

**BRUSSELS CONFERENCE
SUPPORTING THE FUTURE OF SYRIA AND THE REGION
4-5 April 2017**

**THEMATIC EVENT: HUMANITARIAN AID INSIDE SYRIA
NEEDS, CHALLENGES & THE WAY FORWARD
4 April 2017**

**THE OUTCOME OF THE HUMANITARIAN THEMATIC EVENT:
OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE CHAIR**

The humanitarian thematic event 'Humanitarian aid inside Syria: needs, challenges & the way forward' held on 4 April 2017 in Brussels brought together the humanitarian community represented by a large group of international and local aid organisations and of key donors.

*The event had **two main objectives**: i) to build common understanding on the main priorities and gaps in the humanitarian response inside Syria and on the main challenges of the humanitarian response, specifically access and protection for the most vulnerable, as well as ii) to identify solutions and recommendations of necessary commitments on how to effectively deliver principled and needs-based assistance across Syria amidst an increasingly polarized context.*

The present operational recommendations endorsed by the co-chairs were presented to the "Syria - Humanitarian Assistance and Resilience" session of the Ministerial Conference "Supporting the future of Syria and the region" taking place on 5 April 2017 in Brussels. They are intended to promote compliance with humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law amongst all parties to the conflict, as well as provide concrete operational recommendations to donors, governments and aid organizations.

The EU, chair of the thematic event, together with the co-chairs of the Ministerial Conference, will work in close coordination with all interested partners and relevant stakeholders to monitor and push forward the advancement of these operational recommendations.



OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPEAU

For the sake of civilians, and of maximising the impact and effectiveness of assistance mobilised, participants to the thematic event emphasised the urgency to adopt and apply the Grand Bargain commitments announced at the World Humanitarian Summit, and translate these commitments into concrete actions for the Syrian humanitarian crisis response.

1. Promoting respect for international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law to protect civilians and ensure accountability

- Protection of civilians in Syria is recognised as an absolute priority.
- All actors should promote and enhance the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure (i.e. schools, medical facilities, water stations), especially in the conduct of hostilities, by respecting the laws of armed conflict, lifting all sieges and facilitating civilian freedom of movement, refraining from the use of wide-area explosive weapons in populated areas and sparing civilian infrastructure from military targeting or military use.
- All actors should support the reinforcement of local communities and people's capacity to protect themselves from the effects of conflict, e.g. mine awareness, freedom of movement, psycho-social support and protection from chemical attacks.
- Governments should ensure that the principle of non-refoulement is fully respected by all countries hosting Syrian refugees.
- All actors should contribute to ensure that voluntary return of IDPs and refugees is implemented in conditions of safety and dignity and based on their choice, fully informed of a) the political, security and socioeconomic environment in the area to which they will return and b) the protection, support and assistance they can expect upon return.

Responding to the specific needs of civilians

- Parties to the conflict hold prime responsibility to enable humanitarian actors to provide appropriate and timely protection assistance and humanitarian aid to the victims of International Humanitarian Law/Human Rights Law violations (IHL/HR).
- All actors should promote and enhance efforts to respect and protect medical personnel, transports and facilities, as well as humanitarian relief personnel and assets, against attacks, threats or other violent acts.
- All actors should promote and enhance education for all Syrian children in order to ensure No Lost Generation, as well as ensuring a more systematic effort to prevent attacks on schools, pupils and teachers.
- All actors should restate their commitment to the “do no harm” principle in the delivery of humanitarian aid, so as not to put further at risk the security of civilians.
- In their response, donors and aid organizations should maintain an up-to-date strategic approach on protection, informed by a Whole of Syria protection strategy, with detailed implementation and advocacy plan.

Particular attention should be paid to the needs of the most vulnerable, including women, children and minority groups.

Accountability

- Abuses and violations of international humanitarian law and of international human rights law should be systematically reported and condemned.
- All actors must take concrete steps to ensure accountability for those responsible for such violations or abuses, such as supporting the speedy implementation of the UNGA Resolution A/71/L.48 by establishing an International Impartial and Independent Mechanism (IIIM).

2. Ensuring principled humanitarian action based on priority needs

- All humanitarian actors should restate the importance of delivering assistance to civilians, wherever they are, on the basis of their needs, and in line with humanitarian principles.
- All humanitarian actors should enhance engagement with, and accountability to, recipients and communities, in order to ensure the response is tailored to their changing needs.
- Donors and aid organizations should continue strengthening the response by enhancing the coordination of the Whole of Syria approach. The response should be based on a single, comprehensive, cross-sectorial and impartial needs assessment, which informs regular updates to the annual Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO)

3. Ensuring humanitarian access and humanitarian space

- Parties to the conflict and governments must enable humanitarian actors to access the most vulnerable people, particularly those in hard-to-reach and besieged areas, in a rapid, safe and unimpeded manner by all means possible and via the most direct routes.
- Parties to the conflict and governments should respect and ensure the safety and security of Syrian civil society and humanitarian workers and allow them to work throughout Syria without fear of arrest, forced eviction or accusations of criminal activity, regardless of their personal or their organisation's legal status. All principled humanitarian assistance provided by registered or unregistered Syrian and international humanitarian organisations should be recognised as legitimate humanitarian action.
- Parties to the conflict and governments should, as a matter of priority, facilitate medical evacuation for all victims of the conflict and humanitarian workers.
- All humanitarian actors should be developing robust, accountable and complementary access strategies to secure and maintain access in line with the Whole of Syria-approach, using all aid hubs and response modalities, including through regular programmes, cross-line, cross-border and air operations, in a sustained, principled and effective manner. Governments should fully support those access strategies, and facilitate access negotiations with parties to the conflict.

- Governments and aid organizations should use all possible fora, including the Humanitarian Task Force of the International Syria Support Group (ISSG), to facilitate access and ensure protection across Syria.

4. Ensuring access to health & protection of humanitarian health workers

- Parties to the conflict should demilitarize all zones around hospitals
- Parties to the conflict should ensure continuous and unconditional medical supply, as well as the implementation of vaccination and immunization programmes
- All humanitarian actors should systematically report and condemn any form of violence and attacks against health structures and health workers.
- Donors should ensure adequate programming and funding for mental health and psychosocial support programmes
- Donors should increase investment in training and self-empowerment of health workers, to be able to protect themselves and build resilience

5. Managing Emergencies and adapting to risks

- Humanitarian actors should continue to ensure joint contingency and preparedness plans notably through the pre-positioning of vital aid stocks across delivery hubs and within at-risk locations, allowing supplies and resources to be quickly mobilised and shifted in case of territorial changes/access shifts.
- Donors and governments should support humanitarian organizations in responding to critical humanitarian needs in all parts of the country, regardless of the line of control.
- Aid organisations should be allowed to conduct proper need assessments and monitoring of aid delivery throughout the country, without any restriction.

6. Empowering civil society and local humanitarian action

- Governments, donors and aid organizations should facilitate and support the continued development of a robust Syrian civil society, as central to both the humanitarian response as well as for Syria's future.
- Donors should continue strengthening operational partnerships with International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) and a greater number of Syrian NGOs and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs).

7. Supporting livelihoods and access to basic services of most vulnerable people as part of humanitarian assistance to strengthen resilience and self-reliance

- Governments, donors and aid organizations should consistently invest in livelihoods opportunities to reverse negative coping mechanisms.
- Governments, donors and aid organizations should ensure that safety nets are in place to address people's needs, particularly those of the most vulnerable groups.

- All humanitarian actors should support resilience building of affected people (displaced and host communities) by focusing on livelihoods, access to basic services, particularly education, and preparedness where and as possible.

8. Ensuring sustainable and flexible financing

- Donors, governments and aid organizations should increase and diversify the funding base in line with global commitments embodied in the Grand Bargain and the 'World Humanitarian Summit' outcomes
- Donor governments should increase multi-year, collaborative and flexible planning as well as predictable and flexible humanitarian funding, including via pooled funds, to enhance the ability of humanitarian actors to respond rapidly to changing needs and ensure continuity.
- All humanitarian actors should be supporting an increase in the use of multi-purpose cash assistance, particularly given the lack of access to more traditional forms of in-kind assistance, in many parts of Syria, and to stimulate market and local economies.
- Donors should work together harmonize reporting and monitoring requirements in order to reduce administrative burden for implementing partners.

9. Promoting transparency

- All humanitarian actors should ensure, in the spirit of the Whole of Syria-approach, a transparent sharing of in-depth needs assessments and analyses through enhanced information platforms, allowing for better decision-making, integrated/joint planning and higher accountability to donors and responders.
- Donors, governments and aid organizations should invest in improving the capacity of all partners to collect, access and publish data, while ensuring confidentiality.
- Donors and aid organizations should prioritise regular reporting on humanitarian aid to the Syria crisis via the Financial Tracking Service (FTS), to facilitate transparency and accountability and enable sustained advocacy.
