



Capacities for Peace: Lebanon

The European Union funded Capacities for Peace project, implemented by Conciliation Resources, Saferworld and their partners, supported local actors to enhance the effectiveness of early warning and early action in conflict-affected contexts. In Lebanon, activities focused on the lessons from local efforts to alleviate tensions between Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees. Through shared learning, the project sought to enhance practice and increase trust and cooperation between various groups.

The project brought together civil society organisations (CSOs) and representatives of municipal authorities from across Lebanon, as well as international actors, to reflect on current practices and approaches, including challenges and potential areas for coordinated responses. A workshop was held in Beirut in December 2014.

The work in Lebanon was part of a Syria-focused 'regional hub' aiming to strengthen local capacities to respond to the influx of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

Achievements

- Creating space for dialogue between CSOs and municipalities led to an increased understanding of each other's positions and perspectives. This allowed them to voice frustrations and identify obstacles – practical and perception-based – to collaboration, including mutual distrust and suspicion. This was significant because the groups rarely sit together to discuss common concerns.
- The workshop allowed municipal officials and key representatives from local and international civil society to reflect on current approaches to reduce tensions. They identified practices that had been successful as well as those that had contributed to increased friction and stresses; lessons they said they could take forward practically in their work.
- The workshop increased international agencies and organisations' awareness of the importance of communication between, and with, municipalities and CSOs for effective interventions. For many international actors it was the first time they had sat together with both CSOs and municipal officials.

Insights

Strengthened relations between municipalities and civil society (both local and international) can be an enabling factor for effective initiatives to reduce tensions. Opportunities at a regional and local level for local actors to discuss concerns around risks and tensions allow for the identification of responses tailored to the needs of specific communities.

Greater and more open communication by international non governmental organisations (INGOs) with municipalities and civil society organisations is important for build trust and catalyse effective action. INGOs in turn have useful roles to play as convenors of consultation processes between local authorities and civil society organisations, strengthening confidence and communication between them.

A broader peacebuilding approach in refugee responses would make initiatives more effective. These could include: 1) overcoming resistance to the inclusion of Syrian voices by promoting better relations between the two communities in safe, non-political spaces; and 2) tension reduction strategies that recognise and address existing and prevalent Lebanese-Lebanese tensions.

"The participants in the workshop were very diverse politically, some in support of the [Syrian] regime and others against it. In other circumstances they could have been killing one another. Politically they don't talk. And they were sat together here talking."

Carmen Geha, workshop facilitator,
Beyond Reform and Development



Above: Participants at a Capacities for Peace workshop in Beirut, Lebanon, map out conflict dynamics. © Conciliation Resources/Charlotte Melly
 Front page: Line of refugees in front of the UNHCR registration centre in Tripoli, Lebanon. © World Bank/Mohamed Azakir

Sharing lessons from across Lebanon

A number of informal initiatives have developed across Lebanon to deal with the influx of Syrian refugees. However, there has been little opportunity to reflect on how effective these have been in reducing tensions. The Capacities for Peace project sought to highlight successful examples, allowing participants to share lessons from their experiences. Six locally led initiatives from across Lebanon were discussed to identify the main success factors, as well as key challenges faced.

Reducing tensions through improved sanitation

The Lebanese Relief Council (LRC) was set up in 2013, after an Akkar resident, Ahmad Al Ayoubi, noticed that emerging tensions between municipalities and international non-governmental organisations were preventing the effective delivery of aid and services. He decided that a localised approach could minimise this conflict and ensure effective delivery of services to those Lebanese and Syrian populations most in need.

Through two projects – the replacement of wooden toilet seats with metal ones in informal tented settlements and the provision of water in two villages – the LRC team became the main contact for refugees in the area, local communities, the Shawish (the local leaders in refugee settlements) and municipalities. If tensions

arise the LRC team intervenes quickly to coordinate with the relevant municipality to resolve the issue. For example, in autumn 2014, after the Lebanese Army demanded that refugees in the area leave immediately, the refugees called LRC. The field coordinator was quickly on the scene to assist the refugees, coordinate with the military to decrease tensions and prevent a possible eruption of violence.

“If he was not there so early in the morning, things would’ve gotten out of hand and the refugees would have definitely started a fight. Thankfully, our team was there to help them through the process and communicate with the army.”

Ahmad Al Ayoubi, Founder,
 Lebanese Relief Council

Lessons from the Capacities for Peace project have been published by Conciliation Resources and Saferworld in ‘Effective local action: from early warning to peacebuilding’, February 2016. Conciliation Resources’ publication ‘Lebanon: Local Capacities for Peace’, December 2014 and Saferworld’s publication ‘Jordan: Local Capacities for Peace’, September 2014 provide further information on the regional workshops in Lebanon and Jordan.

