



Co-funded by  
the European Union



# QUDRA2

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



**SOCIAL COHESION  
GUIDANCE NOTE**

# Building on local capacities to support social cohesion

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?

Implementers of programmes working with local actors in the context of flight, migration and displacement

### What is its purpose?

To identify practical steps for creating projects that strengthen local capacity for social cohesion.

## INTRODUCTION

### **Social cohesion interventions in contexts of crisis and displacement can struggle to achieve sustainable results.**

Such projects often produce tangible gains in creating contact between different communities, generating dialogue between institutions and communities, and increasing people's respect of human rights, tolerance and diversity, but it is much harder to make these changes last after the end of a project.

In a challenging and dynamic context, project participants can end up reverting to their original ways of doing and thinking about things. They are influenced by the common narratives and prejudices around them that are, in turn, fuelled by grievances and socio-economic pressures, political divisions, state policies and media coverage.

Social cohesion projects can produce more lasting results **when they identify and strengthen the capacities of local actors who act as connectors in their societies and will retain a long-term presence** beyond the life of the project. These actors are individuals, organisations or institutions embedded in the communities and trusted by different groups.

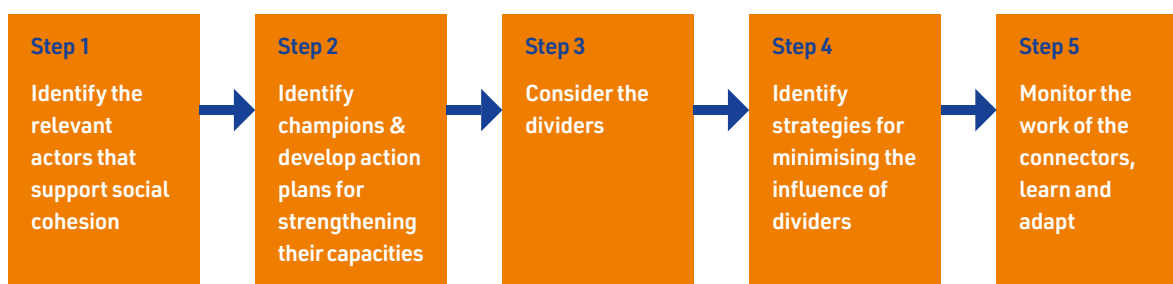
## HOW TO STRENGTHEN LOCAL CAPACITY FOR COHESION

**Programmes aiming to strengthen local capacity for social cohesion should be designed based on analysis of the local context, including mapping the connectors and dividers in the targeted communities.** Such programmes are informed by people's daily experiences and seek to strengthen opportunities for interaction, relationship building, trust building, belonging and participation where they already exist.

The first two steps below focus on identifying and supporting positive factors for social cohesion. Steps 3 and 4 aim to minimise the influence of local forces that undermine social cohesion.

## What are connectors and dividers?

Connectors bring people together and/or tend to reduce tensions. Dividers are the factors that cause tensions and divisions between people and can drive violence. They can be systems and institutions (such as governing bodies and legal frameworks); attitudes and actions (such as restrictive social or gender norms, and attitudes toward violence or crime); values and interests (e.g. in relation to shared or competing business interests); experiences (e.g. of environmental degradation or catastrophes); and symbols (cultural events, flags, brands etc.).



## Step 1: Identify the relevant actors and factors that support social cohesion (connectors)

**Connectors are institutions, systems, spaces, experiences, attitudes, interests and values that connect different groups.** Individuals and groups can also act as connectors. These actors will be unique for each context, even in communities with similar socio-political make-ups.

### a) Safe spaces and shared experiences

**Safe spaces are places where different groups can interact and potentially build positive relationships.** The emphasis is on the safety and accessibility of the spaces for shared use. For example, a public park in a more affluent neighbourhood may be open to the public but inaccessible to refugees, because refugees tend to live in poorer areas and have no access to transportation to reach the park. On the other hand, a public park in a middle-class neighbourhood may be accessible but unsafe due to the high risk of conflict between refugees and local residents. Markets are often a powerful connector because they serve both economic and social purposes.

**Experiences are another powerful connector.** They may include cultural festivals and events, which bring together a cross section of the community, or be specific to a gender or age group (i.e. backgammon games for older men, gyms for younger men, or reforestation activities organised by a local civil society organisation for young men and women). An in-depth understanding of the connecting experiences for different ages, genders or interest-based groups is a precondition for tailoring programmes to support and expand the reach of these connectors effectively.

### b) Local actors that influence attitudes and perceptions

**Influential people, organisations or media channels/programmes that bring together people from different groups and share positive stories about different groups also act as connectors.** Traditional leaders such as the *mukhtars* and local religious leaders are influential with some groups, but other influencers have emerged as

well, including social media celebrities with many followers. Leaders of civil society organisations, headteachers of local schools and directors of community centres can have a strong voice, and when their institutions are serving diverse groups, these individuals can be strong connectors.

### c) Systems and institutions

One of the most common connectors in communities hosting refugees and/or internally displaced people (IDP) are the institutions that provide services to all the populations under their jurisdiction. **In urban areas, service providers such as municipalities, water institutions, agencies responsible for solid waste management, schools and healthcare centres are often connectors**, because people of different communities use their services and are equally affected if services are unavailable or poor quality. Organisations need to map the experiences of people using different services. Are members of the host community and refugees using the same schools and healthcare centres? Do they use them at the same times? Do they perceive the quality of services similarly? Are service users of different nationalities, faiths, genders, abilities and sexual orientations treated equally?

**Relations between communities and institutions, levels of trust in institutions, and the ability of institutions to engage the communities in decision-making are all indicators of vertical social cohesion.** Supporting these institutions can create vertical cohesion between the state and different groups, and can potentially strengthen horizontal cohesion, for example, by creating shared safe spaces (i.e. through shared consultation mechanisms or shared services provided to different groups at the same place and time). Qudra 2 partners have supported municipalities, public schools, governmental vocational training centres, and community centres run by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as connectors in communities.

#### Case study: Municipal services in Turkey

In Turkey, Qudra 2 is focused on supporting municipalities to improve the services they provide to all populations. Municipalities have a long-term presence in communities and access to resources independently of the project, which makes them much more likely to sustain activities than NGOs. Moreover, working with municipalities provides opportunities to work on vertical, as well as horizontal, social cohesion. Municipalities are often well trusted by host communities, but not always by refugees, who may be hesitant to engage with the state in their host country or simply not be aware that services are available to them. Qudra 2 was able to improve vertical social cohesion by supporting municipalities to reach out to refugee communities and make them aware of available activities and services. The delivery of these activities and services helped build trust between municipalities and refugee communities.

## Step 2: Identify champions and develop actions plans for strengthening their capacity

There are two main factors to consider when planning how to strengthen local connectors:

- 1. Identification and selection of focal points or 'champions' for social cohesion who can drive positive change:** Once institutions have been identified as connectors, it is important to select the right individuals or administrative teams to work with. Going through the established hierarchy may be necessary at the operational level, but strategically it is critical to identify the individuals or teams who are already most effective as connectors in the communities. To identify these individuals or teams, analytical tools such

as the Alignment Interest Influence Matrix<sup>1</sup> can help to assess key individuals/ teams in terms of their alignment to the social cohesion objectives of the project; their interest in pursuing these objectives; and their influence within the institution. Individuals whose interests are well aligned with the project's objectives, are keen to improve social cohesion and are influential are the most effective local actors to support. Other individual connectors between host and refugee communities, for example, can include volunteers who support refugees with language classes and introduction to local institutions and community life and culture.

- 2. Assessing for sustainability:** The most sustainable champions are embedded or invested in communities. Strategies to support sustainability may include the engagement of these individuals in inspiring others, in supporting them to become active in their new place of residence, or being part of a network of mentors to people who work on social cohesion in their community, if the initial champions move or change roles.

Having identified the connectors and key individuals best placed to support social cohesion, programme staff need to develop action plans to support them and build their capacity. The effectiveness of these strategies is largely dependent on the plans being developed jointly with local actors and having funds available to implement them. Successful programmes are aligned with the local context and the interests of social cohesion champions, and are flexible to respond to emerging opportunities. To ensure that support for champions within public institutions continues beyond the lifetime of the project, action plans for capacity building must be included in the strategic plans of the institution and funding proposals must be submitted to external donors. Without this level of integration, the plans for supporting social cohesion champions within an institution may remain a fantasy on paper.

Local connectors can be involved in projects as partners or as beneficiaries, depending on the nature of the support provided. Examples of strengthening local capacity for social cohesion include technical and budgetary support to municipalities, with a focus on staff who are in daily contact with service users, and upgrading public spaces such as community gardens.

### Step 3: Consider the dividers

**In every context there are local forces that act against social cohesion.** In many of the Qudra 2 contexts, certain actors obstruct efforts to strengthen horizontal social cohesion between host communities and Syrian refugees or vertical social cohesion between refugees and national authorities. Mainstream media outlets often share stories and promote opinions that are divisive. Social media can also amplify hostile voices.

To achieve positive results in strengthening cohesion, implementers need to understand and mitigate the **risks to the programme posed by those who act as dividers or 'spoilers' to social cohesion**. Such actors can be identified at the level of community (municipality or district) or at the level of each institution the project seeks to engage.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Alignment Interest Influence Matrix", Outcome Mapping Learning Community, 15 September 2014, <https://www.outcomemapping.ca/nuggets/alignment-interest-influence-matrix>

### Guiding questions to help identify dividers

- Which institutions divide the communities through their policies, practices or official statements (intentionally or unintentionally)?
- Which entities (political parties, associations, clubs) or leaders promote divisive policies or antagonistic attitudes?
- Which spaces or experiences are exclusive (do not include different groups from host, refugee or displaced communities, including different ages and genders and people with disabilities)?
- Which of the above are influential in the community?

## Step 4: Identify strategies for minimising the influence of dividers

The next step involves **identifying strategies to engage with local actors who are opposed to social cohesion and who intentionally or unintentionally undermine social cohesion**. An example of unintentional negative influence on social cohesion is favouritism. This could be a local official prioritising certain families to receive a service over others, without a legitimate reason, or a nurse giving priority to their neighbour to see the doctor before other patients who have been waiting longer. In both these cases, such favouritism undermines trust in institutions and feeds resentment towards groups seen as privileged.

**Influential actors who intentionally oppose efforts to strengthen cohesion, for personal, political or ideological reasons, can threaten the success of the project.** Communicating with such actors and understanding their perspectives, motivations and needs can help reduce the risk of their interference or opposition to the project.

To engage with dividers, organisations need to work out how to influence these actors to change their behaviour. The term 'social cohesion' can cause fear and suspicion, so altering the language used to communicate with them can help. Describing the project's objectives in a way that is relatable to these actors can help build rapport and create a better environment for supporting local actors. When mainstream and social media are acting as dividers, monitoring the coverage on certain topics can help predict emerging tensions and mitigate the impact of these tensions on the communities targeted by the project.

## Step 5: Monitor the work of the connectors, learn and adapt

Local actors, whether formal institutions or informal community-based actors, are embedded in a dynamic context. Their work is affected by changes in local politics, the funding environment and national events. Close monitoring and follow-up are key to projects supporting local capacity for social cohesion. This involves reflection and learning with the institutions and individuals working with the project. Exchange of experiences and learning within and across communities supports conflict-sensitive implementation, and helps create a support network for individuals, organisations and institutions committed to fostering cohesion within a challenging context. Monitoring and evaluation processes require budget, human resources and technical knowledge and must be taken into account during the project planning phase.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This guidance note was authored by Ilina Slavova and Ruth Simpson of International Alert. The authors would like to thank the Qudra 2 team and implementing partners for their valuable and insightful contributions. In particular, the author would like to thank Kristina Willebrand-Biyik, Martin Linden and Nazlı Karayigit of GIZ, and Beatrice Nicouleaud of Expertise France. Additionally, the author would like to thank Alys Brown, Ghada Rafai, Lama El Awad, and Murad Nassif for their valuable reflections.

**Published by**

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale  
Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH  
under the Qudra 2 – Resilience for refugees, IDPs, returnees and host  
communities in response to the protracted Syria and Iraq crises

**Authors**

Irina Slavova and Ruth Simpson / International Alert  
May 2023

**Registered offices**

Bonn and Eschborn  
Germany

Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32 + 36  
53113 Bonn  
Germany  
T +49 228 44 60-0  
F +49 228 44 60-17 66

Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1 - 5  
65760 Eschborn  
Germany  
T +49 61 96 79-0  
F +49 61 96 79-11 15

E [info@giz.de](mailto:info@giz.de)  
I [www.giz.de](http://www.giz.de)

**Registered at**

Local court (Amtsgericht) Bonn, Germany: HRB 18384  
Local court (Amtsgericht) Frankfurt am Main, Germany: HRB 12394

VAT no. DE 113891176

**Chairperson of the Supervisory Board**

Jochen Flasbarth, State Secretary in the Federal  
Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development

**Management Board**

Thorsten Schäfer-Gümbel (Chair)  
Ingrid-Gabriela Hoven

**Disclaimer**

This guideline was produced with the financial support of the  
European Union, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation  
and Development, and the Spanish Agency for International  
Development Cooperation. Its contents are the sole responsibility of  
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH (GIZ)  
and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union, the  
German Government and the Spanish Cooperation.