Session title: Building and strengthening Social Cohesion between Refugees and Host Communities

Session IV.2. Coping with extreme refugee influx: Developing best practices for building and maintaining peaceful co-existence.

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Main topics:

- The situation of municipalities with regard to the co-existence between a large number of refugees and the host community:
  - Economic and social challenges of communities in Jordan and Lebanon – Example of Sarhan: Various challenges such as the provision of public services to water and sanitation, health, education, public transport, waste sectors, cultural services etc cause high unemployment rates, rising housing costs, a change in social concepts and traditions etc. 
  - Impacts this had on the co-existence between refugees and the host communities. Example of Sarhan: Rising social tensions between the society and the refugees, resulting in mistrust in governmental institutions, fear of security threats, physical forms of violence towards refugees, harassment, discrimination, declining tolerance etc.
  - Example of the impacts of refugees on the job sector in Sarhan: The main impact is noticed on jobs in the private sector (as refugees are mainly working there, e.g. agricultural jobs) and a small impact is noticed on jobs in the public sector (as Jordanians are mainly working there).

- The mechanisms municipalities have to cope with these tensions and good practice examples for conflict prevention (selected methods in selected fields) to strengthen social cohesion within the municipalities:
  - The importance of the municipalities’ role in this endeavor as well as concrete support municipalities need in order to build and strengthen social cohesion.
Best practices:

- **Building social networks:** The municipality of Sarhan started teamwork sessions on a political level where refugees and the host community come together to get equally involved in the policy making of the municipality by sharing responsibilities, getting in touch with the line ministries, the Jordanian government, International Organizations etc.
- **Strengthening social awareness through education centers:** Educational workshops can raise awareness to subjects such as drug abuse etc.
- **Creating joint job opportunities:** The municipality of Sarhan started a huge mechanism of shared job opportunities where Syrian refugees and Jordanians come together, interact, socialize, and hence foster social cohesion. (e.g. Jointly cleaning up the city and thereby, also responding to the waste problem).
- **Health reduces social stressors that could cause social tensions:** The International Rescue Committee, in partnership with municipalities in Northern Jordan offers humanitarian assistance and medical care by health services for those in need – Vulnerable Syrian refugees and Jordanians are equally treated.

Lessons learnt:

- **Social spaces to enhance recognition:** The recognition is an important factor that has to be considered in order to build common feelings of membership, trust and unity. This leads to cohesion amongst individuals and also amongst different social groups.
- **The improvement of basic services:** Health plays a crucial role, but also building economic opportunities, the creation of jobs etc.
- **Potentials of refugees:** Considering the potentials of refugees can help in new contexts to come up with appropriate projects and approaches.
- **Innovative solutions:** We have to think in an optimistic way, recognize the advantages of these co-existences and be innovative.
- **Inclusive aid:** ICRs showed us how inclusive aid can work. By equally considering refugees and the host communities, the stressors of social tensions are reduced. We also learnt that it is more promising to support an existing delivery system than to duplicate services.
- **Personal relationships at a local level:** Relationships with the authorities of the municipalities have to be built in order to demand the needs of the community, to implement best practices and to connect with the local communities. The coordination system should adapt to the local authority. There should be an integrated coordination mechanism.

Recommendations:

- **Importance of understanding the root causes of social tensions and addressing social stressors at its core:** We should address this topic in a comprehensive way. The media has the ability to damage perceptions – we should look further.
- **Multiple actor involvement and the creation of partnerships:** There have to be multiple actors working against a growing policy of segregation. E.g. in the health sector including both vulnerable host communities and refugees in their programmes. This is also true for other sectors.
• **Building formal and informal social networks:** In order to strengthen participation in formal and informal social networks we have to build up engagements with political actors.

• **Support mechanisms must be enhanced:** Growing gaps and costs resulting from inadequate support to national and local delivery systems must be addressed (health, education, and municipal services).

• **National and regional differences:** We have to keep these differences in mind when it comes to decide about specific strategies and approaches.

• **Resilience is very much linked to social cohesion:** We cannot look to social cohesion without taking into consideration aspects of resilience.

• **Long-term solutions have to be found:** It is crucial to have a good monitoring system which provides regular information on the proposals.

**Need to follow-up:**

• **Communication platforms:** E.g. a website, where actors can exchange their problems, success stories etc.

• **Social cohesion is about the community in front of us:** Face-to-face meetings.

• **Further peer-to-peer meetings:** The exchange of experiences is crucial.