



INFORMATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Kurdish Region of Northern Iraq:

Humanitarian information needs of Syrian refugees

ims

INTERNATIONAL
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Introduction

Addressing information needs among refugees as well as among host communities is a complex undertaking. It requires thorough assessment and tailored responses that take into account diverse issues including culture, language, education levels, the host environment and a tentative time frame of the displacement to secure that information needs are being met adequately.

Participatory approaches involving crises affected persons and communities have for years been at the forefront among humanitarian actors. Humanitarians have increasingly tried to include the voices of the direct beneficiaries and to involve them in decision-making and the design of aid projects, but this aspect has not received the attention it deserves. Ironically, the eagerness and pressure by humanitarians to respond to the needs and assist those in need often seems to overrule the principle of participation and direct engagement with the community.

The objective of this assessment was to better understand and address the information and communications needs among Syrian camp and non-camp refugees in and around the city of Sulaymaniyah, in the Kurdish Region of Northern Iraq, as well as to gain insights into information and communications needs within the host community.

The assessment is motivated by IMS' aim of responding to the serious challenges of forced displacement – a direct and dire consequence of the crisis in Syria. IMS has more than seven years of continuous experience with media projects in Iraq. Over this period it has built a solid knowledge of the media scene in the country; non-governmental media initiatives; the political context in the different regions; and it has access to a large network of actors within the media sector and the aid sector. IMS is currently supporting and cooperating with 11 independent media outlets in different parts of Iraq.

IMS also draws upon lessons learned from the experiences within the network of Communication with Disaster Affected Communities (CDAC), of which IMS is a founding member. These lessons come from other information needs assessments developed recently by CDAC members.

The assessment was carried out in cooperation with CartONG, a French NGO specialising in providing mapping and information management services to humanitarian and development organisations.

This report presents the core findings of the assessment carried out in January-February 2014 and the main recommendations and conclusions resulting from a peer review of these findings validated during a follow-up visit to Sulaymaniyah in March 2014.

1. Background

Syria is currently experiencing the largest and most devastating humanitarian and displacement crisis in the world. As of February 2014, more than 140,000 Syrians have lost their lives, more than 9 million people are displaced within Syria and nearly 4 million have fled the country seeking safety and protection in the neighbouring countries of Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt. By the end of February 2014, more than 226,000 Syrians were registered as refugees or were awaiting registration in Iraq by UNHCR – the majority of them (95%) in the Kurdish Region of Northern Iraq. According to the Iraqi Authorities and the UNHCR, more than 250,000 Syrian refugees reside in Iraq.

For any person being forcefully displaced and seeking refuge, the list of challenges is long: how to register as a refugee; how to secure basic needs such as shelter, food and medicine for one's family; how to access education and health facilities for one's children; how to secure an income

and maintain a bearable life in safety and dignity. These difficulties and uncertainties arise naturally for displaced persons. And often information about how to access basic services, register, secure one's rights and know about one's duties in exile is difficult to obtain or simply not available. Although the systems supporting refugees such as aid organisations; (I)NGOs, UN agencies and local authorities try to include information and communication management in their efforts, such services are often under-prioritised, under-resourced or neglected during emergencies. Information needs among refugees are as varied as for any person arriving to settle in a new country without preparation, support systems or structures to assist. In addition, many refugees have faced insecurity, violence, discrimination, persecution, threats or direct attacks in their country of origin or on their way to safety, leaving them in shock and sometimes traumatised. In many places, host populations have shown great sympathy and support for refugees – this goes as well for the Kurdish Region of Iraq, where the host population have shown great solidarity with the Syrian refugees and provided improvised and organised assistance. Hopefully, this approach will continue if refugees remain in the Kurdish Region for a significant period of time. Providing information and platforms for communication and dialogue between refugees and their host population is essential to prevent potential conflicts and to sustain the current positive relationship.

2. Methodology

Based on recommendations and lessons learned via the CDAC Network, IMS developed a Concept Note¹ and a paper on methodology² in preparation for this assessment. The methodological framework consisted of contextual background, assessment/data collection options, sampling strategies, some secondary data reviews, operational planning and timeline as well as sample questionnaires to be used when meeting with different stakeholders. This assessment was based on this methodology.

To augment the findings of the assessment, external documentation and additional information and data has been reviewed, including documentation from UNHCR, Refugees International, Oxford Refugee Studies Centre/Forced Migration Review, Syrian Needs Analysis Project, the Camp Management Toolkit and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

The assessment was conducted by a team of six national and international enumerators (five male and one female) and a team leader. A total of 383 persons/households were interviewed including 15 persons representing local media, using tailored and pre-produced questionnaires. In addition, approximately 10 key informants were interviewed, including the Mayor of Arbat town, a Camp Council representative from the Arbat Transit Camp, NGO representatives and local media representatives. The questionnaire was developed based upon CDAC Network recommendations and was comprised of approximately 25 questions adapted to the three different target groups: refugees, the host population and local media.

It was decided to conduct the assessment at household level instead of at community level in order for persons to freely express their views and opinions. This was possible in camp settings. However, cultural aspects of gender and language prevented the assessment team from adhering to the original plan and adjustments had to be made in order to obtain information from non-camp refugees. Therefore, instead of household visits the enumerators randomly contacted people in public areas known to be housing Syrian refugees and conducted the interviews there.

¹ IMS – Strengthening the information and communication flows between Syrian refugees and their host communities in order to build resilience and engagement in decisions about relief and recovery efforts, December 2013

² IMS – Rapid Media Needs Assessment Sulaymaniyah, CartONG, February 2014

Figure 1 – Overview of population assessed

Targeted population	Number of households	Target sample size	Margin of error at 95% level of confidence
Refugees (Camp)	814	95	10%
Refugees (Non-Camp)	9,131 ³	108	10%
Host Community Sulaymaniyah	Unknown	106	10%
Host Community Arbat	< 10,000	74	
Local Media		15	
TOTAL		398	

The enumerators managed to access men and women among Syrian refugees both in the camp (53% women and 47% men) and outside of the camp (42% women and 58% men), but they could not access women when interviewing Kurdish host populations in Arbat (3% women and 97% men) and Sulaymaniyah (8% women and 92% men). Consequently, there is a lack of gender balance in perspectives on information needs among the host populations. Finally, the assessment did not include further gender segregated data so the analyses do not provide an overall gender perspective on information needs of refugees as well as host population. This must be taken into account when validating the data and designing a response.

3. Key findings

3.1 Target groups

The primary target group of the assessment was Syrian refugees in and outside camps in Sulaymaniyah – in UNHCR terms, camp Refugees and non-camp Refugees. The secondary target group was the host population or host communities in and around Sulaymaniyah. Local media were also included in the assessment.

3.2 Demography and geography

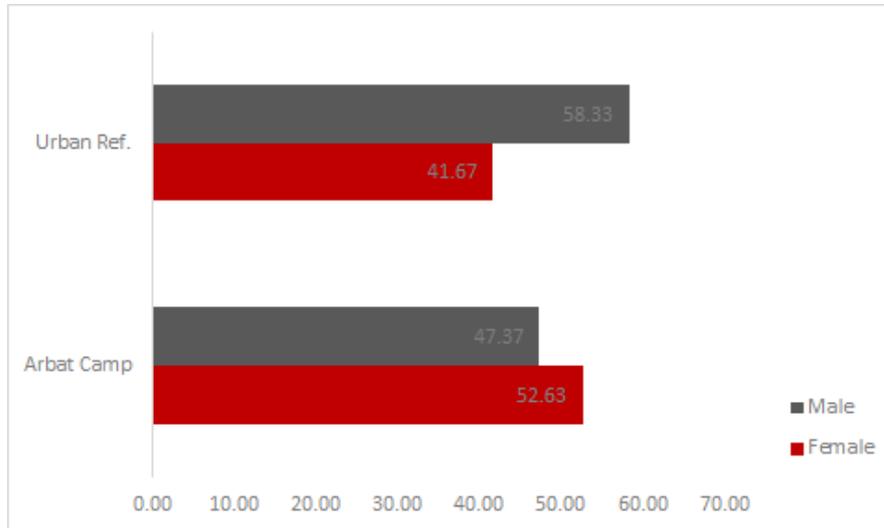
As of 28 February 2014⁴, 225,548 Syrian refugees were registered in Iraq. 25,293 Syrian refugees were registered in the Governorate of Sulaymaniyah out of which 51% are women and children (both sexes) and 49% are adult men. Some 3,000 resided in the temporary transit camp Arbat and

³ Kurdish Region Government figures

⁴ UNHCR Monthly Information Kit – March 2014 Erbil/Iraq

the remaining approximately 22,300 non-camp refugees resided in and around Arbat town and Sulaymaniyah city.

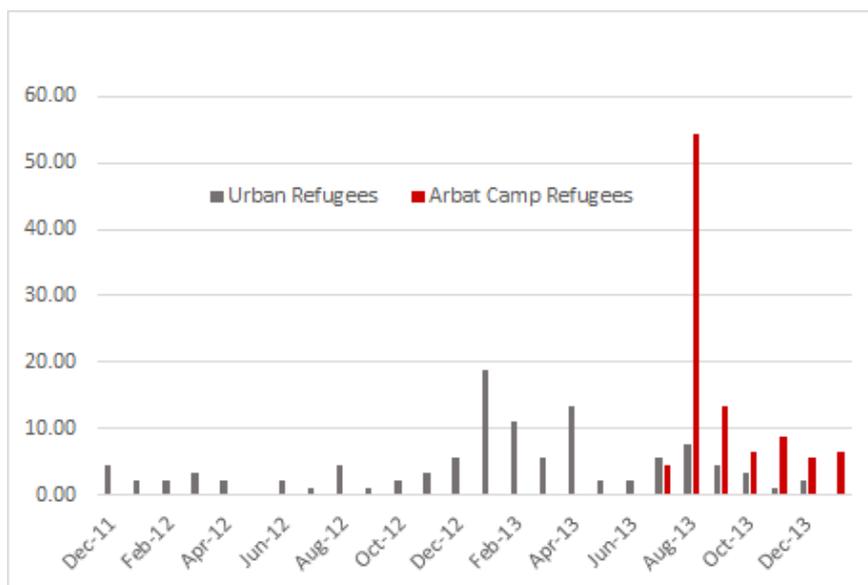
Figure 2 – Percentage of male and female Syrian camp and non-camp refugees assessed



The majority of the refugees in the Arbat transit camp and outside of the camp originated from the Al-Hasakeh Governorate in North Eastern Syria and were predominantly ethnic Kurds. 82% of the camp refugees and 57% of the non-camp refugees originated from Al-Hasakeh Governorate. The balance of refugees interviewed originated mainly from Aleppo (11% of camp refugees and 36 % of non-camp refugees) and from Damascus (6% of camp refugees and 7% of non-camp refugees) while a small percentage were from the city of Homs.

The majority of the Syrian refugees living in the Arbat transit camp crossed the Syrian border into the Kurdish Region of Iraq in August 2013. The non-camp refugees have been arriving in Sulaymaniyah since the beginning of the crisis with the largest groups of refugees arriving in December 2012.

Figure 3 – Percentage of refugees interviewed by month of arrival to Sulaymaniyah and Arbat Transit Camp



The majority of the persons surveyed were between the age of 18 and 34 (64% and 55% of the host population in Arbat and Sulaymaniyah respectively, and for the Syrian refugees 57% of camp and 67% of non-camp refugees). The second largest age group interviewed were between the ages of 35-49 years (approximately 23% of the host population in both locations and the same for the camp and non-camp refugees).

The camp in Arbat is by UNHCR named 'Arbat Temporary/Transit Refugee Camp' or site'.⁵ It is situated 22 kilometres from Sulemaniyah city and was established and opened in September/October 2013. By March 2014, some 3,000 persons were registered in the camp. The camp has a planned capacity for up to 5,000 persons. According to UNHCR, essential needs are met within Health, WASH, Protection, Food, Non-food Items and Shelter in the camp. UNHCR, UNICEF, ACTED and UNAMI are listed as the organisations working in the sector of Information Management (IM) in the camp. A new Arbat camp (non-temporary) is currently under construction with a planned capacity for up to 10,200 persons. So far, it is not known when this camp will open for refugees who are to relocate from the transit camp but there are indications that this might happen in June 2014.

According to the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics, the population of Al-Hasakeh was estimated at 1.6 million in early 2011; estimates for the number of Kurds varies due to lack of data but is thought to be between 40-70% of the governorate's population. They are residing mainly in four districts: in Al-Hasakeh: Al Malikeyyeh/Dêrika; Quaumishli/Qamislo; Ras Al Ain/Serêkaniyê; and Al-Hasekey/Hesekê. Historically, Al-Hasekey has been one of the poorest governorates in Syria despite it being known as the bread basket of the country. Long-term targeted discrimination by the Syrian Government towards the Kurds, exploitation of Al-Hasakeh's oil revenues (outside the governorate) and a devastating drought during 2004-2007 have compounded the hardships endured by its population and have possibly contributed to their increased vulnerabilities.⁶ In 2010, the labour force of Al-Hasakeh consisted of one quarter of the working population in the agriculture sector, a quarter in services and nearly 20% in the building and construction sector, while the rest was engaged in the services sector such as hotels and restaurants, and industry and other smaller sectors.

Consideration of the possibility for repatriation for the Syrian refugees was not included in the assessment. However, in a follow up mission during which the question was posed, none of the refugees interviewed mentioned it as an option and they expressed that repatriation was very unlikely for a considerable period of time. Sources also described the establishment of new shops, shelters and other facilities in and around camps in the Kurdish Region as a sign of the recognition by refugees that the prospect of returning home is distant. This aspect should also be taken into account when designing information projects for Syrian refugees in the Kurdish Region.

3.3 Levels of education and literacy

Varied sources suggest that the current population of Syrian refugees in Arbat and Sulemaniyah originating from Al-Hasakeh has been exposed to several shocks over the years prior to the conflict, partly caused by years of discrimination and partly affecting their access to e.g. proper health care, maintaining nutritional standards (14% of children under five in Al-Hasakeh were underweight in 2010) and access to education facilities. For example, sources described how parents have been forced to take children out of schools in Syria to have them work to generate income due to the financial pressure on their families (pre-crisis and during crisis).

⁵ The Arbat Transit Camp or Site is referred to in this report as 'the camp' or 'Arbat Camp'.

⁶ Al-Hasakeh Governorate profile, Syria Needs Analysis Project – February 2014

According to the assessment 17% of the camp refugees interviewed had completed university education, as opposed to the higher 46% of interviewees among the host population of Sulaymaniyah. The percentage of persons interviewed having completed secondary education was, however, similar at an average of 41-42% across all four groups with the Arbat host population slightly lower at 39% having finalised secondary education.

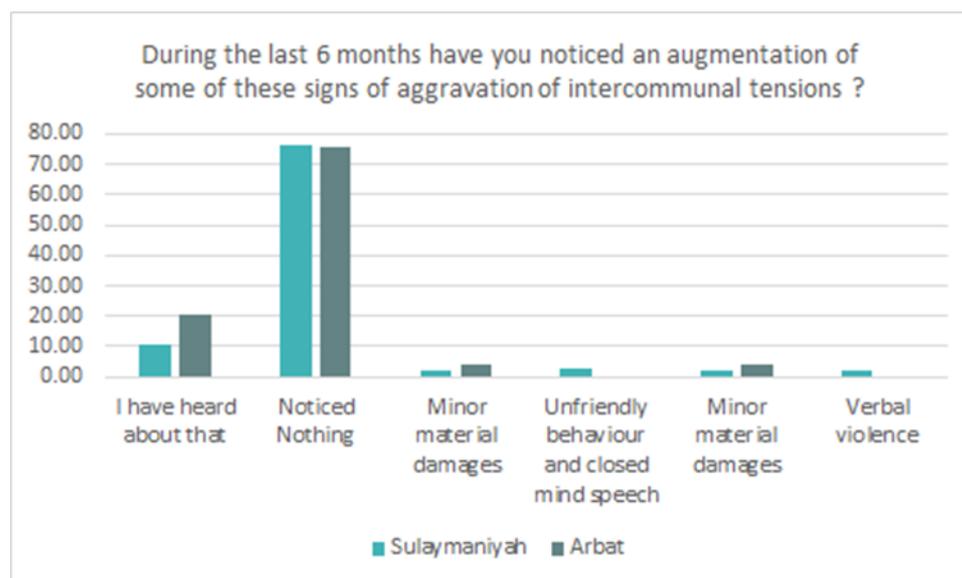
The level of self-identified illiteracy was markedly higher at 7% among those interviewed in the Arbat town population than among interviewees in Sulaymaniyah where it was at 1%; whereas about 10% of refugees in the Arbat Transit Camp and approximate 9% of non-camp refugees considered themselves illiterate.

3.4 Relations between refugee communities and host communities

According to sources such as UNHCR and Refugees International⁷ more than half of the Syrian refugees in the Kurdish Region of Iraq live outside of camps in the Governorates of Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. As for the Syrian refugees in Sulaymaniyah Governorate, by far the majority live in urban settings and not in camps. This could change to some degree once the construction of the permanent Arbat Camp is finalised.

Overall, relations between refugees and local communities were reported as positive with few tensions having arisen or been noted in the assessment. This might in part be attributed to the fact that majority of refugees share a common ethnicity, culture and language with the host communities. In addition, the Kurdish population in Iraq have previously experienced forced displacements and thus may share a greater feeling of solidarity for refugees than host populations in general. Sympathy has been shown by local people setting up small aid organisations or associations in support of refugees. Finally, the relatively short timeframe has to be taking into consideration as the majority of the Syrian refugees arrived to the Kurdish Region less than a year ago.

Figure 4 – Tension noted among host population as to Syrian Refugees



⁷ Beyond Emergency Assistance: Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Northern Iraq – February 2014

The Refugee International report predicts that possible tensions between the host population and the Syrian refugees may increase with increasing competition over scarce resources, if the international support to the KR decreases in the coming months/years. It could be expected that non-camp refugees will face deteriorating conditions over time, due to increasing difficulties in finding work, paying rent, buying food and accessing health and education facilities.

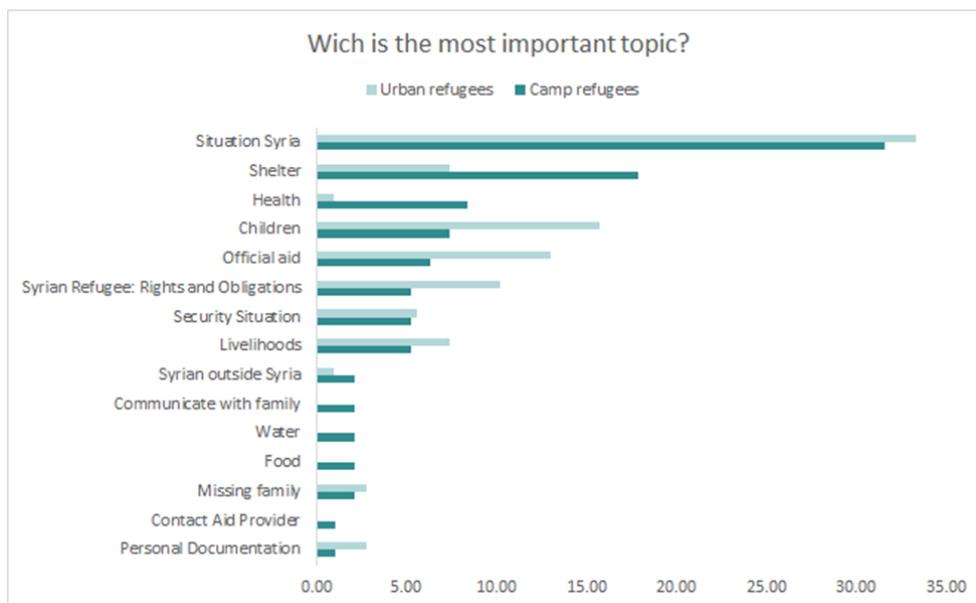
3.5 Language

Kurdish is the main spoken and preferred language among both refugees and host community (98%). Among the host communities, 60% in Sulemaniyah and 22% in Arbat are also able to understand Arabic. While the refugees speak Kurmanji Kurdish and Arabic, they are unable to read and write any of the Kurdish languages as they were taught in Arabic in Syria and therefore read and write in Arabic. However, as the Syrian refugees mainly speak Kurmanji Kurdish and the local host population use Sorani Kurdish there are clear language and communication gaps.⁸

3.6 Information needs

The majority of the respondents among both camp and non-camp refugees reported that the situation inside Syria is the most important topic, when it comes to information needs. This is followed by issues related to their current displacement such as services for their children, shelter, aid in general and rights and obligations related to their refugee status. As for refugees in the camp setting their second priority needs after information needs about the situation in Syria are issues related to shelter and health. This presumably is related to the challenges of camp life with storms and other weather issues and the dependency on health services inside the camp. For the urban refugees, issues connected to children are a priority which could include lack of access to education facilities due to mainly language barriers whereas there are schools set up in the camp with teachers who speaks Kurdish Kurmanji.

Figure 5 – First priority of information needs among camp and urban refugees



⁸ During consultation with Syrian refugees in March 2014 refugees brought up the issue of language and that refugee children have huge problems in accessing the educational system in Sulaymaniyah

Figure 6 – second priority of information needs among camp and urban refugees

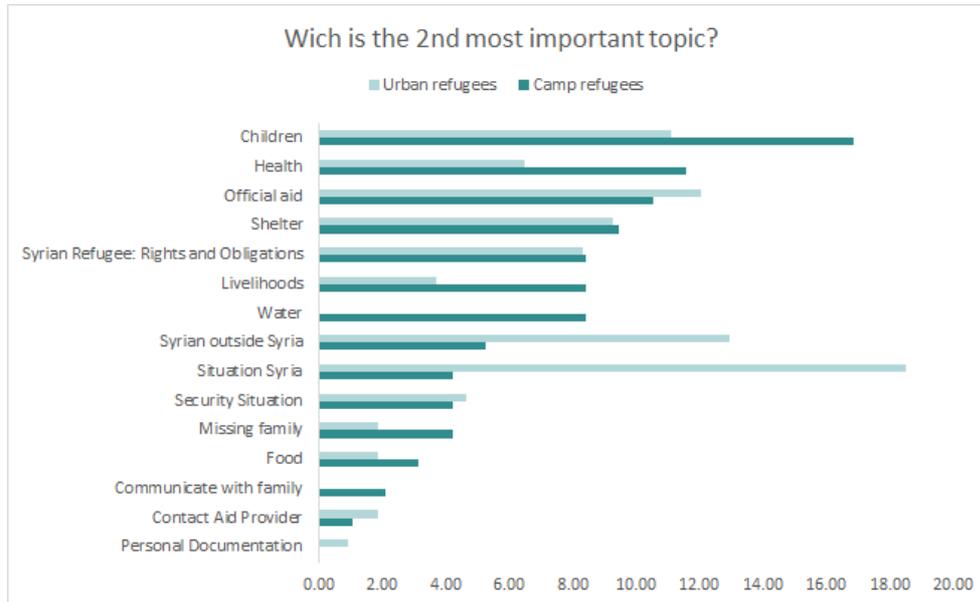
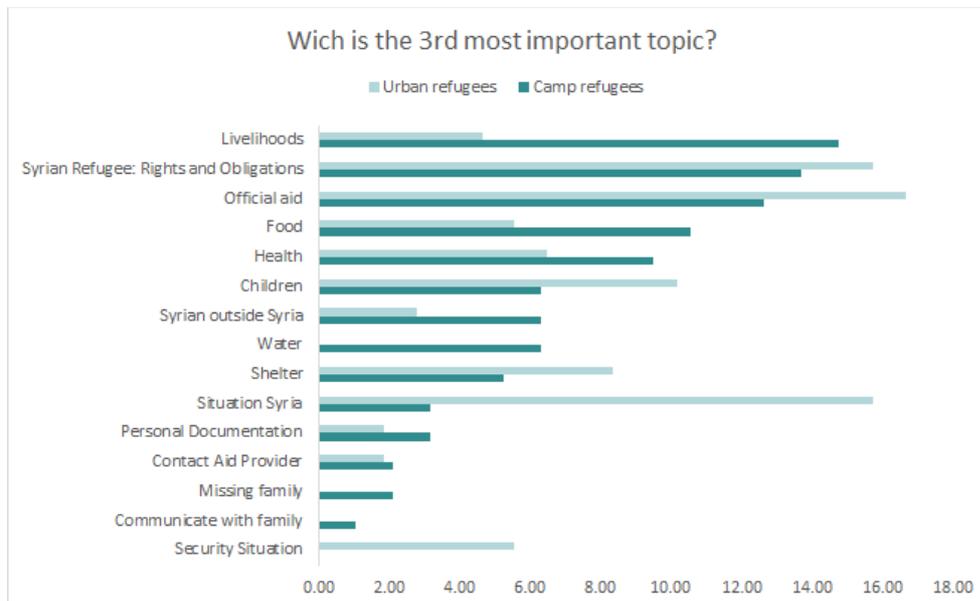
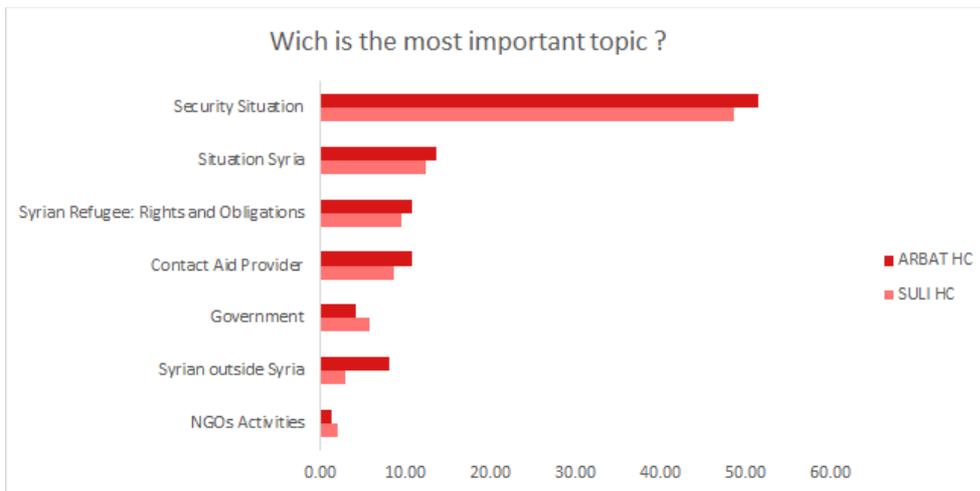


Figure 7 – Third priority of information needs among camp and urban refugees



The main information need of the host population interviewed was the security situation, but the assessment did not specify if this need was related to the presence of Syrian refugees or to a more general concern about the security situation in Iraq. Given the lack of tensions reported, it is however, assumed that the host population interviewed was referring to the deteriorating security situation within Iraq, mainly in the central and south of the country where there are links to the conflict in Syria.

Figure 8 - Overview of priority of information needs among rural and urban host population



The rights and obligations of the Syrian refugees was the second priority of information needs assessed among host population and the third priority in Syria.

Figure 9 - Overview of second priority of information needs among rural and urban host population

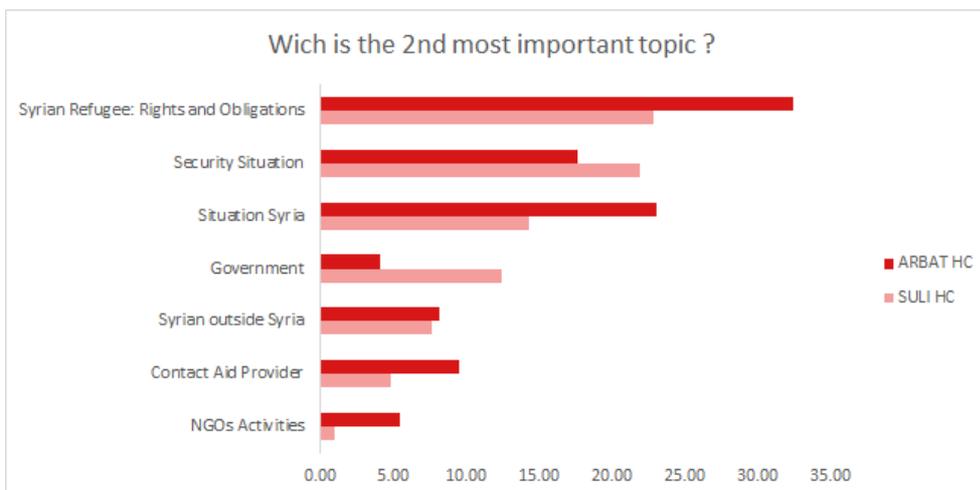
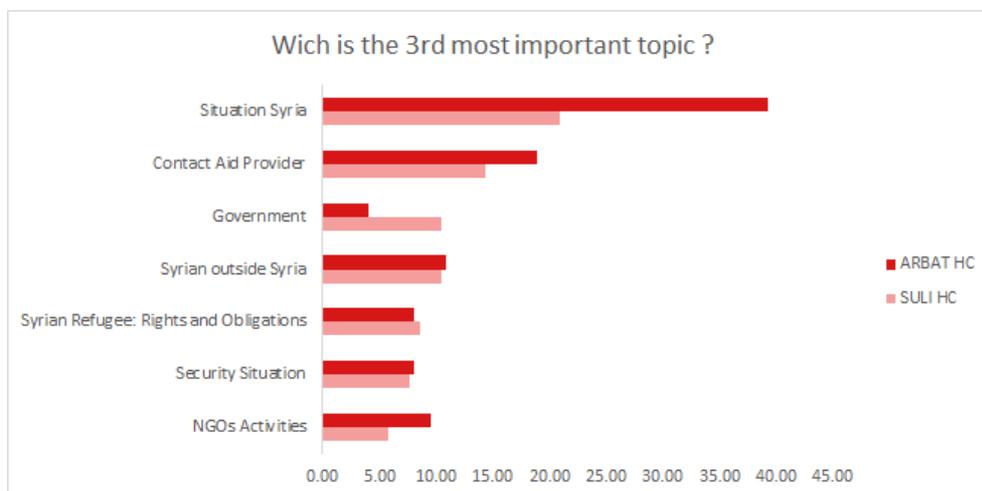
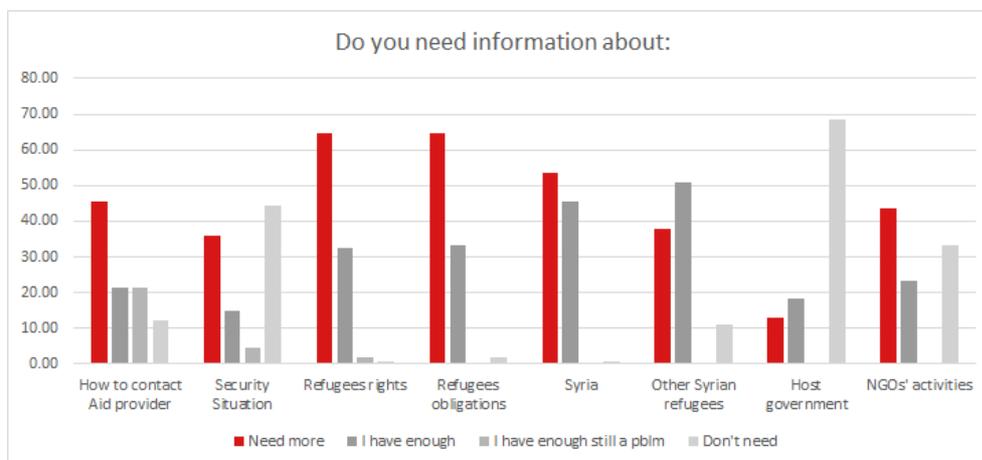


Figure 10 – Overview of third priority of information needs among rural and urban host population



When non-camp (urban) refugees were asked about their daily information needs, the majority raised numerous issues with a priority on the rights and obligations as a refugee.

Figure 11 – Urban refugees' information needs



The urban refugees were asked to comment on the amount of information needed as per their priorities. For most issues, further information was needed particularly in relations to refugee rights and obligations, the situation in Syria and how to contact the aid organisations. Interestingly, the majority expressed that they were not in need of information from the Kurdish Government.

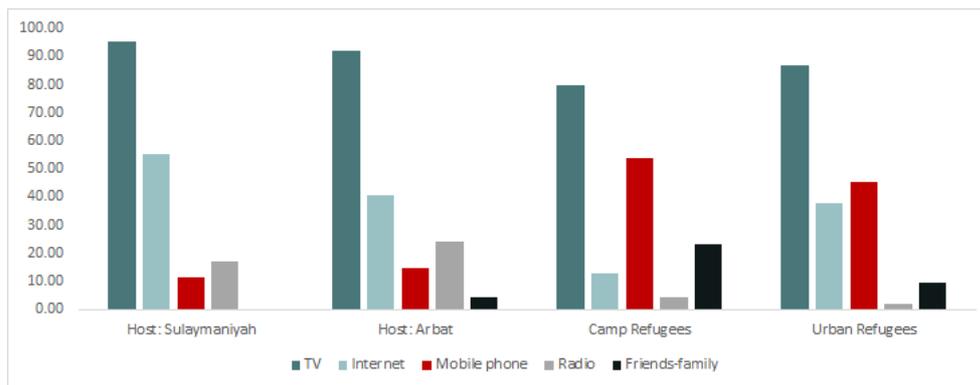
3.7 Information channels

Television seems to be the first source of information cited by 84% of the Syrian refugees.⁹ Mobile phone calls come in second for both urban (45%) and camp refugees (53%). Mobile phones are

⁹ The assessment did not ask for details regarding which TV channels refugees and host population watched. However, during the mission to Sulaymaniyah refugees confirmed that they mainly watched international, regional/pan-Arabic and Syrian TV channels, whereas the host population mainly watched local TV channels.

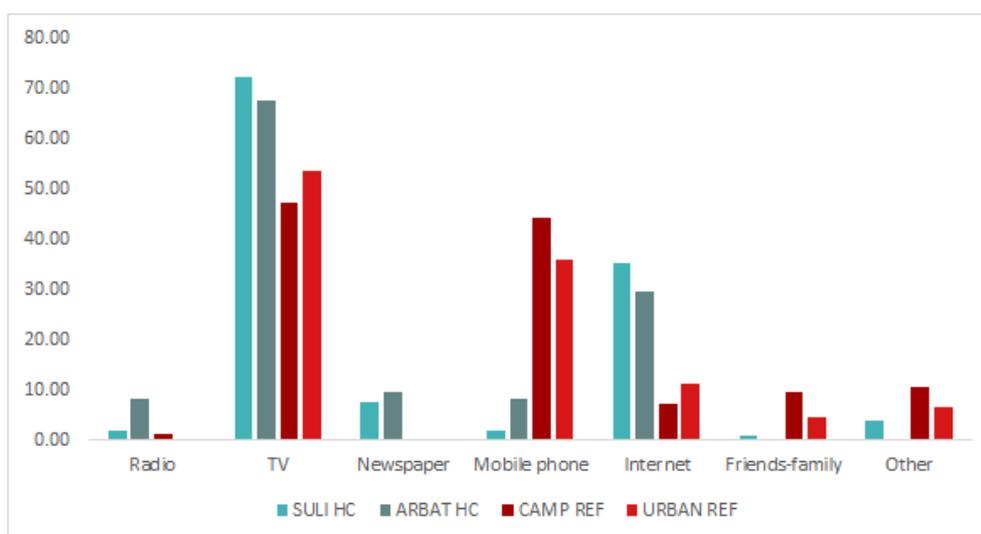
mostly used for telephone calls. Only 13% of refugees use mobiles daily for SMS and/or Internet. While the internet is the third source of information for urban refugees, refugees in the camp rely on their friends and family as their third most important information source. This may be due to the lack of access to internet facilities in the camp. Among the host population, more than 90% use television as their primary source of information, whereas internet and radio are listed as the second and third most important sources of information, respectively.

Figure 12 – Preferred channel/Source of information among Syrian refugees and host population



In terms of trust in media, the majority of both the Syrian refugees and the host population deemed television to be the most trustworthy source of information, although refugees also commented that they had no other choice of source and thus had to rely on the television. Twenty-five per cent of the urban refugees and 21% of camp refugees cited lack of funds (59%) as the main reason preventing them from accessing (other) sources of information, whereas the host population did not express any problems accessing alternative information.

Figure 13 – Overview of which source of information is trusted by refugees and host population



In terms of other means of addressing information needs, many refugees said they wanted to be able to address needs and problems directly in face-to-face meetings with aid agencies. This also relates to the issue of trust and familiarity -- both camp-based and non-camp refugees (and the Arbat host population interviewed) found direct personal interaction with aid workers preferable as a way of communication, followed by telephone calls and meeting with local authorities.

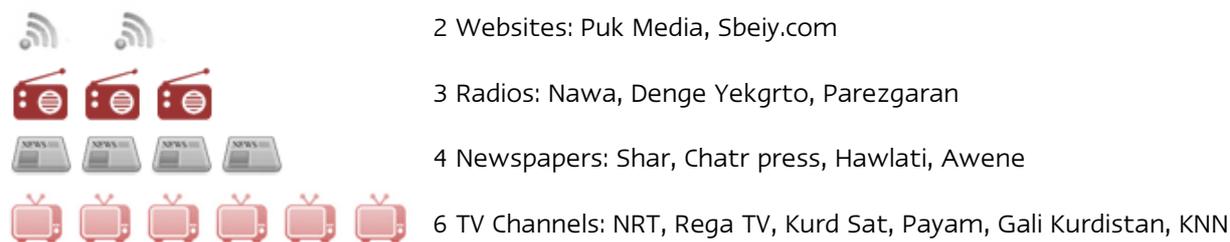
Figure 14 – Preferred way to communicate for refugees and host population

Column1	Host Community		Refugees	
	Sulaymaniyah	Arbat	Camp	Urban
Telephone call	36.19	29.73	16.84	43.52
SMS	0.95	0.00	0.00	0.00
Call Radio/Tv	7.62	8.11	1.05	0.00
Email	17.14	6.76	3.16	2.78
Social Networking Site	8.57	2.70	1.05	3.70
Suggestion box	0.95	0.00	4.21	0.00
Meeting with Aid workers	35.24	70.27	80.00	71.30
Meeting with Gov. Official	16.19	17.57	27.37	7.41
via community meetings	3.81	5.41	14.74	0.93
via community leader	0.95	4.05	8.42	0.00
Religious leader	0.95	0.00	0.00	0.00
Other	5.71	6.76	4.21	1.85

3.8 Local media: capacity and outreach

The assessment surveyed 15 different local media¹⁰ covering a variety of publications/outlets from TV stations (6), newspapers (4), radio stations (3) to online media (2).

Figure 15 – Overview of local media interviewed



The dominant medium for publication/broadcasting is the internet, which is used by 60% of media, followed by radio (45 %) and TV (40%). The preferred frequency for the newspapers is daily publication and coverage is split between local Kurdish/Iraqi and international issues with a preference for local issues. Out of the 15 media assessed only 3 publish some news in both Arabic and Kurdish (Sorani) whereas none publishes in Kurdish (Kurmanji).

¹⁰ It is unknown how many persons at each media had been interviewed and at what level they are placed in the organisations

As for coverage of the Syrian crisis and Syrian refugees in KR, all media confirmed that there has been an increase in the coverage with more than a third of the media having had between 15 and 50 interviews with Syrian refugees and half of the media reporting to have increased their coverage of the Syrian crisis significantly. In addition, it seems there is a lively communication with and feedback from audiences mainly by calls into radio or TV programmes followed by emails.

Figure 16 – Overview of increase of coverage of issues related to the Syria crises by local media

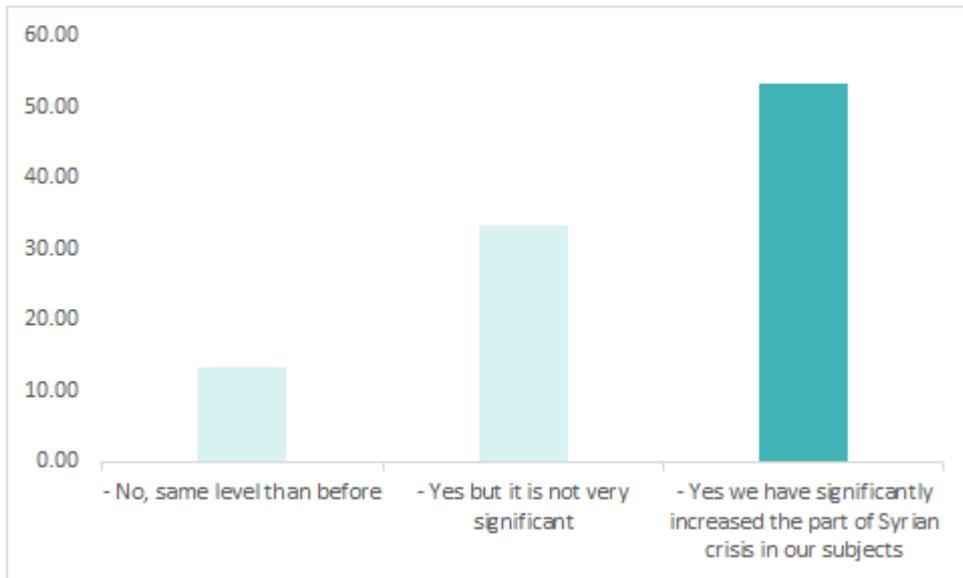
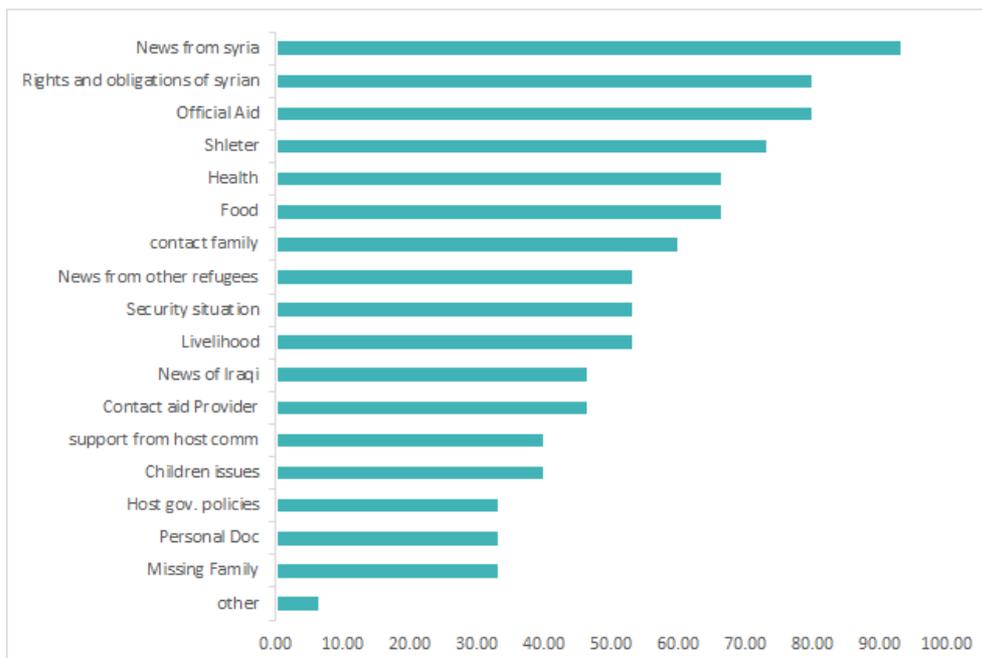


Figure 17 – Overview of issues published by local media related to Syrian refugees

As for the topics published in the different media it seems to reflect the expressed priority information needs among the Syrian refugees with news from Syria, rights and obligations among refugees and aid as the three primary topics.



As for collaboration and engagement between the media and the aid community (UN and (I) NGOs), about 73% of the media are in contact with the aid community and the majority of these confirm that they want to or are willing to collaborate with the aid community. Around 90% of the media have had the aid community contact them to get information broadcasted. The type of information requested for broadcast was, however, not captured in the assessment.

5. Conclusions

The key findings of the assessment document a range of unmet needs and priorities among both Syrian refugees and host populations. Though many issues related to information are common to all target groups they do not fully overlap, and attention should be paid when addressing the needs of the different target groups. Identifying existing or developing new media channels that e.g. communicate in the refugees' preferred language is of importance.

The assessment concludes that there is not 'one magic answer' to the question of which media channel is the most effective – rather a variety of channels must be used to reach as many people as possible. While TV scores high among both refugees and host population as a preferred media channel it will be challenging to reach out to the refugees through TV, as it seems they mainly watch international, Syrian and Pan-Arabic TV channels, whereas the host population primarily watches local Kurdish/Iraqi TV channels. Other communication channels such as the internet and telephones are being used by refugees and the host population but direct communication and dialogue with aid providers is valued by refugees.

The assessment underscores that the information needs among refugees – residing in camps or in urban settings – do not differ much. Syrian refugees are concerned with the developments inside Syria and are eager to be updated on the situation in Syria. The next most important information demands are related to life as a refugee, such as securing adequate shelter and health services and the rights and obligations of refugees. Here, it seems that the urban refugees are in greater need of information than the refugees in the camp setting. Both groups value direct contact and dialogue with aid agencies highly – presumably because trust plays a part and due to the wish to get clear answers immediately.

6. Recommendations

The following non-exhaustive recommendations include aspects about means of communication, information and dissemination, and criteria which it is hoped can be of use for agencies planning to address the information needs among Syrian refugees and the host population in the Kurdish Region of Northern Iraq and/or in the region;

- » *One size does not fit all – refugees and the host population have different information needs, use different media and should be reached with tailor-made strategies*

Different target groups require different approaches and it may not be effective to use one media product to address the needs of both refugees and host population. The type of information in demand varies, and the preferred language of communication is not the same, as the majority of Syrian refugees understand Kurdish Kurmanji and Arabic but are not able to read Kurdish Sorani. When developing multiple media products, trust-building, transparency and equal access to information will be important to avoid any potential mistrust between host population and refugees caused by a lack of understanding of each-others' language. As for camp residents, their particular focus is on the humanitarian services provided in the camp

and the access to information regarding these services in addition to feeling that there is a platform for dialogue with the stakeholders (aid agencies and local authorities) and that their needs are being heard, acknowledged and reacted on. In addition, as movement out of the camp might be limited for some camp residents such as women and young people (out of cultural, financial, practical reasons) the need for accessing information inside the camp via e.g. online media is important. For refugees living in urban settings – where information is scarce and difficult to locate and access – there is a need for guidance on where to find relevant information and advice. There is a need for a physical location where refugees can search and access information and which can be used as a platform for communication – both among refugees as well as between refugees and the host population.

- » *Clarify literacy levels and preferences for types of information*
Although data suggests a fairly high level of literacy, a validation of the effectiveness of primarily written communication among the target group is recommended. This could be in the form of tests in Kurdish and Arabic for both women and men. It is possible that visual information should be prioritised when designing a pilot project while also further assessing the reading capacity and interest among the target groups.
- » *Include a stronger gender balance*
In the design of pilot projects, the perspectives and demands of the female parts of host populations should be further explored through additional consultations and by including e.g. local women's organisations in the development of the pilot project. This could also be a way of ensuring better gender segregated data and analysis for future assessments and surveys.
- » *Engaging the recipients – securing sustainability*
Priority should be given to the inclusion and involvement of the recipients in design and conceptualisation of the pilot project from the beginning to increase usability of the media products. Both local and refugee journalists and other relevant stakeholders should be included in the development of the pilot project. Also, advisory boards/committees of recipients should be formed while taking into account the following concerns:
 - *Avoid polarisation, politicisation and bias*
The political, security and societal developments in Iraq and Syria do not look promising in terms of securing freedom of expression and pursuing professional journalistic standards. This calls for an increased awareness of how to communicate freely and to present different views of and among the refugees and the host population. Avoiding political, military, security and other similarly sensitive issues when information about Syria is produced and distributed would be recommended for multiple reasons: the unpredictability of the developments inside Syria, the uncertainty when validating information sources, the risk of unwillingly being perceived as taking sides in the conflict, and finally the fact that most refugees are better informed about the situation in their home of origin through families and friends who stayed behind than any information outlet would ever be.
 - *Let the voices of minorities/persons with special concerns be heard*
Any project should aim at both engaging minority groups and addressing their (particular) needs and situations. This could be children, people with physical or mental impairments¹¹, adolescent girls and boys, women¹², the elderly, and ethnic or religious minorities. Reports

¹¹ A Handicap International assessment in KR camp settings found that 54% of assessed person with disabilities could not read or write.

¹² Although not a minority, both Syrian refugee women and Kurdish women are in many ways discriminated and underrepresented in society/ the public.

have recently been presented by the UN raising the concern of sexual and gender-based violence cases in camps in the Kurdish Region underlining the importance of improving channels for information and communication.

- » *Document all steps of the process/project*
As there are few media projects in the Kurdish Region of Iraq, it is important to ensure documentation of all steps taken from the beginning of a project, hence ensuring that successes can be replicated and mistakes avoided in future. In addition, the field of humanitarian information/communication is still evolving globally and will benefit from all lessons learned.
- » *Build on existing capacity and expertise*
Ensure that any media product is eventually integrated into existing media/media programmes by creating local ownership and demand to avoid it becoming an unsustainable add-on dependant on foreign support. As for the Syrian refugees in the Kurdish Region – many have higher educational backgrounds and are trained as journalists and other media professions, which could be utilised by local media and as a tool to build stronger relations between refugees and host population.
- » *Be informative – address essential 'basic' needs*
Meeting confirmed needs is the surest way towards ensuring sustainability. Refugees who have arrived recently or who have moved from one location to another in the Kurdish Region are in need of concrete information on practical issues pertaining to access to services such as health, education and food, contact to aid providers and information regarding their legal status as refugees, such as registration procedures and obligations towards local authorities.
- » *Present diversity and stem stereotyping*
Media have a role to play in preventing potential demonisation of the unknown. With time and the possible decrease in international aid, potential competition for available resources might result in a less tolerant host community. Objective and trusted media products could help prevent tensions from escalating.

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Cover photo: A young Syrian refugee in a refugee camp in Northern Iraq. Photo: Mustafa Khayat / <https://www.flickr.com/photos/mustafakhayat/11877353166>