

# State of the Syria Crisis Response:

## An Assessment of Humanitarian and Development Challenges and Ways Forward

### Report

November 2016

Voluntās  
ADVISORY

## Table of Contents

1	Executive summary .....	2
2	Introduction .....	4
3	Context .....	5
4	Findings .....	8
4.1	Main challenges faced by refugees and host communities .....	8
4.2	Response performance .....	10
4.3	Response gaps.....	13
4.4	Challenges to effective response .....	18
4.5	The way forward and possible solutions .....	22
4.6	Private sector engagement .....	25
4.7	Outlook .....	28
5	Bibliography .....	29
6	Appendix .....	31

## 1 Executive summary

Since the Syrian conflict began in 2011, 11 million people have been internally displaced or have fled to neighboring states. This has put an incredible strain on the hosting societies, particularly in Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey. The international community has dispatched more than \$17 billion<sup>1</sup> in funding to Syria Response Plans, 300 organizations have implemented projects, and thousands of people have been activated to assist both host communities and refugees themselves to cope with the circumstances.

For a comprehensive review of the response, Voluntas Advisory addressed practitioners from international organizations, NGOs, government authorities, donors, the private sector and academia, covering the cross section of the refugee and host community response from workers on the ground in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey to key decision makers.

Overall our findings show that there is widespread disillusionment among the practitioners with both the situation and the response. This criticism from within the humanitarian and development system underscores the need to act to ensure the viability and relevance of the response to the people in need.

**The conditions in the neighboring countries for refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees and host communities remain dire and are not set to improve.** This is supported by the fact that 56% of practitioners expect the situation to worsen one year from now, while only 11% believe it will improve. Youth in particular are being robbed of their right to a future<sup>2</sup> with **limited access to education and employment.**

Despite the tremendous efforts by national authorities, UN agencies, and NGOs alike to address these challenges, performance is not perceived to be adequate. **National NGOs are the only actors perceived by survey participants to be performing well on addressing host communities' challenges.** In contrast, only about one third believe that donors, national authorities, and international organizations perform well in this area.

Negative perceptions of the Syria response are supported by the fact that a **majority of practitioners believe that the strategies of donors, national authorities, and international organizations are not meaningful.** The response is furthermore hampered by a lack of cooperation and coordination between the various actors engaged in the response both from UN agencies to NGOs and national authorities.

With these critical response challenges, practitioners have a pessimistic outlook on the future. More than **eight out of 10 do not believe that the national and international response will improve within the next year.** The London Conference held in February addressing the challenges to the large refugee flows is not perceived to have had a significant impact, and only 49% believe that the World Humanitarian Summit and Grand Bargain outcomes will have a positive influence in the foreseeable future. Consequently, Europe and other parts of the world should brace themselves for a continued increase in refugees trying to reach their borders, as 89% of practitioners believe that the influx of refugees to third countries will increase.

The findings highlight that new and innovative thinking is needed to improve the response and the situation in neighboring countries. More strategic thinking is needed to adjust funding focus to actors that have a meaningful strategy and are capable of ensuring a right to a future for both local and Syrian refugees. A number of solutions are highlighted in this report as both relevant and feasible by the practitioners to heighten the performance of the response. These include harmonizing and simplifying donors' reporting requirements, including recipients of aid in decision-making and increasing

---

<sup>1</sup> All monetary figures reported in USD.

<sup>2</sup> As also highlighted a year ago by a joint group of international NGOs in the briefing paper *Right to a Future* available at: <https://www.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/Report%20final-%20Syria.pdf>

collaborative, multi-year funding, and planning for the foreseeable future. Furthermore, efforts should be made to make the response more inclusive of other non-traditional actors such as the private sector, social enterprises, local municipalities, religious groups, and academia.

### **Acknowledgements**

This study was designed and implemented by Voluntas Advisory led by Alexander Kjaerum and Daniela Espro with support from August Bundegaard Aggebo and Rasmus Elm. In helping with the design of the study a steering committee was established, which provided excellent inputs to the design, implementation, and analysis of the study. The committee consisted of Anita Bay Bundegaard, Director and UN Representative of Save the Children, Geneva, Dr. Melissa Phillips, Non-Resident Fellow at NYU Center for International Cooperation, Dr. Nasser Yassin, American University of Beirut, Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen, Research Director, Raoul Wallenberg Institute, Hart Ford, Country Director Lebanon, ACTED and Andres Gonzalez Rodriguez, Country Director Iraq, OXFAM.

## 2 Introduction

The Syrian crisis has now entered its sixth year. An estimated 11 million people have fled the country since the revolution in 2011. To date 4.8 million people have sought asylum in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt and 6.6 million are internally displaced within Syria. A total of 13.5 million people are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance in the country.

Vulnerable groups inside and outside of Syria lack access to basic goods such as food, water, shelter, and protection, as well as access to education, healthcare, and security. Major humanitarian organizations have pointed out that a “lost generation” of children is taking shape as a result of the displacement.<sup>3</sup> Host communities in states neighboring Syria have shown their solidarity with refugees, but they too are running out of resources to support the overwhelming number of people crossing their borders every day. These countries are now starting to struggle to guarantee services such as power, clean water, education, healthcare, and waste management to their citizens.

Notwithstanding national and international efforts to tackle the externalities of the crisis, a number of issues have emerged, which have led to mistrust and increasingly complicated and troubled relations amongst international organizations, donors, and NGOs involved in the region. Two major conferences took place in February and May 2016 in London and Istanbul respectively, with the objective to identify new ways forward to address funding, aid management, and coordination and co-operation both amongst UN agencies as well as between UN agencies and the large NGO sector in the region. Some ideas have been put forth, but their relevance has not yet been investigated.

Taking this framework as a starting point, the objective of this study is to shed light on the status of the crisis and of the response to it, looking at the main challenges that vulnerable groups and national and international actors are currently facing. Simultaneously, this study aims at assessing the relevance and feasibility of innovative solutions. The project has been developed by a steering committee which includes:

- Anita Bay Bundegaard, Director and UN Representative of Save the Children, Geneva
- Dr. Melissa Phillips, Non-Resident Fellow at NYU Center for International Cooperation
- Dr. Nasser Yassin, American University of Beirut
- Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen, Research Director, Raoul Wallenberg Institute
- Hart Ford, Country Director Lebanon, ACTED
- Andres Gonzalez Rodriguez, Country Director Iraq, OXFAM

The data for the study is based on a survey distributed to more than 4,000 professionals from all the primary stakeholders’ groups involved in the crisis, including international organizations, national and international NGOs (INGOs), government agencies in the region, donors and partners, private sector, charitable organizations, media, and academia. The study is geographically focused on the Middle East, paying specific attention to respondents from Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq, who are currently or have previously been involved directly or indirectly with the crisis. The data was gathered in the period of 22 July 2016 - 23 August 2016.

The first section looks at the context and provides a background for the analysis. The second section presents the findings, focusing on:

- a) the challenges faced by vulnerable groups;
- b) the performance of the crisis response and gaps herein; and
- c) solutions and ways forward.

The third section discusses forms of broadened engagement between different categories of actors in the response and practitioners’ predictions about the development of the situation in the coming future. The methodology of the study is described in the appendix.

---

<sup>3</sup> Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children, IRC, CARE, World Vision and Oxfam International, 2015, *Right to a Future*, Oxfam GB, <https://www.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/Report%20final-%20Syria.pdf>

### 3 Context

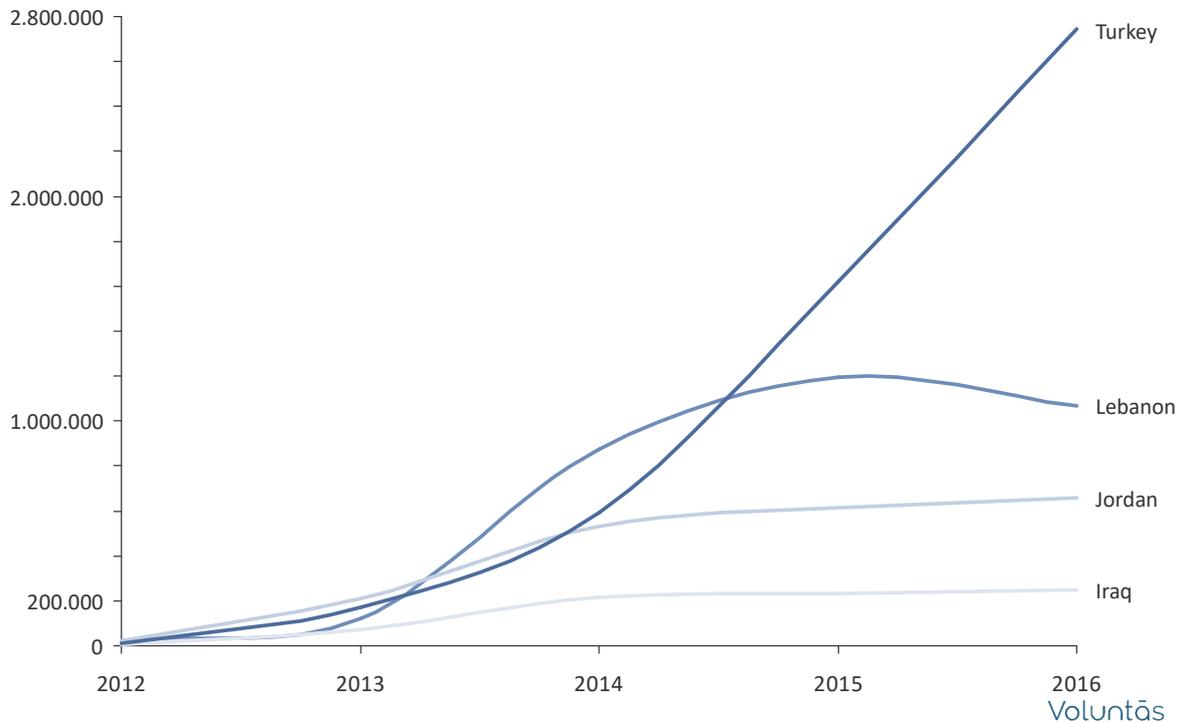
Since the revolution in Syria in 2011 and outbreak of conflict, the context of the region has dramatically changed. In April 2011, 5,000 Syrian refugees crossed the Lebanese border through unofficial means to escape fighting in the city of Talkalakh, commencing one of the largest refugee flows in history and the largest since World War II. During the following months, thousands of people entered Turkey, Jordan and, later, Iraq. Though trying to maintain a welcoming attitude towards Syrians, authorities in Jordan and Lebanon have found themselves under pressure to fulfill basic needs of their populations and asylum seekers. Also, the majority of refugees, especially in Jordan, have spread throughout the territory, instead of residing in camps, making it increasingly hard to reach them. As the conditions in and outside camps worsened the UN launched an initiative called “Children of Syria” in March 2013 to spread awareness about the needs of a whole young generation of refugees who are lacking basic access to education.

Since January 2014, it has been clear that the situation in frontline states has become unsustainable, with refugees outnumbering indigenous populations in most border towns. In June 2014 a new displacement crisis began, as the Islamic State forced 500,000 people to leave Mosul. This has pushed the international community to authorize military strikes targeting the terrorist group. At the time of the publication of this report, Iraqi military forces are trying to regain control of the Islamic State’s stronghold in the major city of Mosul. Overall, this underlines the pressure for long-term response strategies to the challenges faced by refugees and host communities in a fast changing and highly dynamic context. Figure 1 shows the number of refugees that have fled Syria directed in neighboring states since 2011.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Data from UNHCR Syria Regional Response, Interagency Information Sharing Portal: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224>

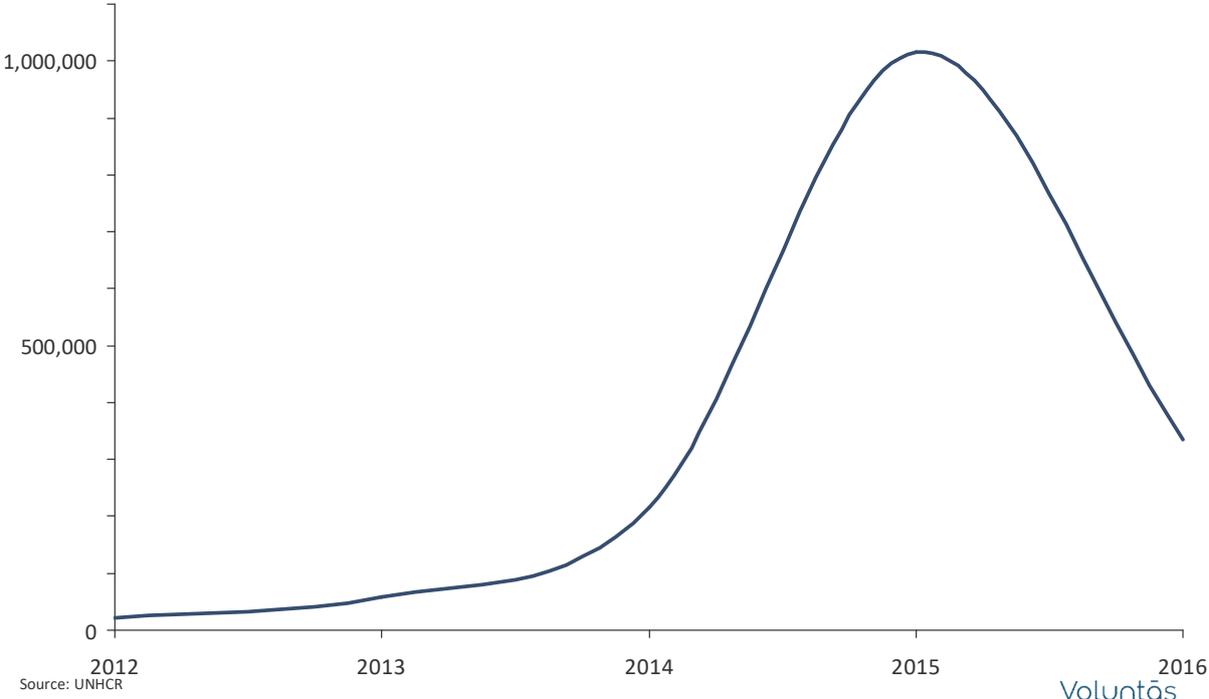
**Figure 1. Refugee influx to frontline states since the outbreak of the crisis**



Many of the refugees in the neighbouring countries have moved on towards third countries, mainly in Europe. On this journey the refugees join the flow of other migrants trying to reach Europe through various means. In March 2016, the European Union (EU) negotiated an agreement between Turkey and the member states to slow down migration from frontline countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey into the EU. Migrants and refugees from these countries typically travel by boat across the Mediterranean Sea and enter Europe, mainly through Italy and Greece. In 2015 the number of refugees and migrants trying to cross Europe's borders peaked, with a total influx of a little more than 1 million. However, since the agreement between the EU and Turkey, the number has drastically decreased, and immigration levels now equate those of 2014.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Data from UNHCR Syria Regional Response, Interagency Information Sharing Portal: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224>

**Figure 2: The number of refugees crossing the Mediterranean sea has been increasing until 2015**



## 4 Findings

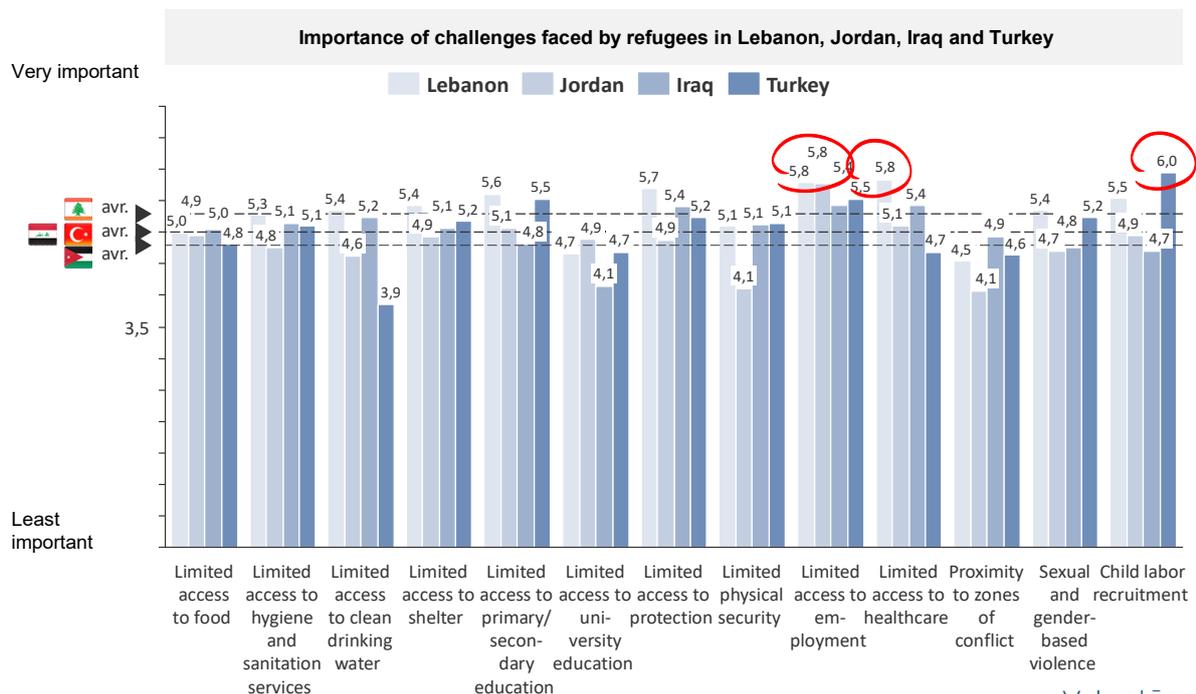
### 4.1 Main challenges faced by refugees and host communities

Refugees and host communities have been confronted with a number of challenges related to the level of development in frontline countries and the further pressures brought on by the influx of refugees. The massive influx to frontline countries means that in towns at the borders between Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon, the refugee population is more numerous than the host population. In Jordan, one in 10 people are refugees, while in Lebanon a quarter of the population are refugees from Syria. Overwhelmed by this sudden and quickly escalating pressure, authorities in frontline countries have been unable to provide sufficient basic services for their existing population - such as education, clean water, and healthcare - let alone for arriving refugees.

#### Challenges faced by refugees

The first section of the analysis aims at determining the current main challenges faced by refugees and host communities respectively. Results show that there are similar perceptions about what these challenges consist of across Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan. Across the four countries, access to employment is considered a key challenge for refugees. However, it is worth underlining important cross-country variations, such as child labor recruitment being considered the most significant challenge in Turkey, followed by limited access to primary and secondary education. Healthcare and employment were considered as major challenges in Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon.

**Figure 3: Differences in main challenges facing refugees with access to employment being a key challenge across countries**

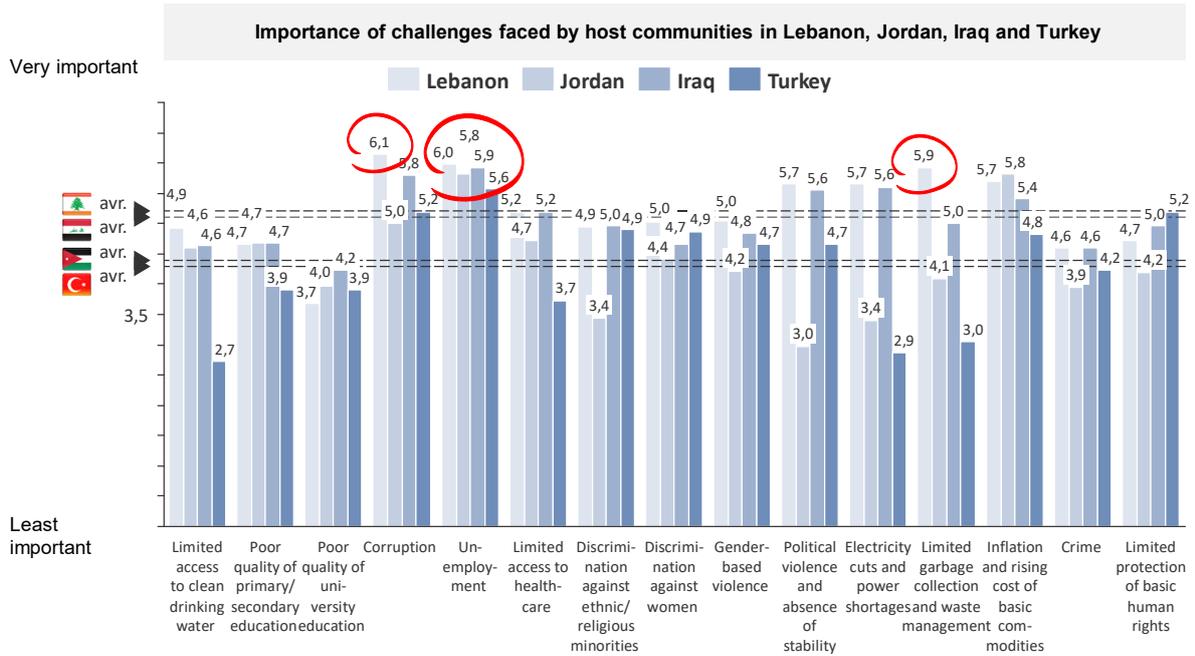


#### Challenges faced by host communities

When looking at the challenges faced by host communities the issue of unemployment is, similarly to refugees, consistently perceived as among the primary challenges across the four countries. Taking a closer look at the different challenges faced by host communities, it becomes apparent that corruption and limited garbage collection in Lebanon constitute major challenges in this country. Specifically, in

Turkey challenges related to protection of fundamental human rights and the presence of corruption are also highlighted. Turkey is the country which has the lowest average challenge score for host communities, indicating that the situation for host communities is perceived more positively than in the other three countries.

**Figure 4: As for refugees, challenges to host communities vary with unemployment being a cross-cutting challenge**



© 2016 Voluntas Advisory. All rights reserved. Strictly Confidential.

## 4.2 Response performance

The international community has made considerable efforts to respond to the refugee flow towards countries neighboring Syria. However limited results have been achieved. In fact, although more than \$17 billion has been devolved towards finding durable solutions to support host communities in the frontline countries and building resilience, a vast number of refugees have moved on from these frontline countries to others, mostly towards Europe but even as far as Brazil.

### Overall performance

The actors with the highest performance score on responding to refugees are INGOs. Seven out of 10 surveyed (71%) reported that INGOs' performance towards this group was either "good" or "very good." By contrast, national authorities scored the poorest performance amongst the participants responding to the challenges of refugees. Overall, only a little more than four out of 10 said that the performance of national authorities towards the challenges of refugees was either "good" or "very good".

The performance of the same actors towards the challenges faced by host communities is rated as poorer than the response towards refugees. National NGOs were rated as those with the highest performance, with 58% of respondents reporting a "good" or "very good" performance. By contrast, 66% of the surveyed reported that the national NGOs performance towards refugees was "good" or "very good". While INGOs came out as top performer towards refugees, only 45% say their performance towards host communities is either "good" or "very good. This indicates that the move for greater localization of aid is warranted especially for addressing host community challenges.<sup>6</sup> In 2015, direct contributions to national NGOs amounted to only 0.4% of the total global humanitarian funding.<sup>7</sup>

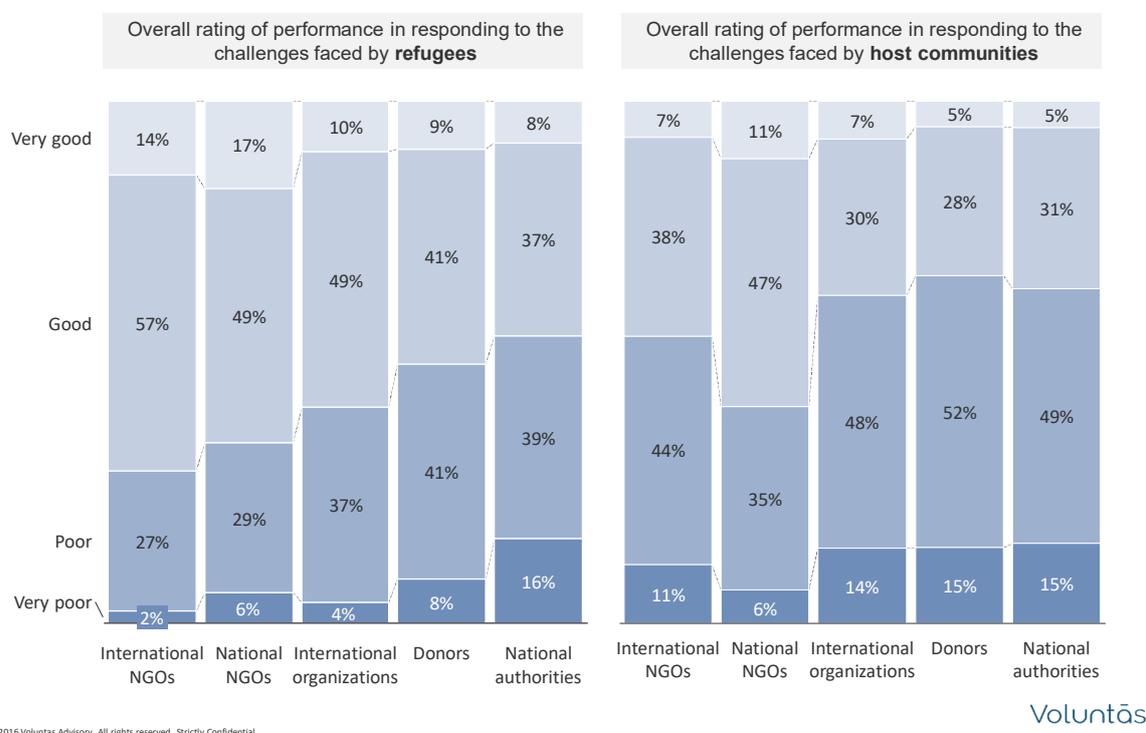
In general, only about one third of respondents believed that donors, national authorities, and international organizations perform well on challenges facing host communities. Again, national authorities scored the lowest, with 64% of respondents rating their performance as "poor" or "very poor."

---

<sup>6</sup> Global Finance Strategies, 2015, *Going Local: The Promise and Challenge of Aid Localization*, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/550a2277e4b00f7ac2f656e1/t/55419fd0e4b029f3456de473/1430364112704/GFS+Going+Local+Report.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Development Initiatives, 2016, *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report*, <http://devinit.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Global-Humanitarian-Assistance-Report-2016.pdf>

**Figure 5: National and International NGOs perceived as best performing; performance on host community challenges perceived to be poor**



## Response strategies

A somewhat similar trend appeared when respondents were asked whether the relevant actors are deemed to have a meaningful strategy to address the challenges of refugees. Seven out of 10 say that INGOs have a meaningful or somewhat meaningful strategy towards responding to the challenges of refugees. When asking about the perceived meaningfulness of INGOs strategy towards host communities only five out of 10 say they have a meaningful or somewhat meaningful strategy.

National NGOs are perceived to have the most meaningful strategy towards the challenges faced by host communities. Six out of 10 surveyed say these organizations strategies are meaningful or somewhat meaningful. Overall, it can be noted that the strategies towards refugees across all organizations are believed to be more meaningful compared to the strategies targeted at host communities. This might indicate that a more coherent approach addressing the challenges facing host communities is needed.

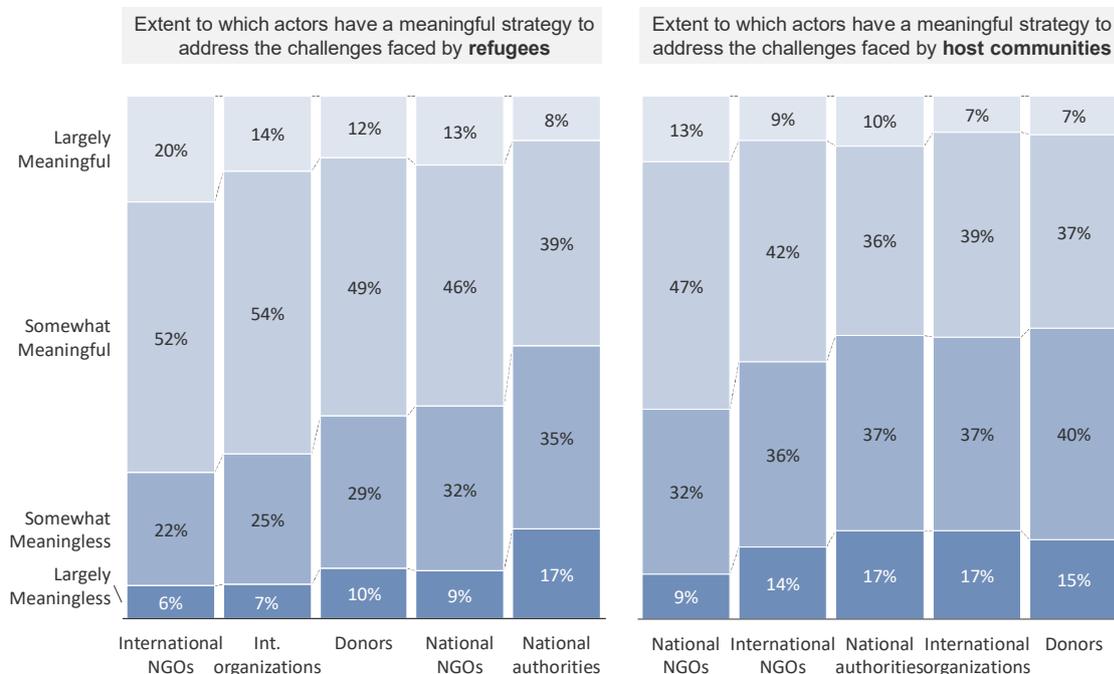
It is concerning to see that 54% of practitioners believe that international organizations do not have a meaningful strategy to address the challenges faced by host communities. The lack of a meaningful strategy was also highlighted by a recent synthesis analysis of evaluation reports, including UN agencies, donors and INGOs which found that *“the lack of an explicit (written) overarching strategy was an obstacle to effective decision-making and to programme coherence for the agencies.”*<sup>8</sup> The report further highlights that in a number of areas *“strategic ‘disconnect’ are apparent between different United Nations agencies’ roles, and between the United Nations and others (international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), Red Cross/Crescent). The attempt to boost coherence by*

<sup>8</sup> James Darcy, 2016, *Syria Coordinated Accountability and Lesson Learning (CALL): Evaluation Synthesis and Gap Analysis*, [http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/darcy-\(2016\)-syria-call-eval-synthesis---gap-analysis-\(002\).pdf](http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/darcy-(2016)-syria-call-eval-synthesis---gap-analysis-(002).pdf)

creating a comprehensive regional strategic framework (CRSF) appears not to have been successful.”<sup>9</sup> Along the same lines, UNHCR response has been criticized for having operated “without a fully functional and integrated regional- or country-level strategy designed to guide all facets of its operations.”<sup>10</sup> With 61% of humanitarian funding in 2014 flowing directly to UN agencies and ICRC, the lack of a meaningful strategy limits the efficient use of the scarce humanitarian funds.<sup>11</sup>

Lastly, the perceived lack of meaningful donor strategies adds to the negative picture due to the influence donors have on how funding is spent. An example is a 2014 evaluation of Australia’s Humanitarian Response to the Syria Crisis which found that “its coherence has been less than optimal in the absence of a clear strategic vision. Funding has been spread across too many partners, reducing its potential effectiveness...”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), was also criticized in a recent evaluation of their Syria regional response for not having a written strategy for their response nor any expected results.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 6: International NGOs and organizations actors have meaningful strategies to address refugee challenges**



© 2016 Voluntas Advisory. All rights reserved. Strictly Confidential.

Voluntās

<sup>9</sup> James Darcy, 2016, *Syria Coordinated Accountability and Lesson Learning (CALL): Evaluation Synthesis and Gap Analysis*, [http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/darcy-\(2016\)-syria-call-eval-synthesis---gap-analysis-\(002\).pdf](http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/darcy-(2016)-syria-call-eval-synthesis---gap-analysis-(002).pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Transtec, 2015, *Beyond Humanitarian Assistance? UNHCR and the Response to Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon, January 2013 - April 2014*, UNHCR, <http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/5551f5c59.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> ALNAP, 2015, *The State of the Humanitarian System*, <http://www.alnap.org/resource/21036>

<sup>12</sup> Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2014, *Australia’s Humanitarian Response to the Syria Crisis*, <https://www.oecd.org/derec/australia/Australias-humanitarian-response-to-the-syria-crisis-eval-report.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> J. Betts et al, 2016, ‘Striking the Balance’ Evaluation of the Planning, Organization and Management of Norwegian Assistance related to the Syria Regional Crisis - Volume I: Evaluation Report, <http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/syria-evaluation-report-norad.pdf>

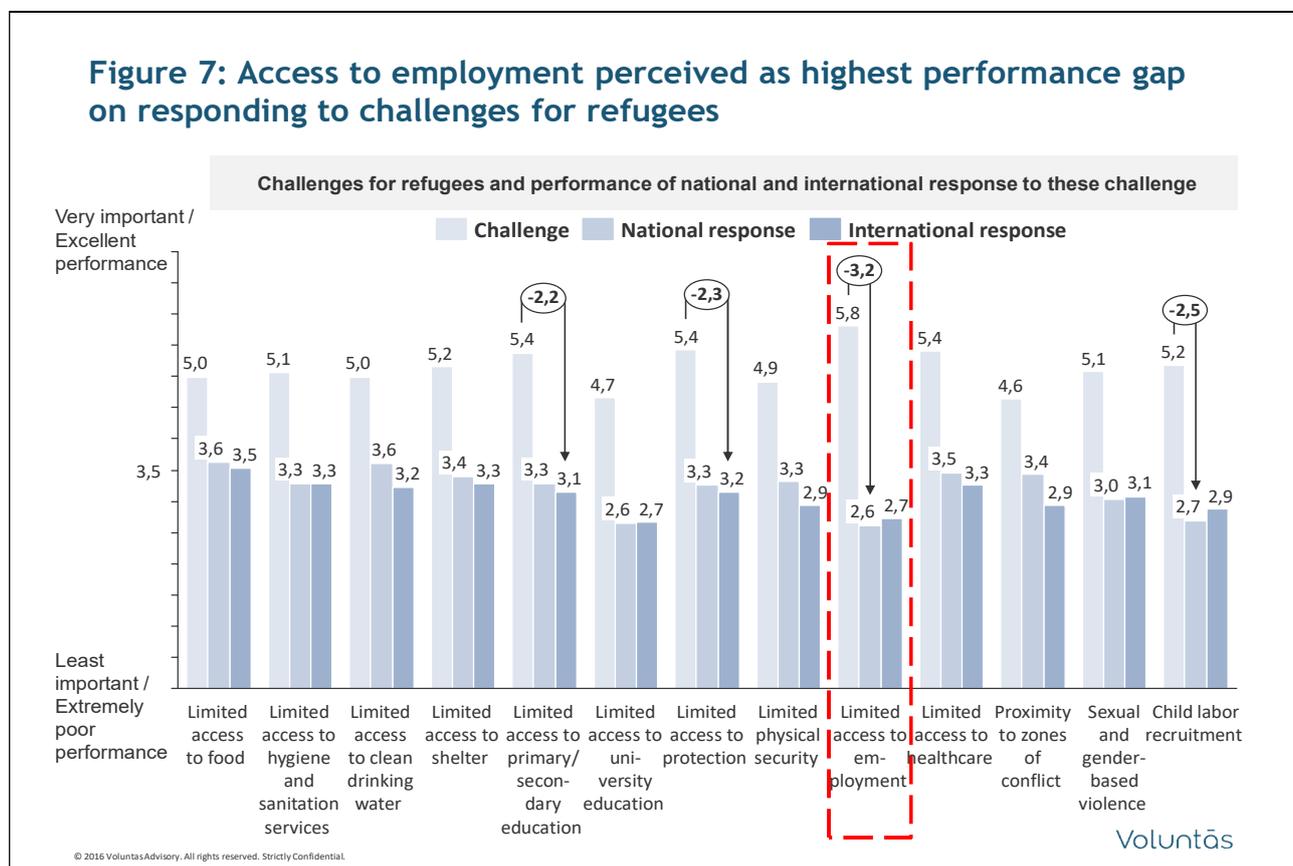
### 4.3 Response gaps

To shed light on how performance could be improved, the analysis seeks to identify specific challenges not adequately responded to. The analysis thus looks more closely at the response performance in relation to the specific challenges faced by refugees, host communities, IDPs and returnees, and compares this to the rated importance of the challenge to identify main gaps in the response.

#### Refugee response gaps

Figure 7 shows that limited access to employment for refugees is not only perceived as the primary challenge but also as the area with the biggest response gap, measured as the difference between the importance of the challenge and performance of the national and international response. This shows that despite the high level of donor and policy focus on providing livelihood opportunities for refugees in neighboring countries, the performance so far has not been adequate and more and innovative efforts are needed to close the performance gap.

Coming in as the second biggest gap between importance and performance is child labor recruitment amongst refugees, which underlines the vulnerability of this group. Limited access to protection is also perceived as having a high gap between performance and importance for this category.



Looking at the gap in responding to access to employment for refugees in a historical perspective shows that support for livelihood opportunities are usually challenged by a number of different factors, such as the following<sup>14</sup>:

<sup>14</sup> Jacobsen, K. and Fratzke, S., 2016, *Building Livelihood Opportunities for Refugee Populations: Lessons from Past Practice*, Migration Policy Institute, <http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/building-livelihood-opportunities-for-refugee-populations.pdf>

- Political and economic constraints in the host countries, such as the political will to integrate refugees into the national labor market, as well as the absorptive capacity of the local labor market
- Refugee motivations and experience, such as preference for remaining “under the radar” by not registering with authorities or not wanting to integrate because they are waiting to move on to another location or to return home
- Insufficient and unpredictable funding with livelihood support often not being among the top priorities of donors and short-term horizon, and funding not being conducive to the most long-term planning needed for livelihood interventions
- Lack of experience among implementing partners, as these are often the same agencies that have their core competencies in providing basic needs services
- Inadequate incorporation of host-community participants in programming with livelihood interventions often relying on parallel structures instead of building on existing local structures and services

Some of these challenges have also been relevant for the livelihood response to the Syria crisis. From April to July 2016, a 90-day grace period was introduced in Jordan where Syrian refugees could sign up for a work permit in designated sectors. The initiative was implemented in exchange for a \$300-\$500 million World Bank loan to help spur economic growth in the Jordanian economy. Based on this plan, the increased supply of labor from Syrian refugees would have been met by increasing investment in jobs in Jordan. However, the plan has not been as successful as investors hoped for. Three arguments have been put forward to explain the lack of progress. Firstly, while generous pledges for up to \$2 billion in grants and \$1.9 billion concessionary loans were made on a conference held in London in February 2016 to address the challenges for refugees and host communities, donors have been slow to follow through on their pledges (for more on the London conference, see Figure 13). Thus, the expected amount of investments in the Jordanian economy has not been reached. Secondly, through the so-called *Kafala* system tied to the work-permit scheme, the scheme effectively links Syrians who obtain a work permit to their sponsoring employer. This means that many refugees have chosen to remain illegal workers. Thirdly, many refugees also fear they will lose financial support from the UN if they go from informal to formal employment. For these reasons the work permit initiative has failed to live up to the high expectations and many refugees are still unemployed or working without a permit and adequate protection.<sup>15</sup>

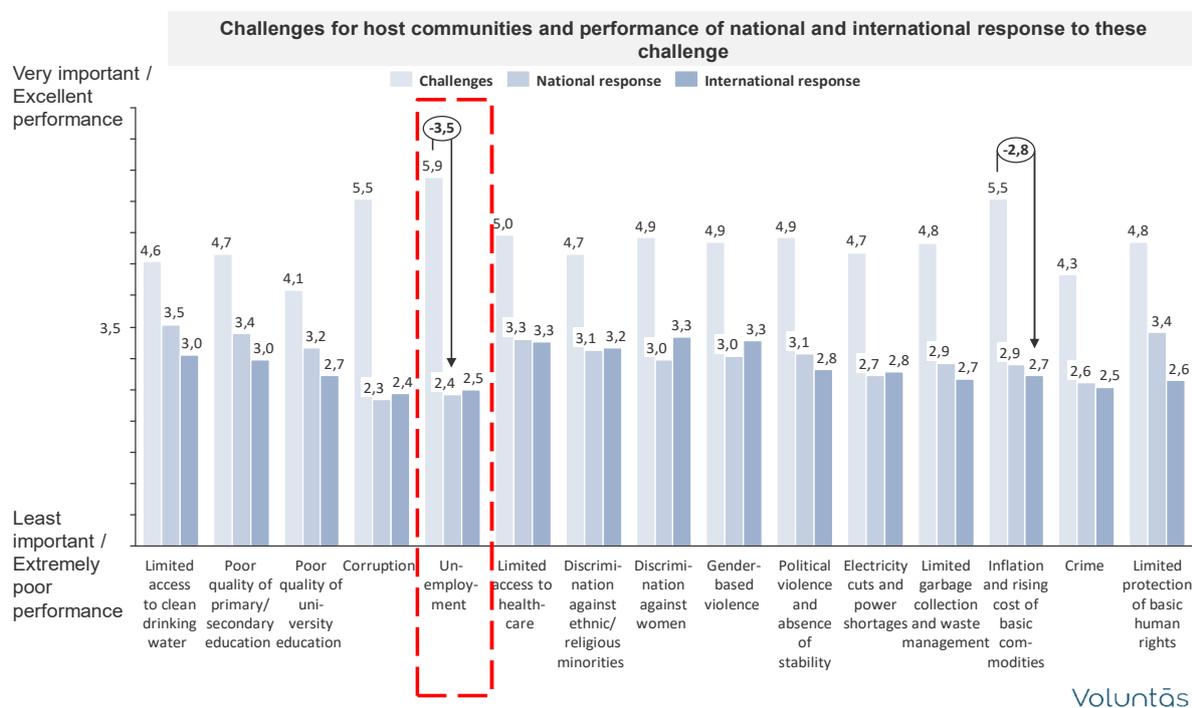
### Host community response gaps

As for refugees, the issue of employment is also where the main response gap is in relation to the challenges faced by host communities. The issue of livelihoods and access to employment falls both within the humanitarian and development domain, as it requires both different temporal perspectives and tools to address. This indicates that both humanitarian and development strategies are needed to overcome the challenges. For host communities, inflation and rising costs of essential commodities are reported to have the second highest gap between importance and performance.

---

<sup>15</sup> Hannah Patchett (July, 2016), *Why Jordan’s plan to integrate Syrian refugees into workforce has faltered*, Al-Monitor, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/07/jordan-free-work-permits-syrian-refugees.html>

**Figure 8: Unemployment perceived as main challenge for host communities and highest performance gap**



© 2016 Voluntas Advisory. All rights reserved. Strictly Confidential.

Voluntās

### Challenges and response gaps for IDPs and returnees

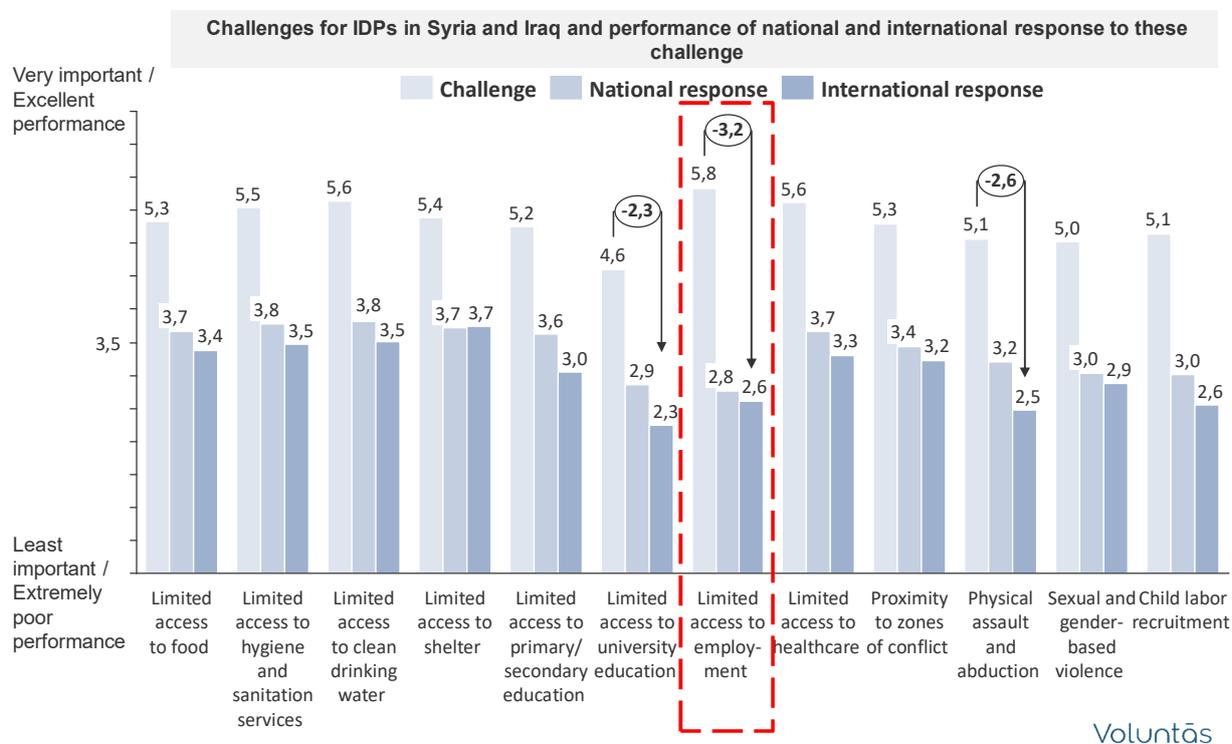
As of October 2016, 6.1 million people were internally displaced in Syria because of violent conflicts in the country.<sup>16</sup> A similar situation exists in Iraq, where OCHA estimates that 3.3 million people are internally displaced and in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>17</sup> Newly displaced people are said to be the largest vulnerable population in the country as of now. Internal displacement also affects host communities in Iraq which struggle to cope with the increasing influx of IDPs.

When asked about the biggest challenges facing IDPs in Syria and Iraq and how well the performance of the response is rated, limited access to employment appears to be the most significant gap, in line with the findings for refugees and host communities in neighboring countries. On a scale measuring importance from 1 (least important) to 7 (most important), access to employment was rated 5.8. In contrast, the performance of national and international actors towards these challenges, rated on a similar scale of 1 (extremely poor) to 7 (excellent), was only rated as 2.8 and 2.6 respectively. This indicates that response strategies are not adequately tailored to the needs of IDPs in the area. Among the other faced challenges, the perceived gap between importance and performance is also deemed to be large regarding physical assault and access to education. Overall, it should be noted that none of the important challenges are perceived as being matched by adequate response, including child labor recruitment, gender-based violence and limited access to primary and secondary education.

<sup>16</sup> UNOCHA, Syrian Arab Republic, 2016 <http://www.unocha.org/syria>

<sup>17</sup> UNOCHA, Iraq, <http://www.unocha.org/iraq>

**Figure 9: Limited Access to Employment for IDPs in Syria and Iraq Perceived as having the highest performance gap**



Following the eruption of conflict in Syria, a large number of refugees that fled Iraq and sought shelter in Syria have started to return to Iraq to escape the new crisis. A report from IOM found that around 542,528 individuals have returned to Iraq since the commencement of the Syrian civil war. A vast majority of these individuals stated that the reason for return had been the deteriorating security, though for some locations, such as Salah-al-Din and Ninewa, returnees also said that the place of return was safe to go back to. Some also stated that they were encouraged by community and/or religious leaders to return. Also, 95% stated that they had the intention to remain in the country, which raises issues with the presence and conditions of meaningful livelihoods and services to be provided for them.<sup>18</sup>

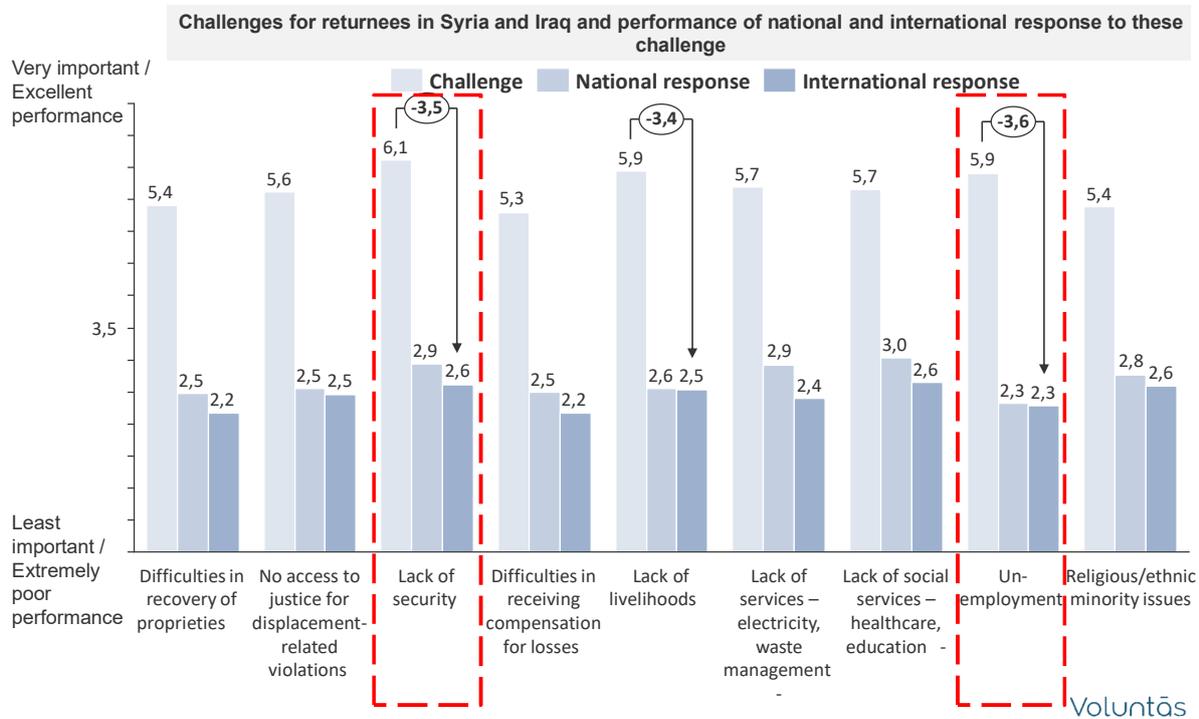
A similar scenario exists for Syrians returning to Syria from neighboring countries. Over the past months thousands of Syrian refugees have returned home, especially from Jordan, due to the poor living conditions in the neighboring country. UNHCR has expressed concern over these returns, as refugees are returning to areas that are still unsafe, where food security is very weak and access to education and healthcare is unavailable.<sup>19</sup> Lack of security and livelihoods as well as unemployment have the highest perceived gap between importance and performance for returnees in Syria and Iraq. This finding is somewhat aligned with the results from the performance gap among IDPs. Unemployment seems to constitute a core challenge for both groups, indicating that more long-term development

<sup>18</sup> IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2016, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IOM%20DTM%20Returnee%20Assessment%20-%20March-May%202016%20-%20Dashboard.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> UNHCR, *UNHCR Fears for Returning Syrian Refugees* [http://www.unhcr-northerneurope.org/news-detail/?tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Bnews%5D=448&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&cHash=123235103405e7987308d60c680b3e3e](http://www.unhcr-northerneurope.org/news-detail/?tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=448&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&cHash=123235103405e7987308d60c680b3e3e)

solutions ought to be implemented together with humanitarian measures to address the most relevant needs of those directly affected by the crisis.

**Figure 10: Unemployment and security for returnees in Syria and Iraq have the highest performance gap**



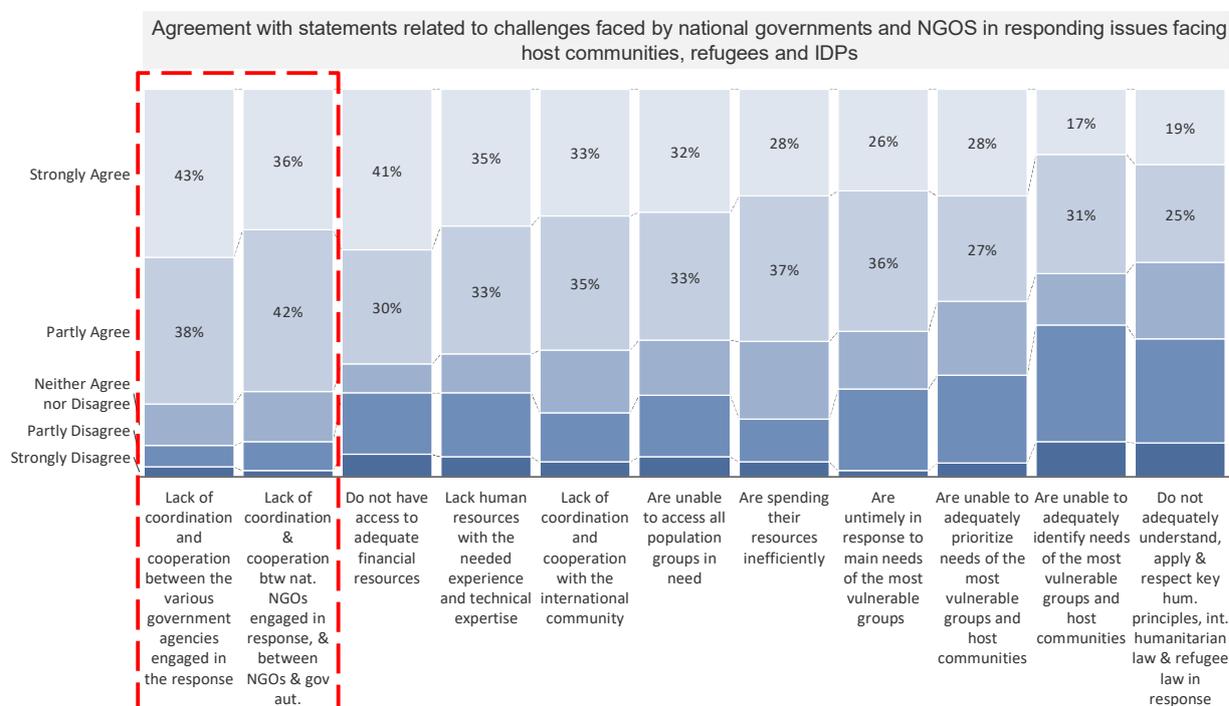
## 4.4 Challenges to effective response

A number of reasons can help to explain why the performance of the national and international response has not been adequate in addressing the challenges of refugees and host communities.

### Challenges to national response

Several challenges faced by national responders were identified by the practitioners. Lack of coordination and cooperation amongst national government agencies and NGOs were highlighted as the main challenges. Only 44% of those surveyed reported that the respect of fundamental humanitarian principles, international humanitarian law, and refugee law constitute the biggest challenge to the response strategies of national actors and therefore perceived as the least challenging issue.

**Figure 11: Lack of cooperation and coordination between national actors is main challenge to national response**



© 2016 Voluntas Advisory. All rights reserved. Strictly Confidential.

Voluntas

### Challenges to international response

A similar picture emerges when comparing the above results with the main challenges respondents identified for the international response, with lack of coordination and cooperation again deemed to be the greatest challenges. Overall, 73% of those surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that coordination between UN agencies is a challenge, while 69% claimed that issues emerged in the coordination of international actors and national governments, and 67% stated that there is a lack of cooperation between international actors and other NGOs. Anecdotal evidence from the region indicates that the challenge is not related to the number of coordination forums, which are plentiful, but rather to the actual quality of the coordination, follow-up, and inclusion of the relevant actors and persons in coordination forums. One issue may be lacking inclusion of local actors in coordination, which has been found to be a general problem in the humanitarian system<sup>20</sup>, especially taking into consideration that

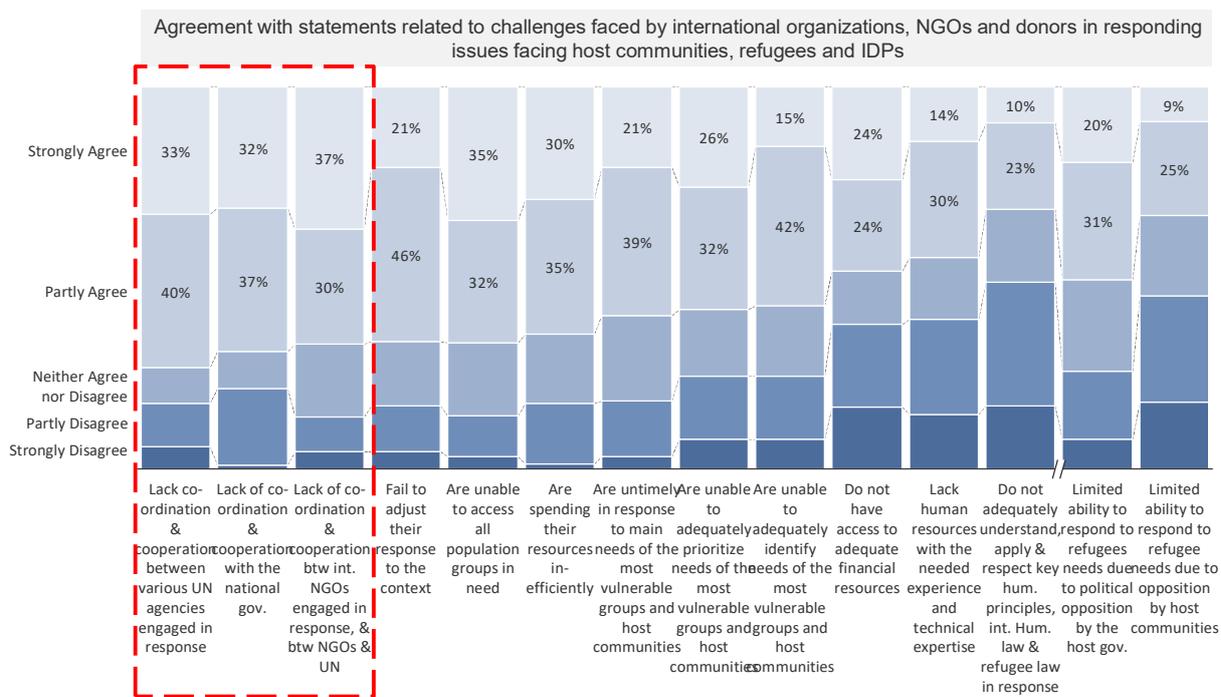
<sup>20</sup> ALNAP, 2015, *The State of the Humanitarian System*, <http://www.alnap.org/resource/21036>

national NGOs are perceived to have the more meaningful strategies and performance in responding to challenges faced by host communities. A possible explanation of the lack of inclusion is the fact that aid agencies sometimes bypass local authorities in order to avoid local bureaucracy. Inclusion is further hampered by the limited ability of humanitarian actors to build and maintain long-term relationships with local actors due to funding constraints and limited program timeframes.<sup>21</sup>

Interestingly, the fourth most significant challenge for the international response has been the failure to adjust the response to the context. A 2016 evaluation of OCHA’s response to the Syria crisis highlighted some of these failures, where a lack of contextual understanding left the UN open to manipulation. It further concluded that:

*“A more detailed understanding of the needs, the politics, the conduct of the war, the social and economic systems and the impact of the conflict might have produced a better strategy earlier. At times, the system appeared in denial, producing an early recovery strategy as tens of thousands of people were pouring across borders seeking sanctuary.”<sup>22</sup>*

**Figure 12: Lack of cooperation and coordination between actors is main challenge to international response**



© 2016 Voluntas Advisory. All rights reserved. Strictly Confidential.

Voluntās

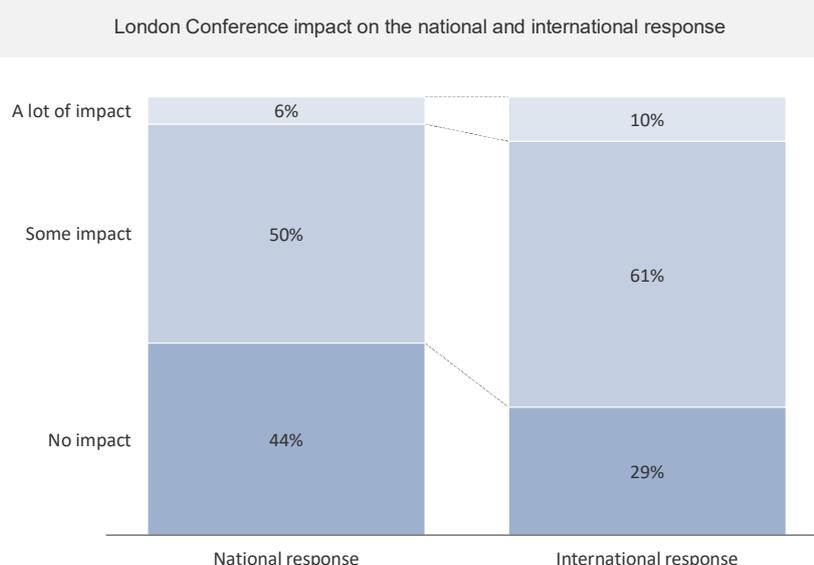
<sup>21</sup> Marwa Boustani, Estella Carpi, Hayat Gebara and Yara Mourad, 2016, *Responding to the Syrian crisis in Lebanon: Collaboration between aid agencies and local governance structures*, IIED Working Paper. IIED, London, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/10799IIED.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Lewis Sida, Lorenzo Trombetta and Veronica Panero, 2016, *Evaluation of OCHA response to the Syria crisis*, OCHA, [https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OCHA%20Syria%20Evaluation%20Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OCHA%20Syria%20Evaluation%20Report_FINAL.pdf)

## Impact of London Conference on response

The challenges to the response have not gone unnoticed. As mentioned in relation to the identified gap in responding to livelihood needs, considerable pledges were made at a conference held in London in February 2016. The conference was co-hosted by UN, the UK, Germany, Kuwait and Norway, committing to collect financial support for the Syria crisis, and aimed to address both the immediate and the long-term needs of those affected. \$12 billion were raised in pledges - \$6 billion for 2016 and a further \$6.1 billion for 2017-20, to enable partners to plan ahead. So far 73% of the funding for 2016 has been committed, but disbursements have been slow.<sup>23</sup> The conference also set ambitious goals for education and economic opportunities to support refugees and the countries hosting them, which have not all been reached. Some progress has been made, such as the relaxation of the 'rules of origin' on imports to make it easier for products from Jordan to enter EU market. The survey indicated that the impact of the conference has been limited, with 94% of the surveyed asserting that the London conference had some to no impact on the national response. It seems that the effect has only been seen slightly more in the international response, where 90% of the surveyed say it has had some or to no impact.

**Figure 13: London Conference has only to a limited extent had an impact on the national response to the crisis**



© 2016 Voluntas Advisory. All rights reserved. Strictly Confidential.

Voluntās

## Impact of World Humanitarian Summit on response

In a similar effort to, among other, improve the overall response to displacement, a World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) took place in 2016. The Summit was held in Istanbul on 23-24 May and

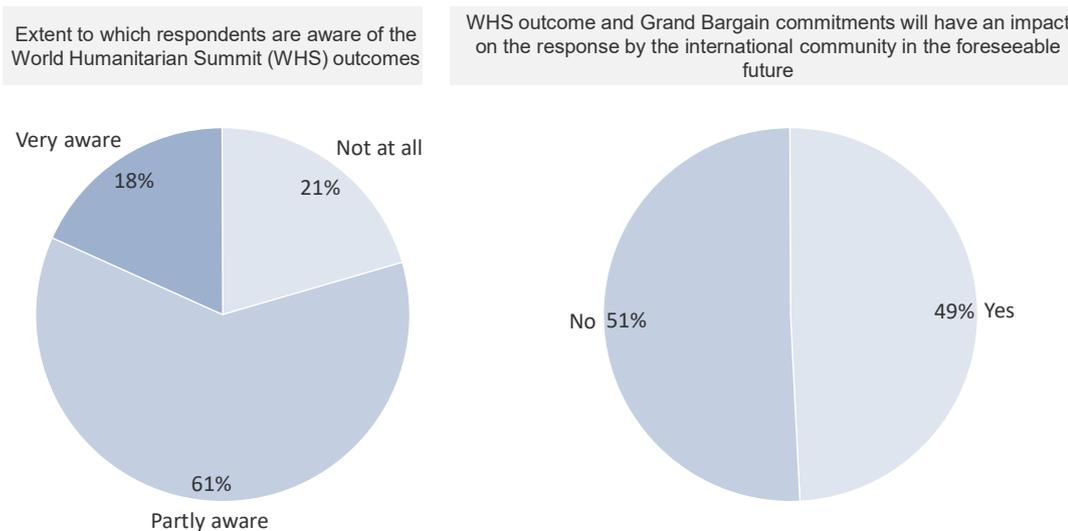
<sup>23</sup> Concern Worldwide, 2016, *Still Paying the Price? Progress on addressing the Syria crisis since the London Conference*, <http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/concern-still-paying-the-price-syria-report.pdf> and Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam International and Save the Children, 2016, *From Words to Action*, <http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/oxfam-from-words-to-action.pdf>

convened 9,000 participants from around the world to support a new shared Agenda for Humanity and take action to prevent and reduce human suffering. The Summit generated more than 3,000 commitments to act and launched more than a dozen new partnerships and initiatives to turn the Agenda into meaningful change for the world's most vulnerable groups. Initiatives range from financing education in emergencies, to data platforms and charters on inclusion. They seek to ensure that the needs of persons with disabilities, children and youth, migrants, the elderly, and other marginalized groups will be fully taken into account in preparing response strategies and work on new, innovative ways to finance humanitarian action.

A part of the WHS was The Grand Bargain, a package of reforms to humanitarian funding including 51 commitments to make emergency aid finance more efficient and effective. The agreement was signed by 30 representatives of donors and aid agencies.

While it is still early days for the WHS outcomes and the Grand Bargain, it is concerning for the possible future impact that only 18% of the key target audience for the summit believe they are very aware of the summit outcomes, while more than one in five of the practitioners is not at all aware of the WHS results. Furthermore, 51% of the practitioners do not believe that the Grand Bargain Commitments will have an impact in the foreseeable future.

**Figure 14: Some confidence in WHS outcomes and Grand Bargain Commitments will have an impact on response**



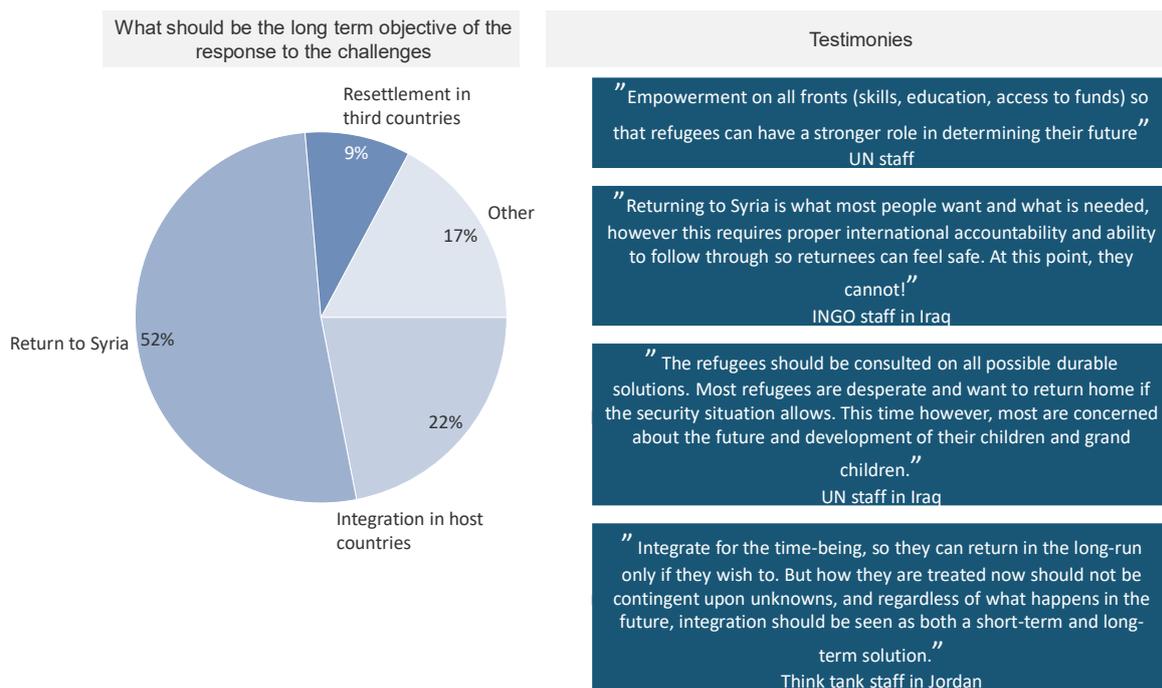
## 4.5 The way forward and possible solutions

As the Syrian crisis now approaches the end of its sixth year, the international community is facing the challenge of what should be the primary long-term solution for displaced populations and refugees, including a return to Syria and resettlement in third countries. In the short- to medium-term no one-size-fits-all solution is feasible; integrated and combined approaches tailored to the needs of the specific individuals are required.

In the longer-term outlook, 52% of practitioners agree that the goal of the response should be the refugees' return to Syria. However, almost one in four (22%) stated that integration into the host country should instead be the long-term solution. A UN staff underlined that empowerment of refugees is also necessary, so that *"refugees are more able to determine their future."* One worker at a think tank in Jordan expressed that refugees must be integrated in the short run to enable them to return to their home countries in the long run.

When confronting such statements with the results presented above, it seems ever urgent to plan strategies that combine humanitarian and development objectives in order to ensure economic development in host countries and tackle most critical challenges and needs.

**Figure 15: Return to Syria should be the long-term objective**



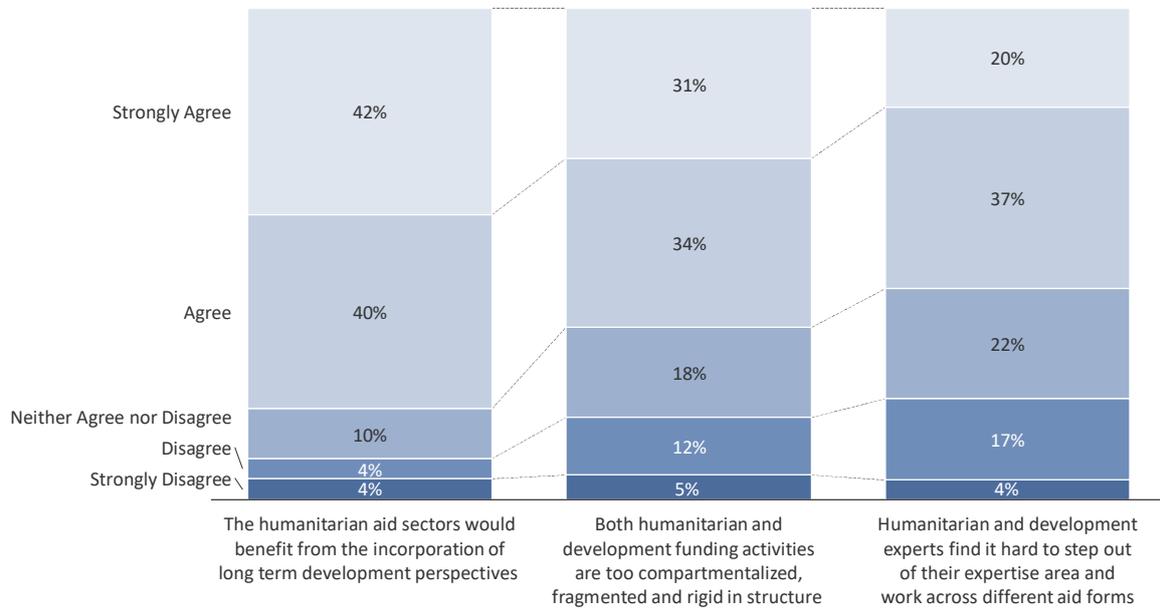
© 2016 Voluntas Advisory. All rights reserved. Strictly Confidential.

Voluntās

One major obstacle towards the provision of sustainable and targeted solutions to the crisis is precisely the lack of long-term development perspectives and planning. Accordingly, eight out of 10 surveyed reported that they agree or strongly agree that the humanitarian aid sector would benefit from the incorporation of more long-term development perspectives. In this sense, 83% of the respondents also noted that funding activities are too fragmented and rigid in structure, impeding the exploitation of synergies between humanitarian and development action.

**Figure 16: 8 out of 10 believe the humanitarian aid sector would benefit from more long-term development plans**

Agreement on statements related to the relationship between the humanitarian aid and development response to the crisis in the Middle East



© 2016 Voluntas Advisory. All rights reserved. Strictly Confidential.

Voluntās

Respondents were further asked to provide inputs regarding the feasibility and relevance of some of the innovative ways to solve the current crisis and response challenges. In the following graph (Figure 17), the feasibility of a range of solutions has been assessed on the y-axis, while the relevance of these solutions is estimated on the x-axis. Together this compiles a matrix where the upper right corner represents “low hanging fruits” defined as initiatives having high importance and high feasibility. As it can be noted, one of the low hanging fruits that can significantly impact the quality of the response at a low cost is the inclusion of people receiving aid in the decision making. This was also highlighted in the 2015 *State of the Humanitarian System* report by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), which showed that only one out of three aid recipients had been consulted by aid agencies on their needs before commencement of the assistance programming.<sup>24</sup> Another strategy would be to work towards more collaborative long-term planning of response strategies. Finally, harmonizing and simplifying reporting requirements also represents a significant and relatively easy step forward.

Other solutions were deemed as relevant but not feasible, such as reforming UN agencies’ mandates to enable a better and more integrated response. This was also found when ALNAP held a forum with 300 participants in June 2015 and asked them about recommendations for the UN Secretary General. The UN reform debate primarily covers three topics:<sup>25</sup>

- Reform to create a more efficient, single command and control system (e.g. through mergers within the humanitarian aid architecture).
- Reforming mandates to avoid overlaps and gaps in coordination and clearly marking boundaries of the mandates.

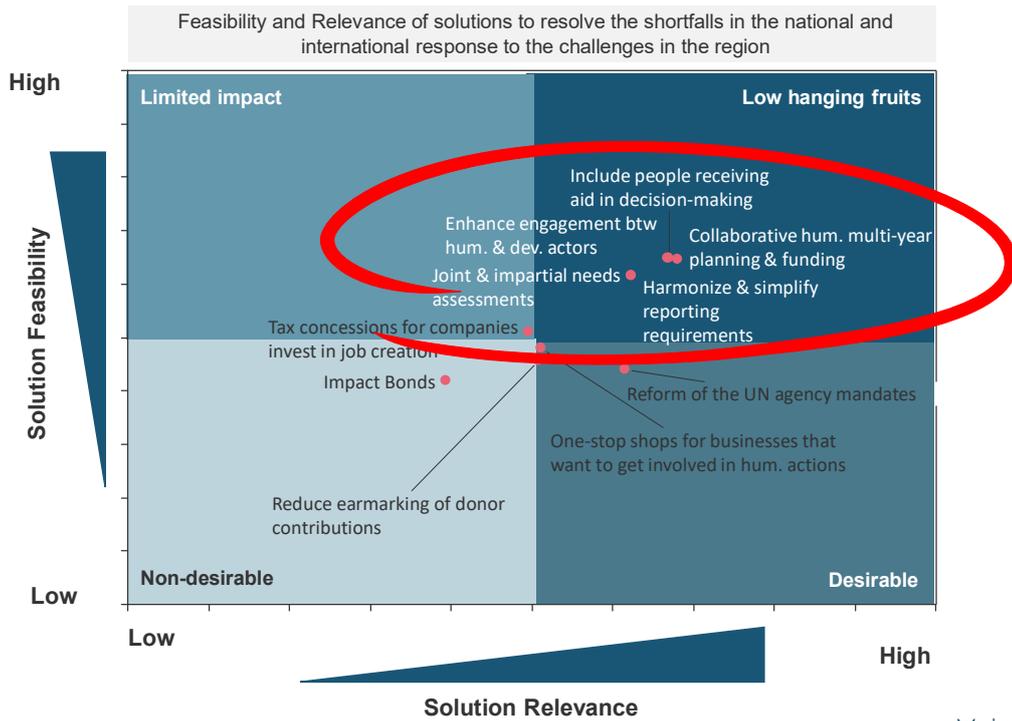
<sup>24</sup> ALNAP, 2015, *The State of the Humanitarian System*, <http://www.alnap.org/resource/21036>

<sup>25</sup> ALNAP, 2015, *A bucketful of UN reform*, <http://www.alnap.org/blog/140>

- Reforming power balance in global governance structures through increased involvement of non-UN participants and participants from the global South.

Other desirable solutions include reducing earmarking of donor contributions and increase core funding, as well as focusing on developing one-stop-shops for private sector actors that wish to get engaged and support the response.

**Figure 17: A number of solutions are deemed to be both feasible and relevant to address the response shortfalls**



© 2016 Voluntas Advisory. All rights reserved. Strictly Confidential.

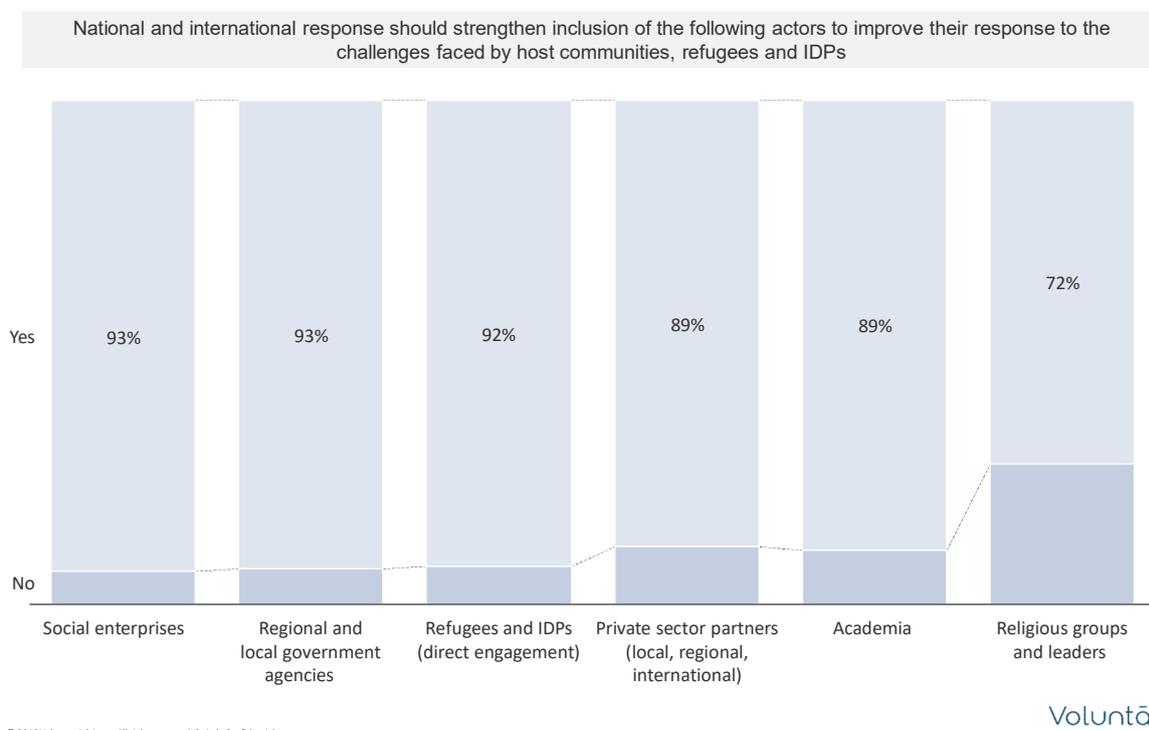
Voluntās

## 4.6 Private sector engagement

As indicated by the desired solution of facilitating private sector involvement, there seems to be an untapped potential for including non-traditional actors in response strategies. Approximately nine out of 10 believe that actors such as social enterprises, academia, and private sector partners should be included in response to the challenges faced by host communities, refugees, and IDPs. Increasing inclusion of private sector in the response was also among one of the conclusions in a recent evaluation of the Danish Humanitarian Strategy 2010-2015 which found that

*“...because Jordan and Lebanon are middle-income countries where government institutions play an important normative role while the private sector is involved in service delivery, particularly in Lebanon.”<sup>26</sup>*

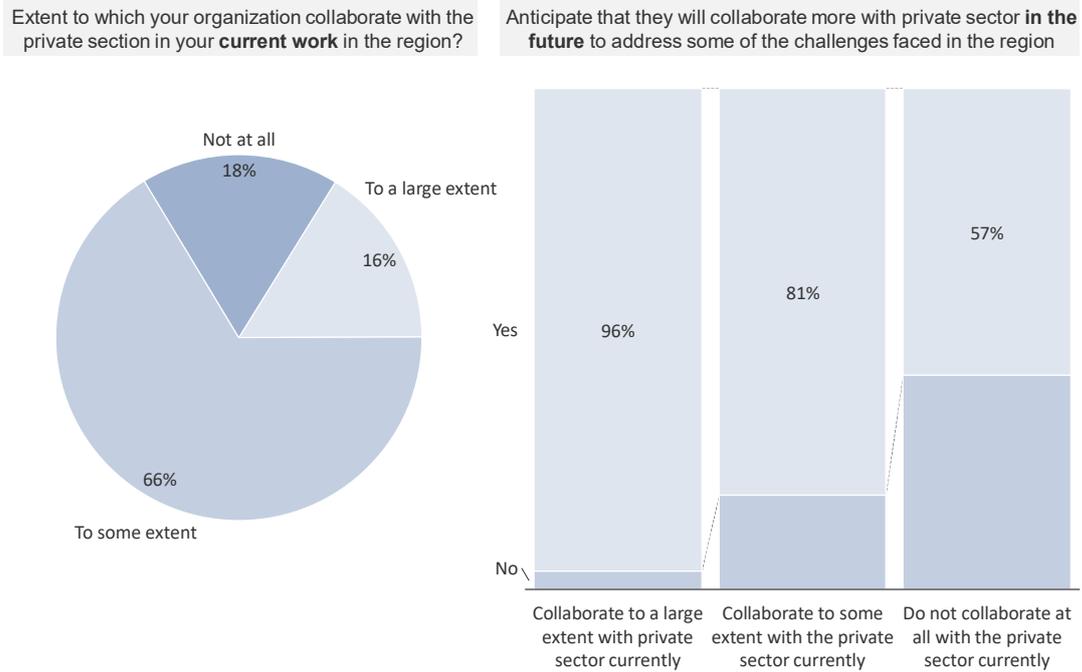
**Figure 18: Strong support for strengthening inclusion of non-traditional actors in response**



The private sector is already engaged in various ways in the response, and thus eight out of 10 of the practitioners say that they collaborate at least to some extent with the private sector in their work. Interestingly, practitioners already working with the private sector to a larger extent anticipate that their collaboration will increase in the future, compared to practitioners not currently collaborating with private sector actors.

<sup>26</sup> Mowjee, T., Fleming, D. and Toft, E., 2015, *Evaluation of the Strategy for Danish Humanitarian Action 2010-2015*, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [http://um.dk/en/danida-en/results/eval/eval\\_reports/evaluations/publicationdisplaypage/?publicationID=F169D9B5-42E4-457D-9234-1721F71A5EFC](http://um.dk/en/danida-en/results/eval/eval_reports/evaluations/publicationdisplaypage/?publicationID=F169D9B5-42E4-457D-9234-1721F71A5EFC)

**Figure 19: Actors already working with private sector looking to expand their collaboration**



© 2016 Voluntas Advisory. All rights reserved. Strictly Confidential.

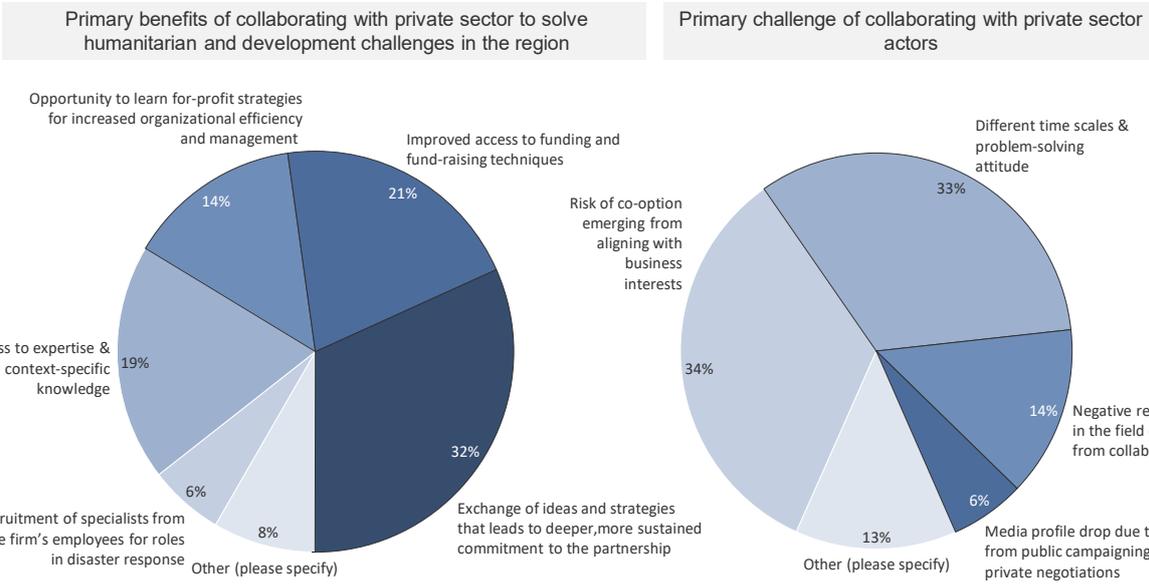
Voluntās

A number of benefits can be identified from working with the private sector. One third say that exchange of ideas and strategies is the biggest advantage of cooperation with private sector actors in humanitarian work. Coming in second is increased access to funding, while access to expertise come third listed by one in five as a benefit of the engagement. Furthermore, as an INGO staff in Jordan expresses it:

*” The biggest benefit of working with the private sector is that with its for-profit focus, it brings in an element of continuity and sustainability that is foreign to the way the humanitarian sector thinks. This is a vast area of learning for us. We pay lip service to the terms ‘sustainability’ and ‘exit strategy.’ It almost feels like we want a crisis to go on forever to protect our jobs.”*

However, some challenges also occur when humanitarian actors work together with private sector participants to address the Syria crisis. The primary challenge is the risk of being co-opted by businesses. Equally challenging are the different time horizons and different problem-solving attitudes between private and humanitarian actors. In some instances, there are mutual interests between humanitarian and private actors and sometimes they counter each other, with one participant noting that *“for-profit ideas can be counter to humanitarian ideals.”* In line with this argument, an INGO staff in Lebanon expresses similar concerns about different priorities, noting that *“private sector wants to make money, while NGOs/UN want to help people. These objectives do not always align”*.

**Figure 20: Exchange of ideas and strategies is perceived as key benefit from collaborating with private sector**



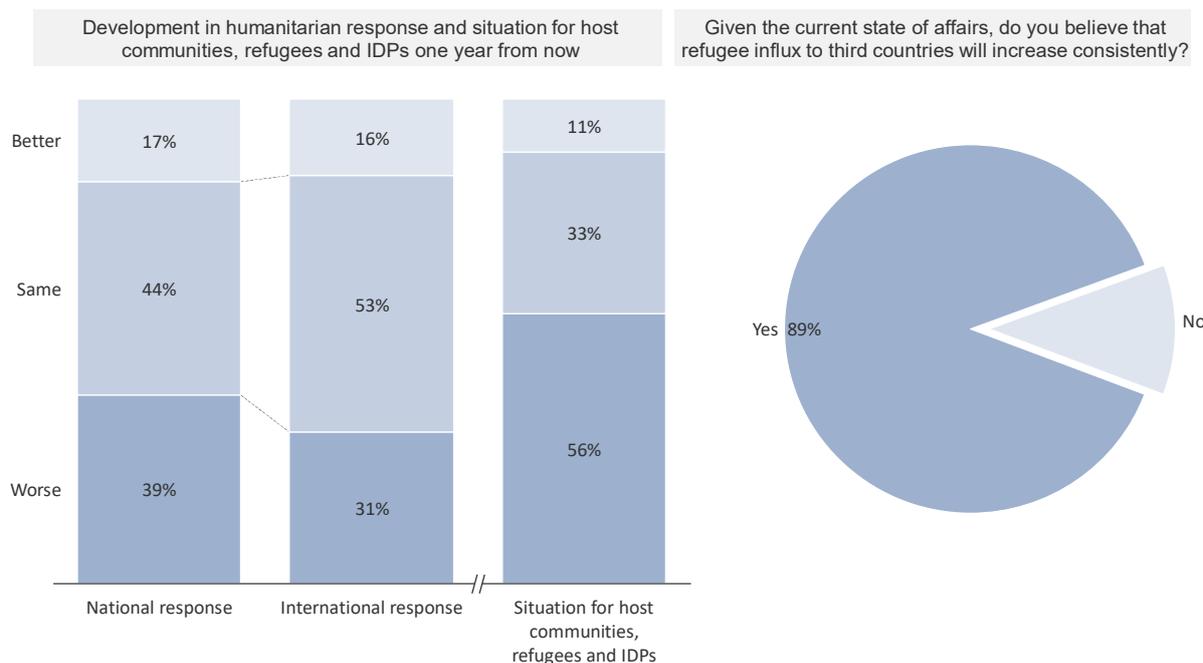
© 2016 Voluntas Advisory. All rights reserved. Strictly Confidential.

## 4.7 Outlook

When asked about the practitioners' outlook on the future a somewhat negative picture emerges. Eight out of 10 do not believe there will be any improvements in humanitarian response. Also, 89% believe that refugee flow to third countries will increase consistently. Youth are being robbed of their right to a future with limited access to education and employment. As one staff from an INGO explained, *“the key challenge is to give a better alternative to the youth than blowing themselves up after sending a selfie to their friends.”* The current alternative for many youths living in this hopeless situation without improvement in sight is to take the perilous journey towards Europe.

This overall pessimistic outlook stresses the immediate demand of solving some of the issues the humanitarian and development sectors are facing in the MENA region. Future response should be based on strategies that are more meaningful for both refugees as well as host communities and have long-term development goals. In implementing the response more collaboration and coordination is needed between various actors in the sectors and beneficiaries should be included in decision-making. These efforts should be supported by developing more effective tools and procedures, such as simplifying and harmonizing reporting and multi-year planning. Finally, the humanitarian and development sectors should look outside of traditional aid communities and broaden engagement with other actors, including private sector.

**Figure 21: 8 out of 10 believe the humanitarian response will not improve and 89 % believe refugee influx will increase**



© 2016 Voluntas Advisory. All rights reserved. Strictly Confidential.

Voluntās

## 5 Bibliography

Al-Monitor, (2016), *Why Jordan's plan to integrate Syrian refugees into workforce has faltered*, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/07/jordan-free-work-permits-syrian-refugees.html>, [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

ALNAP, (2015), *The State of the Humanitarian System*, <http://www.alnap.org/resource/21036>, [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

ALNAP, (2015), *A bucketful of UN reform*, <http://www.alnap.org/blog/140>, [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, (2014), *Australia's Humanitarian Response to the Syria Crisis*, <https://www.oecd.org/derec/australia/Australias-humanitarian-response-to-the-syria-crisis-eval-report.pdf>, [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

Betts J. et al, (2016), *'Striking the Balance' Evaluation of the Planning, Organization and Management of Norwegian Assistance related to the Syria Regional Crisis - Volume I: Evaluation Report*, <http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/syria-evaluation-report-norad.pdf>, [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

Boustani M., Carpi E., Gebara H. and Mourad Y., (2016), *Responding to the Syrian crisis in Lebanon: Collaboration between aid agencies and local governance structures*, IIED Working Paper. IIED, London, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/10799IIED.pdf>, [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

Concern Worldwide, (2016), *Still Paying the Price? Progress on addressing the Syria crisis since the London Conference*, <http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/concern-still-paying-the-price-syria-report.pdf>, [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam International and Save the Children, 2016, *From Words to Action*, <http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/oxfam-from-words-to-action.pdf>, [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children, IRC, CARE, World Vision and Oxfam International, 2015, *Right to a Future*, Oxfam GB, <https://www.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/Report%20final-%20Syria.pdf>, [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

Darcy J., (2016), *Syria Coordinated Accountability and Lesson Learning (CALL): Evaluation Synthesis and Gap Analysis*, [http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/darcy-\(2016\)-syria-call-eval-synthesis---gap-analysis-\(002\).pdf](http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/darcy-(2016)-syria-call-eval-synthesis---gap-analysis-(002).pdf), [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

Development Initiatives, (2016), *Global Humanitarian Assistance Report*, <http://devinit.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Global-Humanitarian-Assistance-Report-2016.pdf>, [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

Global Finance Strategies, (2015), *Going Local: The Promise and Challenge of Aid Localization*, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/550a2277e4b00f7ac2f656e1/t/55419fd0e4b029f3456de473/1430364112704/GFS+Going+Local+Report.pdf>, [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2016, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/IOM%20DTM%20Returnee%20Assessment%20-%20March-May%202016%20-%20Dashboard.pdf>, [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

Jacobsen, K. and Fratzke, S., (2016), *Building Livelihood Opportunities for Refugee Populations: Lessons from Past Practice*, Migration Policy Institute, <http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/building-livelihood-opportunities-for-refugee-populations.pdf>, [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

Mowjee, T., Fleming, D. and Toft, E., (2015), *Evaluation of the Strategy for Danish Humanitarian Action 2010-2015*, Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [http://um.dk/en/danida-en/results/eval/eval\\_reports/evaluations/publicationdisplaypage/?publicationID=F169D9B5-42E4-457D-9234-1721F71A5EFC](http://um.dk/en/danida-en/results/eval/eval_reports/evaluations/publicationdisplaypage/?publicationID=F169D9B5-42E4-457D-9234-1721F71A5EFC), [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

Save the Children, (2015) Joint Briefing Paper, *Right to a Future*, <https://www.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/Report%20final-%20Syria.pdf>, [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

Sida L., Trombetta L. and Panero V., (2016), *Evaluation of OCHA response to the Syria crisis*, OCHA, [https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OCHA%20Syria%20Evaluation%20Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OCHA%20Syria%20Evaluation%20Report_FINAL.pdf), [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016]

UNHCR, (2016) *UNHCR Fears for Returning Syrian Refugees* [http://www.unhcr-northerneurope.org/news-detail/?tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Bnews%5D=448&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx\\_news\\_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&cHash=123235103405e7987308d60c680b3e3e](http://www.unhcr-northerneurope.org/news-detail/?tx_news_pi1%5Bnews%5D=448&tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&cHash=123235103405e7987308d60c680b3e3e), [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

UNHCR, (2016) Syria Regional Response, Interagency Information Sharing Portal: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224>, [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016]

UNOCHA, (2016), Syrian Arab Republic, <http://www.unocha.org/syria>, [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016];

UNOCHA, (2016), Iraq, <http://www.unocha.org/iraq> [accessed on November 25<sup>th</sup> 2016]

## 6 Appendix

### About Voluntas Advisory ([www.voluntasadvisory.com](http://www.voluntasadvisory.com))

The purpose of Voluntas Advisory is to improve living standards and life quality through business as a force for good and public participants as catalysts for distribution of opportunities and creation of wealth. By working in the intersection between state and business, the interplay between society and market, and the synergy between citizen and consumer, we ...

- ... deliver intelligence based, informed and innovative policy making
- ... create purposeful business and branding strategies
- ... produce enlightening market research and impactful analysis

Voluntas Advisory has worked for a number of international organizations, NGOs, donors and private companies in the Middle East and North Africa since 2011 and is currently engaged in projects in Jordan, Lebanon, and Libya.

### About the Middle East Crisis Survey

The project was designed by Voluntas Advisory based on our experience working in the region. A steering committee was established to provide inputs to the analytical framework and process. This committee consisted of:

- Anita Bay Bundegaard, Director and UN Representative of Save the Children, Geneva
- Dr. Melissa Phillips, Non-Resident Fellow at NYU Center for International Cooperation
- Dr. Nasser Yassin, American University of Beirut
- Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen, Research Director, Raoul Wallenberg Institute
- Hart Ford, Country Director Lebanon, ACTED
- Andres Gonzalez Rodriguez, Country Director Iraq, OXFAM

The survey was distributed in English and Arabic via email to a database developed by Voluntas Advisory of 4,000 practitioners working in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Syria or regionally on responding to the crisis in the Middle East. The database included staff from international organizations, international and national NGOs, government authorities, donors, the private sector and academia. The response rate for the survey was 10%, comparable to response rates in regular public opinion surveys

The data was collected in the period from July 22 to August 23, 2016.