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# QUDRA2

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



**SOCIAL COHESION  
GUIDANCE NOTE**

# Working on social cohesion during economic crisis

Implemented by



# 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 developing or implementing programmes for economic development and income generation, in contexts of flight, migration or displacement with increased tensions due to economic insecurity

## Purpose

To provide practical steps on adapting interventions to strengthen social cohesion during times of economic crisis.

# INTRODUCTION

**Social tensions have increased as a result of the economic crises in Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey and the recession in Jordan.** Competition (perceived and actual) over jobs and business opportunities is seen as the leading cause of tensions between host communities and displaced populations in the four countries.<sup>1</sup> The informal economy, while providing a lifeline for vulnerable refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs), has also facilitated exploitation and fostered perceptions that refugees are taking jobs away from local populations.

**These economic drivers of conflict need to be addressed to reduce social tensions, yet organisations need to be mindful that “not all economic development is good for peace”.**<sup>2</sup> Organisations focused on economic development and job creation need to adjust interventions to support social cohesion. At the same time, organisations working on social cohesion need to explore ways to address people’s livelihood needs because social cohesion can only improve when basic needs are met.

# ENHANCING SOCIAL COHESION BY SUPPORTING INCOME GENERATION

A number of Qudra 2 partners have developed interventions that support livelihoods, which fall into five broad approaches:

1. Labour-intensive programmes that provide short-term employment to host and refugee community members
2. Vocational training and the provision of tools to support people to start self-employment
3. On-the-job training or apprenticeships to equip trainees with practical skills and facilitate access to employment

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

2 P. Vernon, Peace through prosperity: Integrating peacebuilding into economic development, International Alert, 2015, <https://www.international-alert.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Economy-Peace-Through-Prosperity-XSum-EN-2015.pdf>

4. Support to cooperatives to strengthen their profitability and enhance income for their members
5. Support to micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) to sustain their operations in a fragile economy and sustain or increase jobs.

In times of crisis, need and demand for income-generation programmes increases. **It is often wrongly assumed that providing income-generation opportunities to participants of different backgrounds, specifically a mix of host community members and refugees, automatically improves social cohesion.** Evidence for links between employment programmes and peace “is often thin or missing entirely”.<sup>3</sup> It is important to design detailed and clear theories of change and ensure that evidence is collected to test these theories.

## WAYS FOR EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME GENERATION TO CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIAL COHESION

Employment programmes can impact social cohesion in three ways:<sup>4</sup>

1. **creating opportunities** for participants that increase their sense of purpose and agency and create a sense of belonging;
2. **decreasing isolation and marginalisation**, thus preventing engagement in harmful coping strategies; decreasing feelings of injustice; enhancing attitudes towards institutions previously perceived as acting unfairly or towards groups who were perceived as benefitting unfairly from opportunities; and increasing hope; and
3. **creating interaction between groups** that can improve relationships and mutual understanding.

Projects can be designed based on one or a combination of these theories of change. It is important that assumptions around change are based on an analysis of the context and the drivers of conflict as experienced by the target groups. These pathways of change can work at the project level and at the level of the job market.<sup>5</sup>

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3 See, for example: T. Brueck et al, Jobs aid peace: A review of the theory and practice of the impact of employment programmes on peace in fragile and conflict-affected countries, 2016

4 Adapted from T. Brueck et al, 2016, Op. cit.

5 Adapted from T. Brueck et al, 2016, Op. cit.

**Table 1: Pathways of change in employment-focused social cohesion programming**

Link with social cohesion	Participation in project activities	Successfully joining the job market
<p><b>Creating opportunities</b></p>	<p>“Relief from idleness” through participation in programme activities</p> <p>Increased social network and developed sense of belonging to a new group (professional, interest-based etc.)</p> <p>Improved skills for non-violent communication, conflict resolution, cooperation and teamwork (if integrated into programme)</p> <p>Increased confidence and sense of purpose</p>	<p>Improved self-image and perception of their status</p> <p>Increased sense of purpose and agency (confidence in their own power to make a positive difference)</p> <p>Increased sense of belonging to a work team or professional group</p>
<p><b>Decreasing isolation and marginalisation</b></p>	<p>Increased trust in civil society</p> <p>Increased trust in institutions (if part of the programme)</p> <p>Increased participation and reduced sense of being unjustly left out (if participants are sensitised on everyone’s right to gain skills and opportunities for income generation)</p> <p>Improved sense of hope and perceptions of the future (if participants find the programme relevant to their needs and the job market)</p>	<p>Increased feeling of belonging to society</p> <p>Increased trust in institutions</p> <p>Increased trust in civil society</p> <p>Decreased sense of injustice towards the group</p> <p>Improved sense of hope and perceptions of the future</p>
<p><b>Increasing contact</b></p>	<p>Increased contact with people of different backgrounds in the programme, calling for cooperation and teamwork (if cooperation, sharing and teamwork are integrated into programme)</p> <p>Improved perceptions of out-groups as a result of positive interactions (if space, psychosocial support (PSS) and facilitated discussions are provided within the programme)</p>	<p>Increased contact with people of different backgrounds at the workplace, promoting cooperation and teamwork</p> <p>Improved perceptions of out-groups as a result of positive interactions</p>

## POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS OF JOB CREATION PROGRAMMES FOR SOCIAL COHESION

In the design and planning phases, organisations need to consider the potential limitations of job creation programmes to influence social relations on a larger scale. **The main limitation in the context of economic crisis is that job opportunities are scarce and, even with high-quality training and support programmes, beneficiaries may not be able to secure employment.** This outcome risks having a negative impact on social cohesion, especially if feelings of injustice are strong and programme participants come to believe that even with increased skills they will not find work.

To mitigate these risks, income-generation programmes need a **clear communications strategy**. This ensures that participants have an accurate perception of the job market and realistic expectations of their employment prospects through the programme. Effective messaging can counter misperceptions around job competition and promote the contribution refugees make to the community. Communication can also help participants understand the benefits of networking with specialists and peers during project activities for finding jobs, identifying business opportunities and increasing social capital.

**A second limitation of job creation interventions targeting host and refugee communities is posed by the legal frameworks that determine which jobs are available to refugees in a particular context.** Equipping refugees with skills for vocations that they are not allowed to practise can do harm and increase their distrust and frustration with institutions and civil society. Refugees often find irregular employment in the informal economy, which can expose them to exploitation and abuse. Programmes need to equip participants with the knowledge and skills to manage these risks, and seek assistance if they, or someone they know, is at risk. This can include sharing information on programmes offering legal aid, mediation or counselling support. Through direct communication and opening spaces for discussion, programmes should also aim to increase participants' awareness and acceptance that everyone has a right to earn a living.

**The third limitation is in the lack of sufficient empirical evidence that job creation alone contributes to social cohesion.** To promote social cohesion, programmes should consider additional elements such as creating cohesive groups and strengthening skills in non-violent conflict resolution (see Table 1). Providing PSS to vulnerable groups can be a useful entry point to building group cohesion because it helps participants deal with trauma and resentment, which can limit the capacity for positive, constructive and healthy interaction. Facilitating discussions between participants from different backgrounds can help address prejudices, strengthen empathy, build positive relationships within the group, and increase the likelihood of friendships being formed and sustained outside the programme. Programme implementers should ensure that partners are equipped with the necessary skills to engage in these activities or provide support.

**Table 2: How to use the pathways of change**

To create opportunities	
In the context analysis and project design phase	Understand target groups' perceptions of their sense of purpose/agency and the role of income generation. Use a gender lens.
In the implementation phase	<p>Use empowering language.</p> <p>Use participatory methods in training.</p> <p>Provide mentoring/coaching to participants.</p> <p>Invite guest speakers who have successfully joined the job market after similar programmes.</p> <p>Integrate soft skills training with a focus on collaboration, communication and conflict resolution.</p>
In the evaluation phase	<p>Monitor participants' self-perception (confidence and ability to recognise opportunities) through surveys and focus group discussions.</p> <p>Generate evidence through monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) to prove the validity of the pathway of change.</p>
To decrease isolation and marginalisation	
In the context analysis and project design phase	<p>Understand the perceptions of communities related to employment and livelihoods to inform design.</p> <p>Understand the business environment, job markets and legal frameworks on the right to work to inform programme design.</p>
In the implementation phase	<p>Train MSMEs and cooperatives on equality and inclusion.</p> <p>Encourage employers to hire beneficiaries and increase inclusion and diversity.</p>
In the evaluation phase	<p>Monitor participants' perceptions of injustice through surveys and focus group discussions.</p> <p>Generate evidence through MEL to prove the validity of the pathway of change.</p>
To increase contact	
In the context analysis and project design phase	Assess mobility and perceptions of safety of different groups and genders, and assess levels of contact and perceptions of the other community.
In the implementation phase	<p>Create groups of participants with a similar level of education to avoid stereotyping one group as less educated than another.</p> <p>Use interactive methodologies to create social bonds, i.e. encourage group work, small group discussions, intentionally mix participants of different backgrounds etc.</p> <p>Create safe spaces for interaction. Collaboratively set up the rules/code of conduct; inform participants of protection policies and complaint mechanisms; ensure safe access for all groups; and set up the space in a way that encourages interaction (i.e. avoid classroom seating).</p>
In the evaluation phase	<p>Monitor participants' perceptions of the 'other' group through surveys and focus group discussions.</p> <p>Generate evidence through MEL to prove the validity of the pathway of change.</p>

# SHARING INFORMATION ON THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF DISPLACED POPULATIONS ON HOST ECONOMIES

The perception that the economic crises in the region are caused by the presence of Syrian refugees or IDPs is not uncommon. More specifically, perceived competition for scarce job opportunities is a leading driver of tensions between host communities and refugees, especially in sectors where refugees tend to find employment (such as hospitality and retail). Programmes need to address misperceptions and enhance understanding of the benefit of all employment for economic recovery. The following activities will support this:

- **Produce and share credible information on the economic role of refugees in a host country's economy.** The economic benefits of the Syrian refugee workforce and the contribution of international assistance to host countries' economies are insufficiently researched and positive narratives are largely missing. Implementing organisations should consider partnering with universities and research institutes to produce more evidence and analysis on this topic. They should also communicate clearly around controversial issues such as the impact of cash assistance to refugees on local economies.

## Raseef 22: Communicating the facts

Raseef 22 is an independent media platform that describes itself as "partial to the principles of human rights". It shares verified facts and different perspectives on the impact on Lebanon's economy of the nearly one million Syrian refugees in the country. Such data is not, however, easily available.

For example, the American University of Beirut published three volumes of 'Facts and figures on the Syrian refugee crisis' between 2018 and 2021. Drawing largely on humanitarian data sources, the booklets contain verified figures on refugee employment and some of the benefits for local economies (such as the number of Lebanese shops that are part of the World Food Programme 'cash for food' e-card programme for Syrian refugees). Unfortunately, verifiable data on the economic impacts is difficult to obtain in the context of informal employment, which is challenging considering only 4% of Syrians working in Lebanon have a written contract.

- **Share examples of collaboration and positive stories with the population.** Organisations working on social cohesion have access to positive stories that are usually not covered in the mainstream media. They need to proactively engage with journalists and share stories on social media. When working on job creation, implementers should also emphasise that any job created or sustained is helping the economy as a whole. Concrete metaphors (e.g. rising tide that raises all boats etc.) can help people see job creation through a new lens, beyond competition for employment.
- **Provide training for journalists to report professionally on issues related to the impact of refugees on the economy.** Projects that equip journalists with the skills to access and verify information from reliable sources, and introduce them to publicly available sources or to specialists in the field who can provide additional perspectives to the officially shared information, can have a positive impact on social cohesion.
- **Counter misinformation.** This entails sharing verified information with programme beneficiaries, creating spaces where they can ask sensitive questions (including anonymously), and providing access to specialists who can provide facts and analysis on issues related to the economy. This should help to address the grievances of host communities who feel disadvantaged due to competition for jobs with refugees.

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