QUDRA 2

Resilience for refugees, IDPs, returnees and host communities
in response to the protracted Syrian and Iraqi crises

**SOCIAL COHESION
GUIDANCE NOTE**

How to approach social cohesion in programmes

BACKGROUND

About Qudra 2 social cohesion guidance notes

Qudra 2 is a regional programme seeking to strengthen resilience for Syrian refugees, displaced persons, returnees and host communities in response to the protracted Syrian and Iraqi crises. The programme operates across different thematic sectors in Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Turkey. One of its main objectives is to strengthen social cohesion. After three years of implementation, various local implementing partners in the four Qudra 2 countries came together virtually to discuss their intervention strategies and the impact on social cohesion. Based on these discussions, five guidance notes were developed to elaborate possible solutions for the common challenges identified.

Who is this guidance note for?

Individuals and organisations planning and implementing a programme on social cohesion.

Purpose

To explain what social cohesion is and the different forms it takes; how to engage project participants in the process of building social cohesion; and how to develop and implement interventions on social cohesion.

INTRODUCTION

Social tensions are high across the four countries where Qudra 2 is being implemented.[1] Weakened economies and currency devaluation have left local governments in all countries struggling to provide basic services to local communities and refugee populations. In addition to economic and social pressures, divisive political and media narratives are challenging social cohesion in all contexts. In such divided environments, and amid perceptions of aid as unjust, it is essential that projects are designed not only to 'do no harm', but also to actively promote social cohesion. For Qudra 2, social cohesion is a key objective in all four countries.

This guidance note is based on experiences and evidence generated through the Qudra 2 programme. There is no single blueprint for enhancing social cohesion outcomes in programmes, but the good practice outlined here will be useful to other development and humanitarian programmes with a social cohesion component.

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1   Qudra 2, Compass social cohesion/stability reports for Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, Qudra 2 programme internal documents, 2022

Figure 1: Factors negatively impacting social cohesion
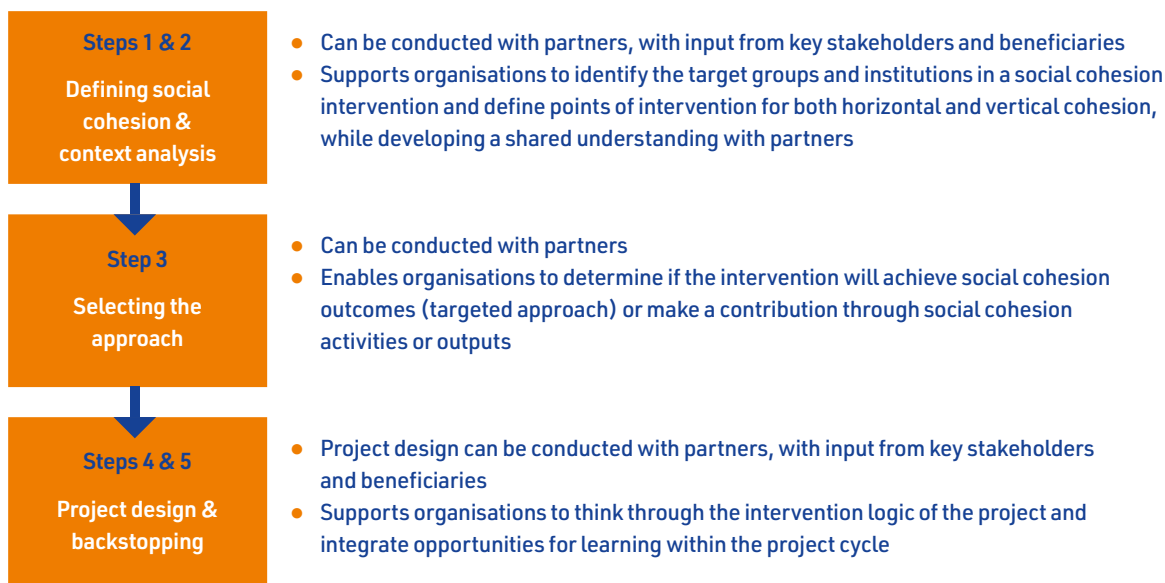

WHAT IS SOCIAL COHESION?

For Qudra 2, social cohesion is defined in two forms – horizontal and vertical social cohesion:

- **Horizontal social cohesion** is about the relationships within and between groups. In cohesive societies, people of different groups interact positively with each other and participate in community life (economic, social and cultural). They accept and generally trust other people, and share a sense of belonging to the community.[2] Horizontal social cohesion can refer to the relationships between host communities and refugees, between local communities of different confessions, languages or political affiliation, and even between men and women.

- **Vertical social cohesion** is concerned with the relationships between people and the state, as well as levels of trust in state institutions. It refers to the interactions between individuals and groups with the authorities, trust in institutions, and a sense of shared responsibility for the wellbeing of the community. In the context of Qudra 2 countries, the focus is on interaction with and trust in local authorities. This includes municipalities and social centres, vocational training centres and schools which, although affiliated with ministries, are located in communities and usually staffed by members of the local (host) community.

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2   Definition based on GIZ presentation during dialogue sessions

HOW TO PLAN A SOCIAL COHESION INTERVENTION

Steps 1 & 2

Defining social cohesion & context analysis

- Can be conducted with partners, with input from key stakeholders and beneficiaries
- Supports organisations to identify the target groups and institutions in a social cohesion intervention and define points of intervention for both horizontal and vertical cohesion, while developing a shared understanding with partners

Step 3

Selecting the approach

- Can be conducted with partners
- Enables organisations to determine if the intervention will achieve social cohesion outcomes (targeted approach) or make a contribution through social cohesion activities or outputs

Steps 4 & 5

Project design & backstopping

- Project design can be conducted with partners, with input from key stakeholders and beneficiaries
- Supports organisations to think through the intervention logic of the project and integrate opportunities for learning within the project cycle

Step 1: How to define social cohesion in the area of intervention

Understandings of social cohesion differ across contexts and implementing organisations may have different ways of framing social cohesion depending on their mission or mandate. **Each organisation or team needs to define clearly what social cohesion means to them before analysing the root causes of tension and conflict and planning how to address social tensions.**

Humanitarian and development organisation can define social cohesion based on their understanding of conflict and tensions related to their specific sector of work and their traditional target groups. Once the issues causing the social tensions have been identified, they can initiate a context analysis focused on the selected issue, service or sector and develop the intervention from there.

In contrast to humanitarian and development NGOs, organisations with social cohesion and peacebuilding missions can start with a broad context analysis instead of limiting their analysis to a specific sector or thematic area. They can identify the main dividing lines in the society they are working with and choose to work with the groups most affected by social tensions.

> **Guiding questions to help define social cohesion when planning a humanitarian/ development intervention**
>
> - Horizontal relationships: Which communities/groups are in conflict or are discriminated against by other groups?
> - Vertical relationships: Which groups have unequal access to basic services or are legally or institutionally discriminated against?

Step 2: How to analyse the social cohesion context

Context analysis is more accurate and more in-depth when it involves different perspectives. Organisations should involve their partners and consult key stakeholders and potential beneficiaries during this stage to assess perspectives of relationships within and between groups, and different groups' views of institutions and services. This includes perceptions on international aid and the local, national and international actors providing it.

Guiding questions for context analysis for social cohesion programming

- What are the main groups in the area? Groups can be analysed based on different markers depending on the context. Identity (regional, religious, family) and status (refugee, IDP, returnee) are often useful markers to include in the analysis.
- How often and where do these groups interact? Do the interactions differ across genders, age groups or socio-economic status?
- How do different groups perceive themselves and each other? What historical, legal, or economic factors underpin these perceptions?
- What are the root causes and triggers of conflict? How do these dynamics affect people of different genders and gender identities, ages, socio-economic status, disability status etc.? Also how are marginalised segments of the communities affected differently (such as indigenous groups, LGBT+ individuals, displaced individuals etc.)?
- What are the factors that divide and connect these groups? These can be systems and institutions (governing bodies, legal frameworks); attitudes and actions (restrictive social or gender norms, attitudes toward violence or crime); values and interests (in relation to shared or competing business interests); experiences (of environmental degradation or catastrophes); and symbols (cultural events, flags, brands etc.).
- What are the specific risk factors for women, girls, men and boys of different backgrounds, displaced people and minorities, perpetrators/victims of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)? How do gender identities and gender norms interplay with these risk factors?
- How do men and women of different groups participate in decision-making? Do men and women, host communities and refugees have equal voice and agency (i.e. the confidence and skills to take action and the self-belief to make a positive difference)?
- What kind of institutional mechanisms/processes are in place to resolve conflict? What informal mechanisms are present? To what extent are they perceived as fair by different groups?
- What policies currently exist that lead to social and gender inequalities and how do they affect the current situation?

Step 3: How to choose between a targeted approach and a mainstreaming approach

Having defined its understanding of social cohesion in the context, the organisation or team needs to decide if it will work directly (targeted approach) or indirectly (mainstreaming approach) on improving cohesion. An intervention applies a targeted approach to social cohesion when it aims to improve relations in the community. An intervention applies a mainstreaming approach when it has different objectives, through which it helps to improve social cohesion.

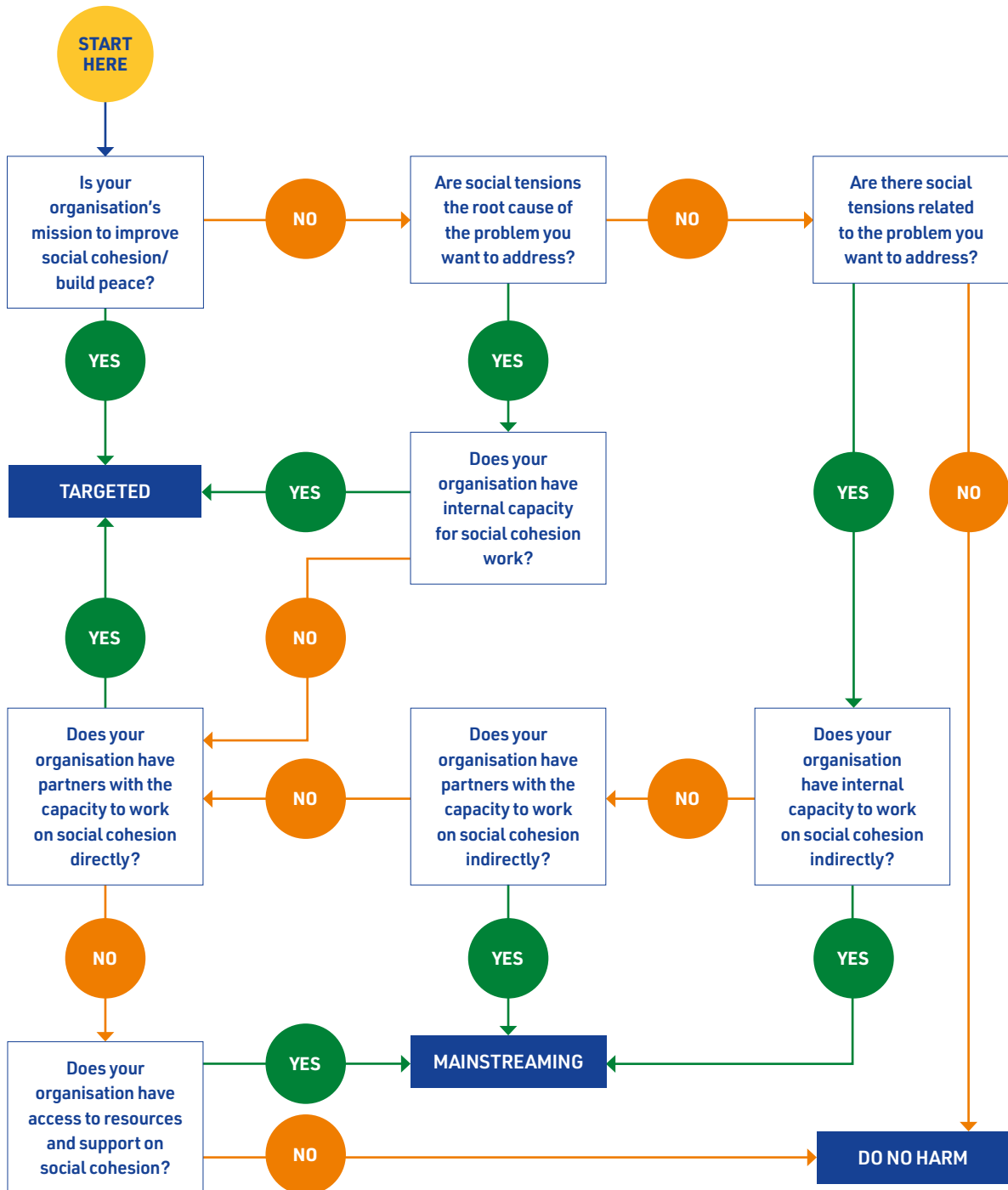## Table 1: Comparing a targeted and mainstreaming approach

	Targeted approach (direct)	Mainstreaming approach (indirect)
Overall objective	Aims at improving relations in the community	Has different objectives, through which it helps to improve social cohesion
Horizontal cohesion	Aims at improving relations and trust between groups by building opportunities for positive interaction, collaboration and trust-building between these groups.	Contributes to improving relations between groups while pursuing other objectives through: • inclusive targeting and communicating about the equal rights of targeted groups to access services/opportunities; and • creating safe spaces for interaction between groups that do not usually interact.
Vertical cohesion	Aims at improving relations and trust between groups and institutions by: • working with governments on policies to ensure inclusivity and equal opportunities, which may at times include positive discrimination of certain disadvantaged groups (e.g. through specific activities for disabled people or women); • strengthening participation of targeted groups in decision-making; • improving accountability and communication channels between the targeted groups and institutions; and • supporting the emergence of an institutional culture of serving all people in the jurisdiction.	Contributes to improved relations between groups and institutions by: • building in interactions with public authorities into project activities; • strengthening the ability of institutions to provide services without discrimination; • improving transparency and accountability of institutions; and • aligning project support with existing (non-discriminatory) strategies, plans and ensuring interventions do not undermine institutions.

The choice of project approach depends on four key factors:

- the mission/mandate of the implementing organisation
- the context
- the capacity of the implementing organisation and its partners
- the availability of resources and support on social cohesion programming

The following flowchart can help organisations decide if they should apply a targeted or mainstreaming approach to social cohesion.

How to choose your approach to social cohesion (targeted vs. mainstreaming)

START HERE

Is your organisation's mission to improve social cohesion/ build peace?

NO → **Are social tensions the root cause of the problem you want to address?**

NO → **Are there social tensions related to the problem you want to address?**

YES (from first box) → **TARGETED**

YES (from "Are social tensions the root cause") → **Does your organisation have internal capacity for social cohesion work?**

YES (from internal capacity) → **TARGETED**

NO (from internal capacity) → **Does your organisation have partners with the capacity to work on social cohesion indirectly?**

YES (from "Are there social tensions related") → **Does your organisation have internal capacity to work on social cohesion indirectly?**

NO (from "Are there social tensions related") → **DO NO HARM**

Does your organisation have partners with the capacity to work on social cohesion directly?

YES → **TARGETED**

NO → **Does your organisation have access to resources and support on social cohesion?**

YES → **MAINSTREAMING**

NO → **DO NO HARM**

NO (from partners indirectly) → **Does your organisation have partners with the capacity to work on social cohesion directly?**

YES (from partners indirectly) → **MAINSTREAMING**

YES (from internal capacity indirectly) → **MAINSTREAMING**

Step 4: How to design the intervention

It is good practice to include partners and key stakeholders in the project design, and if possible, potential beneficiaries. The intervention's theory of change needs to be specific about the objectives, results and activities related to social cohesion. A project with a targeted approach will have social cohesion objectives (such as improved relationships, behaviours and attitudes, more inclusive policy frameworks or cultural practices), while a project with a mainstreaming approach will include social cohesion at output or activity level (e.g. increased access to safe spaces and opportunities for interaction between groups or improved perceptions of institutional support to small businesses).

In the selection of target areas, organisations need to involve different perspectives and avoid relying on recommendations from institutional representatives in case they are not evidence-based. When working in divided societies, the choice of target areas needs to be justified and communicated in a way that does not exacerbate existing tensions.

> The participation of different groups in needs assessments, project design and implementation is necessary but insufficient on its own to contribute to (mainstream) social cohesion. It needs to be paired with specific services that create conditions for improving relations (i.e. psychosocial support), capacity-building that improves knowledge and skills to work with others for the common good, and engagement between groups or between specific groups and institutions.

Social cohesion projects target diverse groups. Even when targeting is based on vulnerability and a particular marginalised group is prioritised for support, projects should seek to include other groups. This creates opportunities for communication between groups and for changing perceptions, behaviours and relations between the groups (horizontal social cohesion).

Step 5: How to backstop and support social cohesion projects

Resources for social cohesion programming need to be included in individual project designs and budgets, but donors can also support their partners and grantees with analysis and opportunities for exchange and learning across contexts. Implementing organisations and donors should include training and learning activities in all social cohesion interventions.

- **Staff training:** Staff often share dominant perceptions of the communities they come from, and they need training not only on technical skills but also on understanding conflict, gender, power and diversity. Staff also need to be exposed to reliable information on issues that are commonly misunderstood, such as the amount of aid refugees receive, the conditions for return, or accurate crime rates. Furthermore, staff on social cohesion projects need the soft skills for communication with diverse groups, conflict resolution and dialogue facilitation. New staff should be onboarded accordingly.
- **Workshops to clarify concepts and approaches:** Workshops and joint discussions involving donors, international and national partners can help clarify how social cohesion is understood in different contexts and how implementers understand the approaches. Collaboratively developing indicators on social cohesion can help donors monitor and compare project results across contexts and approaches, and facilitate learning on what works for social cohesion.
- **Participatory planning:** Individual organisations are encouraged to involve beneficiaries in regular context monitoring and reflections on the programme. They can also use holidays or commemorations

(e.g. human rights day, child rights day, or the 16 days of activism) to encourage discussions on topics related to social cohesion that can feed into project plans. Regional programmes can also employ participatory planning and include programme participants from different country contexts to share experiences and plan together for more sustainable results.

- **Reflection and learning:** In fast-paced projects with multiple activities, it can be difficult to find the time to reflect on the context and the project. Reflection needs to be included in the project plans from the beginning and seen as equal to other project activities. In areas where social tensions are high or where aid is generally seen as biased, reflecting on the work done and how it is seen by local stakeholders is critical for learning to reduce the risk of harm, as well as grasping emerging opportunities to strengthen social cohesion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS