



# Supporting Syria and the Region

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NGO Joint Position Paper

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## Background

Five years into a conflict that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, conditions confronting civilians in Syria continue to deteriorate, particularly for children and youth. Warring parties continue to violate UN Security Council resolutions and international humanitarian law by deliberately and wantonly attacking civilians and civilian infrastructure, including homes, markets, schools and hospitals leaving a deadly legacy of Unexploded Ordnance. Widespread loss of documentation further challenges civilians' freedom to move inside Syria, hindering their ability to reach safe areas, access assistance, and ultimately seek asylum. Meanwhile, as needs increase, the availability of basic protection and services such as health, education and livelihoods for the almost 4.6 million Syrians sheltering in neighbouring countries is diminishing. Access to legal stay and legal employment is limited, and poverty rates are rising to unprecedented levels. More and more refugees are exhausting their financial reserves and sinking deeper into debt, forcing them to accept exploitative work, driving impoverished parents to send their children into exploitative child labour, forcing desperate women and girls into survival sex and early marriage, and leading men, women and children to return to Syria, or try to reach Europe and third countries through informal channels, at great risk to their lives.

As Syrian, national and international non-governmental organisations providing humanitarian assistance to those affected by the Syria crisis, we have since 2011 repeatedly stressed that only a political solution and an end to the conflict can spare Syrian civilians further violence, trauma and misery. The Vienna process launched in October 2015 may yield such an outcome, but the urgent humanitarian, protection, health, educational and livelihoods needs of Syrians cannot be put on hold while national, regional and international leaders work to overcome their differences. A whole generation risks losing its future: six million children affected by the conflict are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance<sup>1</sup>. More than half of children living as refugees in countries neighbouring Syria are not in school<sup>2</sup>. In addition 30 per cent of refugees have specific needs with one in five affected by physical, sensory or intellectual impairment<sup>3</sup>, requiring immediate and long term effort for all to access services. Moreover, present and future stability in the Syria region depends on the development community's ability to positively engage, equip, and empower a critical generation of youth who will someday rebuild their communities/society/economy.

To ensure the needs of Syrians living under daily conflict are met it is absolutely vital that the UN Humanitarian Response Plan for Syria and that the 3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2016-2017 are fully funded throughout all sectors and for all host countries.

We ask that the international community be bold in its ambitions and commit to providing 'compacts' which strive to improve protection, educational and economic opportunities for Syrians. It is against this backdrop that we collectively submit the following recommendations to national governments and other stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> 2016 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, October 2015

<sup>2</sup> 2016 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic, October 2015

<sup>3</sup> Hidden victims of the Syrian Crisis, Handicap International and Helpage, 2014



# 1. Protection

## 1.1 The Crisis Inside Syria

- We call for an end to all attacks on civilians and violations of international humanitarian law inside Syria, and call on all parties to the conflict to immediately halt all attacks on homes, schools and medical facilities, and we call for an immediate end to siege tactics and the obstruction of humanitarian assistance.
- We call for the immediate implementation of the provisions of UN Security Council resolutions 2139, 2165, 2191 and 2254 so that all those in need of aid and protection can access it fully and safely, without any impediments; and benefiting from intentional and proactive steps to remove barriers to access safe services. That all humanitarian actors – including local staff – regardless of their origin or point of access, can work free from fear of arrest, detention, loss of property, retaliation, persecution or interference from all parties.
- We call on the UN Security Council to establish a mechanism to monitor and publically expose attacks by any and all means against civilians inside Syria, as well as the use of besiegement, and lay down clear consequences for the perpetrators of such tactics.
- We call for the provisions on UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 et al on Women, Peace and Security to be fully implemented. Inter alia, efforts need to start now to enable a diverse range of Syrian women activists to participate in policy-making on the crisis and to prepare for any political process to resolve the conflict, as well as to build their networks amongst civil society groups, the wider crisis-affected population and within and across different factions in the conflict.
- We ask that humanitarian mine action start as soon as possible. All governments and stakeholders should acknowledge that humanitarian mine action is essential, if the significant risks that unexploded ordnance and landmines - improvised or manufactured - pose to Syrian communities and humanitarian actors are to be averted, and further acknowledge that such action is critical to longer-term stabilisation and recovery efforts inside Syria and across the region. Donors should commit to funding risk education, survey and clearance of mines and explosive remnants of war, and support to Syrian response capacity to effectively respond to these threats. Donors must also support also victim assistance programmes, including rehabilitation services and access to them.
- We call on all donors to dramatically scale up support for programmes aimed at providing support and recovery services to those affected by mental illness inside Syria.
- We call on all donors and the humanitarian community to provide substantial support, both financial and non-financial, to Syrian and national NGO's working to provide services to those in hard to reach areas.

## 1.2 The Syrian Refugee Crisis

- We urge Syria's neighbours to keep their borders open to all those fleeing the conflict in Syria, to respect refugees' right to freedom of movement, and to refrain from *refoulement* and to ensure that refugees can access registration and legal stay. This includes ensuring proactive means to reach refugees with difficulties accessing registration points.
- We urge the countries of the European Union to reform visa processes making it simpler for Syrian refugees to apply for visas from countries of first asylum and processing those with family connections to help avoid more people making perilous crossings by sea to Europe
- Above all we urge conference participants to commit to an ambitious, long-term recovery plan for Syrian refugees and Syrian refugee-hosting countries in the region. Such a plan should comprise significant increases in developmental and multi-year funding pledges. It should encourage the establishment of cross-sectorial partnerships between governments, civil society, the private sector and international financial institutions, support increased access to education for refugees and work to create income earning opportunities for refugees and host communities.
- We urge all conference participants to ensure that investments in youth are holistic and integrate psychosocial support, education, jobs training or skills training programs with the increased access to market-based opportunities
- We urge all host countries in the region and beyond to lift restrictions on working for refugees and allow refugees to participate in the economy so that they can benefit themselves and those who have welcomed them.
- We ask all host countries in the region and beyond to allow humanitarian agencies to access all refugees awaiting processing at border crossings, and ensure that procedures for obtaining and maintaining civil documentation – and securing legal status and residence – are accessible, affordable, and as simple as possible.



- We ask all host countries in the region and beyond to enable refugees to obtain and maintain legal stay without sponsorship requirements or other limitations on work.
- We ask all host countries to remove restrictions on the employment of refugees in income generation schemes made available by the creation of community and public support programs to enable these programs to actively support development in host communities.
- We ask all host countries to regularise the position of refugees currently working on an informal basis.
- We ask all host countries to ensure dignified labour standards inform work opportunities made accessible to refugees and vulnerable host communities.

### 1.3 Across Syria and Syrian Refugee-Hosting Countries

- We ask all conference participants to ensure policies and programmes should be adjusted to enable female refugees' access to education and livelihoods opportunities. These are essential both for them to realise their potential as well as to avoid negative coping strategies, such as working in the informal sector at higher risk of exploitation and abuse. We ask that all conference participants recognise the specific dangers and risks that children, including adolescents (12-19 years of age) are facing in this conflict, and the perils and uncertainties of refugee life, donors should provide funding to ensure that appropriate support services for children are in place, for family tracing and reunification, for child victims of violence and abuse, and for children involved in exploitative child labour and to ensure that psychological and developmental needs are met.
- We ask that all donor participants recognize the increased challenges faced by older people, those living with a disability or who are injured. in accessing basic services and meeting basic and specific needs, provide medium- and long-term funding to support key areas of national-level response, in particular weaknesses in health system management of chronic diseases, mental healthcare and post-operative, rehabilitation and care services..
- We ask that donors and the humanitarian community ensure that protection concerns particular to men (especially young males) inside Syria and in neighbouring countries – such as forced conscription; the greater likelihood of their being refused entry to states of first asylum; exclusion from resettlement programmes; particular threats to their physical safety; the risk (often work-related) of abuse and exploitation; exposure to detention, imprisonment and/or forced repatriation; an inability (perceived or actual) to secure legal redress; challenges in accessing information and services – are recognised and included in assessments of protection contexts, so that these needs are not overlooked to the detriment of men and – indirectly – other vulnerable populations. States should not categorically exclude single men and boys from resettlement opportunities, and recognise these protection risks in consideration of entry criteria.
- We urge both the Syrian Authorities and host governments to ensure that all refugees can access alternative forms of documentation quickly and without undue restriction.



Syrian women refugees in an informal settlement in Lebanon



## 2. Livelihoods and Resilience

- We urge donors to ensure that investments in livelihoods benefit host communities and other refugee communities, including Palestinians, as well as Syrian refugees to enable social cohesion. This should also include a thorough market analysis to understand the labour markets in host countries.
- We ask that gender, age and other inter-sectional vulnerabilities such as disability are taken into account in livelihoods strategies.
- We request that humanitarian approaches are maintained inside Syria whilst also enhancing flexible support for livelihoods and resilience.
- We urge governments to amend Counter-terror financing policies to enable remittances, livelihoods and resilience for crisis-affected communities inside Syria.
- We urge governments to increase funding to income generation schemes, linking investments in critical infrastructure to the benefit of both refugees and host communities. .In addition we must ensure sufficient oversight is provided if funding is allocated via host government entities to ensure money is appropriately and efficiently used.
- We urge governments to promote responsible private sector investment and pro-poor policies that include proactive and targeted support for Micro and Small Enterprises, access to Decent Work and Human Rights Due Diligence in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
- We urge donors to consider an Enterprise Fund as a targeted investment vehicle to support small and medium businesses and entrepreneurs, particularly youth.
- We ask the financial institutions to develop inclusive financial services and packages for vulnerable populations especially women and youth. Host governments should enable refugees to access financial services, as needed, despite lack of residency.
- And we call for Syrian and wider regional private sector initiatives to engage with refugee communities and communities inside Syria to prepare the country for reconstruction and promote a more accessible approach in infrastructure reconstruction

### 2.2 Conditions for Refugees in Host Countries

- We ask that host countries enable refugees to obtain and maintain legal stay without sponsorship requirements or other limitations on work. Lack of valid residence permits is limiting the free movement of refugees within the country and therefore limiting access to work.
- We call on host countries to remove restrictions on the employment of refugees in income generation schemes made available by the creation of community and public support programs to enable these programs to actively support development in host communities.
- We call on host countries to improve procedures/processes for issuing work permits for refugees to enable faster and cheaper issuing of permits while ensuring labour rights and social protection obligations are respected.
- Host countries should formalise the position of refugees currently working on an illegal basis. Host countries must ensure that dignified labour standards inform work opportunities which are made accessible to refugees and vulnerable host communities. This is to there are safe, decent, and equitable work available as well as limiting the practice of child labour.
- We call on host countries and donors to open-up opportunities for education and vocational training. Standardise certification linked to a wider strategy on social cohesion to address host community concerns.

### 2.3 Conflict sensitive approach to assistance

- We ask that all assistance committed to under the conference applies a 'conflict sensitive approach'. This means that assistance should, through careful planning, maximize opportunities to bridge divides and start to promote the conditions for peace within communities, both in Syria and in host countries. This is particularly the case for aid related to education and livelihoods which create common interests and goals. It also means a commitment to ensuring that all aid observes 'do no harm' principles to avoid inadvertently exacerbating local conflict conditions.



## 3. Education

### 3.1 Close the Education Funding Gap

- We urge donors to commit at least \$1.4bn annually to ensure that all children and young people affected by the conflict are in education and learning during the 2016/17 school year and on an ongoing basis.<sup>4</sup>
- This funding should include system strengthening, school building, training and paying teachers as well as support for non-formal programs to provide educational opportunities to children for whom the formal system is inaccessible and vocational and other training for adolescents.

### 3.2 Enact policies that guarantee access to quality education inside Syria and in host countries

- A comprehensive strategy should be developed to help all Syrian children inside and outside Syria have access to accredited quality education. This should include:
  - Inclusive and flexible registration and documentation systems that allow children from Syria to enrol in and attend formal education wherever they are.
  - Increasing the capacity of formal schools and improving facilities for both girls and boys and those with disabilities.
  - Increasing accredited and certified informal and non-formal learning opportunities for out of school children, and recognizing and supporting the vital role of NGOs as collaborative partners in this provision.
  - Ensuring all teachers, including refugee teachers, are paid a living wage.
  - Investing in actionable research.
- These formal and non-formal educational opportunities must be protective, inclusive and deliver the opportunity for genuine learning outcomes. This must include:
  - Monitoring and regulating education funding, service provision and outcomes to ensure accountability and transparency.
  - Providing greater support and professional development opportunities for teachers, with priority accorded to providing psychosocial support, training in second language learning, supporting students with disabilities, and helping children acquire both social-emotional and academic skills.
  - Ensuring school policies promote child safety, well-being and inclusion, reduce instances of school bullying and harassment, and foster social cohesion.
  - Catalysing private sector support to develop and provide third party accreditation and certification of learning that is recognised across the sub-region.
- Secondary, tertiary, and vocational educational opportunities must also be expanded in Syria and host countries.

### 3.3 Protect Students, teachers and educational facilities

- We call for the immediate cessation of attacks against educational facilities, personnel, and students as well as a stop to the military use of such infrastructures.
- We encourage all parties to the conflict to immediately vacate any schools they are occupying and ensure that schools are safe for students to return.
- We urge donors to support the training of teachers and school personnel in conflict-sensitive approaches to education, including how to keep children safe while in school. All schools should have contextualized emergency preparedness plans and safety and security procedures, to ensure children's safety and protection.
- The international community should continue to urge all parties to the conflict to greater respect of international humanitarian law, to condemn the use of explosive weapons in populated areas in Syria acknowledging that civilians, and in particular children, must be protected, and to push for a negotiated solution to the conflict to ensure all children inside Syria are protected and their right to education fulfilled.

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<sup>4</sup> The calculations are based on the HRP and 3RP processes. The figure includes 2.1 million out of school children within Syria at a cost per child of \$150 and a total cost p.a. of \$318 million, and 1.7 million Syrian refugee children and affected host community children in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt at a cost per child of \$625 for a total cost p.a. of \$1 billion. The costings per child are based on figures provided by UNICEF.

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These recommendations have been developed by international and local organisations working either in Syria or the region with Syrian refugees.

