



Briefing Brussels Conference IV - 30 June 2020

The Refugee Protection Watch (RPW) – an initiative between Basmeh and Zeitooneh, AIJEF Act for Human Rights, PAX, 11.11.11. and Upinion – is comprised of human rights, peacebuilding, humanitarian and development organisations and a social enterprise with research and advocacy expertise and experience in Europe, Syria and Lebanon. The coalition was formed in 2019 and undertakes research and advocacy on protection issues facing Syrian refugees in Lebanon and the conditions for safe, voluntary, informed and dignified return to Syria. A first RPW publication on the impact of COVID-19 on refugee and host communities in Lebanon can be found [HERE](#).

For the occasion of the upcoming Brussels Conference IV on June 30; based on the work, experience and research of the RPW coalition, we would like to present the following recommendations to organisers and participants of the conference:

Refugee Policy

1. Participants to the Brussels IV conference on Syria should maintain the position that Syria is currently not a safe destination of return; and that any return should be safe, voluntary, dignified and informed, and a personal decision made by the individual refugee involved.
2. Participants to the Brussels IV conference on Syria should ensure that the outcome document makes an explicit reference and commitment to the UNHCR Protection Thresholds, as outlined in UNHCR's Comprehensive Protection Solutions Strategy*, and state that this will be the basis for return policies. They should also request UNHCR to provide regular reporting on the situation in Syria with regards to the thresholds, including on any backsliding or information gaps.
3. EU member states should increase the number of resettlement places for Syrian refugees, commit to improved responsibility-sharing between member states, uphold the right to asylum, continue to provide pathways to resettlement even if these are temporarily paused due to COVID-19, and provide information about potential delays due to COVID-19.
4. Participants to the Brussels IV conference on Syria should ensure and apply a holistic approach that recognizes that the 3 internationally-recognized "durable solutions" for displaced Syrians are inherently interlinked and should be actively and simultaneously promoted.

Funding

5. Participants to the Brussels IV conference on Syria should ensure multi-annual, predictable and flexible humanitarian and development aid for refugee- and host communities, through dedicated mechanisms. They should also ensure funding to human rights and peacebuilding initiatives addressing issues facing refugees and host communities.
6. Donors at the Brussels IV conference on Syria should make more resources available for Syrian-led and Syrian-owned research efforts that document protection concerns in areas of return, and with regard to protection in host countries. This is of key importance to help ensure the knowledge and expertise of Syrians is better incorporated into policy discussions and to help increase information available to Syrians who are thinking of returning.

*UNHCR's Comprehensive Protection Solutions Strategy: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/63223>

Civil Society Inclusion and Localisation

7. Organisers of the Brussels IV conference on Syria should ensure that Syrian CSOs are structurally included in discussions about refugee policy, before, during and after the Brussels IV conference.

8. Participants to the Brussels IV conference on Syria should identify ways to better structurally include Syrian organisations in discussions around the protection and rights of refugees, as well as about return policy. This should include an explicit request to UNHCR to structurally include Syrian civil society in the UN-led Durable Solutions Working groups at regional and national level.

9. Donors should ensure flexible funding for local NGOs in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and economic crisis in Lebanon, in terms of reallocation of existing budgets, allowing staff to adjust to the current circumstances, adapt programming, acquire new skills, invest in tools and procedures for safety and risk management. Donors should accelerate and concretize aid localization efforts and commitments, by providing longer-term and flexible funding that includes adequate support for overhead costs to cover safety, health insurance, severance pay and other risk management priorities.

COVID-19 Response

10. Donors should ensure sufficient funding in response to COVID-19 and urgently commit resources to support emergency response plans for COVID-19 testing and treatment, food assistance, hygiene promotion, healthcare, rent support and emergency cash and/or in-kind assistance, as well as awareness-raising activities. This can be done, in part, through a contribution to the UN's COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan (GHRP). In the GHRP, UN agencies and donors should also increase the availability of unearmarked funds for NGOs.

11. Donors should ensure that funding for cash, food and hygiene support also considerably targets vulnerable host communities in Lebanon, due to the volatile context and loss of purchasing power of a large segment of the Lebanese population.

12. Participants to the Brussels IV conference on Syria should ensure that COVID-19 related services, particularly health services, are provided in a non-discriminatory manner between refugees and host communities. They should also request that any restrictions of movement or curfews due to COVID-19 are likewise non-discriminatory, and strictly monitor that the COVID-19 crisis is not used as a pretext to forcibly deport Syrian refugees to Syria.

13. Donors should ensure that any funding to COVID-19 response plans is additional to already existing humanitarian and development projects, and does not come at the expense of existing funding.

14. Donors should maintain or increase support to human rights activities, local civil society, and peacebuilding activities, and should ensure that any diversion of human rights and peacebuilding funding is only shortterm and temporary, given their important role in the response to COVID-19, as well as to protect against backsliding on important issues during the COVID-19 emergency.



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