Large scale movements of IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) has created a strain on local services and further increased resentment within the host society.
- **Economic factors** - There is a feeling that municipal service provisions are unequal between different groups in Iraq, e.g. cities are favored over rural regions. There is also a perception that certain communities are given preferable treatment, such as the Shi'a community in Iraq. Local government administrators are finding it increasingly difficult to respond to the widening gap between the provision of municipal services and the growing demand of new refugees. In Jordan, for example, there has been a reduction in access to social services and economic opportunities which is challenging social cohesion and resilience of host communities at all levels of governance and administration.
- **Inclusion in the labour market** (Employment/Training)- The Syrian crisis has had a significant impact on the region's labour market, exacerbating conditions for the already informal workforce and intensifying competition for employment. Pre-existing economic strains on an already saturated labor market. Perception here also plays a role in that host communities perceive jobs given to refugees as denied opportunities to citizens.
- **Social benefits** - There exists a lack of understanding and tolerance of different cultures and religions. Such ignorance has led to exclusion of group from have equal rights. There are high levels of mistrust among the different communities. For example, despite the serious challenges to social cohesion in Jordan, there are important elements that have helped sustain the influx of refugees. For instance, in addition to the usual family ties between those who live and work in the borders areas of the Middle East, there is a natural cultural affinity between the Jordanians and the Syrians, and the people of the Levant as a whole. They share a common culture and speak the same Arabic.
- **Housing** - The lack of physical security and diminishing resilience in host communities, with an urgent need to focus on shelter support given the large number of people living in desperate conditions. This has been contributing to higher levels of vulnerability and deteriorating social cohesion in these communities.
- **Education** - Overpopulation is a main reason for the decrease in the quality of education. Additionally, Iraq's segregated educational system has alienated students and since it is based on communal lines, it encourages divisions within society.
- **Participation** in social, cultural and political life:
 1. **Political:**
 - In Iraq, the de-Baathification process is perceived by host society as targeting the Sunni community to decrease Sunni influence in the government.
 - Low levels of political participation due to disillusionment with political system which has led to a decrease in

responsiveness from the government and a decrease in the inclusion of different groups within society.

- Low levels of engagement with political actors. People feel the government is uninterested in their needs.
- Divisive political arena: Almost all parties are based on ethnic or sectarian lines. Parties utilize communal differences to gain electoral support.
- Poor civic participation/civic values: There is a diminished sense of civic spirit since 2003. This is due to the lack of trust and concerns of security. A lack of volunteer spirit.

2. Social/Cultural:

- Policy of Cultural diversity: No coherent policy to protect cultural diversity or ensure space to engage in cultural practices. Despite the serious challenges to social cohesion in Jordan, there are important elements that have helped sustain the influx of refugees. For instance, in addition to the usual family ties between those who live and work in the border areas of the Middle East. For e.g., there is a natural cultural affinity between the Jordanians and the Syrians, and the people of the Levant as a whole. They share a common culture and speak the same Arabic.

These are often accompanied by indicators of racism and discrimination, reflecting institutionalised forms of racism and discrimination. These indicators typically include the following:

- Data on **racism and discriminatory acts:**
 - 1. Gender discrimination:** Women are denied equal participation or access to services.
 - 2. Bureaucratic concern over religious identity:** Concern over religious identity exposes citizens to discrimination and danger.
- Data on **racially violent crimes and harassment:**
 - 1. Security factors:** The strengthening of militant groups like al-Qaida and Jabhat al-Nusra in the border areas inside eastern Syria and western Iraq does not bode well for the stability of Baghdad or the region, which is best viewed as an extended part of an interconnected, dynamic whole and as a perceived battle for survival between Sunni and Shia—as well as an opportunity for either side to attack Israel. Further, the advent of ISIS has heightened sectarian tension and mistrust of Iraqi Sunnis.
 - 2. Sectarian violence:** Fear and mistrust between communities has denied opportunities for engagement and has created social divisions.
 - 3. Normalization of violence:** Years of instability and violence has led to the young being less likely to adopt compromised solutions or to be tolerant of others.
- Data on patterns of **discrimination in government:**
 - 1. Poor inclusion of minorities:** Minority communities do not feel included with institutions or political system; they feel this is based on discrimination.
 - 2. Lack of implementation of laws regarding rights and liberties:** The legal basis for social cohesion is established in the Iraqi constitution however it is not effectively implemented and citizens do not have the freedom to express their cultural and communal rights without fear of discrimination at governmental and societal levels.

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