

Jordanian Hosts and Syrian Refugees: Comparing Perceptions of Social Conflict and Cohesion in Three Host Communities

Executive Summary

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Generations For Peace (GFP) is a Jordanian NGO that seeks to improve peace-building skills and reduce violence among youth through sport- and arts-based activities. Active in 50 countries, GFP provides programmes in Jordan to build social cohesion and reduce violence between Syrian refugees and Jordanian host community members.

In order to deepen GFP's understanding of challenges to social cohesion in Jordan and thus improve GFP's programme design and implementation processes in Jordan, research was conducted by GFP staff in spring and summer 2015 with GFP programme participants (12-22 y/o, Syrians and Jordanians), parents of programme participants (Syrians and Jordanians), and GFP volunteers (GFP Delegates, Jordanians). Research was conducted primarily through 25 Interviews and 26 Focus Group Discussions with 155 research participants in community centres in Amman, Mafrq, and Irbid.

While much recent research has examined the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on host communities in Jordan and broad causes of conflict within host communities, much less in-depth qualitative research exists on relations and causes of conflict between Syrian and Jordanian children and youth, as well as on the complex dynamics of social relations between Syrians and Jordanians.

The research sought to examine what *differences* exist between Jordanian and Syrian perspectives (including those of children and youth) on relations and conflict between members of each nationality in host communities in Jordan, in order to assess how GFP can ensure that conflict analysis and programme designs reflect accurately the conflict transformation needs of host communities in Jordan.

In addition to identifying ways to strengthen the effectiveness of GFP programming in Jordan, the research generated practical recommendations for other programmes seeking to build social cohesion in other Syrian refugee host countries.

Ultimately, this research sought to identify any differences between Syrian and Jordanian perspectives on the following questions:

1. What are the most important / main forms of conflict prevalent between Syrian and Jordanian children and youth in urban and village communities in northern Jordan?
 - What are the root *local causes* of this conflict?
 - What *local actors* are involved in this conflict and how should they be involved in addressing it?

2. What are the most pressing needs (at the community level) in addressing these different forms of conflict between Syrian and Jordanian children and youth?

- How can the root causes of *local* conflict be addressed through *community-based* programming?
- What resources are needed to address *local* conflict through *community-based* programming?

Analysis of the research data indicated that significant differences did exist between Jordanians' and Syrians' perceptions of their relations with one another in the Jordanian host communities studied. Primary areas of divergence between Jordanian and Syrian participants' perceptions of (1) relations between local community members of both nationalities and (2) conflict causes and factors included:

1. The distribution of humanitarian aid;
2. Syrians' status as either "guests" or as refugees: hospitality- and rights-based discourses;
3. The accessibility of education for refugee children and youth;
4. Community safety and relations with local law enforcement and civil/municipal authorities;
5. Perspectives on Syrian women and girls' marriage practices, including marriage to Jordanians and early marriage.

The research also revealed a group of interacting social factors that seemed to influence strongly both groups' attitudes towards the issues described above. These factors included:

1. The relationships between Syrian refugees and Jordanian teachers in local schools;
2. Communication patterns within families;
3. The gender of the individuals involved in Jordanian-Syrian interactions;
4. The historical precedent of Palestinian refugees in Jordan.

Ultimately, the research revealed a feedback loop of social dynamics contributing to increased conflict between Syrians and Jordanians in host communities, Syrian children's and youth's decreased access to education, and increased social isolation of Syrians. By examining these dynamics, the researcher identified key points of intervention at which this downward spiral of conflict in host communities could be addressed. Analysis revealed the powerful potential of several specific *actors* and specific *types of contact* between Syrians and Jordanians to interrupt this negative spiral and redirect refugee-host community relations towards social cohesion.

Based on these results, this report recommends several ways in which the design and implementation of GFP's Jordan Social Cohesion in Host Communities Programme may be improved. These recommendations may also be relevant for other programmes designed to strengthen social cohesion in other Syrian refugee host countries in the region. Recommendations include:

1. Ensure that women and girls are included in programme activities;
2. Include both parents and children and youth in programme activities;
3. Design programming to address Jordanian teachers' attitudes towards Syrians;
4. Ensure that Syrian stakeholders are included in the programme design and implementation processes;
5. Create more safe spaces for positive Jordanian-Syrian interaction in host communities.

Ultimately, it is hoped that these recommendations will prove useful in building positive refugee-host community member relations in other Syrian refugee host countries in the region, in addition to guiding the ongoing development of GFP programmes in Jordan.