

PATHWAYS TO RESILIENCE: TRANSFORMING SYRIAN REFUGEE CAMPS INTO SELF-SUSTAINING SETTLEMENTS

FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR RESILIENCE-BUILDING IN SYRIAN REFUGEE CAMPS AND THEIR
NEIGHBOURING HOST COMMUNITIES IN THE KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ

QUALITATIVE ASSESSMENT: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Authors: Lahib Higel, Aaso Mohammed, Naresh Singh
and Roger Guiu.
Middle East Research Institute.

Report submitted to UNDP - Iraq, June 2015.

Middle East Research Institute
1186 Dream City, Erbil
Kurdistan Region, Iraq

MERI is a registered NGO in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Its mission is to contribute to the processes of democratization and nation-building in the Middle East in general and Iraq and Kurdistan in particular, through evidence-based research and engagement in policy debates.

<http://www.meri-k.org>
info@meri-k.org

Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	6
1.1. Methodology.....	6
2. Vulnerability context.....	7
2.1. Conflict and crisis-related vulnerabilities.....	7
2.2. Non crisis-related vulnerabilities.....	8
2.3. Vulnerability of the host community.....	8
3. Livelihood structures.....	9
3.1. Main livelihood groups.....	9
3.1.1. Wage labour.....	9
3.1.2. Self-employment.....	10
3.1.3. Self-employment outside the camps.....	12
3.1.4. Employment in the camp-management and NGOs.....	12
3.1.5. Challenges of skills matching on the labour market.....	12
3.2. Capital Assets.....	14
3.2.1. Human Capital.....	14
3.2.2. Physical Capital.....	15
3.2.3. Natural Capital.....	16
3.2.4. Financial Capital.....	17
3.2.5. Social and Political Capital.....	17
3.3. Service Provision.....	20
3.3.1. Education.....	20
3.3.2. Health.....	21
3.3.3. Water.....	21
3.3.4. Electricity.....	22
3.3.5. Waste disposal.....	22
4. Coping strategies.....	22
5. Institutional structures and policies.....	23
5.1. Governance Institutions.....	23
5.2. Policy challenges.....	24
6. Conclusions.....	25

Executive Summary

The findings presented in this report are the result of a participatory qualitative assessment on resilience building in Syrian refugee camps and their host communities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). It was carried out in four refugee camps in the governorates of Duhok, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. The assessment is part of a greater resilience feasibility study, commissioned by the UNDP, that includes a desk review and a household survey carried out in the same camps and governorates. Taken together the findings of these assessments will inform policy recommendations in an integrated report for a Resilience Based Development Response in the KRI.

Three urgent and interlinked issues motivated the study. First is a realization that the protracted conflict in Syria may continue for the foreseeable future with continued spillover effects in Iraq. Second is the economic crisis caused by budget disputes between the regional and federal government, and aggravated by the displacement of millions of IDPs due internal conflicts in Iraq. Third, are the ongoing and further reductions in international humanitarian aid for Iraq and the Syrian refugee crisis. Against this backdrop a transition towards a resilience based approach, rather than a pure humanitarian response, that enables refugees as well as host community to become more self-reliant and sustainable is imperative.

The purpose of this qualitative assessment is to complement the household survey and to provide a deeper understanding of the following dimensions of the livelihoods dynamics in the camps:

- 1) The vulnerability context, including impact of conflict and economic crisis
- 2) Household and community assets
- 3) Livelihood activities, capabilities and outcomes
- 4) Coping and adaptive strategies of the people
- 5) The role of institutions and policies as facilitators and/or barriers to sustainable livelihoods

To meet the research objectives several participatory methods were used, including focus groups, key informant interviews and direct participant observation in the camps. The key issues and themes to be explored were discussed together with the UNDP and UN agencies inter-sector group prior to the fieldwork, which was undertaken in April and May 2015.

Key findings of the assessment

- *Economic situation.* The economic crisis that hit the KRI a year earlier was the main factor affecting the vulnerability context of the refugees and the host community. It severely limited the livelihood opportunities of both communities and all types of livelihood groups were affected. The crisis also lead to increased competition on the labour market.
- *Assets loss.* For the refugees the displacement itself and the refugee status added to their vulnerabilities. Many had seen their asset base significantly diminished as they left Syria. Not only land and property was left behind but also personal possessions and sometimes

documents crucial for them to pursue further studies or work within their profession. Furthermore, due to their status as non-citizens, refugees are not entitled to own land or fixed property, or register businesses in their own names outside the camps.

- *Obstacles in labour market.* It was found that wage labour, especially in the construction sector, constituted the main income generating activity among the refugees. However, due to the crisis a majority of the labourers were working fewer hours per week. It was also found that many faced issues with payment guarantees in this sector. Although it was found that the Syrian refugees in general were better skilled than the host community there were issues with skills matching on the labour market as well as recognition of certificates.
- *Obstacles in employment in the camp.* Many issues were reported regarding job opportunities inside the camps. Whether related to employment in the camp management and NGOs, or starting a business in the camp refugees explained that *wasta* was needed. There was a general perception that favouritism and informal networks played a big role in the camps.
- *Coping strategies.* Due to the crisis refugees applied different strategies to cope with the results, some with negative consequences and others more positive. For example, early marriages and child labour were typical negative coping strategies as well as reduction of food consumption and sales of crucial household assets. Examples of positive coping strategies were borrowing money from relatives and non-harmful reduction of food consumption.
- *Limits in financial assets.* Limited access to financial sources seriously affected refugees' livelihoods. As there is no banking system the only alternatives available are borrowing from each other or taking credit from shop owners. However, as the whole community is affected by the economic crisis and demand for credit increases there is also less availability.
- *Main issues in public services.* While public service provision was generally good in all camps some locations reported issues with waste collection and water provision. The main issue however, across all camps, was lack of access to secondary school.
- *Security perceptions.* Refugees in general felt safe within the camps and had no major issues with the host community. However, women felt insecure to a larger extent outside the camp and would not seek job opportunities outside the camp.

1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of a participatory qualitative assessment carried out in Syrian refugee camps and their neighbouring host communities in the governorates of Erbil, Duhok and Sulaymaniyah in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. It is part of a resilience feasibility study, funded by the UNDP, and includes a desk review and a household survey covering the same the governorates. Taken together they are to inform an integrated report to recommend pathways to resilience building strategies in the Syrian refugee camps and their hosting communities.

The motivation and objectives of the study emanates from three interlinked issues. First, there is a realization that the protracted conflict in Syria that is well into its fourth year may continue for the foreseeable future. Second, an economic crisis in Iraq caused by budget disputes between regional and federal governments, and aggravated by the displacement of millions of IDPs as a cause of Iraq's internal conflict. Third, is ongoing and probability of further reductions in international humanitarian aid.

These factors have prompted the international humanitarian community to seek ways in which the response to the Syrian refugee crisis can move from merely provision of humanitarian assistance to support of long-term self-reliance through resilience-building in the camps and host communities.

1.1. Methodology

Apart from complementing the quantitative household survey conducted in the Syrian refugee camps and their neighbouring communities, this qualitative assessment aims to provide a deeper understanding of the following dimensions of the livelihoods dynamics in the camps:

1. The vulnerability context, including impact of conflict and economic crisis
2. Household and community assets
3. Livelihood activities, capabilities and outcomes
4. Coping and adaptive strategies of the people
5. The role of institutions and policies as facilitators and/or barriers to sustainable livelihoods

The theoretical framework that informs the methodology and the objectives of the assessment is the Sustainable Livelihoods framework from which the following questions have been deduced:

- Which factors impact the vulnerability context? What makes household livelihoods susceptible to shock and stresses?
- What is the livelihood structure?
- What are the coping strategies and their outcomes?
- What constraints and opportunities exist to recovery strategies and resilience building?
- Which are the institutions and policies that determine sustainability and resilience building?

Methods for data collection

Methods for data collection included focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs) and direct participant observations in the camp.

Key informant interviews (KIIs) included various stakeholders such as representatives of the international humanitarian community and government officials. Their inputs were used to understand the current situation and the barriers and non-exploited opportunities to resilience.

KIIs were also carried out with relevant interest groups inside and outside all camps, such as business owners, teachers, women's representatives and NGOs in order to better understand vulnerability contexts and livelihood opportunities. Specifically KIIs targeted people in livelihood activities in the camps and the host communities in order to understand vulnerabilities surrounding different livelihood groups.

The focus groups were carried out in Domiz and Arbat camp as well as trial groups in Qushtapa camp. The groups were disaggregated by gender and age making five categories; male, female, youth male, youth female as well as one group of vulnerable persons. Every group consisted of 6-12 people.

Composition of the research team and training

The research team consisted of one principal investigator acting as team leader, managing two groups with one facilitator and one note taker in each. The structure of the research team reflected different backgrounds of skills, education and experience of qualitative evaluation methods. All went through the same training, consisting of 1,5 day workshop focused on participatory methods and the Sustainable Livelihoods theoretical framework.

2. Vulnerability context

The vulnerability context of the Syrian refugees is affected by various factors but can be attributed to two main external stressing factors; the protracted Syrian conflict and the economic crisis in the Kurdistan Region, which is aggravated by the great influx of IDPs since June 2014. There are also a set of vulnerabilities that arise from individual circumstances and community characteristics. Combined, these factors affect people's asset base and livelihood opportunities in different ways.

2.1. Conflict and crisis-related vulnerabilities

Having been uprooted from their usual habitat the Syrian refugees carry not only material losses but in many cases also psychological trauma. However, it is important to be aware that the Syrian refugees arriving in the Kurdistan Region have come in different waves, from different parts of Syria and for different reasons. Many were not directly affected by the conflict but came to the KRI prior to its economic crisis as economic migrants searching for better opportunities. As the

conflict worsened in Syria they could not return, and with higher competition on the labour market in Kurdistan many could no longer support themselves in the host community, and therefore seek shelter in the camps. All camps, except for Akre, reported high numbers of families living in the host community now requesting to be registered in the camps.

The vulnerabilities arising from the displacement can be noticed in the contractions of households' asset base. People have left behind land and property that in some cases has been destroyed. Even human capital in terms of skills and knowledge that travels with people can often not be utilised as refugees do not have certifying documents with them.

The vulnerabilities arising from the economic downturn in KRI have affected people's livelihood strategies towards more negative coping mechanisms and reduced their access to financial resources. Due to lack of job opportunities many families resort to harmful solutions such as taking their children out of school in order to provide for the family, or marrying young girls to lessen the financial burden on the family. Other strategies include selling household assets such as furniture or women's gold. These types of strategies were reported in all governorates and camps. Since the crisis affects the whole community, access to financial resources decreases. For example many refugees rely on credit from within the community, provided by relatives or shopkeepers, but as savings and cash bases are depleted less credit is available.

2.2. Non crisis-related vulnerabilities

By definition of their status, refugees are at a disadvantage due to their legal status in the country. As non-citizens they are for example not entitled to own fixed property including land. Thus, their access to durable housing or farming activities is limited and therefore also the diversification of livelihood opportunities.

Vulnerability also relates to social norms and codes. Due to cultural and traditional norms women's opportunities to work are very limited. In none of the locations where FGDs and KIIs were conducted did we come across a woman working outside the camp. And although many women used to work in Syria, working outside the camp was not considered appropriate or safe.

In some of the governorates language barriers also added to the vulnerability context as Kurds from Syria speak Kirmanji Kurdish while Kurds in the Erbil and Sulaymaniyah governorates speak Sorani.

2.3. Vulnerability of the host community

The vulnerabilities of the host community that also have repercussions on the refugees are mainly related to the economic crisis. As civil servants are without salaries for months, demand for goods and services in general decreases and as a result also the demand for labour. Many business owners, in both urban and rural areas, explained that they noticed a significant decrease in revenue and many had let go of employees during the past year.

In the city of Erbil, where many Syrian refugees have been employed in the service sector employers, especially in retail and hotels, suffer from the consequences of both the economic crisis and the security situation. One hotel owner of a middle class hotel in the city center explained that his customers who are mainly Iraqis from outside the Kurdistan Region are no longer coming. “It is not easy to enter the Kurdistan Region because of the security situation and because of the economic crisis people are not spending money anymore”. Shop owners in the malls witnessed of the same thing. One owner of a shoes store explained that he used to employ seven people but now he only needs three. “Business has gone down more than 50%, I don’t need as many people to work for me”.

In an industrial area outside the town of Qushtapa owners of metal workshops, car mechanics and car services complained about the economic crisis seriously affecting their businesses. A man owning a car wash explained that he noticed how people are saving and being more conscious about how they spend their money. “My usual customers don’t come to wash their cars as often as they used to”. Business owners in similar areas in Duhok and Sulaymaniyah witnessed of the same difficulties.

3. Livelihood structures

3.1. Main livelihood groups

The most common income-generating activities can be categorized into two main groups; wage labour and self-employment. Specific to the camp settings are the employment opportunities offered by the camp management and international NGOs operating in the camps.

3.1.1. Wage labour

Wage labourers and specifically daily labourers constitute the biggest livelihood group in all the camps assessed. The majority work in the closest urban area to the camp. It was reported from all focus groups that most men leave the camp every morning for daily work in the cities, of which the construction sector was the most common. Daily workers within the construction sector gather in hubs in the city centers where employers find the needed labour force for the day. This entails that employment may be available only for a few days during a week. In some cases employment can be offered for weeks in a row at a specific construction site but when the job is finished, labourers return to the same procedure. The nature of this kind of work makes it unpredictable, as workers are dependent on the demand for the day. It also incurs costs that may not be covered, as workers need to pay transportation each day. In the case of Arbat a one-way ticket to Sulaymaniyah costs 3000IQD with the privately run bus service that operates between the camp and the city. Another vulnerability that was raised by daily workers was the absence of guarantee of being paid. In all male focus groups, workers had experienced not being paid by construction companies. However, the main issue raised was how the economic crisis had affected the availability of jobs. FGDs in all governorates reported that while they had been able

to find jobs almost every day of the week before the crisis, now a whole week could pass without work.

Many young males work in restaurants, cafes and shops in the cities. Access to this sector requires a license from the health department. This is not something specific for refugees but the bureaucratic procedure to obtain it was reported as difficult. However, for people working in small towns outside urban areas it was easy to neglect this, as authorities did not follow up in these areas. The same applies for the case of work permits which is an official requirement but that is rarely complied with outside the urban centers. A work permit is effectively a clearance from the Asayish in which the employer has acted as a guarantor for the employee. A few of the KIIs conducted with business owners claimed that the bureaucratic procedure was not worth it in order to employ refugees. In spite of these barriers a majority of the employers in the service sector are still willing to employ Syrian refugees who are sought after due to their reputation as being committed and hardworking. This was especially the perception in the urban areas amongst restaurant owners, hotel managers, barbers etc. An owner of a tea house showed the documents of all the Syrians that he had employed. "I understand that not everyone is willing to go through this hassle with the authorities but for me they are even better workers than the locals." Another reason why Syrian labour is sought after is that they are willing to work for less than the locals; however this was not the most cited reason for employment.

The only location where perceptions of the Syrian labour in general were more negative was in Domiz town, which is in immediate proximity to the camp. For example, shop keepers stated that they would not hire Syrians because of lack of trust. Local shopkeepers also claimed that the three year presence of the camp has not brought any added benefit in terms of more business. On the contrary, many locals now enter the camp to buy things, as it is cheaper. Important to bear in mind is that the Domiz camp provides a special case, as its population is much larger than the immediate host community.

3.1.2. Self-employment

The most common type of self-employment is small businesses inside the camps. For example, restaurants, bakeries, grocery shops, retail shops, money exchanges, barbers and tailors. The conditions for opening and running businesses vary across camps and even within camps.

Shops are either built within the demarcated area of individual houses or as separate structures on the main streets or market area in the camps. The shops that are built within the houses are paid for by the owner himself and are free from rent. In the case of shops outside the vicinity of the house shopkeepers either pay rent or cover for initial start-up expenses. Many of them received financial support from international NGOs. Certain businesses such as barbers also received support in terms of equipment.

Anyone wanting to open a business in the camps has to seek permission from the camp management. However, there were cases where requests had been denied but the shop had been created anyway. In the relevant camps where this had occurred the management was usually aware but chose to overlook it.

In Qushtapa camp the Emirates Red Crescent built shops that were handed over to the Barzani Foundation which collects monthly rent from the shopkeepers in order to fund a sewing center for women. One man had taken over the businesses from a previous shop keeper for 300\$ and initially he paid 200\$ per month in rent but the rent was then decreased for everyone to 50,000 IQD. Simultaneously there were shops in the market area that did not need to pay any rent.

In the Domiz camp great variation was found in the conditions of running businesses. While it was no longer allowed for any new businesses to open up along the main streets most newly started businesses were found as part of household allocated slots. Depending on the location in the camp rents differ. In a more remote area of the camp one woman was renting a clothes store for 100,000 IQD from the house owner. The products in the store she bought herself from traders that enter the camp. Another woman was renting a bridal shop for 200,000 IQD. There were also cases of businesses being sold and bought although this is not formally allowed by the camp management. One grocery store owner had bought the shop for 500\$.

Through the FGDs many issues were raised regarding how to start and run businesses. Participants complained about the difficulties to either get permission to start businesses or to get financial support from NGOs. Without exception all male focus groups reported that one needs *wasta*, middle hand, may it be to get permission from the camp management or to get support from NGOs. Although camps and NGOs have a policy that only one family member should be allowed to be employed or run a business in the camps, participants claimed that many families have several beneficiaries, which is due to corruption in the system that requires connections inside the management or NGOs. These statements were refuted by camp managers as well as NGO representatives who claim that they have actively worked against such duplications in order to provide more equal opportunities for all in the camp. However, NGOs also stated that it was difficult to coordinate amongst them in order to avoid duplications. It was also apparent that the selection criteria that NGOs used when deciding on which businesses were to receive financial support were not made clear to the refugees, who perceived the interventions as unequal treatment.

Obstacles in running businesses had mainly to do with competition and restructuring of certain camps. In the case of grocery stores, many shop keepers in camps where WFP had introduced the voucher system, instead of direct food distribution, experienced decreasing sales. Since the voucher shops had a greater variety of food items these goods were no longer demanded from the local shops as the vouchers can only be used in the WFP stores. Another source of damaging competition was that some camps had too many shops for their size. In the case of Arbat for example, with nearly 6000 inhabitants 80 shops already exist. Meanwhile the IOM and REACH are constructing 74 new shops in total that are to be run mainly by vulnerable households in the camp. This doubles the number of shops and the camp management was questioning whether everyone would be able to make their living out of these shops. This proved to be a valid concern as both participants in FGDs and KIIs claimed that their current businesses were not enough to cover the expenses of the family. Some had even closed their shops due to the lack of demand.

Another obstacle arose from relocations within camps. In Qushtapa one restaurant owner had invested all his savings in opening the restaurant on what was the main street of the camp.

However, as the camp transformed from temporary to permanent housing foundations many blocks in the camp were relocated to a new area that also included a market area with new shops. Less and less people therefore pass his restaurant which is devastating for his business.

As all livelihood groups, business owners in the camps also face difficulties due to the economic crisis. Since refugees work to a lesser extent and generate less income many shopkeepers see their sale volumes diminish. One man in Domiz who used to run a grocery store explained that he shut down his shop and became a street vendor instead. “Now, I buy the vegetables that I sell for 150,000 IQD, but even if I had more money to buy produce for I wouldn’t get it sold”.

Informal businesses also existed in terms of people providing training in their homes. One young female was taking sewing lessons from a lady for 25,000 IQD per month in Domiz, and a young man was taking oud (guitar) lessons in order to play at wedding parties.

3.1.3. Self-employment outside the camps

Being self-employed as a Syrian refugee outside the camp is almost impossible unless one has a business partner. As Syrians cannot buy property or register businesses in their own name the only possibility is to find a local who is willing to act as a guarantor or who can be a business partner. One such case was found in the Bazar in Erbil where a local had opened a bakery together with a Syrian refugee, and also employing Syrians as workers. They had both made initial investments to open the business. This kind of arrangement entails a high level of trust as the refugee has no legal guarantees should something happen to the business.

3.1.4. Employment in the camp-management and NGOs

Apart from running businesses in the camp, employment was available either through the camp management or NGO:s, or as teachers and nurses in the schools and health care facilities. It was obvious that competition over employment in the camp management and NGO:s was very high and many complained of corruption and favoritism in the selection process. Teachers at the schools were all refugees from the camps and employed by the Ministry of Education but as other civil servants in Kurdistan they had been without salaries for months. In both Qushtapa and Domiz teachers had been striking. Refugees working as nurses in the health facilities did not face the same issue as the teachers as their salaries were often paid by international organisations.

3.1.5. Challenges of skills matching on the labour market

There was great diversity of working skills and professional backgrounds across the camps. However, few were able to work with the same profession they used to have in Syria. It was noticed in the FGDs that it is easier for certain professions such as decoration workers and restaurant workers to work with the same profession. This has to do with the fact that the Syrians have better experience than locals within these professions. Teachers are another group which had

it easier to work within their own profession, although they were limited to work within the camp. On the other hand, those who used to work as government employees or used to run their own businesses, found it almost impossible to work in the same capacity as in Syria.

The inability to work within one's own profession was not reported as a big concern in the FGDs. Refugees' main priority was to have a job at all. Nobody would refuse a job because it did not match his profession. Their main concern was to have a job that gives a source of income, and this is why most of them work, or seek work within the most accessible sectors, which usually are low skilled labour.

It was suggested in several FGDs that jobs focused on production could be created in the camp. Male FGDs claimed that more productive livelihood activities were needed. For example it was suggested that they could produce dairy products. Factories in general would employ more people and generate added value.

When it comes to women there are more obstacles to finding jobs relevant or similar to their profession, and in many cases it is even problematic for them to work at all, because of certain social norms. In Arbat camp one of the FGD participants explained that he is the only provider for his family which consists of his wife, 4 daughters and one son. He added that he would never allow any of his daughters to work whether it is outside or inside the camp, despite that he doesn't make enough money from his work at the grocery market. He explicitly stated that their traditions do not allow them to send their daughters to work.

Women asked for better job opportunities in the camps and greater diversity of vocational training, apart from sewing which was the most usual activity provided by NGOs. They also explained that they could be more productive if given the right tools. Making pottery, baskets, jams and pickles were a few of the things mentioned. In Arbat women complained that they were not able to make use of the skills they had acquired from vocational training, as they could not keep the tools when the course was over.

Another issue was the employment of non-graduates by the NGOs and schools, while many university graduates are either unemployed or working as unskilled labour. This was explained as an example of the corruption in the NGOs, where people get employed through contacts and not on the bases of qualification and experience. However, especially in the case of teachers the issue is more often related to people having left the documents certifying their degrees behind.

Overall, the FGDs tell us that the main issue is not lack of working skills but rather match making and availability of jobs. In addition, they all express their readiness to work with any kind of work that can ensure them and their families an honorable source of income, in order to be able to have a better quality of life. The only group that can be excluded from this is the vulnerable group, and more specifically those who are old, and suffer from serious chronic diseases. This group mostly seeks jobs that suit their health situation and that are located inside the camp.

3.2. Capital Assets

The capital assets focused on in this section are human capital, physical capital, natural capital, financial capital, and social and political capital.

3.2.1. Human Capital

Workings skills

FGDs revealed a wide range of working skills. Among the male groups craftsmen, construction, mechanics, farming, hospitality sector, tailoring and hairdressing were mentioned but also accounting, civil service and IT. However, it was apparent that most males, regardless of background, were working as low skilled labour. There was a shared perception that the Syrians are highly skilled in the fields of construction work and craftsmanship especially, but also in the hospitality and service sector.

Among females the most cited skills were handicraft, hairdressing, retailing, nursing, hospitality sector and administrative work. Due to higher education levels among young females more specialised skills such as computing, engineering and law practice were also reported.

In all the groups there was a perception that there is little demand for high skilled labour and therefore many who had previously worked in this capacity sought to acquire more practical skills.

Education

Education levels appeared to be similar across the camps. The majority of FGD participants had at least primary level education from Syria, with secondary education being the most cited. All FGDs stated that they had had good access to all levels of education in Syria. It was however apparent that illiteracy was more common in the groups of vulnerable people. The tendency to drop out of school in order to work seemed to be common among young males already in Syria. In each male youth group we came across 1-2 cases of young males who were nearly illiterate or had major difficulties reading and writing. Apart from the group of vulnerable persons illiteracy among females, especially in the younger generations, was not common and simultaneously many reported having entered or finished university studies.

There was a concern in all groups of the ability to maintain or improve one's education level due to bad access to education beyond primary level in the camps. Children in secondary school age are after 2-3 years in the camp still waiting to start or continue.

Health

In all FGDs participants claimed that people's health condition overall has worsened in the camp in comparison to Syria. Especially old and disabled persons claimed that they could better live with their disabilities in Syria as they had access to better treatment and stimulation to maintain

their health condition. One woman explained that there were specialised schools for disabled children.

Especially in the female groups deteriorating mental health was discussed. Women explained that they had more freedom in their daily life in Syria which made them feel empowered. They explained that isolation, dependence on others in the camp and concerns about the future created depression. They also explained that many children were suffering from post-traumatic stress and that many men felt demoralised.

Factors undermining Human Capital

In all the assessed camps factors undermining the human capital were present. However, these factors may differ from a camp to another because of the size, location and management of the camp. These factors are mainly: poverty, boys' drop out of schools in order to work instead, the lack of secondary schools, poor health services, corruption in the NGOs and camp management, lack of training courses and entertainment activities, bureaucracy in government institutions and most importantly the economic crises that has affected the refugees as well as the host communities.

3.2.2. Physical Capital

Shelter

Physical capital in terms of shelter was seen as one of the major losses and changes in daily life of the refugees in comparison to life in Syria. Many stated that family problems occur precisely because of lack of space and families with up to 10 people living in one shared room.

Shelter and housing system is different from camp to camp. In Qushtapa there were different types of accommodations (basic tents, tents with durable structures and houses with permanent structure). The basic tents were the main type in the camp, but they were in the process of being replaced by more durable structures with concrete foundation and walls. The process of relocation was on-going in the camp and families were relocated into the durable structures gradually. The houses with proper concrete structures were built by the Emirate Red Crescent. House improvement is allowed in the camp, but they are only allowed to use a limited amount of construction material which they buy on their own expenses outside the camp.

In Domiz there are three different types of shelters due to different status. The camp has a "transit" area for the new arrivals who are supposed to live there temporarily until they are transferred into permanent tents. The shelters in this area are basic tents. In the "regular" area most shelters are durable tents with concrete foundation. The "irregular" area shelters non-registered families in basic tents. Improvement of the houses/tents is also allowed in Domiz camp but each household is only allowed to use 500 blocks.

In Arbat most of the refugees lived in houses with a proper concrete structure, some in improved tents, and to a lesser extent in basic tents. In Arbat too, a process of relocation was going on. Families were previously allowed to improve their houses, but they are not allowed to do so any longer. The decision of forbidding the improvement came from the local government in Sulaymaniyah.

Akre camp is a special case as it is one permanent structure which used to be a prison. Depending on the size families have one or two rooms and every two to three families share toilets and kitchen. The main complaint was issues with mould. In terms of electricity and water it was the best supplied camp.

In all camps with tents families were worried about the risk of fire which had occurred several times affecting a number of households.

Transportation

The main form of transportation available to the camps that connect them to urban areas are mini- and regular buses, but some refugees have also been able to buy motorbikes or cars. In Qushtapa, Arbat and Domiz there are buses and bus stations just outside the camp. In the case of Domiz, and because of the size of the camp, there are also shuttles within the camp itself. The refugees in Akre have access to the same local transportation services as the host community because of the location of the camp inside the city of Akre. Covering for transportation costs was reported a major challenge in all locations.

3.2.3. Natural Capital

Natural capital is possibly the asset base that has contracted the most for the in-camp Syrian refugees at large, as access to cultivatable land and recreation areas are limited.

Many of the refugees used to be farmers in Syria and would have liked to see opportunities in the agriculture sector. However, there are several barriers to such opportunities. One is that refugees cannot buy and own land in the country. It was also reported from several FGDs that refugees had either attempted to rent land or to offer their labour as farmers but without any success as rents are either too high or salaries too low. One man explained that he had been offered to work a piece of land in Qushtapa for 400,000 IQD/month. But the area would require 4 people to work and the income would therefore not be enough to feed four people and their family members.

Although farming opportunities are limited within the confines of the camps smaller scale initiatives exist. For example REACH is building green-houses next to the Arbat camp for vulnerable families. In Domiz, the camp manager explained that “phase 8” of the camp is a large area suitable for farming and that the management would encourage NGO initiatives to establish projects there.

With regard to recreation, refugees across all camps said that it is a luxury they cannot afford. Although nature is accessible for them and they can move freely outside the camps they claimed

that everything they do outside the camp is out of necessity, either working or purchasing essential things for the household. Many of the youth groups also complained on access to youth friendly spaces such as sports grounds. While boys claimed that football pitches were not available or in a bad condition, girls claimed that there were no areas suitable and specific for girls to do sports.

3.2.4. Financial Capital

Various financial resources were reported from the camps but the access to and diversity of financial capital was significantly different from Syria.

The most apparent difference was the deprivation of property and land resources but also material possessions. In the camps, the most common type of possessions they could exchange for cash in times of need were furniture or women's gold. In all female FGDs there were women who at some point had sold personal pieces of gold. There were also examples of families who had sold a fridge or TV during months of insufficient income. Many families had also sold aid that they had received, such as NFIs or food parcels.

Another difference from Syria was reduced access to credit and loans, both in terms of sources and quantity. Respondents explained that they had better access to financial institutions in Syria, whether formal or informal. "The only access we have to credit here is through the shop owners but they too are in a difficult situation and have limits to how much credit they can give", said one male respondent. Respondents in all FGDs also explained that they at some point had asked for loans from neighbours or relatives in the camps. There were also a few cases of families receiving remittances from relatives in Europe.

It was apparent that access to financial capital mainly had been generated from within the community, and as less people were involved in income generating activities due to the economic crisis over the last year, many experienced difficulties in finding financial resources. The same applied to cash savings. Respondents in the FGDs complained that they were no longer able to save money. Many stated that they had depleted whatever savings they had brought from Syria or savings they had generated from previous work in the KRI.

3.2.5. Social and Political Capital

Respondents in FGDs spoke of various social and political assets with safety of the camp being the most important one.

Mutual support

FGDs indicated high level of trust between families in the camps. Although problems sometimes arose due to lack of space and high pressure on shared facilities people in general thought that relations to their neighbours were good. Women explained that if needed they could always find someone to look after their kids. Most families had experienced economic hardship which had

forced them to take a loan from a neighbour. “We are all in the same situation; of course we help each other. One month my husband is unemployed, the next hers”, one female respondent explained.

Safety

The most positive perception of life in the camp, which was reported by all FGDs was the feeling of safety. Both men and women felt a high level of safety inside the camp. Many expressed their gratitude to the protection that was granted to them through police and Asayish. When asked if they would like to see the walls of the camp removed in the future and integrate more into society the overwhelming majority responded negatively. In the camp they felt that they were amongst their own kin. Even in the youth groups there was little interest for a settlement without fences. As movement in and out of the camp is free they do not see the necessity. Only in a few cases, women expressed a desire to live in a more open environment, where the camp does not “feel like a prison”.

Household relations

Especially in the female groups mental health problems family issues were discussed. Many women expressed deteriorating mental health such as depression due to uncertainties of the future, especially with regard to their kids. They also expressed concern for the men who they thought were very frustrated over their situation, not being able to do what they used to do or provide for the family. It was apparent that problems occurred much more often between husband and wife in the camp than before, so too the occurrence of violence. “More people get divorced than married here. If a woman was beaten by her husband once a month before imagine how many times a week she is beaten now”, one female respondent in Domiz explained.

Community networks

There were few self-organised community networks in the camps, except for women’s associations which existed in every camp. The women’s groups mainly had the function of a platform for women to meet and speak about their experiences and difficulties. Some also dealt with SGBV cases in liaison with relevant NGOs. Otherwise, most networks and social platforms were somehow managed or provided through NGOs which was the case for youth centers and entertainment facilities.

Relationship to the host community

In all governorates refugees in general said that they had a good relation to the host community. This was especially the case in Akre and Qushtapa. In the case of Akre, it can be explained by the fact that the camp is located in the middle of the city and thus the population of the camp has more interaction with the host community. In Qushtapa it appeared that the refugees made their shopping as much inside as outside the camp and people said that they had friends in the host community. In the female FGD it was also mentioned that there had been a few cases of marriages between refugees and locals.

In Domiz and Arbat there were more reservations towards the host community and was especially

expressed in the youth groups. One young female in Domiz said: “They know that we are not from here. They look at us and we don’t feel comfortable going outside the camp. Maybe it is because we are not as conservative as them. We dress differently”. Young males said that although they were working outside the camp and were interacting with the locals they felt like strangers. In the Arbat youth group many had experienced bad treatment from employers but they also stated language differences as a reason for differentiation as the Syrians speak Kirmanji while Sorani is the spoken Kurdish in Sulaymaniyah. In the male group it was stated that while there were no direct problems with the host community they did not necessarily feel welcomed either.

In Domiz one man explained that integration with the host community is hard since integration among the Syrians themselves is difficult. “We come from Qamishli, Hasake, Aleppo and we have problems integrating with each other inside the camp, how easy do you think it is to integrate with the host community?”

Influence on decision-making

All FGDs reported lack of influence on decision-making but they were not necessarily seeking more influence, the main concern was that their needs were not being acknowledged and that there were injustices in the camp systems. Many complained about corruption and about the need to have *wasta* in order to get through, both when it comes to camp management and NGOs. Respondents were saying that those who had managed to get employed by the camp management or NGOs were only getting friends and relatives in.

Vulnerable persons explained that it was difficult to get access to people who could help or listen to their needs. In Domiz, attendants said that they had requested a meeting with the camp manager but had not got an appointment after months of waiting. When asked if there was no one else to turn to they explained that the mukhtars were not able to do anything, they were only middle hands of the camp management. One female participant also questioned how only 11 mukhtars could cover such a big camp as Domiz with over 40,000 inhabitants.

In Arbat, which is the only camp that has an elected refugee committee FGD participants said that it does not matter if they are elected or not because their task is not to represent them. This was indirectly confirmed by the camp management that explained that the committee helps with distribution of aid, liaising between NGOs and the management and acting as mukhtars when refugees need a reference for residency permits or registration¹.

Political activities

In most FGDs there was a reluctance to speak about political activity. A few single voices and KIIs confirmed that there were political activities in the camp, both affiliations to Kurdish parties in Syria and Iraqi Kurdistan. While there was a KDP presence in the camps in Erbil and Duhok, PUK had a presence in Arbat. Respondents claimed that that some people may join political parties thinking that they might be useful in the future if one encounters problems. One young

¹ The role of the Mukhtar in this context is to act as a witness or guarantor of the person’s identity, where he is residing and of how many people that are living in the household.

female in Domiz explained that she had approached the KDP in order to get help to get access to university.

One man, who had been politically active in Syria and that was wanted both by the regime and the YPG² said that he had continued to be politically active in Iraq. However, he explained that it was a risk since political affiliation makes it difficult to get a job.

3.3. Service Provision

This section provides an assessment of the service provision in the camps in terms of education, health and infrastructure.

3.3.1. Education

Many barriers exist that prevent refugees in camps to attend schools or continue their studies. One of the problems frequently mentioned was that many families are not able to send their children to school because of economic reasons. Boys are the main victims in this case as young males in school age are sent to work instead of school. In a youth FGD which consisted of a group of young boys aged 15-20, none of the participants were attending school. All of them, except for one, had left school because of work. In one case a 15 year old had been waiting for two years to attend the secondary school that was yet to be opened in the camp. This was a problem in both Qushtapa and Arbat. Participants explained that the students can attend the secondary schools outside the camp, but this requires certain bureaucratic procedures which were described as long and difficult. Meanwhile, it was mentioned that in both camps a secondary school will be opened by the start of the next school year.

The opinion about the curriculum that is taught in the camp schools differed in the assessed camps. In Arbat and Qushtapa the refugees were satisfied with the curriculum and said that the curriculum is the same as the one used in the public schools in Kurdistan. The case was different in Domiz, where several FGDs claimed that the local curriculum was difficult for children to understand and they had troubles following lessons and doing their homework. However, they added that it was requested by the refugees themselves to use the Iraqi curriculum in order to make it easier for their kids to continue their studies at Iraqi universities. It was also mentioned that some of the schools make use of the Syrian curriculum depending on the availability of the literature and books.

Another problem with education for the Syrian refugees was the inability of the university students to continue their studies in the universities of Kurdistan region. In Qushtapa a block leader explained that the Barzani Charity Foundation is in the process of helping some university students in order to be able to continue their studies in the Kurdish universities. In the FGD in Arbat it was mentioned that it is very difficult for university graduates to evaluate their

² YPG is the armed wing of the PYD, Kurdish Democratic Union Party in Syria.

certificates, but there were single cases where university graduates have been able to get a job within the private sector using the degree they have, and without evaluating it.

3.3.2. Health

In all of the assessed camps there were complaints about the health care system. The most cited issue was poor health services in the camps. This was mainly in terms of lack of good and specialised doctors and their availability.

Another issue that was mentioned in all camps was the inability to get the medicines need. In general, the opinion about both quantity and quality of the medicines available in the camp PHCs was very negative. All of the FGDs stated that the PHCs only offer painkillers and any other kind of medicine they have to buy from the pharmacies in the cities. This was explained challenging because of the expenses of transportation and the medicine itself. A woman from the vulnerable group in Domiz camp mentioned that she buys medicine for about 125,000 IQD every month from the pharmacies outside the camp. She explained that she gets the money from her relatives sometimes, and that sometimes she is not able to buy them at all.

Access to an ambulance in the camp was another issue in some locations. In Qushtapa there was no ambulance operating at all.

Vulnerable people and more specifically disabled people explained that they were taken care of much better when they were Syria and that they suffer more as refugees. Some of them mentioned that they used to receive a salary from the government in Syria. They also complained about the NGOs role in providing suitable jobs for disabled people. In Domiz it was stated that only two disabled persons have jobs inside the camp. And in Qushtapa a disabled man mentioned that they don't get the assistance and attention they need, and that he has been applying to get a shop many times, but his application was never approved. Disabled and sick people also explained that they need a medical report in order to be registered as vulnerable and thereby be eligible to special assistance. However, the PHCs in the camps cannot issue such reports and when referring to clinics outside the camp they are often refused.

There are also many cases where treatment or surgery is needed but they cannot access it either because of affordability or that the treatment is not available in KRI.

The overall opinion of the refugees about the health care system was negative. In all of the camps it was explained that both the physical and mental health of the refugees has worsened in the camps.

3.3.3. Water

Infrastructure provision differs both across camps and sometimes within camps. In Qushtapa there were many complaints about the water service in the camp. It was mentioned in the FGDs that the camp does not have any water distribution network. In some cases up to 8 families have

the same source of water, which is basically a water hose. They also share washing facilities which are especially uncomfortable for women and sometimes also a source of dispute between neighbours.

There were also problems with the water system in Domiz camp as well. Despite the fact that a water distribution network has been established, 1300 families still get water by trucks. In addition, in some areas 3-4 families share washing facilities.

Arbat was the camp which had the most serious problem with the water. Despite having a water network with hoses in every house, the water is not always potable. All of the FGD attendants complained about this problem and said that they have problems to afford clean water and water filters.

3.3.4. Electricity

In general, electricity seemed to be of less concern in the camps. There was also awareness that some camps had better electricity supply than the host community. Electricity appeared to be relatively well provided as all camps were connected to the national grid. In Akre the camp also has a private generator which provides electricity when the national grid is off. For those who can afford it, each family pays about 20\$ per month to get electricity from the generator.

3.3.5. Waste disposal

Regarding waste collection in Akre and Domiz it was done by the municipality and the governorate. The main complaints of waste collection came from Arbat camp where the IRC who is managing the camp had to resume the responsibility from the governorate that claimed it no longer had a budget.

4. Coping strategies

The participants in the FGDs provided insight about the most common coping strategies they would resort to in order to get through economic hardships or other challenges they are facing or might face in the future. These included both positive and negative strategies:

Negative coping strategies

- Sending the young male family members to work instead of school.
- Cutting food expenses by reducing the number of meals or quality of food to such an extent that it affects physical health.
- Collecting leftovers from the other tents that might be contaminated or old.
- Selling food parcels.

- Drinking contaminated water because they cannot afford buying clean water or water filters.
- Selling protective household and personal possessions such as blankets or medicines.
- Early marriages to lessen the family's financial burden.
- Switching to high risk or degrading jobs.
- Buying food and household supplies on credit to an extent that no more credit is granted.
- Taking loans from relatives and friends without being able to pay back.
- Going back to Syria and try to work there although it might incur risks.
- Illegal activities such as prostitution.

Positive coping strategies

- Saving more during times of employment.
- Cutting food expenses by reducing the number of meals or quality of food in a way that it does not affect physical health.
- Collecting leftovers from the other tents.
- Taking loans from relatives and friends.
- Buying food and household supplies on credit.
- Selling household and personal possessions such as furniture and women's gold.
- Selling food parcels.
- Try to register with as many organizations as possible.

5. Institutional structures and policies

5.1. Governance Institutions

The institutional landscape within the camps is composed by a diversity of public and international institutions in different layers. This landscape, with which refugees interact daily, can be summarised as follows:

- Governorate office —the main role is undertaken at the governorate level. The governorate office, in practice, has a bigger decision-making power than the regional government when it comes to management of refugees and displaced families. For instance, governorate's departments of health and education are the responsible bodies to implement and coordinate the provision of these services to the displaced population, both to families living in a camp setting or outside. Level of implementation and responsibilities assumed, hence, differs in each governorate.
- Governorate refugee councils —their main presence involves implementation the policies set up at governorate level and coordinate the local services provision (electricity, water, waste collection, etc.) with the local authorities in the municipalities where camps are located. At camp level, these councils are represented with a camp management structure, with the main

role of general administration issues as well as the enforcement of in-camp policies and norms. Only in the camp of Arbat the camp management was done by an international NGO.

- Asayesh —in charge of security and controls in the camps. These bodies act independently from the camp management.
- Municipal authorities —the role of this administration level in the whole of Kurdistan is relatively small and with extremely limited decision-making capacity. In this sense, their role regarding the camps is negligible, although they are a key actor for resilience-building.
- United Nations bodies —as the decision-making capacity in camp is mainly concentrated at governorate level, UN holds a strong role in supporting the implementation of the services and, especially, providing funding for them.
- Local and international NGOs —discussions with key informants pointed to the fact that the presence of NGOs is unbalanced. There is a large number of them operating in some sectors but, on the contrary, there are difficulties to find organisations willing to implement projects in other crucial areas. For instance, it was pointed out that there is a lack of child-friendly spaces in Domiz camp as no NGO has approached this gap.
- Refugee representatives in form of mukhtars, block leaders and refugee councils existed in all camps but were often not empowered in way that they could sufficiently answer to people's needs.
- Few informal community or self-organised groups were reported. Only self-organised women's groups existed in the camps.

5.2. Policy challenges

Many policies in place whether inside or outside the camps create obstacles for improved livelihoods. Below is a list of obstacles most frequently cited by the refugees.

Inside the camp

- *Restrictions on improved shelters.* The right to improve shelters is either limited or prohibited in the camps. Refugees complained about these limitations as security and quality issues.
- *Permission to start businesses in the camps.* In all camps permission had to be granted by the camp management but these permissions seemed to be given on an arbitrary basis. Refugees who had been refused often did not understand the reason why.
- *Lack of consistency in NGOs targeted assistance.* Concerns were raised that NGOs assistance did not reach those in mostly in need.
- *Lack of compliance with policies of the number of assistance beneficiaries from the same household.* For example, no more than one family member is allowed to be employed in the camp or being employed and open up a business simultaneously, but these rules were often breached.

- *Unfair selection processes of refugee representatives, volunteers and employees in the camp management.* Appointments were not based on qualifications or elections. Only in Arbat were the members of the refugee council elected by the inhabitants.
- *Lack of empowerment in decision-making.* Refugee representatives, whether elected or not, have no actual influence over decision-making.

Outside the camp

- *Right to own land and property.* Refugees are not entitled to own land or property.
- *Right to set up business.* Refugees cannot start businesses outside the camp unless they partner with a citizen that can register the business in his/her name.
- *Work permits.* Obtaining a work permit requires a lengthy bureaucratic process which differs from governorate to governorate and even on a case to case basis.
- *Evaluation of certificates.* University degrees and other types of certificates are not always possible to evaluate in KRI.

6. Conclusions

This qualitative assessment has sought to provide a deeper understanding of the livelihood dynamics in the Syrian refugee camps and how they relate to the host communities in order to inform a Resilience Based Development Response (RBDR). It has focused specifically on vulnerability context, livelihood strategies, community assets, coping and adaptive strategies as well as the role of institutions and policies. A full analysis of the options for developing a RBDR can only be provided in the integrated report that draws on data from this assessment as well as the desk review and household survey that together constitute the comprehensive framework of the research project. However some insights are evident from the observations made in this qualitative study.

From the perspective of a resilience based development response, RBDR, assuming a scenario in which current conditions apply and international funding diminishes significantly in about 3 to 5 years, the following questions are important:

- Should the camps continue to exist or would it be better to integrate the refugees into the host communities?
- What are the perceived obstacles, threats or challenges including negative coping strategies to building RBDR?
- What are the opportunities, best practices, assets, etc on which a RBDR can be built?
- To what extent have the livelihood activities of the refugees impacted the HC ability to make their livelihoods?
- What challenges can be expected in the provision of services?

Bearing in mind that resilience refers to the ability of communities to cope with, adapt to, and recover from shocks and stresses it is important to consider whether this is better achieved in a context with sustained camps or integration with the host communities. It is evident that a camp

incurs more costs as a separate entity for which infrastructure and other public services need to be provided. The existence of camps also generates new markets, but while camp residents have free movement outside the camp the inverse situation does not apply. Integration of markets entail greater added value for both refugees and host community, both in terms of access to greater variety of goods and services but also in terms of knowledge exchange and knowledge transfers.

The main obstacles to resilience building lie in limitations that impede people from realizing their livelihoods. In the case of the refugees these relate to, among other things, policies that restrict variation and diversity in livelihood strategies. Rights to land and property ownership, business registration, shelter improvement, bureaucratic hurdles to enter the labour market are just to mention a few. Other challenges relate to negative coping strategies such as early marriages or withdrawing children from education in order to work. Whereas room might exist for policy amendments also in times of restricted financial capacity, lack of funds may be detrimental to curbing negative coping strategies.

Opportunities arise when people's and communities' asset bases are used to their full potential. This can only be realized if those who possess assets are engaged in the resilience-building process. Communication channels and representative structures must therefore be established between different livelihood groups, marginalized groups and stakeholders in government and non-government institutions in order to set mutual priorities, build the right capacities and preparedness mechanisms, and also to counter spread of misinformation and negative attitudes.

While it is clear that the livelihood activities of the refugees have impacted the host community in terms of increased competition on the labour market, it is also evident that the livelihood activities of the refugees in some areas have enriched and brought new services and skills to the local markets. Seeing diminishing funds, priority should be given to initiatives that support the latter for mutual benefit between the refugees and host community and that simultaneously thwarts exclusions caused by the former through creation of new job opportunities.

Finally, with diminishing international funds and continued economic hardships, service provision may be seriously threatened. In this case schemes in which the public adopts some of the costs is essential (in contrast to the current situation where most public services are free). This can be combined with security nets that support the most vulnerable groups.