

DO NO HARM

INTERNAL STUDY AND ACTION PLAN



**SYRIA
RESILIENCE
CONSORTIUM**



**DRS DANISH
REFUGEE
COUNCIL**



The Syria Resilience Consortium (SRC) was formed in 2016 with the mission of equipping conflict-affected Syrians with the tools and skills to rebuild their lives. We are the only consortium of International NGOs (INGOs) on the ground in both government and non-government controlled areas, reaching conflict-affected people wherever they are.

The six INGOs bring together diverse experience in resilience programming, including livelihoods, economic empowerment, gender and inclusion. Our longer-term approach means that we are there until and after reconstruction begins.

Over a five-year period, the consortium aims to reach a million conflict-affected people within Syria. Our collective investment in thought leadership, continual learning and adaptive programming allows us to make changes that are essential in a fluid context.

ABOUT THE STUDY

At the SRC, we take the principle of 'do no harm' seriously.

While humanitarian aid saves millions of conflict-affected individuals each year, and has the potential to shift gender norms and livelihood opportunities, we are also aware that our programmes can have unintended harmful effects.

To ensure that we are making every effort to prevent and overcome these unintended harmful effects, we conducted a study in 2017. The study aimed to identify any pitfalls and provide recommendations for our consortium members to help reduce the risk of such harm.

WHAT IS 'DO NO HARM'?

'Do no harm' refers to the general principle of avoiding harm through project interventions. It is a term prominently used in the humanitarian sector, originating from medical ethics. It is used as a principle or commitment to identify, mitigate and prevent any sort of negative impact humanitarian intervention may have.

METHODOLOGY

84 Interviews were conducted with SRC staff, partners, external third parties, local councils and beneficiaries.

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KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Syrian war has entered its eighth year, with widespread humanitarian implications for over 13 million people. About 69 per cent of the population are now estimated to be living in extreme poverty. Ongoing conflict, large-scale population movement and the widespread destruction of services, infrastructure and livelihoods creates a complex environment for aid agencies operating in the region.

With such a variety of factors to weigh and consider, the SRC aims to ensure that the benefits of our intervention always outweigh the risks. Our study has identified a series of unintended harmful effects that could potentially be caused by our programmes in Syria. The key findings that follow have corresponding agreed actions from the SRC to help mitigate these harmful effects.

TARGETING BENEFICIARIES

In developing the list of men and women most eligible for receiving aid, the SRC relies partly on local councils, particularly those in the north, centre-south and north-east of Syria. However, there are concerns over the potential bias of these local councils in relation to friends, relatives and tribal allegiances, which can cause excluded tribes and vulnerable groups to miss out on support.

To ensure we do not inadvertently cause harm to excluded and vulnerable groups, the SRC has committed to the following actions:

- Conduct research to determine whether groups are being marginalised in programme areas.



- Refine complaint mechanisms to better capture signs of exclusion.
- Enhance communication through follow-up sessions with those not selected for the intervention, and aim to reduce the drop-out rate of beneficiaries from aid programmes.
- Push for greater transparency and implementation of agreed criteria.

INVOLVING VULNERABLE GROUPS IN THE LABOUR MARKET

The SRC's programmes on the ground are committed to empowering women and people living with disabilities. In practice, this means involving them in the labour market.

However, it is unclear whether this act of empowerment could result in sexual and gender-based violence or reinforce norms for women and people living with disabilities. Despite efforts to collect data on the ground, we know there are methodological flaws:

1. It generally involves interviewing the head of the household – often a man who is not living with any disabilities.
2. Contextual information about the role of women prior to the war – considering their social class, geographical spread, age or education level – is not comprehensive.

As such, we cannot fully understand whether women's involvement in the labour market can lead to potential exposure to sexual and gender-based violence.

Based on these findings, the SRC has committed to the following actions:

- Collect data on any negative impact for women participants and those living with disabilities.
- Support a gender, age and disability-responsive approach by developing and implementing minimum standards for supporting non-traditional engagement in the labour market for women and people living with disabilities.

PROTECTING VULNERABLE GROUPS

The SRC actively integrates the protection of vulnerable groups in its activities. This is done through a range of provisions, such as women's centres, child care, psychosocial support, legal support and allowing women to work from home. Wherever possible, we engage men in challenging accepted gender and disability norms.

While making headway on this, we recognise that gaps in protecting vulnerable groups continue to exist, and the SRC is committed to the following actions in order to improve this potential risk:

- Establish a set of minimum standards for programmes and raise additional funds to mainstream these throughout the consortium.

Targeting



Gender & Inclusion



Protection



Internal Competencies



Donor Requirements



IMPROVING INTERNAL SYSTEMS AND COMPETENCIES

The harm we generate could begin with us, our staff or our partners. While respondents in the field had some understanding of harm, they believed their programmes did not cause any. This could be a result of personal conflict, gender and inclusion blindness.

Based on this finding, the SRC has committed to the following actions:

- Dedicate more resources and support to conflict sensitivity and protection mainstreaming.
- Improve the awareness of staff and partners on the subject of gender and inclusion.

INFORMING DONOR CONDITIONALITY

In shifting from pure humanitarian aid to long-term livelihood programmes, donors may introduce additional conditionalities that could result in harm. Some examples of this include: partner vetting, pushing for engagement with local authority structures in areas outside of government control, and having no contact with proscribed groups.

The SRC has committed to the following actions to ensure donor conditionalities do not negatively impact our beneficiaries:

- Creating a set of operational principles in government-held territories.
- Conducting research to understand whether the SRC is creating any unwanted pull factors for returnees.
- Engaging with donors to explore the potential for common principles of operation in government-controlled areas.

OUR CALL TO ACTION

The SRC recognises that these findings and recommendations remain limited for the complexities in Syria, and welcome collaboration and partnerships with other development actors and donors.

We are committed to ensuring that we make every effort to mitigate any risk of harm presented by our programmes. Development actors are encouraged to find out more about 'do no harm' from us, and to take meaningful steps to address this in their own areas of intervention. We urge donors to invest in these harm-reduction mechanisms to help mitigate the risk of harmful effects as we seek to further improve our programmes.

Supported by



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