



Integrating Social Cohesion in the 3RP

A regional guidance note

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Executive Summary

Since the establishment of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in response to the Syria crisis (3RP), social cohesion and social stability have become a growing source of concern across 3RP countries. The main drivers of tensions between host communities and refugees include increased job competition, rising costs of living, and pressure on municipal and local basic service provision.

Against the backdrop of these challenges, social cohesion is integrated into the 3RP strategic directions. The 3RP is uniquely positioned to increase its impact on do-no-harm and social cohesion, given its robust coordination system, its wide network of partners, its strong relations with national governments, and the experience and expertise on social cohesion accumulated over the past decade of interventions. This guidance note aims to support 3RP partners and countries into strengthening social cohesion as “the management of social tensions within a community so as to prevent conflict and foster opportunities for collaboration between groups.” More specifically, this guidance note focuses on strengthening conflict sensitivity mainstreaming and the do-no-harm approach across the response.

In this respect, the 3RP coordination structure has a key role to play to support coherence in social cohesion mainstreaming and do-no-harm. This entails not only providing the right data and analysis on social cohesion so that operational 3RP partners share the same understanding of social tensions trends and causes, but also how their interventions are impacting them. Here again, the note highlights good practices and requirements to support the needs of both 3RP partners and donors with context-specific guidance and trainings on conflict sensitivity.

The support from the national coordination structure is an important pre-condition for 3RP partners that are not specialists on the topic of promoting social cohesion to integrate do-no-harm, conflict-sensitivity and mainstreaming considerations in different steps of their programme cycle. The guidance note details key recommendations stemming from the 3RP experience in that respect.

In particular, it shows how an evidence-based approach guided by local knowledge will help partners do-no-harm and mainstream conflict sensitivity when aiming to provide opportunities to individuals and communities to engage in more positive behaviours with members of the other group. The note highlights the recommendations to address negative attitudes indirectly, recognizing that limited and ad hoc interventions to bring communities in contact and to interact with each other have proven insufficient to foster social cohesion changes. Rather, the note emphasizes that activities developed to mainstream social cohesion should bring people together on the basis of what they share, building, where possible, on existing community mechanisms to be inclusive of both host communities and refugees. While partners need to be ready to take corrective actions, these shifts towards commonalities may enable cross-group collaboration to emerge and change the dynamics in a location, especially when these are considered and documented through a long-term perspective lens.

The note also highlights the current gap across the 3RP in proper monitoring and impact assessments on social cohesion and recommends addressing this shortcoming. The 3RP has a key role to play at regional level to support countries in this process. This would entail facilitating exchange of experience, lessons learnt, as well as practical tools and approaches between 3RP countries.

I. Purpose of the guidance note

Host countries and 3RP partners have all made social cohesion an important aspect of their respective response strategies to address the needs of Syrian refugees and the communities that host them. As a result, there is now a wide range of experiences to draw upon. Capitalizing on them is particularly important as the overall 3RP response has evolved to increasingly focus on the inclusion of refugees into national systems. This underscores the importance of paying increased attention to the following: 1) including social cohesion efforts into existing programming; 2) outlining principles and key actions needed to do no harm; and 3) mainstreaming conflict sensitivity and social cohesion based on lessons learned and exchange of experiences.

Considering its increasing importance, the 3RP Joint Secretariat commissioned policy research into the social cohesion across the 3RP countries, comprising both a stocktaking paper and this Social Cohesion Guidance Note. The stocktaking paper provides an analysis of the current social cohesion environment in 3RP countries, efforts by 3RP partners to address or mitigate related needs and formulate recommendations on how to strengthen social cohesion efforts.

The purpose of this guidance is threefold. First, it highlights key principles related to social cohesion and proposes approaches and considerations likely to strengthen the social cohesion and conflict sensitive aspects of programming. Second, it provides guidance on steps to improve social cohesion aspects of relevant 3RP humanitarian and resilience programming, and how to “do-no-harm” and be conflict sensitive. Third, it acts as a repository of good practices and helps to facilitate an exchange of experiences between countries and a common basis for action. This guidance is primarily aimed at 3RP coordination staff and partners that do not have dedicated capacity and experience on social cohesion.

The guidance complements existing 3RP guidance on conflict sensitive programming (see annex), and it is in line with relevant global frameworks, including the Global Compact on Refugees and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG16), which aims to create more peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.



Photo: ASAM / Ünal Turakoğlu

II. Scope and limitations of the guidance note

A. Focus of the guidance note

Social cohesion efforts and initiatives across the 3RP countries vary in size and scope.¹ As such, while experience sharing and dissemination of good practices is vital, this should be done with a view to tailoring and adapting them to the specificities of respective country context. As such, the guidance is more general in nature and does not cover advanced social cohesion programming.

This guidance rather aims to support this by providing a common basis to 3RP partners on do-no-harm, conflict sensitivity, and mainstreaming of social cohesion, which can then be used to facilitate experience sharing and dissemination of lessons learnt. Furthermore, this guidance note focuses on horizontal social cohesion, such as the relations between refugee and host communities.

The guidance outlines how the process of integrating do no harm, conflict sensitivity, and mainstreaming social cohesion into programming requires a tangible commitment from all levels (from decision-makers, donors, coordinators, programme managers to frontline staff) and for relevant technical components that are integrated in all stages of the programme cycle. In practice, this guidance is expected to result in small changes to existing practices; on “how we do things” rather than “what we do”. The mainstreaming approach refers to the practice of integrating specific activities or activity components into larger programmes at various points of the programme cycle. For example, adding specific social cohesion related questions in an assessment or baseline or indicators of a log frame, or involving specific activities or modules being included in broader programming.

B. Audience of the guidance note

It is important to note that it was developed with a regional focus and cannot cater for all contexts in the five 3RP countries. It is expected that the 3RP coordination at national level and 3RP partners themselves will further contextualize and tailor key take-aways from this guidance note to their specific context, capacities, and interventions.

The guidance note looks at the enabling environment necessary for partners to include do-no-harm and mainstream social cohesion in their programming and outlines key requirements to include social cohesion at different stages of the programme cycle.

While this guidance note will inform broader 3RP efforts, its key audience is 3RP members working at country level, and in various sectors and areas of intervention, looking to maximize the positive impact of programming on social cohesion, and to minimize any negative impact.



Photo: UNHCR / Emrah Gurel

¹ See *Social Cohesion: An Overview of Host Community-Refugee dynamics in the 3RP context*



Enabling environment for social cohesion: Coordination and donors issues

Given the complex context in which social cohesion challenges arise, coordination is crucial to ensure coherence amongst actors in how social cohesion principles are mainstreamed into the 3RP. This section looks at how coordination structures and donors can foster do-no-harm and the mainstreaming of social cohesion principles in the different phases of the response. These key principles and arrangements are important to provide the necessary support for partners to include such aspects at the operational level, which is developed in the next section.

I. General principles and approach

This sub-section summarizes the key overarching principles that should underpin the 3RP response from a social cohesion perspective, which are then translated into practice at national (coordination – section II.B) and operational (project level – section III) levels in the rest of the document.

A. Do-No-Harm & conflict sensitivity

The principle of Do-No-Harm commits humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding actors to prevent and mitigate any negative impact of their actions on refugees and their host communities. When intervening as external actors in any context to assist a vulnerable population, it is vital to ensure that the presence and actions of humanitarian and development actors are benefiting rather than bringing harm to those we aim to assist, including the unintended side effects that might not directly relate to the focus of the intervention. A large body of publications exploring ethical interventions is available for practitioners, and several agencies² have developed their own approaches and manuals to doing no harm.

From a social cohesion perspective, as a third party, the mere presence of the 3RP partners in the field impacts the dynamics between groups. Being aware that the 3RP visibility and presence may change the dynamics of the conflict / tension is an important step in our efforts to avoid doing harm. For example, the fact that refugees are receiving humanitarian aid, international attention, and / or basic services can trigger negative sentiments among communities hosting the refugees, even if they are not

in need of such assistance or received other benefits stemming from the refugee presence.

An evidence-based approach to social cohesion is needed to ensure the positive impact of the initiatives and for reasons of accountability towards persons of concerns. This requires proper analysis of the context and how 3RP interventions are likely to impact them. This is summarized in the conflict-sensitivity definition adopted by the 3RP: “the ability of an organization, and thus its staff, to understand the context in which its interventions are implemented, to assess the interaction between these interventions and the context in which the organization operates, and act based on these understandings to reduce negative impacts and maximize peace gains”.³

² <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Chapter02-MHRM.pdf>;
<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/DoNoHarmHandbook.pdf>

³ 3RP 2021-2022 Planning Guidance Note 17 – Aligning 3RP planning with the practice of conflict-sensitive programming. See also <https://www.international-alert.org/publications/how-guide-conflict-sensitivity/>



This also requires partners to continuously review and document how their interventions impact local social cohesion and ensure that their projects and interventions are supported by evidence rather than assumption. This is further explained below in the sections on training on conflict sensitivity, monitoring social cohesion, and project monitoring and evaluation.

B. Equity, inclusivity and leaving-no-one behind

3RP interventions should account for tensions driven by the perception of inequity or injustice amongst targeted communities. The sentiment and perception of relative deprivation is central to reducing intergroup conflict and tensions. This makes the principles of inclusivity and equity essential to social cohesion work. In short, humanitarian assistance at any location needs to benefit the most vulnerable, irrespective of their status, and needs to be done transparently to avoid perceptions of preferential treatment. In the context of the HDP Nexus, resilience and development assistance should also maintain this objective.

Tensions between refugees and host communities, within communities themselves, or between communities and the state, are better addressed through inclusive interventions in line with the principle of leaving no-one behind, and humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence. Partners also need to pay attention to the perceived fairness or equity in the distribution of resources but can also include issues involving the transparency / fairness in information, particularly regarding the needs-based targeting and selection of beneficiaries, as well as respectful interactions between parties, and equal and transparent access to information.



Photo: UN Women/Tayfun Dalkılıç

³ 3RP 2021-2022 Planning Guidance Note 17 – Aligning 3RP planning with the practice of conflict-sensitive programming. See also <https://www.international-alert.org/publications/how-guide-conflict-sensitivity/>



C. Dividers and connectors

The concept of “Dividers and Connectors” is useful in terms of how to engage in social cohesion programming. Dividers are factors that create division or tension, while connectors are factors⁴ that pull groups together or help them to coexist in constructive ways. Identifying these connectors and dividers and identifying the ways in which our presence and interventions are likely to interact with either is important to avoid doing harm from a conflict perspective.⁴ This requires a robust context analysis to identify dividers and connectors to specific contexts. It is also critical to acknowledge that refugees and host communities are not homogeneous groups, and that tensions can often be higher between refugee or host communities’ groups. This requires identifying dividers and connectors within groups as well.

The most direct example of the potential to do harm is where the 3RP response itself is inadvertently contributing to tensions, especially when assistance is provided to one community and not to another. When an organization targets solely vulnerable refugees in a specific location, the aid brought to the refugee community can change the balance of access to resources between the refugees and host communities. This can negatively impact the relationship between the two communities (why are “they” benefitting and not “us?”), and between the aid organization and the neglected host communities (why are they “targeting them” and “not targeting us?”). This could include distribution of supplies or equipment only to refugees but not to host communities living in the same areas with the same needs, or development of specific assistance scheme, in particular cash assistance, that predominantly target refugees.

3RP partners must also critically assess how they are perceived by the larger community and how they might fuel specific dividers rather than connectors. Targeting the whole area / community, identifying the most vulnerable regardless of their displacement status and communicating this clearly to all communities when bringing assistance to the area can help a host community understand the added value of hosting refugees as well as give them a sense that the 3RP intervention is just and necessary.

Category examples of dividers and connectors

- Values and attitudes
- Interests, power and positions
- Actions and experiences
- Organizational and projects
- Specific individuals and groups, including gender roles
- Governance and management practices
- Access to service provision

It is important to underline that the do-no-harm principle and a conflict-sensitive programming approach needs to factor in the indirect impacts of programming on dividers and connectors. This includes potential impact on relations between groups other than refugees and host communities, as well as any impact stemming out of procurement and hiring practices. For example, consider an organization setting up a base of operations to assist refugee communities in a specific location that decides to locate its offices in a nearby town due to the facilities available there. The organization might decide to recruit staff from the town it is based in, rather than from the community that it targets for assistance. However, unbeknownst to the organization, this town and its citizens have a long history of tension with the community in the town where programmes are going to be delivered. The organization’s best efforts will have inadvertently reinforced dividers between the communities, first by bringing benefits to one of the two conflicting communities, and second by increasing risk of confrontation. As such, taking into account the wider context of ones’ interventions is also an important aspect of do-no-harm and conflict sensitivity.

⁴ <https://www.cdacollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Do-No-Harm-A-Brief-Introduction-from-CDA.pdf>



II. Coordination requirement for effective social cohesion mainstreaming and do-no-harm

This sub-section provides some guidance and lessons learned in terms of the relevant supporting conditions needed to better implement social cohesion programming.

A. Coordination structure for efficient information and sensitive communication

The “[Overview of Social Cohesion in the 3RP](#)” analysis accompanying this guidance note highlighted the importance of a robust coordination structure to support coherence in social cohesion mainstreaming and do-no-harm. At a general level, adequate multi-level, multi-channel communication lines from government agencies and officials to UN agencies and NGOs to local leaderships and community members are key not only to an efficient response, but also to the dissemination of adequate and consistent information at the community level.

The central government and local authorities, including community leaders, play a crucial role in the management of social tensions and are the primary partners in the 3RP. In some 3RP countries, authorities play a leading and centralized role in addressing social cohesion issues and managing social tensions. For example, the Turkish government’s 2018 Harmonization Strategy and Action Plan provides a blueprint for all actors there to tackle social cohesion issues.⁵

With over 270 partners and robust coordination at national, regional, and local level, across sectors and countries, including both large UN entities and small, refugee-led organizations, the 3RP has the potential to facilitate efficient two-way communication to implement some of the principles highlighted:

- Ensure coherent communication and inclusive programming are channeled to beneficiary communities
- Identify swiftly potential tensions stemming out of assistance across partners
- Reduce duplication and improve targeting in regard to service provision

In addition to general coordination and efficient coordination flows, there are specific features of coordination that need to be put in place to help more directly the mainstreaming and do-harm aspects of social cohesion.

⁵ See [Social Cohesion: An Overview of Host Community-Refugee dynamics in the 3RP context](#)



B. Social cohesion and tension monitoring & analysis

The 3RP coordination structure can provide information, analysis and recommendations to partners in terms of the evolution of the social cohesion situation, including trends related to dividers and connectors between communities. In this respect, setting up a social cohesion or tension monitoring system within the 3RP coordination structure has proven efficient for partners to base their mainstreaming and do-no-harm efforts on common information and a joint analysis.

Such a monitoring system could be developed at the national level by the inter-sector structure/working group and partners with expertise and capacity on the matter and be tightly linked and / or complement other inter-agency efforts related to vulnerability analysis, providing a joint reference analysis to all stakeholders. While government involvement would be ideal, this might not always be feasible as some governments are not comfortable engaging directly with such a sensitive topic. In such cases, providing regular ad hoc briefing to counterparts might be more advisable to obtain buy-in from relevant institutions.

The Tension Monitoring System⁶ (TMS) deployed in Lebanon is a good example of what is conceptually needed, as a joint system involving both government and 3RP partners and capitalizing on their respective data sources and information to provide a joint analysis to all stakeholders. Each 3RP country should tailor the social cohesion monitoring to address the country's specific needs, and as such may not need to be as elaborate as the one deployed in Lebanon. Another option is making better use of existing surveys and information, adding specific social cohesion indicators to existing vulnerability assessments, and better consolidating and analyzing available information from different sources (see the section on MEAL for more details on key indicators).

The Tension Monitoring System in Lebanon

The TMS is a collaboration between UNDP, UNHCR, the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MOIM) and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA). Data on tensions is collected through eight different channels including quarterly representative Perception Monitoring Surveys (reaching out to 5,000 people across Lebanon each quarter), systematized incident monitoring and conflict mapping and monthly inputs from UN and NGO partners, feeding into a wider analysis. The findings are disseminated to Lebanon Crisis Response Plan and government partners through monthly and quarterly perception briefs, bilateral meetings, and presentations, to better inform their programmes and policies. Findings are discussed at key stakeholder meetings at national and regional level where key recommendations are formulated and fed back into the response. Findings are also used to serve as an early warning system for potential conflicts and help partners to engage in more conflict sensitivity programming.

⁶ UNDP Lebanon, Tension Monitoring System:

Inter-Active Dashboard <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoizTI0Y2MwMWMtMzQzNy00YWY1LWFiMjktOTM3MmQzMTRmNmQyIiwidCI6ImIzZTVkYjVlTl5N>

DQtNDgzNy05OWY1LTc0ODhhY2U1NDMxOSIsImMiOjh9;

Wave X report: <https://www.ark.international/ark-blog/regular-perception-surveys-on-social-tensions-throughout-lebanon>



However, it is important for any social cohesion monitoring system to go beyond early warning and to also guide and inform do-no-harm and social cohesion mainstreaming:

- Inform do-no-harm and conflict-sensitivity by providing evidence on how humanitarian assistance is perceived by individuals and communities and monitor potential risks in terms of equity highlighted above. This could then be integrated in existing Accountability to Affected Population (AAP) and / or Communication with Communities mechanisms.

- Enable the inter-agency structure to support mainstreaming of social cohesion consideration, especially for partners who do not have in-house capacity to conduct their own analysis and monitoring of social cohesion but what would need to account for local dynamics and risks. An inter-agency analysis of social cohesion could help with identifying which approach would be most efficient from a social cohesion perspective, by identifying how tensions relate to overall 3RP programming:

- ▶ How dividers might create an obstacle to the 3RP: for example, if negative perceptions of the host community are a reason for them to oppose providing job or education opportunities to refugees.

- ▶ Where 3RP programming might provide an entry point to strengthen connectors: for example, if individuals satisfied with their access to services or with their livelihoods display better relations / perceptions of the other communities, this would call to increase programming on access to services or livelihoods in areas identified as more prone to tensions.

The overall inter-agency monitoring and analysis of the response could even aim to identify potential sources of tensions preemptively through identifying emerging needs of communities and gaps which could eventually become a divider if not addressed. In such cases, response efforts could be implemented to ensure that it becomes a connector through early and inclusive interventions.

It is important for a social cohesion and tension monitoring system to entail the following features:

- To be based both on subjective (i.e., perceptions) and objective elements (actual incidents and experience of aggression or violence, but also of discrimination as a barrier to access right or services).

- To be updated regularly enough to capture emerging trends (political/regional developments) – including through lighter data collection such as smaller samples or social media monitoring.

- To be disaggregated enough to provide specific analysis and trends, including at the sub-national level and within groups, particularly the gender aspect of social cohesion.

This can be achieved by conducting a secondary analysis of existing data and does not necessarily entail developing a full new system. Lighter data collection such as social media monitoring or incident tracking can also complement existing surveys. The analysis and recommendations stemming out of a social cohesion and tension monitoring system should then be regularly presented and discussed in the 3RP coordination structure, both at inter-sector and local level, to be able to feed in the overall set of 3RP interventions.

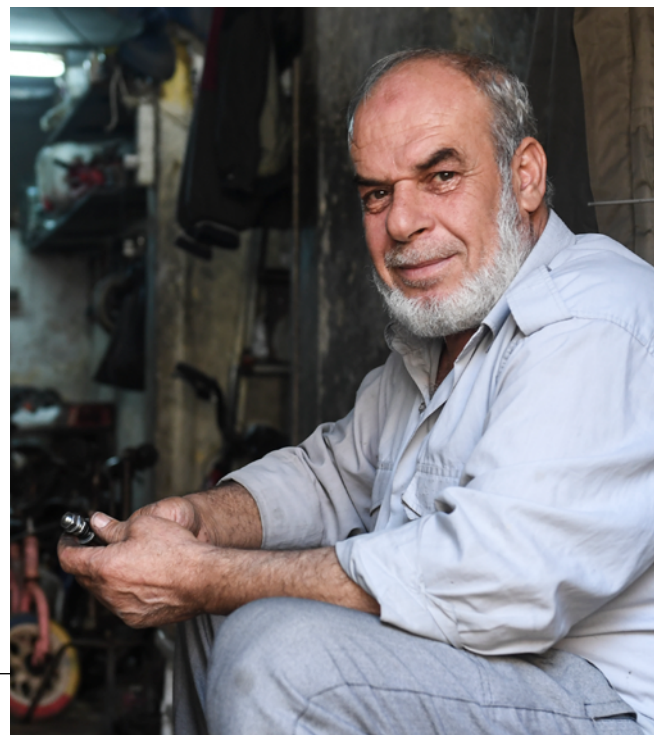


Photo: UNDP / Levent Kulu



C. Country-specific conflict sensitivity guidance and trainings

3RP partners need not only to understand the different dividers and connectors at play, but also how their interventions are impacting them. As these dividers and connectors are inherently context specific and vary across 3RP countries, the 3RP national coordination structure has a role to play to support partners with specific guidance and trainings on conflict sensitivity, capitalizing on the monitoring and analysis of tension to:

- Contextualize the regional 3RP guidance note considering the specific dividers and connectors and tension trends in the country.⁷

- Develop specific guidance / criteria for areas of programming that are more at risk of fueling tensions, based both on the general do-no-harm considerations outlined above and the analysis stemming out of the monitoring. For example, if competition over jobs or livelihoods is identified as a specific source of tensions, specific guidance for livelihoods partners might be required. In some other context, cash assistance might be another issue to tackle.

- Provide training to 3RP and government partners on conflict sensitive programming, to increasing their technical abilities to build ownership and apply the guidance to their own programming and interventions.

Engaging in conflict sensitive trainings or mainstreaming also needs to be done sensitively. Indeed, the concept of “conflict” is highly sensitive and takes many actors to the idea of political violence. Thus, there might be impediments or rejections from the authorities’ side to engage or allow any activity that has to do with “conflict”. Such instances would require contextualization of the language / terminology / methodology of conflict-sensitive programming so that conflict-sensitive programming is achieved, but in a safe and acceptable manner for the context.

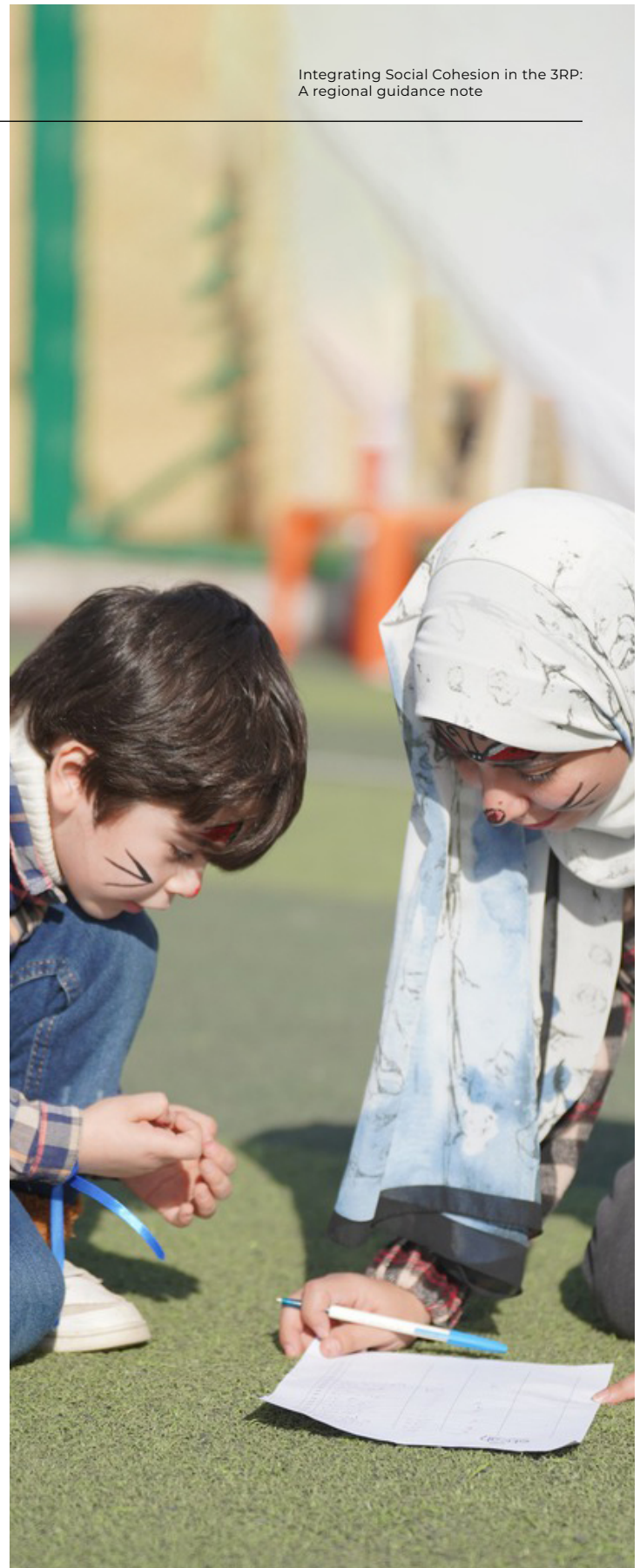


Photo: UNFPA Egypt

⁷ UNDP Lebanon and House of Peace, Guidance Note #1: Getting Started With Conflict Sensitivity in Lebanon, <https://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/library/guidance-note--1--getting-started-with-conflict-sensitivity-in-l.html>



There is a wide range of robust training and guidance material on conflict sensitivity available to support such efforts that are referenced in the annex.⁸ The below summarizes a few key overarching questions to be covered by these trainings. The second section of the guidance looks at how to incorporate answers from these questions and trainings into programming.

Key questions/aspects of conflict sensitivity:

For context-sensitive social cohesion programmes the how is just as - if not more - important than the what. Conflict-sensitivity sees projects as opportunities to engage different actors between whom social cohesion needs to be strengthened. It is therefore more relations-oriented, rather than purely outcome-oriented (i.e., which relations were strengthened vs. how many beneficiaries were reached).

■ What are the main factors that strengthen social cohesion (connectors) and the factors that weaken social cohesion (dividers) in the targeted context? The questions below can help partners identify the dividers and connectors in a specific context and better understand which relations they are affecting:

- ▶ What divides the community in the target area/related to this aspect of programming? What connects the community in the target area/related to this aspect of programming?
- ▶ What causes tensions in this situation? Who are these tensions between?
- ▶ What brings people together in this situation? Who is being brought together?

■ These factors (connectors and dividers) should then be structured into four main interrelated categories:

- ▶ **Socio-Economic:** factors related to the use and distribution of socioeconomic resources in a community or society.
- ▶ **Administrative:** factors related to the administration of a community or society.

▶ **Socio-Cultural:** factors related to social and cultural values, gender roles, identities and practices in a community or society.

▶ **Community Safety:** factors related to the physical and moral safety of individuals in a community or society.

▶ Other relevant categories in specific context might be related to assistance (beneficiary or not), environment, nationality/ethnicity related, religious, gender, territory, politics or ideology.

■ It is then necessary to identify the relevant actors in a context as well as their level of influence and the nature of their interests in relation to connectors and dividers. The following questions can help partners:

- ▶ Who are the actors who can influence the connectors and dividers?
- ▶ Are these actors interested in influencing the connectors and dividers in a way that produces positive change or are they interested in the situation staying as it is (no change)?
- ▶ Who are the actors that are interested in positive change but have no influence to advance it?
- ▶ Who are the disgruntled actors in the community, with grievances towards the intervention?
- ▶ What are their concerns/points of view, fears, positions?
- ▶ What is their ability to influence others and create larger opposition in the community towards the intervention?
- ▶ What would be the most useful strategy to address their concerns and grievances?

⁸ See for example International Alert (2012) *How to Guide Conflict Sensitivity*, <https://www.international-alert.org/publications/how-guide-conflict-sensitivity/>

III. Donors' considerations

The role and influence of donors is often under-reported and insufficiently explored when it comes to social cohesion initiatives. Donors can set the agenda and influence the programming of partners and therefore directly impact do-no-harm and mainstreaming considerations:



Photo: UNDP

■ Donors can unintentionally cause harm if political considerations or requirements in terms of target areas or population, activities, implementing partner, and beneficiaries are not in line with the recommendations coming out of the tension monitoring and conflict-sensitivity guidance. As such, they should be specifically briefed and included in above mentioned efforts to be on the same page as operational partners.

■ Donors can create another associated challenge with a short-funding cycle. Multi-year funding would facilitate the ability of partners to build the necessary trust and communication at the local level to defuse potential tensions stemming out of programming.

■ Donors should encourage partners not to approach social cohesion as an 'ad-hoc' or 'box-ticking' aspect that can easily be added to programming.

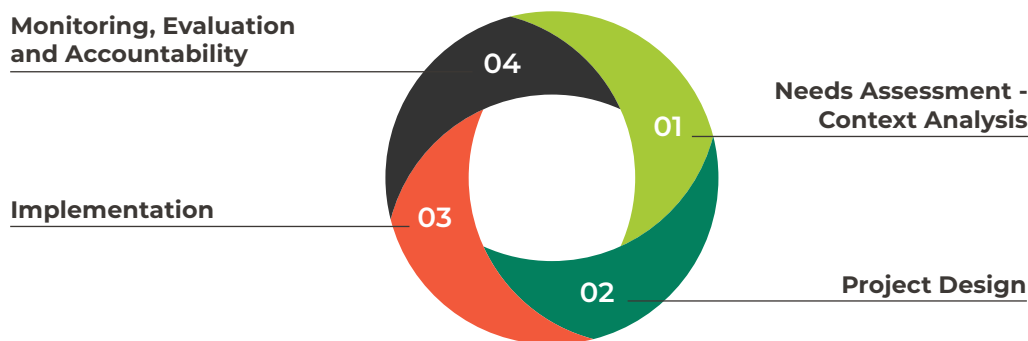
■ Donors should support partners with social cohesion and conflict sensitivity mainstreaming efforts including by providing resources for key tasks such as proper MEAL processes

■ Donors have a positive role to play in terms of advocacy and communication.



Operationalization of do-no-harm and social cohesion mainstreaming approaches

This section provides guidance to 3RP partners that are not specialists on the topic of promoting social cohesion to integrate do-no-harm, conflict-sensitivity and mainstreaming considerations in different steps of their programme cycle, capitalizing on the coordination arrangement is outlined above. The key recommendations are summarized in the below figure.



■ Needs Assessment - Context Analysis

- Review and use national vulnerability analyses or Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessments to set a baseline for intervention;
- Set realistic expectations from the impact of 3RP interventions on social cohesion;
- Gain a thorough understanding of the context of intervention - consider working with local experts and / or other organizations with a stronger technical background related to social cohesion;
- Identify / target social tensions that could constitute a barrier to programming.

■ Project Design

- Consider voices of refugees and host communities in targeted areas;
- Design the project's overall approach more suited in the context and in line with the capacity of the organization; Embed relevant social cohesion indicators into the project design;
- Identify and analyze stakeholders' perspectives about social cohesion, both of contextual and project-related nature, taking into account subjective factors;
- Plan how to involve local authorities and / or other community representatives;
- Aim to provide opportunities to individuals and communities to engage in more positive and collaborative behaviours, in order to address negative attitudes indirectly.

■ Implementation

- Be ready to take corrective actions;
- Take into account that contact-based interventions are not sufficient to foster social cohesion changes - contact between unwilling parties can reinforce stereotypes and can deepen divisions;
- Emphasize the need to bring people together on the basis of what they share and relate to one another;
- Recognize that everyone has multiple identities depending on context and conditions;
- Build, where possible, on existing community mechanisms / participatory processes to be inclusive of both host communities and refugees.

■ Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability

- Consult beneficiaries and the wider communities before, during and after implementation, through regular informal and formal discussions;
- Collect data as per the identified social cohesion indicators linked to the project approach during and after project implementation;
- Use available validated questionnaires and indicators aimed to measure perceptions of social cohesion in specific communities;
- Capitalize on the lessons learnt identified through the monitoring and evaluation processes and the analysis of results.

I. Needs assessment and contextual analysis

An adequate assessment of needs (vulnerability analyses with social cohesion considerations integrated) and a good understanding of the context (conflict sensitivity) are essential requirements for successful programming. This does not require each operational partner to undertake complex social cohesion related assessments of their own but to make use of available ones, through an appropriate desk review and complement them if needed by possibly integrating a few relevant questions in their broader assessments:

■ 3RP partners should review and use national vulnerability analyses or Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessments⁹ to set a baseline for their intervention and to identify priority issues that are likely to impact social cohesion in specific locations (see section on social cohesion monitoring and analysis above).

■ The review of these documents should help set realistic expectations from the impact of 3RP interventions on social cohesion. In acute crises contexts where vulnerable refugees and host communities are struggling to meet basic survival needs, there might be little prospect of improving social cohesion on the short term (except if this fosters solidarity between community members). In such contexts the focus of 3RP partners might be better placed on doing no harm as a minimum standard for social cohesion.¹⁰

■ From a do-no-harm perspective, a needs assessment should provide a basis to gain a thorough understanding of the context of interventions, including relevant historical, cultural, sociological, psychological, and economic aspects.

■ Operational partners should do their own conflict sensitivity analysis based on secondary data and any relevant organization internal data to identify dividers and connectors with a view to reducing potentially negative impacts and accentuating positive impacts in the community. This might entail considering working with local experts and / or other organizations with a stronger technical background related to social cohesion, to do so.¹¹

■ The result of this process should be to identify / target social tensions that do or could constitute a barrier to programming – in such case proper mainstreaming of social cohesion through additional activities or a targeted approach needs to be incorporated in the project design to tackle these barriers.



Photo: IOM / Nadine Al Lahham

⁹ https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/dam/rbas/doc/SyriaResponse/REPORT_Resilience%20Measurement%20Workshop%202-3%20Dec.pdf. Specific examples include The “Geographic Multidimensional Vulnerability Analysis” (developed by UNICEF Jordan), which helps analyse the performance and capacity of sectors; or the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (developed by UNHCR, with WFP and UNICEF Lebanon).

¹⁰ See *Social Cohesion: An Overview of Host Community-Refugee dynamics in the 3RP context* - This is particularly salient in the case of Lebanon, where the unprecedented socio-economic collapse has pushed both host and refugee communities to focus on their very survival (food, shelter, medicine).

¹¹ <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/84022>

II. Project design

Partners designing projects that do not target directly / specifically social cohesion should do so based on the consideration highlighted above, such as using available assessments and analysis to appropriately target communities; identify specific dividers and connectors in that community and how they relate to the area of interventions; and choose the most relevant approach accordingly, either focusing on do-no-harm, or adjusting the design of a project by mainstreaming social cohesion and the conflict sensitivity element. This should enable to them to formulate their own project specific do-no-harm, conflict-sensitivity approaches, based on the following considerations:



Photo: UNHCR

■ **Voices of refugees and host communities in targeted areas must be considered** to ensure greater awareness of needs and a more optimally designed set of interventions as well as to ensure community buy-in. A consultative process at the design stage would identify specific bottom-up needs to cross-reference/validate findings from survey and assessments and identify available resources that could be used for more optimal project implementation. Listening to the community may identify unconventional and more effective means to strengthening social cohesion. Local wisdom can alert to potential spoilers and improve the overall impact of interventions. In addition to focusing on host community – refugee relations, it's also important to consider refugee – refugee relations and relevant dynamics within the host communities.

■ The design of the **project's overall approach** more suited to the context and in line with the capacity of the organization. For example, if on the one hand, competition for services is not identified as an underlying cause of tensions in one area, it might be feasible to attempt to use it as an entry point to strengthen connectors, by fostering inclusive access to services and, bringing community together when doing so by mainstreaming a few key activities or tailoring the approach. If on the other hand, perception of unfair assistance is a prevalent cause of tensions in another area, then a project should focus on mitigating this potential divider, targeting both communities and making sure its selection criteria are well communicated, in line with the inclusive / justice principle outlined above.

■ **Abide by the evidence-based approach by embedding relevant social cohesion indicators into the project design and monitoring** to quantify measuring their social cohesion (evidence) impact beyond the general monitoring and evaluation framework used (see MEAL section below for more details).

■ Partners should **make use of locally sensitive knowledge** to ensure that interventions are culturally appropriate and mindful of the targeted communities.



An evidence-based approach guided by local knowledge will help partners do-no-harm and mainstream conflict sensitivity to design a project contributing to social cohesion in the following ways:

■ **Identify and analyze which are the dividers** that directly relate to the sector / area of the partner (i.e., protection, education, etc.) that can be tackled by mainstreaming conflict sensitivity aspects into the project overall approach or that could cause harm.

■ **Identify and analyze stakeholders' perspectives about existing/potential threats, both of contextual and project-related nature.**

▶ **When doing so, it is important to take into account subjective factors to identify how to approach tensions.** As underlined above, subjective factors and perceptions play a big role in shaping social cohesion. It is often the perception of physical,¹² economic,¹³ or symbolic¹⁴ threat that is a driver of conflict – not the threat itself – and these perceptions are amenable to change. In such cases, partners should focus on addressing both the perception itself and the threat. Conflict sensitive livelihoods interventions would help tackle perceptions related to economic threats (depending on the context, these can range from fostering joint business opportunities between groups to providing specific livelihoods support to the group feeling threatened. Emphasis on cultural commonalities through protection or education programme can also alleviate cultural threat by emphasizing a shared value system, can be beneficial.

▶ **Plan from the design how to involve local authorities and/or other community representatives.** While this relates more to vertical social cohesion, this remains key as sometimes local authorities and local leaders can be dividers, or connectors, who can be helpful in tackling threats through a diverse set of trusted local voices.

■ **Aim to provide opportunities to individuals and communities to engage in more positive social cohesion behaviors (i.e., to be more collaborative with members of the other group) and address negative attitudes indirectly, by working on behavioral changes.** While social cohesion assessments tend to focus on the attitude of respondents towards the other community interventions should not necessarily focus on tackling directly these attitudes, but rather the actual behaviors of targeted communities.

▶ Attitudes can be weak predictors of actual behavior. For example, people sometimes express environment-friendly attitudes and beliefs, but do not put them to practice through their actual behaviors. Similarly, people sometimes express pro-social ideals (for example compassion towards refugees) but find themselves acting negatively against them, including at the non-verbal or emotional level. Efforts and resources spent to change attitudes, especially mildly held ones, may not be sufficiently rewarding in the field. It is of course important to counter fake news narratives, misconceptions, and erroneous beliefs about refugees. However, this is not something 3RP partners are well placed to do at community level rather than at the national level, which should be done by national institutions.¹⁵

▶ Projects from other sectors mainstreaming social cohesion should focus on addressing attitudes and behaviors that could prevent them from achieving their wider objectives. If negative attitudes and behaviors are preventing vulnerable individuals from accessing services and opportunities (for example if members of the other group hold negative perceptions against people from different communities learning or working together), specific behavior targeted messages¹⁶ can help 'nudge'¹⁷ individuals towards that right direction.

This should not necessarily entail engaging different community members in more collaboration, which is only possible if the two or more groups have good trust between them. If not, collaborative work between groups that have trust deficit can create more harm. The below sections offer more details on how to put this overall more indirect approach from the design phase into practice.

¹² Perception that lives, physical safety, or properties are in danger

¹³ Threats to income, job security, employment, etc.

¹⁴ Threats to value systems and cultural norms

¹⁵ See *Social Cohesion: An Overview of Host Community-Refugee dynamics in the 3RP context*

¹⁶ https://download.uni-mainz.de/RePEc/pdf/Discussion_Paper_1905.pdf

¹⁷ See for example: *Applying behavioural science to refugee integration*

III. Implementation

At the implementation phase, the key guidance points and lessons learnt for partners are to keep in mind to do no-harm and mainstream conflict-sensitivity to promote social cohesion:

■ Partners should keep abiding by the principles underlined above when they implement their project activities. They should keep abreast of new developments and trends in the wider community that they intervene in, by building regular, sensitive and transparent two-way communication not only with direct beneficiaries, but also with the wider community, including local leaders and local authorities, particularly on eligibility and targeting criteria of programming, with adequate complain and feedback mechanisms also in place. Partners should be ready to take corrective actions if new risks of doing harm or worsening of the social cohesion situation occurs.

■ If incorporating specific activities and conflict-sensitive approaches related to social cohesion into a wider programme, partners need to account for important key lessons learnt to ensure doing no harm is adequately implemented:

► **Contact-based interventions are not sufficient to foster social cohesion changes:** mainstreaming social cohesion is often equated with organizing events or dialogue sessions bringing refugees and host communities together across the range of regular programming (i.e., protection, education etc.) around religious holidays or other specific celebrations.¹⁸ This is based on the underlying assumption that fostering direct contact between individuals of different communities helps to break prejudices and misperception and in turn alleviate tensions.¹⁹ However, it is increasingly recognized both by the 3RP community and by the available literature on social cohesion that this approach does not always deliver the expected results.²⁰ For such contact to have a genuinely positive outcome, contact needs to occur on “equal status” terms (i.e., between parties who have similar rights or levels of resources in the community), and have support from the broader community. However, the status of refugee populations and host communities often cannot be described as equal. Moreover, positive contact

between some members does not necessarily translate to better relations between the communities in general, as these positive encounters can be considered exceptions to a larger rule.

► In some cases, contact between unwilling parties can reinforce stereotypes and can deepen divisions, thereby actively causing harm. When host community members are unwilling to engage or work with refugees on an equal footing, contact between the “privileged” and the “vulnerable” exacerbates negative perceptions of the other.²¹



Photo: FAO / Sadık Yılmaz Güllü

¹⁸ This was highlighted by Key Informants Interviews conducted as part of this research and is also apparent in the general reporting on social cohesion in the 3RP which emphasizes number of joint events organized and number of people participating.

¹⁹ Contact-based interventions are quite popular among practitioners. The contact hypothesis was developed nearly a century ago by psychologist Gordon Allport, and rests on the assumption that contact between groups can promote tolerance and acceptance, and that if we bring people together, let them meet each other, know each other, then conflict is less likely to occur.

²⁰ Sonnenfeld et al. (2021) <https://www.3ieimpact.org/evidence-hub/publications/systematic-reviews/strengthening-intergroup-social-cohesion-fragile> The authors reviewed all published research addressing social cohesion interventions and noted that school-based interventions, contact-based interventions or dialogue interventions have a small impact on trust and participation between parties, but little impact on inclusion and other social cohesion measures.

²¹ See for example Harb & Saab, 2014



Interventions which add a specific social cohesion activity to other programming in a community are not in line with the general approach previously highlighted, and they are likely to back-fire and cause harm. While properly managed contact can be an important means to reducing prejudice and alleviating tensions, it is important that **activities developed to mainstream social cohesion bring people together based on what they share and relate to one another** to successfully break prejudices and harmful behavior.²²

■ Such interventions should build, where possible, on existing community mechanisms or participatory processes to be inclusive of both host communities and refugees, and then let cross-group interaction occur through these structures to achieve positive changes towards more collaborative and constructive behavior in inter-community relationships.

▶ Mainstreaming social cohesion in other types of projects is particularly suited to improve social cohesion, considering that projects from other sectors would precisely adopt another angle or approach to their intervention. In that respect, it is crucial for 3RP partners to build on /utilize the existing community-based mechanisms in place to achieve the objective of facilitating contact based on a shared goal, shared values, a shared future vision that are more conducive to building shared identities.

▶ Examples of existing mechanisms include parents' committees (education), or consultative process and committees from local municipalities (protection, shelter, or WASH projects). This can also be driven by local civil society, such as workers' associations (livelihoods projects), association of persons with disability, GBV networks (protection projects), etc.

■ Providing opportunities for collaborative interaction to mainstream social cohesion into existing interventions should **recognize that everyone has multiple identities depending on context and conditions**. People can self-define based not only on their nationality, but also based on gender, ethnicity, religion, profession, etc. As tensions between groups partially rest on a perception of an "us" and a "them", it is important to work on shifting perceptions to other elements of identities than the refugee / host community ones, and to do so in a more durable way than ad hoc events. For example, to weaken refugee / host identity rifts, partners should work on emphasizing a different aspect of social identities (e.g., all women in a location, all manual laborers, all sports club members, etc.) that will be inclusive of different groups.

▶ While the host community might be reluctant to engage, collaborate, or even develop friendship with refugees (or vice-versa), they might be much more willing to build relationship with another parent whose child is attending the same school, a worker of the same company, a neighbor of the same of building or area, a woman with the same protection risk, a person with similar disability, etc.

▶ Opening up existing participatory mechanisms would help bring people together on this basis. No matter the initiative chosen or the targeted group identity, it needs to be culturally relevant and specifically tailored to the target location to improve the chances of long-term change and strengthen social cohesion. Importantly, such projects require the involvement of local community members, social workers and scientists, communication specialists and other human resource assets for a successful outcome.

These shifts towards commonalities may enable cross-group collaboration to emerge and change the dynamics in a location, especially when these are considered through a long-term perspective lens. With changing conditions and identity salience, contact-based projects would no longer be limited to interpersonal perceptions, but extend to shaping intergroup perceptions, and extend (generalize) to a larger base that is not directly involved in contact interactions.

²² Academic research on social identities and intergroup relations has progressed significantly over the past decades but has not yet sufficiently diffused to practitioners and the wider community. Social identities are currently at the center of the social and political psychology literatures dealing with intergroup dynamics and collective action (including social cohesion).



IV. Monitoring, evaluation and accountability

Both mainstreaming and do-no-harm approaches to social cohesion require a Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability component for every initiative planned in the field.²³ However, many 3RP countries have not sufficiently included social cohesion in their MEAL or accountability to affected population (AAP)²⁴ component.²⁵ To address this shortcoming:

■ Consult beneficiaries and the wider communities before, during and after implementation, through regular informal and formal discussions (focus groups, key informant interviews), to assess their views, opinions, and perception in terms of safety, dignity, accessibility, and level of participation during project implementation. This method is designed to be kept rather simple as it gives affected populations a space to share their opinions on the services they received.

■ Collect data as per the identified social cohesion indicators linked to the project approach during and after project implementation. Again, aligning these indicators to a national social cohesion and tension monitoring system would provide not only an early baseline, but also a comparison point on the state of social cohesion at specific locations before interventions or programmes are implemented (comparison purposes across timelines and locations). Such systems would feed into the MEAL protocols ahead of programme planning (social cohesion timeline across locations).

■ Ensure validated questionnaires and indicators aimed to measure perceptions of social cohesion in specific communities are available:

► The UNDP social cohesion guidance note has a repository of indicators.²⁶ The Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE) and the Social Cohesion Index for Arab States have already tailored these to specific contexts.²⁷

► Partners should select a few relevant indicators among these (as well as the existing social cohesion indicators of the monitoring systems highlighted above) that relate to the social cohesion dimensions of their project. This could include generic cross-cutting indicators related to social distance²⁸ as well as indicators that could capture social cohesion aspects of general programmes (i.e., tensions related to health, water services, etc).

■ Capitalize on the lessons learnt identified through the monitoring and evaluation processes and the analysis of results. This should be done first internally by designing new or additional interventions of the same partner considering evidence and best practices. It should also be disseminated externally, through 3RP coordination structures, as highlighted in the second section of this document.

²³ See for example the IFRC.org "[project/programme monitoring and evaluation \(M&E\) guide \(2011-2020\)](#)"

²⁴ <https://emergency.unhcr.org/entry/42554/accountability-to-affected-populations-aap>

²⁵ See *Social Cohesion: An Overview of Host Community-Refugee dynamics in the 3RP context*

²⁶ UNDP, (2020), *Strengthening social cohesion: Conceptual framing and programming implications*

²⁷ Promoting Social Cohesion in the Arab Region Project (PSCAR): https://www.arabstates.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/library/Dem_Gov/developing-a-social-cohesion-index-for-the-arab-region.html Social Cohesion and Reconciliation (SCORE): <https://www.scoreforpeace.org/>

²⁸ This is a standard composite social cohesion indicator used by aggregating responses to a range of questions on how acceptable/not acceptable some form of interaction with the other groups are: living in the same area as refugees/host communities, having them as neighbors, having them as colleagues, having your children in the same school, having your children marry them, etc.

Next steps

This guidance note highlights how critical social cohesion remains for the overall 3RP response both as a potential barrier to providing effective support and assistance to refugees and host communities, and as an enabler for increased collaboration between groups fostering joint opportunities. In this context, there is both a risk that ignoring or overlooking social cohesion issues could lead to either doing harm and exacerbating tensions, but also an opportunity to contributing to improving relations through careful and tailored mainstreaming of social cohesion into other types of programming.

This guidance note underscores that all interventions need to follow a rigorous and sensitive process and requires partners to strictly abide to the do-no-harm principle and to receive adequate support from the 3RP coordination structure and donors. The 3RP is uniquely placed to put this into practice, given its robust coordination system, its wide network of partners, its strong relations with national governments, and the experience and expertise on social cohesion accumulated over the past decade of interventions.

This guidance note should be used as starting point to take do-no-harm and mainstreaming efforts to the next level and have a dedicated conversation on social cohesion across the 3RP operations.

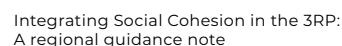
At country level, where this is not occurring already, this guidance note could also be contextualized to the specific operational context. This regional guidance should help trigger and structure the necessary local reflection and brainstorming between 3RP partners and sectors on how to have a more strategic approach to social cohesion and identify opportunities to strengthen existing do-no-harm and mainstreaming approaches. Increasing coordination by facilitated dedicated meetings, workshops and plans to ideally design a country-level guidance on social cohesion do-no-harm and mainstreaming would go a long way to ensure coherence at country level, and to identify support needs from the regional level and other countries.

The 3RP has a key role to play at regional level to support countries in this process. This would entail facilitating exchange of experience, lessons learnt, but also practical tools and approaches between 3RP countries. Many of the recommendations highlighted in this paper have already been successfully put in practice in at least one 3RP country – sharing direct and practical experiences, success factors and potential pitfalls would be immensely helpful to provide more tangible indication to other 3RP countries and partners to tailor them to their own context.

The 3RP Joint Secretariat will continue to support 3RP partners at all levels in that respect.



Photo: UNICEF / Can Remzi Ergen



A. Tools

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