



From Words to Action

Reviewing the commitments made at the
'Supporting Syria and the Region' Conference six months on

Signed by:

➤ NGO Platforms

- Alliance2015
- Jordan INGO Forum (JIF)
- Lebanon Humanitarian INGO Forum (LHIF)
- Syria INGO Regional Forum (SIRF)

➤ Individual agencies

- Action Against Hunger (ACF)
- ActionAid
- Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED)
- Amel Association
- American Relief Coalition for Syria (ARCS)
- Basamat for Development
- CAFOD
- CARE International
- Cooperazione e Sviluppo (CESVI)
- Concern Worldwide
- Danish Refugee Council (DRC)
- Deutsche Welthungerhilfe
- Diakonia
- Dorcas
- Economic Development Foundation (IKV)
- Foundation for the Support of Women's Work (KEDV)
- Hand in Hand Syria
- Hope for Syria
- Humedica
- International Blue Crescent Relief and Development Foundation (IBC)
- International Medical Corps (IMC)
- International Rescue Committee (IRC)
- INTERSOS
- Karam Foundation
- Khayr
- Médecins du Monde (Mdm)
- Mercy Corps
- Norwegian People Aid – Lebanon (NPA)
- Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)
- NuDay Syria
- Oxfam
- Phenix Center for Economic and Informatics Studies
- Première Urgence - Aide Médicale Internationale (PU-AMI)
- People in Need (PIN)
- QuestScope
- Research Center for Asylum and Migration (IGAM)
- Save the Children
- SAWA for Development and Aid
- Sonbola Group for Education and Development
- Syrian American Medical Society Foundation (SAMS)
- Syrian Community Network
- Syria Relief and Development
- Terre des Hommes – Italia
- UDA Consulting
- United Cities Local Governments Middle East and West Asia Section (UCLG-MEWA)
- WATAN
- World Vision International

Executive summary

The ‘Supporting Syria and the Region’ conference held in London on 4 February 2016 agreed ‘a comprehensive new approach on how we respond to this protracted crisis.’¹ The promises made in London have the potential to make a significant contribution to improving the lives of both refugee and vulnerable host communities in [Jordan](#), [Lebanon](#) and [Turkey](#): the three countries hosting approximately 75 percent of refugees from Syria.² However, the conference has failed to deliver with regard to the core issues of the protection of civilians inside Syria and of refugees in neighbouring countries.

Participants committed to ‘reduc[ing] the pressure on countries hosting refugees by supporting them in providing access to jobs and education that will benefit both refugees and host communities.’³ This included a commitment that all boys and girls in refugee and vulnerable host communities will have access to quality education by the end of the 2016/17 school year.

In order to achieve these goals, members of the international community committed to providing Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey with financial and technical support to stimulate their economies and to help with policy reform and better cope with the crisis, including fully funding the aid response, providing increased development and concessional funding, and facilitating access to external markets.

Some steps are being taken in the right direction to make this ambitious ‘new approach’ a reality. Donors pledged \$6bn for 2016 and a further \$6.1bn for 2017–20,⁴ the largest amount ever raised ‘on a single day for a single crisis.’⁵ Since the conference 73 percent of the pledged funding for 2016 has been committed;⁶ the EU announced a relaxation of the ‘rules of origin’ on imports to make it easier for products from Jordan to enter EU markets;⁷ and Jordan had issued 26,000 work permits to Syrians by end of August 2016,⁸ of which approximately only 2 percent went to women.⁹ All three neighbouring host countries are accelerating plans to increase the number of children benefiting from education.

Much more needs to be done, however. Funding needs to be made available promptly. Disbursement has been slow and the UN-led appeal for the Syria crisis remains less than half funded.¹⁰ Many of the positive policy developments already underway will take time and require sustained political will, effort, and sufficient funding and technical capacity to come to fruition. For example, in order to achieve greater access to livelihoods opportunities for host communities and refugees alike at the scale required, clear follow-up plans are required from the Lebanese government for the effective implementation of their decision to lift the ‘pledge not to work’ for Syrian refugees; and Turkey and Jordan need to make regulatory changes to ease applications for work permits. This has



Syrian youth in Zaatari Refugee Camp welding metal.
Photo credit: Norwegian Refugee Council

to be combined with sufficient investment and employment creation plans, with support from the international community.

At the London conference, the international community failed to comprehensively address issues around the legal status and documentation of refugees. As many as 70 percent of refugees from Syria in Lebanon¹¹ and 25 percent of Syrian refugees in host communities in Jordan lack valid residence making them vulnerable to arrest, detention, forced relocation and even deportation. Neglecting refugees' legal status risks undermining the premise of the new approach, as it is a precondition for accessing work and education. Lack of valid residency entails significant limitation on the freedom of movement for many refugees, which hinders their ability to access work and basic services. Fear of the authorities can also make refugees reluctant to apply for newly available work permits and more vulnerable to workplace exploitation. As a result of these and other barriers, despite the commitments made in London, almost one million Syrian refugee children will most likely remain out of education as schools reopen this September in Syria's neighbouring countries.¹³

Even more worrying is that Syria's neighbours, along with many third countries in Europe, North America and elsewhere, seek to limit the number of refugee arrivals by closing their borders or imposing other restrictive measures. Progress on aid, funding and increased livelihoods and education opportunities in neighbouring countries – while welcome and potentially life changing – does not absolve governments of their collective and individual responsibility to ensure that desperate men, women and children are able to flee the terrible violence in Syria and in other countries. Fully sharing the responsibility of the crisis includes offering durable and interim solutions, such as resettlement and other humanitarian admissions; something which most countries outside the region, with few exceptions such as Canada and Germany, are failing to do.

48 organisations and four NGO platforms urge international donors and governments of refugee-hosting countries to use the upcoming UN General Assembly 71 to:

● **Redouble international efforts to achieve a political solution** to the conflict in Syria to enable refugees' to voluntarily return in safety and dignity.

● **Provide sufficient funds and other economic incentives in a timely and transparent manner** to allow Syria's neighbouring countries to implement successfully the substantial policy changes. Use the upcoming UNGA 71 to report on additional financial resources mobilised in 2016 and to develop a stronger monitoring mechanism to track multi-annual funding commitments and disbursements.

● **Take the necessary steps to operationalise the commitments made in London** including clear plans with timeframes and benchmarks. These need to be reflected in relevant country plans under the 3RP.

● **Strengthen access to protection for refugees**, by setting up clear, accessible and affordable procedures to maintain valid documentation, residency and registration. Legal protection is a prerequisite to improving access to livelihoods, education and other basic services.

● **Remove barriers preventing adult refugees from accessing decent work opportunities** without threat of punitive measures by addressing exploitation in the workplace and restrictions on legal stay and freedom of movement; supporting the development of micro, small and medium-sized Syrian-owned enterprises; and expanding and funding initiatives to increase other livelihood opportunities for all.

● **Ensure that every last child benefits from quality education** to avoid creating a lost generation by opening new places in public schools; placing more emphasis on quality and on school retention; addressing the worst forms of child labour; and providing sufficient opportunities for quality and certified non-formal education with civil society support and with a future prospect to engage in formal education.

● **Respect the rights of those seeking asylum.** All countries must allow entry to asylum seekers fleeing violence and seeking international protection, and ensure that due process is afforded where there is risk of deportation. **Third countries must also increase resettlement to at least 10 percent of the Syrian refugee population** by the end of 2016, and also scale up other forms of admission through safe routes including family reunification, scholarships and other labour based schemes.