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 measure
social cohesion

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 designing and implementing monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) activities for social cohesion programmes.

What is its purpose?

To provide practical guidance on how to approach MEL in programmes aiming to improve social cohesion.

INTRODUCTION

Social cohesion is complex, dynamic, and influenced by a range of social, economic, political, cultural, psychological, institutional and other factors. Therefore, measuring cohesion is challenging. Social cohesion projects require new ways of measuring results to capture evidence and learning on what works and what is less effective.

This note reviews the literature on social cohesion, International Alert's experience, lessons from the Qudra 2 programme, and MEL practice. Although there is no specific blueprint for how to measure social cohesion outcomes, the good practice identified here will be useful to other development and humanitarian programmes that include a social cohesion component.

WHAT TO MEASURE AND WHY?

Social cohesion can be measured at two levels: as part of the context monitoring and analysis, and as part of the MEL within the project. These are two separate processes.

Table 1: Monitoring social cohesion

	Monitoring the context	Monitoring social cohesion outcomes
Why	• Because contextual changes strongly influence relationships, behaviours and perceptions • Because capturing changes in the context is necessary for ensuring conflict sensitivity • Because context change may require project adaptation (i.e. change in activities, in approach, or even in objectives)	• Because projects need to capture the results related to social cohesion • Because implementers need to learn what works in different contexts
What	Context indicators, even when this is not formally required in log frames or MEL framework templates. Examples: • quantitative indicators on violent incidents and crime; public perceptions of institutions and other groups; and violence and harassment • qualitative indicators on narratives in the public space, including media and social media	Indicators that capture change in perceptions, behaviours, interactions, relationships, and networks. Indicators need to be: • directly relevant to the change the project aims to make • clear – related to specific change within a particular beneficiary group • realistic - data that can be collected

It is important to distinguish between MEL on projects with a targeted approach to social cohesion and MEL on projects that adopt a mainstreaming approach. An intervention with a targeted approach to social cohesion aims to change relations in the community. An intervention with a mainstreaming approach has other primary objectives but helps to improve social cohesion at the same time. For more information on the different approaches to social cohesion, refer to our guidance note on how to approach social cohesion in programmes.

MEL on projects with a mainstreaming approach are challenging because these projects only have an indirect impact on social cohesion. In some cases, changes related to social cohesion may not even be framed as outputs, outcomes or impacts of the project. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that all projects impact on social systems and relationships, and therefore have the potential to change social cohesion, whether intentionally or not. Social cohesion indicators are essential to capture these changes.

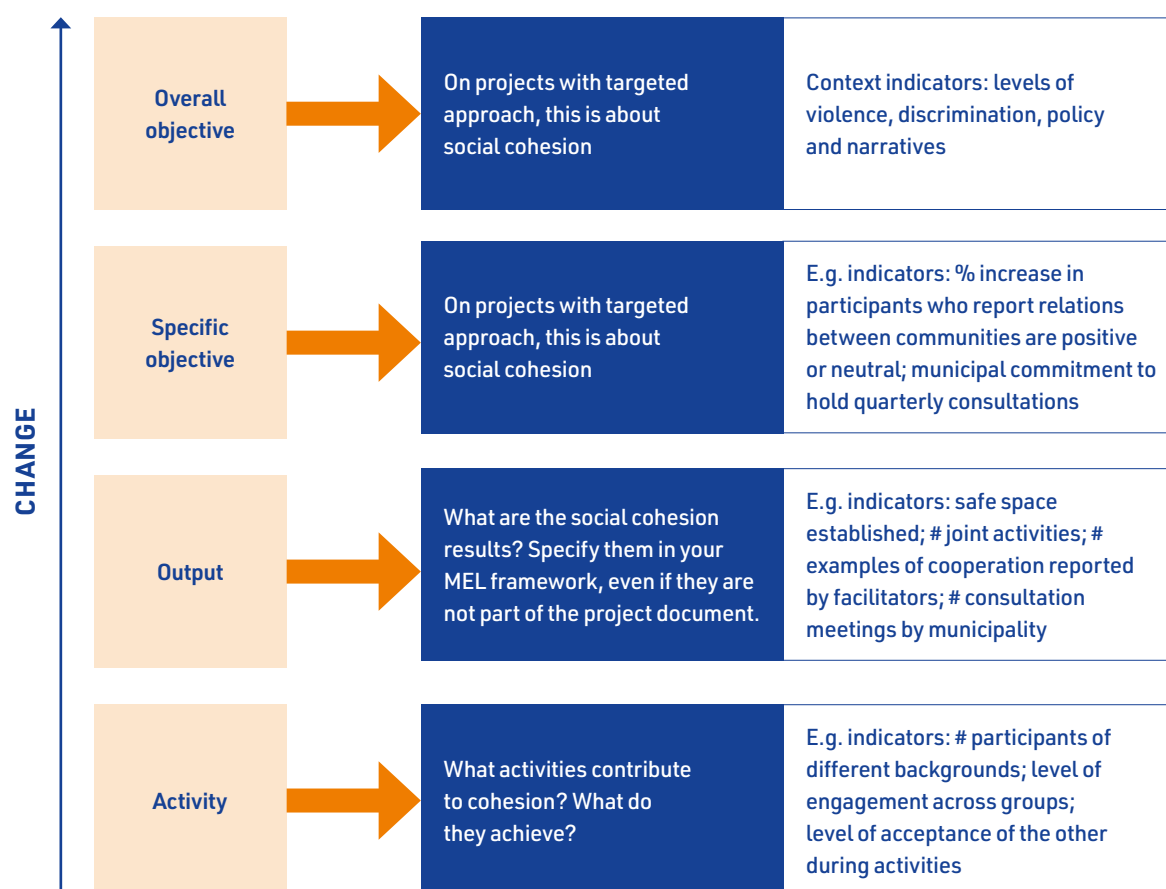**Measuring results in job creation projects aimed at increasing social cohesion**

A job creation project may adopt a mainstreaming approach because competition over jobs is a driver of social tensions between young people in the host community and refugee youth in province X. In this case, the MEL process should aim to capture beneficiaries' perceptions of competition as a source of tension at the start and end of the project.

On the other hand, a job creation project may seek to address the problem of limited interaction between youth from the host community and refugee youth, which is resulting in negative attitudes towards the 'other' group. In this case, the MEL team may want to measure beneficiaries' perceptions of the value of interaction before and after their participation in the programme.

Sample questions to determine what to measure in projects with a mainstreaming approach

- Are service users receiving information that is changing their prejudices of the 'other'?
- Are they attending activities where they can interact with people of another nationality?
- Are their perceptions of the available service changing from 'unfair' to 'fair' and therefore improving their perception of government agencies?

Figure 1: Intervention logic and what to measure

CHANGE			
Overall objective	→	On projects with targeted approach, this is about social cohesion	Context indicators: levels of violence, discrimination, policy and narratives
Specific objective	→	On projects with targeted approach, this is about social cohesion	E.g. indicators: % increase in participants who report relations between communities are positive or neutral; municipal commitment to hold quarterly consultations
Output	→	What are the social cohesion results? Specify them in your MEL framework, even if they are not part of the project document.	E.g. indicators: safe space established; # joint activities; # examples of cooperation reported by facilitators; # consultation meetings by municipality
Activity	→	What activities contribute to cohesion? What do they achieve?	E.g. indicators: # participants of different backgrounds; level of engagement across groups; level of acceptance of the other during activities

To choose the right indicators, the project team needs to understand the logical link between the project's activities and social cohesion. One common assumption is that by providing services projects are meeting basic needs and this is decreasing resentment towards the refugee community. There is limited evidence, however, of this change happening 'automatically' in this way. The project team needs to include indicators related to the perceptions of service users towards the refugee community (the 'other') and monitor change over time. If change in participants' attitudes towards refugees is not evident, then the project team would need to reassess the project logic – for example, by reassessing the root causes of the tension and adapting the project activities to address them.

The main challenge in measuring the impact on social cohesion is posed by the way the change happens. Change is non-linear and significantly influenced by factors outside the programme (e.g. adoption or implementation of policies, statements by political leaders). Therefore, data on perceptions needs to be collected at different points during the project (not only at baseline and endline) to allow for comparison. Focus group discussions and workshops with participants can help implementers understand what influences participants' perceptions and relations and to what extent the project is achieving its desired results. Another challenge is that attitudes and behaviours do not always change sequentially. The assumption that a person needs to change their attitude to something or someone first in order to change their behaviour is not based on consistent evidence. It is good practice to include both indicators of behaviours and attitudes to monitor change.

TIP: To measure social cohesion outcomes effectively, it is critical to have a clear, shared definition of what social cohesion means in practice in the specific context. To help establish this, see our guidance note on how to approach social cohesion in programmes.

HOW TO MEASURE SOCIAL COHESION?

The most common approaches to MEL in a social cohesion programme are mixed-method and participatory approaches. This requires the combination of different methods and the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders. Participants' surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) can be complemented with other participatory methods such as outcome harvesting to evaluate the impact of social cohesion projects.

Perception surveys are useful for capturing attitudes and their change over time, but representative surveys are expensive. At the project level, surveys with beneficiaries can include questions on perceptions, but answers may be biased as participants become aware of the goals of the project (self-reporting bias, conformity bias, social desirability bias etc.).

In Lebanon, UNDP has commissioned regular perception surveys on social tensions, conducted quarterly with a representative sample of Lebanese and Syrian refugees. Questions include assessment of the quality of relations between Lebanese and Syrian refugees (from very negative to very positive), perceptions on the drivers of tensions, perceptions of aid bias, and propensity to violence. Earlier versions of the survey also included questions on the type and frequency of interaction. In early 2023, the 15th wave of the survey was under way.

In **qualitative data collection**, especially in KIIs with stakeholders, social tensions and conflict may be over-reported to try and attract funding. This risk increases in environments where international donors and/or non-governmental organisations have clearly stated objectives to reduce the conflict potential. Literature on social cohesion also highlights limitations in measuring trust, which is a key component of social cohesion. Data on trust in institutions can show overly positive results, which are contradicted by people's use of the services in reality. Networks and participation are also challenging to measure.

The **Most Significant Change approach** involves project participants in identifying the change they have witnessed in a given period and determining the significance of this change.[1] This approach is story based and does not use the project's set objectives as a starting point. Instead, it allows for the collection and analysis of social change as experienced by project participants.

Outcome Harvesting is another approach used by peacebuilding organisations that is applicable to social cohesion projects. Outcome Harvesting involves collecting ('harvesting') evidence of what has changed ('outcomes') and then, working backwards, determining to what extent and how an intervention has contributed to these changes.[2] The project team and key stakeholders (such as project participants and implementing partners) then collect evidence to substantiate this change.

Both the Most Significant Change and Outcome Harvesting approaches are useful in dynamic contexts where the achievement of the initial objectives and results may have become irrelevant or impossible. Additionally, these approaches have the benefit of encouraging participation and inclusive engagement in identifying and contextualising change and concrete outcomes.

> In Turkey, GIZ integrated social cohesion indicators into all the partners' projects and developed indicators (based on the Qudra 2 indicators) for all partners to report on. To make measuring social cohesion easier to understand, monitoring and evaluation officers produced a glossary for partners. Measuring the social cohesion indicators was challenging for many partners who mainly had experience of using quantitative indicators to measure more concrete changes and lacked trained staff to collect data. Even where measuring the indicators was less successful, including them ensured that in each progress meeting partners discussed social cohesion and their understanding of social cohesion deepened.

Conflict sensitivity, gender sensitivity and safeguarding need to be embedded in the MEL process. This means putting in place measures to ensure that MEL data collection does not create conflict or cause harm, protects the privacy of participants, and is fully considerate of the specific needs and concerns of different groups in the community (e.g. women, men, and vulnerable people). Specific safeguards should be put in place to ensure that:

- information is shared confidentially and securely;
- consent is given freely; and
- the safety and wellbeing of children is prioritised.

Additionally, the MEL process should offer participants opportunities to give feedback to ensure that it is not a one-way process.

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1   Most significant change, Better Evaluation, https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/most-significant-change

2   Outcome harvesting, Better Evaluation, https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/outcome-harvesting

MEL systems should also consider gendered power dynamics, access to information and inclusivity. For example, where there is a significant divide in digital skills between women and men, data collection should involve a range of methods to be inclusive. It is also important to factor in gendered roles and responsibilities and safety concerns when organising monitoring activities by scheduling activities for men and women at different times and in different locations. The specific needs of people with disabilities must also be considered. Additionally, it is important to consider the gender composition of the MEL team to ensure women and men of different backgrounds feel safe to share information. The project team should develop a list of potential unintended outcomes based on the context analysis (e.g. a negative perception of the project due to its scope and targeting or a perceived political influence over the project due to the project team's close coordination with certain institutions) and ensure that the monitoring process captures these results in the very early stages in case they occur.

WHEN TO MEASURE SOCIAL COHESION?

Figure 2: The project cycle and MEL
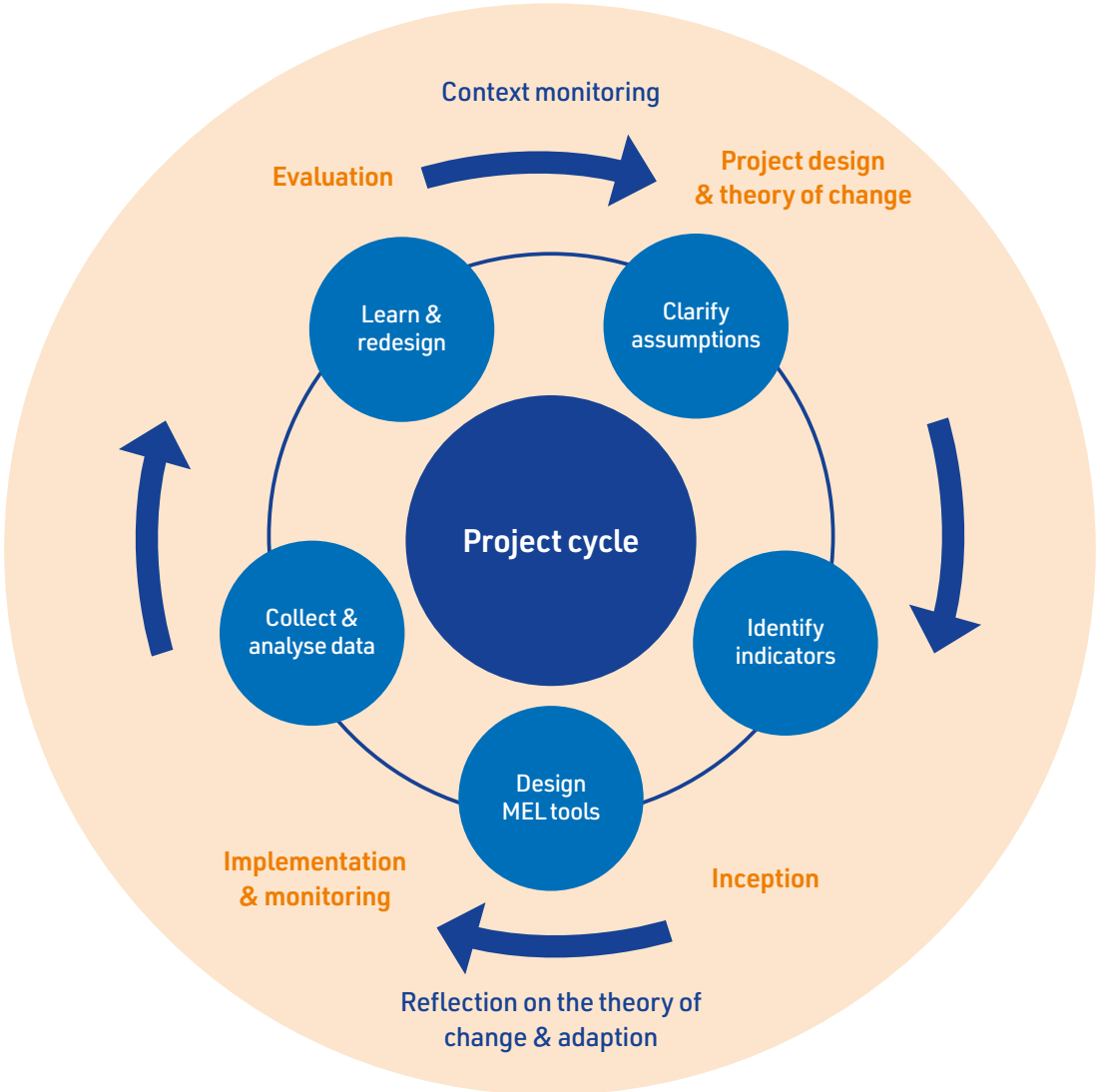
Step 1: Project design phase: clarify the intervention logic

The intervention logic or theory of change needs to link the project activities to the respective outputs, outcomes and impacts, while identifying all the related assumptions. In projects that use the mainstreaming approach to social cohesion, the contribution to social cohesion will be less direct. Therefore, it is important to record the assumptions because these will need to be monitored and validated during implementation. Projects can be designed to influence horizontal cohesion, vertical cohesion or both, but the change pathways will be different.

Step 2: Project inception phase: identify context indicators and project indicators

The context monitoring process should be built into the project's implementation in order to identify contextual changes that may require adaptation of the project's activities. Identifying context indicators at the start of the project and ensuring they are relevant to the project's definition of social cohesion helps to systematise the data collection and link it to the context analysis.

At the project level, indicators need to capture change in horizontal or vertical cohesion. MEL practice in conflict prevention and peacebuilding recommends that two or three indicators are selected at each level of change (output, outcome and impact levels), and that a mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators are used.[3]

Step 3: Project inception and implementation phases: design MEL tools and collect data

Context monitoring process: The context monitoring of social cohesion projects usually relies on publicly accessible information; reports shared by humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors; input from key stakeholders; and observations of project team members. Project beneficiaries can also be involved in context monitoring discussions, especially if they participate in training and workshops on analysing conflict and social cohesion. Data is collected on a monthly, bimonthly or quarterly basis (depending on the project dynamics) and used by the team to update the context analysis and reflect on any adaptation of the project approach or activities.

Project monitoring process: Most organisations conduct monitoring at the activity level, through the use of pre- and post-activity survey questionnaires, activity evaluation discussions (qualitative), and KIIs with selected stakeholders. Project-level complaint mechanisms are also a monitoring tool that can help identify any unintended outcomes. FGDs with selected beneficiaries of different groups (genders, ages, political orientations) can also be used as a monitoring and reflection exercise to ensure that beneficiaries' perspectives are included in MEL and decisions about the project.

For context and project monitoring, activities with beneficiary groups can be integrated into the implementation calendar. Often they will have the dual purpose of creating space for dialogue between beneficiaries and informing the project's implementation.

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3   See, for example: A. Ernstorfer and K. Bernard-Webster, Peacebuilding design, monitoring and evaluation: A training package for participants and trainers at intermediate and advanced levels, CDA Collaborative, 2019, https://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/PB-DME-Training-Package-final.pdf

Step 4: Project implementation and evaluation phases: using findings from monitoring

Measuring social cohesion is an essential part of the management of social cohesion projects. A complete MEL process requires close monitoring of the context, reflective practice and adaptation of the project. The learning element is particularly important when working with new frameworks and concepts to show implementers and donors what works in specific contexts.

Learning can be built into regular MEL plans or form a separate component of a project. The most participative and impactful process is one that involves the team, and wherever possible the beneficiaries, in the context analysis and reflection on the project's impact and approach. Implementers should clearly define which staff member is leading on the learning process and the anticipated frequency of reflection and learning. Unexpected events that affect the context and/or the project may require additional mobilisation of resources for learning.

When a social cohesion project has a learning output or outcome, teams can identify the specific learning questions in advance. Quasi-experimental evaluations or action research methods can help shed light on specific approaches or assumptions and inform the broader community of donors and practitioners working on social cohesion in contexts of forced displacement.

Table 2: Examples of indicators for effective measurement of social cohesion projects

Context indicators (examples)
• Changes in national policy on displaced populations; statements by representatives of the state (vertical) • # forced evictions of displaced people; # eviction threats (by security forced – vertical, by landlord or community groups – horizontal) • # and scale of incidents involving displaced people; # and scale of protests/demonstrations; # arrests at protests/demonstrations • % population by nationality and gender who define relations between host communities and refugees as positive/negative, based on perception surveys (horizontal) • % population by nationality and gender who state that violence is justified when your interests are threatened, based on perception surveys (horizontal, vertical)

Vertical cohesion indicators/targeted approach (examples)
• # and % of beneficiaries who report they trust institutions (municipality, vocational training centre, governmental social development centre etc.) • Existence of consultation mechanisms at the institutional level that engage people of different groups • # complaints submitted; # actions taken in response to complaints • Level of satisfaction with public services, with authorities' response to requests or complaints (by gender, by nationality) • # and % of beneficiaries stating readiness to report a problem to a relevant institution (by gender, by nationality) • Frequency of public engagement meetings between municipalities and community members

Horizontal cohesion indicators/targeted approach (examples)
• # and % beneficiaries who report frequent interaction with the other group and/or who report positive interactions (by gender, by nationality) • # and % beneficiaries who report positive/negative relations in their community (in and out-group) (by gender, by nationality) • # and % beneficiaries who report positive/negative perceptions of their own group and of the 'other' group (in and out-group) (by gender, by nationality) • # and % beneficiaries who report acceptability of violence (by gender, by nationality) • Frequency of witnessed violence; experiences of violence (harassment, bullying) • Availability of conflict resolution mechanisms in target communities (i.e. mediators, committees) • Sentiment towards certain groups on social media (i.e. reactions to incidents expressed on social media)

Vertical cohesion indicators/mainstreaming approach (examples)
• # public authorities (municipalities, vocational training schools) engaged in project design and implementation; # staff engaged (by gender) • Level of alignment of the intervention with existing (non-discriminatory) strategies and plans (i.e. municipal development plans) • Level of acceptance/support of key institutions to the project

Horizontal cohesion indicators/mainstreaming approach (examples)
• # representatives of different groups consulted in project design (by gender) • # beneficiaries who participate in joint activities (by gender, by nationality) • Feedback from beneficiaries on fairness of selection • # and % beneficiaries reporting feeling safe, respected, comfortable when interacting with beneficiaries of different backgrounds in project activities (by gender, by nationality)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS