

Syria Briefing

Issue No. 1 | January - March 2017

Welcome

Welcome to Issue 1 of the [Syria Briefing](#) produced by the Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT) in collaboration with the Syria Working Group at Global Dialogue, with the support of the Asfari Foundation. The Briefing begins with an update on the continuing war in Syria and the refugee situation in the region, followed by a curated list of analytic pieces on the priority themes of the Syria Working Group. It concludes with some key questions for funders and a few readings on lessons learned from other contexts.

Overall Situation

In Syria: As the war enters its seventh year, reports suggest that the prospect of achieving a peaceful solution is growing **increasingly difficult**. Since 2011, it is estimated that **465,000 people** are either dead or missing in a war described as the **worst man-made disaster** since the Second World War. The Syrian opposition is believed to be at its **weakest point since 2012**, while an estimated **6.3 million** people are displaced inside Syria's borders. Syrian children are said to be suffering **incredible levels of trauma and distress**, and verified instances of killing, maiming and recruitment of children increased dramatically in 2016 in the context of a **generalised escalation of violence** across the country. Women have also been particularly affected, with evidence pointing to the systematic use of **sexual violence** as a tactic for repression by pro-government forces.

In the region: To date, the Syrian **refugee diaspora** numbers almost 5 million, the vast majority of whom reside in refugee camps across Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. It is believed they will face **numerous challenges and uncertainty** in the coming year. Until now, Lebanon has accommodated 1.5 million refugees, putting the country under great strain and **leading to attempts to stem the flow**. It is thought that the crisis has the **potential to destabilise** the country and region overall. Jordan, in collaboration with the international community, is implementing a **new approach to the refugee crisis**, in an attempt to reframe the influx of refugees as a 'development opportunity'.

Recommended Readings

This section contains a selection of particularly insightful articles and reports that have appeared since January 2017. They help provide deeper context on a range of structural challenges and dilemmas faced by Syria and the region. We have organised the publications by theme, based on the expressed priorities of Syria Working Group members.

These themes are accountability and justice; children and young people; civil society; conflict resolution; detention; education and employment; the environment; funding and the philanthropic response; media and freedom of expression; minority rights; the peace process and transition; refugees; relief and humanitarian aid; and women. We welcome your suggestions for changes and additions to this list.

In a post on [Synaps](#), Peter Harling, Alex Simon and Rosalie Berthier argue that aid and development programmes in Syria are not in alignment with realities and priorities on the ground. They suggest that to stay relevant, aid providers need to put Syrians back at the heart of any recovery process.

(Publication date: 2 January 2017)

relief and humanitarian aid | funding and the philanthropic response

In a [post on IRIN](#), Aron Lund discusses the ‘gargantuan task’ facing the international community of reconstructing Syria, likely under wartime conditions, and in a situation where President Bashar Al-Assad will play a central role.

(Publication date: 8 March 2017)

relief and humanitarian aid | funding and the philanthropic response

A [Guardian article](#) reports on a new documentary about the many thousands of men, women and children ‘missing in detention’ in Syria.

(Publication date: 21 March 2017)

detention

Al-Monitor **profiles** a project depicting life in refugee camps in Lebanon through comics, initiated by French NGO *Solidarités Internacional*.

(Publication date: 10 February 2017)

refugees | civil society

In an article in Open Democracy, Mary Kaldor discusses the **third annual meeting of the Syrian Civil Society Coalition** held in Beirut. She notes that whilst civil society has faced huge difficulties in the war, they remain largely the only source of social cohesion and activity in many areas.

(Publication date: 4 March 2017)

civil society

A Save the Children study says Syria's mental health crisis has reached a 'tipping point' and that severe distress among children could cause lifelong damage. The report, entitled **Invisible Wounds**, calls on donors to make a new global commitment to support children's mental health and wellbeing in Syria.

(Publication date: March 2017)

children and young people

A major UNICEF report describes the suffering of children in Syria as '**Hitting Rock Bottom**' in 2016, in a year where violations against children were the highest on record.

(Publication date: March 2017)

children and young people

Maria Forestier, an independent journalist and researcher, has produced a **report** for the Centre for Women, Peace and Security at the London School of Economics (LSE) in which she documents the patterns of sexual abuse against women by pro-government forces in Syria. Forestier provides insights into her research in an **interview with Syria Deeply**.

(Publication date: March 2017)

women | accountability and justice | peace process and transition

In a **research paper** for Chatham House, Kholoud Mansour analyses the UN-led system of coordination between the humanitarian and development actors in response to the rush of Syrian refugees into Lebanon. The author also explores the politicisation of humanitarian funding and the exclusion of Syrian actors in the UN coordination system.

(Publication date: 30 March 2017)

relief and humanitarian aid | funding and the philanthropic response

Physicians for Human Rights have produced a major **report** on the continued manipulation by Syrian authorities of UN humanitarian access, and the suffering of populations in besieged and hard-to-reach areas of Syria.

(Publication date: March 2017)

relief and humanitarian aid

In a **research paper** produced by Chatham House, the authors review the West's policies towards Syria, lessons learned to date, as well as various recommendations for future policy. The paper forms part of the think tank's **Syria and its Neighbours Policy Initiative** which looks at the impact of the conflict on both Syria and the region.

(Publication date: 15 March 2017)

conflict resolution | peace process and transition

In an **article** in Syria Deeply, Preethi Nallu examines the deepening divisions that make it so difficult for refugees to return to Aleppo. She suggests that the reconciliation process must address the country's social, economic and religious-sectarian divisions in order for civilians to return in significant numbers.

(Publication date: 17 March 2017)

refugees

A new documentary film, **Lost in Lebanon**, examines the lives of four Syrian refugees attempting to build new lives in Lebanon, and the struggles they face along the way.

(Release date: 12 March 2017)

New Research Voices has published a selection of **articles, opinion pieces and interviews with Syrian academics** focusing on practical education solutions for Syrians. They argue that education can offer a real 'beacon of hope' for the future of Syria and that 'real and lasting solutions are beginning to emerge from the international education community'.

(Publication date: March 2017)

education and employment | refugees

In a Financial Times op-ed, **Putting refugees to work: the greatest challenge in 2017**, Ravi Gurumurthy and Grant Gordon implore donors and governments to focus more on strategies to increase employment for refugees rather than short-term hand-outs. *For those without a subscription to the FT, please **click here** and choose the top search result.*

(Publication date: 6 January 2017)

education and employment | refugees | funding and the philanthropic response

Three key questions for funders:

1. Is it time for private funders to recalibrate the balance of their grant support for conflict alleviation-focused projects versus conflict resolution-focused ones?
2. With most European governments focused more than ever on 'refugee stoppage' (i.e. on treating symptoms rather than causes), what are the comparative advantages and/or additional responsibilities philanthropy has in the context of the Syrian conflict?
3. What are the most effective ways for philanthropy to stay analytically and programmatically 'ahead of the curve' in Syria-related grant-making?

In considering the above questions, some of the ideas and analysis presented in the following publications may be useful:

- *Supporting Countries in Transition: A Framework Guide for Foundation Engagement*. The Institute for Integrated Transitions and the Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement at the American University in Cairo, November 2013.
- *Funding in Conflict-Affected Environments*. The Social Change Initiative, 2017.
- *What can philanthropy do for Syria?* Freeman, Mark, Barbara Ibrahim, Hilary Pennington and Cale Salih. Alliance Magazine, 17 February 2015.
- *Navigating International Aid in Transitions: A Guide for Recipients*. Carothers, Thomas, Mark Freeman, Cale Salih and Robert Templer, September 2016.



The Institute for Integrated Transitions (IFIT) is the first independent, nongovernmental organisation dedicated to the effective integration of strategy and policymaking in the areas of democracy, development, rule of law and security in the context of national dialogues and transitions arising in fragile and conflict-affected states.

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Global Dialogue is a registered charity (1122052) promoting human rights and social change through innovative and collaborative philanthropy.

The Syria Working Group aims to inform and enable private philanthropic support for Syria and the neighbouring countries.

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