

Syria Coordinated Accountability and Lesson Learning (CALL)

Evaluation Synthesis and Gap Analysis

A synthesis and analysis of 24 publicly available evaluative studies concerning the international response to the Syria crisis commissioned by the Steering Group for Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluations

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. *Purpose of the Thematic Synthesis and Gap Analysis*

This report sets out the results of the Thematic Synthesis and Gap Analysis ('ESGA') undertaken as part of the Syria Coordinated Accountability and Lessons Learning (CALL) initiative. It is based on a review of 24 publicly available evaluations and evaluative studies concerning the international response to the Syria crisis, covering the period 2012 to 2015. The aim is to provide a synthesis of the main issues highlighted in those reports, with particular emphasis on areas of convergent findings. While not a substitute for a system-wide evaluation, the ESGA is intended to provide a summary of lessons learned based on a broad cross-section of available material. The report also identifies significant gaps in the coverage of topics and in the publicly available evidence, and suggests an agenda for further learning and investigation.

2. *Methodology*

Following an initial review of the core reference documents, about 30 recurrent themes were identified and clustered under seven headings. A simple scoring system was used to quantify the 'evidence strength' on different themes, to give an indication of the relative depth of coverage on a given topic across the reference documents. The balance of the evidence presented in the report further reflects the *quality* of evidence, with material from in-depth evaluations (often United Nations-commissioned) given more space than that from lighter reviews. A narrative approach is used for the resulting synthesis, combining a précis of material on key themes with editorial comment, to address the question: *What does the available evidence tell us about specific topics and the response overall?*

3. *Context-related findings*

In Syria itself, **protection** of civilians has been the primary humanitarian concern but the area in which the international community has evidently had the least impact. Civilians have been directly targeted as well as suffering from indiscriminate attacks: the United Nations estimate of 250,000 killed probably understates the true numbers. About half of the remaining population is displaced, either internally or externally. Denial of access to assistance has been used as a tactic of war, and more than half of all hospitals are reportedly destroyed or badly damaged. Meanwhile, in the main refugee-hosting countries, temporary or *de facto* protection has been granted to refugees; but without the right to work and with inadequate assistance, effective protection and asylum have been progressively undermined. The current European refugee crisis may in part be a consequence of this.

Space for international humanitarian action has been particularly limited inside Syria, seemingly more for internal political and strategic reasons than for security ones. Space to operate in refugee hosting countries has generally been greater, but with some major restrictions, notably in Turkey where the government's generous response to the largest refugee influx in the region has involved taking full ownership of – and control over – the humanitarian response.

The reports are unanimous that lack of effective **humanitarian access** – largely for political and military-strategic reasons – has been the critical limiting factor on aid coverage inside Syria. This is particularly true of contested, 'hard to reach' areas and besieged communities; and in opposition-held areas, where cross-line or cross-border aid delivery into opposition-held areas has not been commensurate with the scale of need, even following the passing of the enabling United Nations Security Council resolutions of 2014.

4. *Preparedness, strategy, coordination and leadership*

The topic of **preparedness** is little covered in the evaluations – and mainly by reference to preparedness *process* rather with reference to the actual *utility* of preparedness measures. Perhaps the most important factor that emerges as critical to preparedness is that of *organizational flexibility* – and this may constitute a better measure of preparedness than those more traditionally used. Many agencies struggled to meet the challenge of shifting from small, policy-focused development programmes to larger-scale, operational humanitarian responses.

While several of the reports suggest that the lack of an explicit (written) overarching **strategy** was an obstacle to effective decision-making and to programme coherence for the agencies in question, the strategic coherence of the overall ‘system’ response is little analysed and cannot be judged from the available reports. But some areas of **strategic ‘disconnect’** are apparent between individual United Nations agencies, and between the United Nations and others (international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), Red Cross/Crescent). The attempt to boost coherence by creating a comprehensive regional strategic framework (CRSF) appears not to have been successful. The Whole of Syria approach, an attempt to unify the disparate components of the response to the crisis inside Syria, has evidently had more traction but remains to be evaluated.

Analysis of **leadership** and **coordination** beyond Syria itself is dominated by the question of the respective roles of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Regional Humanitarian Coordinator (RHC). Although coordination with regard to refugee and host community responses is reportedly now improved in most respects, confusion (and some related friction) concerning leadership persisted for much of the period of the crisis response in the refugee-hosting countries. Further guidance from the IASC on the question of leadership in refugee responses appears to be needed. There was also some reported confusion and overlap between operational agency roles, and earlier adoption of mutual country-level agreements might have avoided considerable confusion.

5. *Programme effectiveness, coverage, responsiveness and quality*

The delivery of programme **outputs against plans**, and the achievement of output targets, dominates the analysis of programme performance in most of the reports. While most give a positive assessment of output delivery, this is complicated by a lack of clarity on targets, which appear to shift over time and sometimes between planning documents. A major complicating factor appears to have been the discrepancies between budgeted plans and what was actually delivered given available funding. Some reports suggest that target-setting was overly optimistic in terms of overall agency capacity to deliver, although here a major tension arises between ‘needs-based’ and ‘capacity-based’ target-setting.

Most of the United Nations-related reports take the statement of targets and objectives in the common planning documents (RRP/3RP and SHARP/HRP) as the benchmark for their assessment of **effectiveness**, but they use various methods in making this judgement, and the depth of evidence and analysis involved is highly variable. This, too, is affected by shifting targets. Output delivery is often used as a proxy for effectiveness, in the absence of any stronger evidence. As for the wider impact of aid responses, the lack of baseline data goes some way to explaining the relative absence of **impact** analysis, as impact was not in any case within the scope of most of the evaluations and reviews concerned. Overall, it is a feature of the reports that they have little to say about the influence of aid interventions on the social, economic and political situation in the contexts concerned.

With respect to **timeliness** of response and agency **responsiveness** to changing circumstances, the available reports are fairly consistent in their findings. With some exceptions (notably the World Food Programme (WFP)), agencies were slow to realize the scale of the crisis, particularly in 2012 and early 2013. A lack of organizational flexibility contributed to this, even after the Level 3 declaration (for United

Nations agencies) in January 2013. But resource constraints – particularly funding and human resources – were the most significant ‘internal’ obstacles. As noted above, the **coverage** of the response inside Syria has been the biggest shortcoming of the international response: many reports note the dramatic gap between response and actual needs, particularly in the harder-to-reach areas. Beyond Syria, coverage has been much better, although the overall response in support of non-camp refugees (including those living in informal tented settlements as well as in urban areas) has remained well short of meeting the needs in some areas.

Finally, with regard to **quality** of aid, in the sense of compliance with established standards and best practice, this is surprisingly little analysed in the reports. While a few take compliance with standards (internal and external) as a core criterion for their evaluation, most make only passing reference to standards. Some evaluations note a trade-off between extension (coverage) and quality of programmes, with the initial priority being given to coverage sometimes coming at the expense of a focus on programme quality.

6. *Protection, vulnerability, principles and advocacy*

On the subject of **protection of civilians** in Syria, the analysis tends to be concerned primarily with breaches of international humanitarian law and related advocacy efforts. A grim picture emerges of the impotence of the international community to protect civilians in their own country in the absence of concerted political action. Despite the diplomatic efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General, ERC, RHC and OCHA, action has tended to be more in the realm of normative statements than actionable commitments. With respect to **refugee protection**, UNHCR is generally considered to have played an effective role despite the non-applicability of the 1951 Refugee Convention in the key refugee-hosting countries. This has required a difficult balance between ensuring the continued welcome (or at least tolerance) for refugees in the face of mounting political and social pressures, and the need to advocate for greater attention to refugee rights and needs, including sensitive areas like access to work in the formal economy.

Application of the **principles** of humanitarian action – in particular impartiality, neutrality and independence – receives surprisingly little attention in the reports. This is particularly strange given the very obvious challenges to impartial aid delivery in Syria itself. Some attention is given to the principle of independence, about which questions are raised concerning the relationship of some United Nations agencies with governments, both in Syria and in neighbouring countries.

The question of **vulnerability** related to gender, age, disability or other factors is covered inconsistently in the available material. This is an area where again more depth can be found in the non-evaluative studies. The INGO evaluations tend to cover vulnerable groups more thoroughly, since many of their programmes are targeted at groups that have been identified as specifically vulnerable. Very few of the reports cover the particular vulnerability associated with different ethnic or religious identities – for example, concerning the Palestinian or Yazedi refugees from Syria.

7. *Targeting and relevance, community engagement and accountability*

The relatively limited scope for true **accountability** to affected populations inside Syria is acknowledged in the reports. Some of the challenges and approaches involved are discussed, but there is little depth to the analysis. In the refugee contexts, community engagement and mobilization is covered particularly in the INGO reports, this being a topic closely related to their main *modus operandi* through local partnerships. On the question of aid **relevance** – how well the assistance provided addressed priority needs in context – the reports give a generally positive verdict, particularly with regard to the use of cash and vouchers for refugees. The **targeting** of aid has been more controversial. Affected to a great extent by funding shortfalls and the high costs of operating in the countries concerned, targeting presented challenges for WFP and UNHCR, in particular given the scale and nature of their operations. The process of deciding who was

eligible for a given benefit or service is described in some reports, but the effects of targeting are too little analysed – as, more generally, are the full implications of funding shortfalls commonly running at more than 40 per cent.

Providing **assistance to refugees living among host communities**, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas, has posed major challenges for all agencies, often related to the relative invisibility of some of the most vulnerable groups (women in particular). There is much yet to learn from this experience, particularly concerning practical approaches to needs assessment, registration, monitoring and community engagement in such contexts. The related topic of **social cohesion** between refugees and host communities is covered in some of the reports. A common finding seems to be that greater efforts need to be made to ‘join up’ thinking and programming in this area between sectors like education and protection.

8. *Staffing, partnerships and operational efficiency*

A common theme of the reports concerns **human resource** limitations, notably the shortage of organizational staff in certain key roles and the wider issue of organizational overstretch, a problem that appears to be particularly acute at management and senior technical levels. One consequence has been a heavy reliance on internal and external surge deployments, with related problems (discontinuity, transaction costs, etc.) associated with multiple short-term deployments. This has highlighted the lack of dedicated, flexibly deployable standing capacity for emergency response in some of the biggest United Nations agencies and INGOs.

With regard to **partnerships**, some important lessons emerge across a range of partnership types, particularly between United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), INGOs with one another, and INGOs with local partners. Such lessons illustrate both the central role that partnerships play in the delivery of international assistance, and the challenges of meeting different organizational requirements within a single delivery model. On the related subject of **operational efficiency**, the analysis depends in part on reading across a range of topics including human resources, finance, logistics and partnership. The reports identify a number of areas in which efficiency might be improved, but also note the difficulty of making valid cost comparisons given the shortage of relevant data. Some more radical challenges are raised, including regarding current budget-based financial management models.

9. *Assessment, monitoring and evaluation*

The **assessment of needs** inside Syria has proved one of the main challenges for the international community, in large part because of restricted access. While INGOs in particular attempted to assess needs in opposition-held areas and a range of joint assessment initiatives in 2013–2014 helped fill major gaps, it was not until late 2014 that a more comprehensive picture of needs across the whole of Syria emerged. **Monitoring** of programmes in Syria, meanwhile, has remained relatively weak throughout the crisis, which has implications for ‘remote’ management, accountability and programme adaptability. Efforts to address this, including innovative partnerships and third-party monitoring, are only weakly covered in the publicly available reports. For the most part, **evaluations** have had only indirect access to stakeholders inside Syria, which is reflected in the lack of detail on Syria programmes. Considerations of security and other sensitivities have no doubt also determined what is put into the public domain.

10. *Gap analysis*

The ESGA identifies a number of areas where evidence and analysis is weak or absent in the available reports. This is not a criticism of the evaluation practice of the organizations concerned; indeed, they should be congratulated both for commissioning and for making their evaluations public. The perspective taken here is a ‘bird’s eye’ one, looking across the range of available evidence, asking what it tells us about the international response as a whole and what questions remain to be addressed. In many cases, these are questions that can only be answered by looking across the broader spectrum of responses.

Few of the available reports provide any depth of coverage on the **humanitarian response inside Syria itself** (including cross-border work) concerning programme implementation and the extent to which priority needs have been met. This may reflect programme sensitivities or simply a lack of concrete information. Either way, it raises a host of issues, including some basic accountability concerns. Related to this, the principles of **impartiality** and **'do no harm'** – and related aspects of **risk management** – do not receive the attention that might be expected. Given the 'remote' partnerships involved and the multiple potential ways in which warring parties can abuse aid or control its use, this is a major gap. The publicly available reports also give very little sense of the organizational control environments and accountability frameworks within which Syria aid operations were being run.

One of the more surprising gaps concerns analysis of the effects of the **dramatic funding shortfalls** (often as high as 40–50 per cent) that have affected almost every aspect of the international humanitarian response. Programmes are evaluated against scaled-down targets, which may be fair in assessing individual agency performance but presents an overall distorted picture when considering the response against the scale of actual need. The reports do not address the question: *who was not reached through lack of resources?* Related to this, there is little attempt to quantify unmet need in inaccessible areas.

Among other topics where evidence about organizational performance appears weak or absent include: financial management and accountability; organizational capacity and overstretch; the results of advocacy efforts; compliance with best practice standards; transition planning; and organizational preparedness.

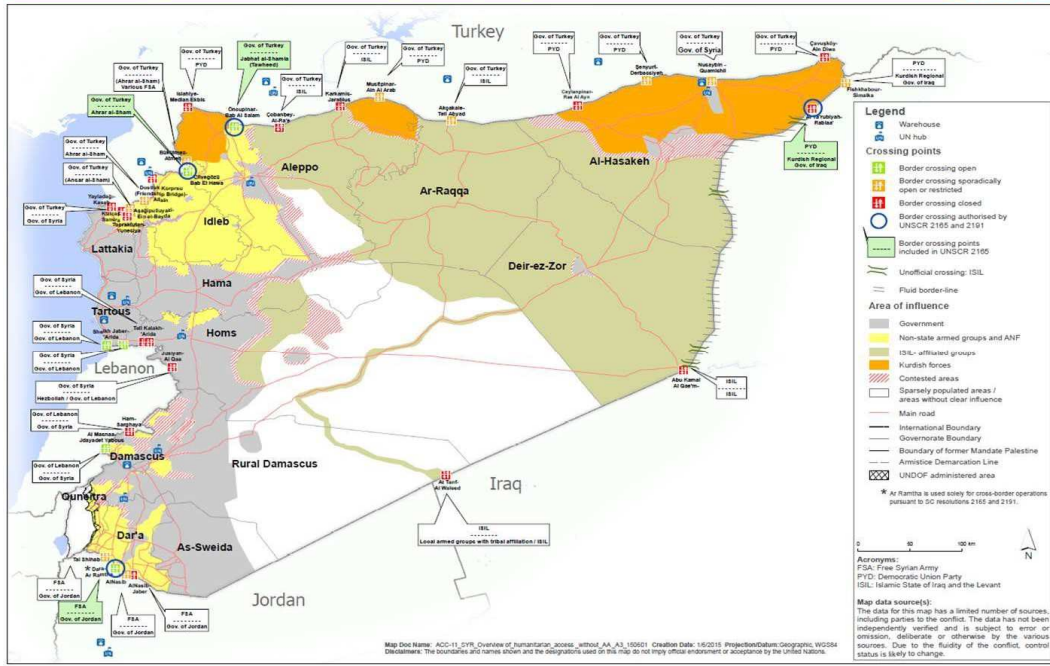
Two main sets of *generic* issues arise from the material and are suggested as requiring more investigation based on further consideration of the international response to the Syria crisis. These include:

System-related issues

- The relationship (synergy/tensions) between the political and humanitarian components of the international response to the crisis.
- The financing of protracted responses, using Syria as a case study (linking to the report of the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing). This should include agency advance financing capacities and strategic coordination between donor governments.
- 'System' coherence and efficiency, as highlighted by the Syria crisis, including the respective coordination and leadership roles of different United Nations agencies, particularly in refugee contexts; the added value and relative efficiency of partnership arrangements (particularly UN-INGO-LNGO); system capacity and its limits.
- The respective and joint roles of humanitarian and development actors in protracted crises, including the ways in which they engage with host governments over time.

Programming and operational issues

- Cross-border programming and remote partnership management. Given the sensitivities, this may require innovative forms of inter-agency knowledge-sharing.
- Assisting and protecting people in urban settings. The related topic of providing aid in middle-income countries might be included here.
- Assisting dispersed refugee populations and host communities. While each context will vary with regard to access and other factors, there is a growing body of evidence here that deserves to be brought together and added to.
- Programming for social cohesion. Agencies have made this a specific objective of their interventions in countries hosting Syrian refugees, and this deserves to be evaluated.
- Resilience programming, particularly livelihood support in restrictive environments. Both the policy and practical programme aspects of this topic need more work.
- Sector-specific learning. There is a considerable body of learning here, notably on the use of cash and vouchers, which merits consolidation and wider dissemination.



Overview of Humanitarian Access, Syrian Arab Republic, June 2015.
Source: OCHA

Box 1: Some facts about Syria and its population

Pre-war population: ca. 22 million

- In early 2011, Syria was a middle-income country with strong economic growth, high levels of fiscal stability and many positive development indicators.
- Between 2001 and 2010, Syria averaged annual gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 4.5 per cent. About 91 per cent of the population owned their own house and 85 per cent of households were using high-quality public water systems.
- Education levels had been consistently high, although less so for females. Health indicators were relatively strong. Vaccination coverage was 91 per cent in 2010, and child mortality was down from 38 per 1,000 births in 1990 to 15 per 1,000 births in 2011.

Current population: ca. 18 million

- Over the past five years, Syria has declined rapidly from a middle-income country to one where four out of five people live in poverty, and two out of three live in extreme poverty.
- More than 250,000 people have been killed in Syria since 2011.¹ More than 12 million people are currently in need of humanitarian assistance (including 7.6 million internally displaced), of which 4.8 million are ‘hard to reach’ and more than 4.3 million are children.
- School attendance has dropped by more than 50 per cent and roughly one quarter of schools have been damaged or destroyed, or are used as collective shelters.
- More than half of Syria’s hospitals have been destroyed or badly damaged.
- Water supply has decreased to less than 50 per cent of its pre-crisis levels.
- An estimated 9.8 million people are currently considered food insecure.
- More than 4 million Syrians have left their country to become refugees, most of them hosted by neighbouring countries. Turkey currently hosts 2.72 million people, Lebanon 1.06 million and Jordan 0.64 million. About 250,000 are in Iraq and 120.000 million are in Egypt.²

¹ According to the Syrian Centre for Policy Research (SCPR), fatalities caused by war, directly and indirectly, amount to 470,000. This estimate is far higher than the figure of 250,000 used by the United Nations until it stopped collecting statistics 18 months ago. Source: www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/11/report-on-syria-conflict-finds-115-of-population-killed-or-injured.

² Sources: OCHA, UNHCR, UNICEFIASC [Operational Peer Review](#), and the *Economist*.

SECTION 1: PURPOSE, APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Purpose and scope

1.1.1 This report sets out the results of the Evaluation Synthesis and Gap Analysis (hereafter called the 'ESGA') undertaken as part of the Syria CALL initiative.³ The Terms of Reference for this exercise describe the rationale behind it:

The Syria CALL initiative was based on the assumption that given the geographic spread and scale of the crisis humanitarian actors would produce a large number of evaluations to assess their programmes... This assumption proved overoptimistic, as evaluative efforts have been limited and uneven in coverage, and the finalization of a rigorous Common Evaluative Framework [proved] impractical.

Nevertheless, a thematic synthesis and gap analysis of evaluative studies so far mapped, five years into the conflict, will provide a useful overview of the areas of learning and accountability efforts undertaken thus far, which will also give an indication of the evolution of the humanitarian response, its challenges and achievements. It will also be useful in identifying areas of further inquiry.

1.1.2 The ESGA is based on 24 publicly available evaluations and evaluative studies.⁴ Most of the core reference documents (18 out of 24) are individual agency or donor evaluations of their own strategy and performance (broadly or narrowly defined), ranging in scope from regional responses to individual programmes. There is also a United Nations inter-agency operational peer review (IASC), and a review of the use made of funds raised through a joint appeal mechanism (DEC). Of the rest, one is a mapping/meta-analysis of existing studies on displacement (Danida); one is a review of the impact of United Nations Security Council resolutions (REACH); one is a study of the experience of NGOs in using pooled funds (ICVA); and one is a review of a needs analysis programme (SNAP). These documents can be grouped as follows:

Region-wide scope

- (i) *Multi-agency*: IASC OPR, Danida (DHA strategy), AusAID, ICVA, DEC
- (ii) *Single agency*: WFP, UNHCR Real Time Evaluation, UNICEF, OCHA, IFRC, HelpAge

Country /programme specific

- UNHCR (Lebanon + Jordan)
- Oxfam x2 (Lebanon, Jordan), Support to Life (Turkey)
- NRC (Lebanon: shelter), IRC (Lebanon: cash assistance)
- Caritas (Jordan)
- UNICEF x 3 – Turkey; Jordan x 2 (Education, PSS), (multi-stakeholder)

Thematic reviews/studies

SNAP (Mid-term review of assessment project), ACTED/REACH (Review of impact of Security Council resolutions), Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) (Protection meta-analysis)

³ For further explanation of the Syria CALL and the background to this exercise, see the Terms of Reference in the Annex.

⁴ These are listed in the Annex. Some further evaluations came too late to include in the analysis, and they are also listed in the Annex for the sake of completeness.

1.1.3 As well as differing in geographic and thematic scope, the various studies also differ with regard to the *point in time* at which they were undertaken and the *periods of time* that they cover. The majority are focused within the time period from 2012 to the end of 2014 or early 2015, so that more recent responses in 2015 are under-represented by the sample. Given the volatility and evolving nature of the crisis, this is a significant limitation. What is presented here is therefore a more or less *historical* picture of the Syria crisis and the response to it. Some of the challenges identified have changed, and some of the identified shortcomings in the response have been tackled. But in most respects it appears from more recent reports that the picture remains broadly as it is presented here, particularly in Syria itself, where the ongoing threats to civilians, continued displacement and limited humanitarian access remain the defining features of the humanitarian situation.

1.1.4 The diversity in type and scope of the evaluative studies is apparent from the list above, and they are strictly 'evaluative' to varying degrees. Apart from the problem of inter-comparability, the list raises wider questions about the adequacy of the evidence base for forming judgements about, and learning lessons from, the overall international Syria crisis response. While the organizations represented, taken together, account for the majority of the total humanitarian spend to date,⁵ there are a number of notable absences from each of the organizational categories (United Nations, Red Cross/Crescent, INGO and Donor).⁶ Overall, United Nations agency responses are more thoroughly covered than those of the INGOs.

1.1.5 The primary intention in writing this report is to present an accessible narrative synthesis of the main findings from the material, grouped into clusters of related themes. This narrative is combined with a commentary, using a series of analytical questions related to each thematic cluster⁷ to 'interrogate' the material, suggesting where the findings point to more generic conclusions, as well as where the analysis or available evidence appears incomplete. This and the subsequent gap analysis draw on some of the supplementary material available and suggest a priority agenda for further investigation and learning.

1.1.6 The thematic synthesis presented here does not cover every topic raised in the reports. Rather, a set of about 30 common themes was identified on the basis of a first reading of the material, each of which is covered by several of the reports. The report does not cover sector-specific themes (other than protection), since the material is simply too diverse to do so within the space available. The ESGA is therefore concerned with cross-cutting issues rather than with technical programme themes.

1.1.7 The scope of this exercise is determined largely by the depth of available evidence. In temporal terms, the years 2013 and 2014 are heavily represented, while 2011–2012 and 2015 are less fully represented. There is too little evidence in the material to include issues relating to Syrian refugees in Egypt and Iraq. Likewise, there is little material on the specific situation of minority ethnic or religious groups among the refugees (including Christian, Kurdish, Palestinian, Turkmen and Yazidi), so this topic is not covered in the synthesis.⁸ Some topics that are covered in the material but only in one or two reports, or only in passing, did not warrant inclusion in the synthesis.

⁵ By way of indication, the combined budgets (and related income) of UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF alone account for around two thirds of the 2015 3RP and around half of the SHARP. Source: OCHA Financial Tracking Service (FTS) (1 July 2016).

⁶ The list of notable absentees includes WHO and IOM from the UN; the ICRC, which has been a major actor in Syria but does not publish evaluations; and MSF, Save the Children, World Vision and CARE among the larger INGOs. The three largest donors to the crisis response – the European Union, the United States and the United Kingdom – are not specifically represented, although much of their funding was to agencies (particularly WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF) that *are* covered by the reports.

⁷ See the Annex.

⁸ It should be noted that some of these groups are among the most vulnerable. See, for example, OCHA Syria Humanitarian Response Update (accessed 7 February 2016): '*Palestine refugees are particularly vulnerable with an estimated 460,000 people receiving regular assistance around Syria*'. The protection meta-analysis commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs gives some detail on the specific vulnerabilities of non-Syrian refugees.

1.1.8 Because of the limitations described above, no attempt will be made in the ESGA to draw any definitive conclusions about the international response to the Syria crisis as a whole. Rather, as explained in the methodology section below, the thematic synthesis summarizes areas of common and recurrent themes, and draws some *indicative* conclusions based on recurrent themes and issues, together with areas of apparent common learning as well as lines of further enquiry. The gap analysis complement this by indicating where the analytical picture is significantly incomplete, and how those gaps might best be filled.

Bearing in mind that even the most recent evaluations date back to early or mid-2015, the questions arise: *what has changed since then, either in the context and in the response? Have the conclusions and recommendations from these evaluations been accepted and acted upon?* The ESGA should be read with this in mind. The material presented here relates (more or less) to the past – although in many cases the same issues appear to persist. While occasional reference is made to the current situation (i.e., early 2016), no attempt has been made to ‘update’ the findings presented here.

Approach and methodology⁹

1.2.1 The extract from the terms of reference cited above highlights two key factors that are relevant to this exercise:

(i) The *relative lack of publicly available evaluative material* on the Syria response by international agencies – i.e., relative to the scale and complexity of the overall response. Those that are available are mostly single-agency reviews, and no overall evaluation of the wider international response (e.g. as represented by the SHARP/RRP/3RP processes) has been undertaken.¹⁰

(ii) The diversity and *lack of consistency of approach and coverage* among those evaluations that are available. This includes lack of consistency in the kinds of data collected and the methods by which they were collected. This limits the scope for direct comparison of results.

To this can be added a third factor, related to (ii) above:

(iii) The *inconsistent quality or status of evidence* provided by the available evaluations, which show varying degrees of apparent rigour, quality/quantity of data used and depth of analysis. While most have been independently conducted, they range from quick and light ‘reviews’ to more in-depth, field-based enquiries.

This diversity in quality of evidence has been reflected in the choice of material used for the synthesis. An ‘evidence strength’ matrix is included in the Annex to this report, in which a numerical scoring system is used to reflect a judgement as to the relative strength and depth of analysis on a given topic across the various reports. These scores are aggregated by theme to provide an indication as to the relative strength of evidence on a given theme or cluster of themes. A further explanation of the scoring process is given in section 2.1.

1.2.2 The factors noted above have largely dictated the approach to the ESGA exercise. In particular, they rule out any statistically valid process of meta-analysis, since there has been no consistent attempt to collect data in any standardized way. They also limit the scope for making a comparative analysis based on common themes. The 24 ‘evaluative studies’ identified as the core data set for this ESGA exercise constitute a purposive sample, but one that is dictated largely by what evidence is actually available. While it cannot be assumed to provide a representative picture of agency performance, it does include a (limited) cross-section of evaluation types as well as organizational types within the categories of United Nations agencies, Red Cross/INGOs and donors.

⁹ A fuller account of the methodology used is set out in the Inception Report.

¹⁰ The IASC Operational Peer Review and the OCHA evaluation are the closest available examples of such an overview.

1.2.3 While analysis of the ‘core’ documents listed above constitutes the main basis for the ESGA, some reference is also made to other sources, both to help identify gaps and to corroborate some of the main thematic findings. The majority of these are thematic reports, studies or assessments that provide context and a potential guide to decision makers. The extent to which, taken together, these have provided a comprehensive and accurate picture of needs, vulnerabilities and opportunities is unclear – and not the subject of the ESGA. Nor is the question of how far this contextual analysis actually informed policy and practice. But the question of *how well informed* agency responses have been by these and other sources of information is one the issues considered below.

Box 2: The basic analytical framework for the ESGA

Five main questions guide the analysis. The first three relate to the thematic analysis; the last two to the gap analysis.

- Q.1 What are the main recurrent themes arising from the core reference documents?
- Q.2 For each of these themes, what are the main findings? What common or recurrent findings emerge? Is there any significant divergence in the findings? Where they diverge, what factors might explain this?
- Q.3 Where common or consistent findings occur, what indicative conclusions do these suggest with regard to the overall international response?
- Q.4 Are there any significant themes missing from the list under Q.1?
- Q.5 Under the themes that are covered under Q.1, are there (i) significant gaps in the related analysis? and/or (ii) significant weaknesses in the evidence base?

Contextual factors relevant to the ESGA

1.3.1 In addition to the general contextual findings presented in the thematic synthesis, some of the contextual factors that are most relevant to the ESGA exercise are briefly considered here.¹¹ These provide the backdrop for the thematic analysis, in the sense that they indicate some of the key questions that arise from the nature of the crisis and the context in which the various responses have been mounted. They also relate to the challenges of collecting data (for monitoring, evaluation, etc.) over time in the different contexts involved in the Syria crisis.

1.3.2 The first key contextual factor is that this is a multi-country crisis – or set of crises – spanning Syria itself, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey.¹² It has two main humanitarian components: (i) the impact of armed conflict on civilians inside Syria itself, both in Government- and opposition-held areas, which constitutes the most acute but intractable humanitarian priority; and (ii) the situation of refugees and hosts in neighbouring countries.

The multi-country nature of the crisis thus raises two main questions for the ESGA analysis: one concerns the *coherence* of the component responses (including issues of strategic and operational coordination); the other concerns the extent to which those responses were well *adapted* to the particular (diverse) contexts involved in each case. This includes the extent to which they were effectively complementary, as appropriate, to host governments' own responses.

1.3.3 While the situation inside Syria is clearly critical, the refugee situations in surrounding countries present less obviously as 'crises'. Yet a number of factors combine to make these situations critical in their own right: the sheer weight of numbers has put great strain on existing infrastructure, services and markets, with major economic, social and political implications. The protection provided by temporary or *de facto* protection policies is precarious and limited; the assistance provided is too little and has been severely under-resourced; access to jobs and services is limited and uncertain; and the impact of these refugee influxes on the host countries – together with cross-border 'spillover' of conflict dynamics – is increasingly destabilizing. Social cohesion is a major and growing concern.

1.3.4 Given the above, the 'Syria crisis' has to be understood as a heterogeneous set of interrelated crises, each with its own dynamic as well as common features and some co-variant factors. The national and local context is a key variable: politics, national and local policies, social dynamics, etc. This makes analytical generalizations difficult, although a number of themes recur across different contexts. The Thematic Synthesis draws links across different contexts and responses, but a range of contextual factors – as well as organizational and other factors – have to be taken into account in interpreting the results.

1.3.5 The most important 'contextual' factor from a humanitarian standpoint is the extent, distribution and nature of assistance and protection needs among those who face or have fled the effects of the Syrian conflict. These tend to be presented in 'aggregate' by aid agencies; but appropriately targeted programmes require a degree of disaggregation based on socio-economic, age, gender and other criteria. This raises a number of issues for the ESGA, including the availability of – and the use made of – reliable data about changing needs and vulnerabilities over time. This in turn raises questions about needs assessment, monitoring, and organizational responsiveness to priority needs. How well were needs understood against the backdrop of the provisions made by the governments concerned for the refugees and conflict-affected populations? This question is considered in the thematic analysis below.

1.3.6 Insecurity and lack of consistent access sets limits both on aid operations and the ability to monitor and evaluate them. Two of the countries concerned (Syria and Iraq) are in a state of active conflict, with significant implications for access. In Syria in particular, humanitarian access has been severely restricted,

¹¹ Sources: Syria Accountability and Lessons Learned Common Context Analysis, evaluation studies, supporting documents.

¹² Refugee flows beyond the immediate Syria subregion are not considered here or in the core material.

and has at times involved agencies working across both front lines and national borders, often through proxies and partner agencies. For the ESGA analysis, this raises a number of issues about the adequacy of the evidence base for programming, about monitoring and accountability, and about the ability of agencies to modify their approaches as circumstances change. It also raises more basic questions about coverage of needs over time.

1.3.7 Finally, the ‘emergent’, evolving and protracted nature of crisis has had major implications for the ways in which agencies have been able to plan for and adequately respond to the needs as they arose. Questions about preparedness, organizational readiness, strategic flexibility, and operational adaptability all seem to arise from the rapidly evolving nature of the crisis. The availability of funding – including advance finance mechanisms – seems to have been one key variable in this. Some of the issues involved are covered in the related sections below.

BOX 3: From political protest to all-out war
The way that the crisis in Syria itself is understood has evolved over time. As the OCHA evaluation notes, *‘For the UN, the Syria crisis was at first characterized as a crisis of human rights. In early 2011, with violent clampdowns on student protest, this is what it was.’* Coupled with the widespread belief that it would be over quickly, this meant that *‘the initial reaction to Syria was not a humanitarian one, but more of a watching brief’*. As the situation developed into armed insurrection and counter-insurgency, particularly with the emergence of the Free Syrian Army in late 2011, the Syria crisis took on the characteristics of a civil war. During the course of the subsequent four years, that war has become ever more destructive, with sectarian divisions playing a growing part, jihadist groups (notably ISIL and the al-Nusra Front) playing an increasingly dominant role in the fragmented armed opposition, and with growing foreign intervention, latterly including air strikes by Russia in support of the Assad government against opposition forces. Apart from limited local ceasefires for humanitarian purposes, peace talks have so far yielded no results. Civilians in Syria have continued to suffer from indiscriminate bombings, prolonged sieges, destruction of homes and livelihoods. Humanitarian access has been severely limited, particularly to opposition-held areas and towns under siege.

SECTION 2 THEMATIC SYNTHESIS

Introduction

This section contains the thematic synthesis that forms the core component of the ESGA. Given the large number of individual themes (more than 30) identified in preliminary work, the themes have been grouped into seven related ‘clusters’ of themes. Individual themes are listed and discussed under each of these headings below.

- 1. Context-related findings**
- 2. Strategy and planning, coordination and leadership**
- 3. Programme delivery, effectiveness, coverage and quality**
- 4. Protection, vulnerability and humanitarian principles**
- 5. Targeting, accountability and community engagement**
- 6. Staffing, partnerships and operational efficiency**
- 7. Assessment, monitoring and information management**

At the start of each cluster, a list is given of themes covered by the cluster, together with an ‘**evidence strength**’ score on a scale of 1 to 3, where 3 indicates the strongest evidence and 1 the weakest. These scores are derived from the matrix included in the Annex, in which scores of depth of coverage by each of the 24 reports are added together. Those themes scoring 20 points or more are given an overall score of 3; those scoring between 10 and 19 are given an overall score of 2; and those scoring 9 or less are given an overall score of 1.¹³ These thresholds were chosen to reflect the overall distribution of scores across the various themes.

¹³ As described in the inception report for the ESGA exercise, a judgement about strength of evidence on a given theme is made on the basis of both the *depth* of coverage and its *quality*. These factors are reflected in different ways. The scoring described here and set out in the Annex is based on the extent or depth of coverage on a given theme. The *quality* of the evidence (a function in part of the method by which it was produced) is reflected in the choice of material for the synthesis and the relative significance attached to it. This explains the preponderance of material from those evaluations that were based on more in-depth processes of consultation and analysis.

Thematic Cluster 1: Context-related findings

Themes

- 1(i) **The political space for international humanitarian action**
 - Evidence strength 2/3
 - Covered in 11 reports (including 6 full-scale evaluations)
- 1(ii) **Working in partnership with governments**
 - Evidence strength 2/3
 - Covered in 9 reports (including 6 full-scale evaluations)
- 1(iii) **Humanitarian access in Syria**
 - Evidence strength 2/3
 - Covered in 11 reports (including 5 full-scale evaluations)
- 1(iii) **The protection context: Threats and safeguards to human security**
 - Evidence strength 2/3
 - Covered in 10 reports (including 2 full-scale evaluations)

Introduction

This section explores some of the main contextual findings to emerge from the material, as they relate to the humanitarian context and related response. It considers how well agencies have tended to adapt to these diverse and changing contexts. The Syria CALL Common Context Analysis¹⁴ provides the most complete narrative account of political events, and no attempt is made to replicate this overall narrative here. Instead, particular contextual findings from the evaluation studies and other reports that provide insights into how the context shaped the delivery of humanitarian assistance and protection, and how it was perceived and responded to by humanitarian actors, are highlighted here. The underlying truth acknowledged in the reports is that the humanitarian situation is itself *created* by political and military action; and that the solution to it lies primarily in the political domain.

The political space for international humanitarian action

All of the reports note factors in the political environment that have affected the delivery of humanitarian assistance across the various crisis contexts. The political environment in Syria itself has been hostile not only for civilians but also for humanitarian actors from the early days of the crisis. The OCHA report records that in a note to the United Nations Secretary-General in April 2012, the ERC documented *“delaying tactics” on the part of the government, and the “lack of urgency and commitment on the part of the government to respond to the humanitarian situation.”* By late 2012, *“it was becoming clear that many people were trapped in areas that could not be reached through existing humanitarian aid channels, and that gross violations of international humanitarian law were occurring.”* The same report says that it was also clear that the Government was *“hindering the establishment of a proper humanitarian operation from quite early in the crisis.”* Humanitarian access has been the main challenge, particularly to besieged and opposition-held areas (*see below*), the main obstacles being a combination of security and bureaucratic restrictions.¹⁵

¹⁴ Syria Crisis Common Context Analysis, May 2014 – Slim, H. and Trombetta, L. (updated September 2015).

¹⁵ As Ben Parker observes in an article in Humanitarian Exchange (HPN/ODI – November 2013) *“According to the Syrian government official position, humanitarian agencies and supplies are allowed to go anywhere, even across any frontline. But every action requires time-consuming permissions, which effectively provide multiple veto opportunities.”*

It is not just the United Nations agencies that have been frustrated in their attempts to provide relief in Syria. As the REACH report comments, *“The Government of Syria ... regularly prevents international humanitarian workers from travelling within Syria to conduct independent assessments of needs, provide impartial assistance, open adequate numbers of field offices outside of the capital or work with local NGOs.”* The same report notes the problems faced by many agencies in securing registration and with obtaining visas for their staff, *“severely limiting aid operations that can be implemented from Damascus.”*

In neighbouring countries, the political challenges have been of a different kind. While obstacles to programme approval and to INGO registration have occurred in Jordan and Turkey, the main host countries (Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon) have for the most part provided a reasonably supportive environment for humanitarian action – local and international – while controlling such actions to a greater or lesser extent. All of the various responses have taken place in a policy environment set by the host government. That environment has itself been shaped in various ways by political pressures (internal and external) and in reaction to the international humanitarian response. In this context, both United Nations agencies and INGOs have faced considerable operational challenges that are well described in many of the evaluations.

Turkey hosts the largest number of Syrian refugees (currently more than 2.2. million) and has kept its borders open to date, but the space for international assistance has been limited. As the UNICEF Turkey report puts it, *“The extent of the ... Government’s ownership of and control over the response to the refugee crisis is one of the defining features of the context.”* While this has positive aspects, it has also limited the potential for effective international support. With growing recognition of the scale of the needs of non-camp refugees, that space opened somewhat over time, at least for the United Nations agencies.¹⁶

In Jordan, which closed its borders to new refugees in 2013, some 620,000 Syrian refugees have entered since 2012. Of these, *“close to half a million ... are living in host communities, concentrated in urban centres in the central and northern governorates of Jordan”* (ICVA). While work in Zaatari refugee camp in the north has been conducted in a relatively free political space, the space to work with non-camp refugees has been somewhat more restricted. In Lebanon, by contrast, where more than 1 million refugees are widely dispersed throughout the country, aid agencies have faced relatively few political constraints. That said, the government policy of not allowing refugee camps to be set up while refusing refugees permission to work has set the context within which humanitarian needs continue to be defined. Within this context, local politics and the relations between refugees and host communities have if anything a greater influence than national politics, with local authorities shouldering most of the responsibility for managing the competing demands.¹⁷

Working in partnership with governments

In general, while the main focus of the INGOs has been on delivering programmes in partnership with local NGOs, that of the United Nations agencies has tended to be one of finding a complementary role – as service providers, technical advisers and policy influencers – to that of the relevant government ministries and other responsible authorities. At times, inter-agency turf battles have affected the United Nations’ ability to play this role efficiently, but most of the evaluations conclude that the agencies have found the right forms of collaboration, while sometimes lacking clarity in their overall strategies (see *the following* section).

¹⁶ The space for international NGOs to operate in Turkey has been highly restricted, with few gaining registration for most of the period under review. However, in June 2015 the bar on foreign NGOs appeared to be lifted, as a number of big NGOs (including MSF) were finally granted permission to operate.

¹⁷ See, for example, Oxfam Italy (2014) *The partnership with local authorities in responding to humanitarian crisis*; MercyCorps (2014) Policy Brief *Engaging Municipalities in the response to the Syria Refugee Crisis in Lebanon*.

The different operating modes of United Nations agencies and INGOs noted above apply to work inside Syria as well as the surrounding countries. United Nations agencies have worked largely with and through government ministries and the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, the Syrian Government's designated lead agency. Of the INGOs represented in the evaluative studies, Oxfam is unusual in having a formal collaborative arrangement with the Syrian Ministry of Water Resources to conduct urgent water system rehabilitation in areas destroyed in the conflict. As the DEC report (written in 2013) comments, *"this arrangement has yet to prove itself in practice, and carries certain risks, but also the prospect of benefiting many more people than might be achieved by other means."* Most INGO assistance has been channelled through Syrian NGOs, some of it across line or across borders into opposition-held areas. Here the faith-based agencies (Islamic and Christian) are said to have had an advantage based on their existing networks (DEC). The related issues of remote management and reporting are considered in sections below.

In Jordan, the Government and international actors have collaborated closely in the more recent planning processes, so that the government-led 'Jordan Response Plan' is incorporated into the United Nations-led '3RP'. This does not mean that there have not been differences along the way. For example, as the WFP evaluation notes, *"authorities in Jordan (and earlier in Lebanon) had discouraged WFP from targeting its assistance out of concern the humanitarian burden of food-insecure refugees might then fall to national or local institutions."* The UNICEF Jordan evaluation of the emergency education programme describes the role of UNICEF in terms of its support to the Government's own refugee education programme, but notes some "grey areas of accountability" relating to UNICEF's changing role over time and ownership of camp education services. In Turkey, there have also been differences of view with some government agencies as to UNICEF's proper role, but on the whole the collaboration is reported to have worked well.

UNHCR has faced a sometimes difficult balancing act in the refugee-hosting countries. On the one hand, its protection priorities have been focused on maintaining the fragile and sometimes politically unpopular provision of basic refugee protection safeguards, including open borders, registration, effective asylum and access to services. On the other hand, it has been coordinating international assistance efforts and faced pressures to push for increased access to work and services, along with other "assistance" priorities for refugees. The evaluation of UNHCR's work in Jordan and Lebanon suggests that it has generally managed the competing demands well.

Humanitarian access in Syria

The most critical of all the various challenges facing the humanitarian response has been the question of safe and consistent access to conflict-affected communities inside Syria itself. Throughout the four and a half years of conflict to date, many of those most urgently in need of protection and assistance have been unable to secure it. For many, the option of fleeing their homes and seeking refuge – inside or outside Syria – has been the only viable protection strategy; although as the Danish Government-sponsored protection meta-analysis reveals, this has left many refugees vulnerable in their place of refuge. But there is no doubt that the most vulnerable of all are those who are classified 'hard to reach' inside Syria, and particularly those in besieged areas.

The failure to secure adequate access for relief has not been for lack of advocacy. The OCHA evaluation notes that as early as mid-2011, the United Nations was requesting from the Government of Syria greater access to populations in need, and in early 2012, the ERC made a number of *démarches* (eventually making 21 visits), *"repeatedly raising issues of access and the protection of civilians."* By late 2012, the report notes, it was clear that many people were trapped in areas that could not be reached through existing humanitarian aid channels, and that gross violations of international humanitarian law were occurring.

Access to opposition-held areas, in particular, has been severely restricted. Limited cross-line operations were conducted from early in the response, and much hope was initially pinned on these (OCHA). *"WFP were reporting that much of their assistance was finding its way into non-government held areas. It took*

*time before it became clear that the government would never let the cross-lines convoys get to scale...*¹⁸ Until the United Nations Security Council resolutions of 2014, cross-border assistance had been formally illegal. What assistance did go across borders was delivered mainly by INGOs based out of Lebanon and Turkey working through local partners in Syria; but it was limited in its scale and reach, and tended to be haphazardly coordinated. Little public record exists of these operations.

The overall record of OCHA and the ERC in securing greater access is positively evaluated by the OCHA evaluation which comments that *“Probably the area where the global leadership of OCHA had greatest impact was in humanitarian access. The series of Security Council resolutions ... on access ... opened up legitimate new avenues for aid to enter areas previously difficult to get to. Importantly, they have also created the potential for a unified response, drawing together a number of disparate aid operations.”* However, the report (written in late 2015) describes the United Nations humanitarian agencies based in Damascus as having been *“slow to take advantage”* of the cross-border routes opened up by Security Council resolution 2165, and as being *“protective of their relationship with the Syrian government.”*¹⁹ The result, it is argued, has been the failure to achieve a “step change” in the volume of aid. Overall, the breakthrough on access is said to have taken *“far too long to achieve,”* although this is attributed to a failure of international politics rather than the aid system.

The REACH report on the effect of the United Nations Security Council resolutions is more blunt in its conclusions: *“Despite passing three UN Security Council Resolutions in 2014, violence in Syria has intensified, killings have increased, humanitarian access has diminished, and the humanitarian response remains severely and chronically underfunded.”* The report comments that the resolutions had been ignored or undermined by the parties to the conflict, by other United Nations Member States, *“and even by members of the UNSC itself.”* It usefully documents some of the bureaucratic obstacles and operational difficulties facing agencies working out of neighbouring countries and seeking to work across borders.

The IASC OPR (July 2015) is also bleak in its assessment on access, particularly to the worst-affected populations, noting that despite some local agreements in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, *“the number of people that are being reached by UN assistance is minimal: less than one percent of the 422,000 people in besieged areas receive any kind of assistance from UN agencies,”* and on average across the various sectors *“only five percent of the 4.5 million people in the HTR areas receive assistance on a monthly basis.”* While stressing the importance of vocal advocacy for access, the OPR report also stresses the importance of capacity building and support to Syrian NGOs, other implementing partners, and Syrian staff working inside Syria with international NGOs. *“It is the Syrian NGOs and national staff of international NGOs, as well as the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC) as a key partner for Damascus-based NGOs, who bear the daily challenge of delivery assistance as they have access to affected people.”* These organisations and people worked ‘heroically’ on the front line ‘putting their lives at risk’, and the humanitarian community needs to invest more in these partnerships.

Finally, as the IASC OPR notes, the lack of access, as well as impeding the delivery of services, has seriously limited the scope for assessments, monitoring and accountability to affected populations. It has also, as

¹⁸ The OCHA report comments that United Nations agencies “were simply not willing to jeopardise their operations in Syria by taking a tougher stance with the Government. The reasons for this are beyond the scope of this evaluation, but will surely be scrutinised at a later point.”

¹⁹ The report also states that, “There has been little open backing of the ERC by other UN humanitarian leaders in her advocacy for access to hard to reach and besieged areas.” It comments that the UN’s initial efforts were concentrated on securing access from Damascus and that there was political nervousness surrounding cross-border options, based on perceptions that there was ‘a risk of aid being politicised by overtly backing cross-border efforts’ which were a red line for the Government. By June 2013, OCHA analysis was ‘beginning to reflect the limits of this strategy’, as around 25,000 people were trapped in Muadhamiyah. This was the beginning of a narrative around populations that were either besieged or ‘hard to reach’. The United Nations Security Council resolutions eventually passed in 2014 reflected the resulting change of strategy.

noted in section 1 above, had a major impact on the quantity and quality of evaluative material concerning the response inside Syria. To a large extent, Syria has been a 'black hole' with regard to reliable information over the period under review; although with the advent of the Whole of Syria Approach, some progress has been made in this regard.

The protection context: Threats and safeguards to human security

The protection response of international agencies is considered in section 2.4 below. Here we highlight a few of the contextual factors raised in the evaluation reports that have had greatest bearing on the security of civilians and refugees in the region.

The IASC OPR describes the situation from a "response" perspective, noting that the response is being carried out *"in the midst of extreme violence"*. This had generated overwhelming protection concerns and huge difficulties in mounting a response. Parties to the conflict routinely used modern weaponry indiscriminately, attacked schools and medical facilities, deliberately targeted medical personnel, forcibly recruited men and boys into the armed forces and NSAGs, and increasingly forced women and adolescent girls into early marriage. The OPR also stresses the vulnerability of those in hard-to-reach and besieged areas, the truth of which has recently become publicly apparent with the siege of Madaya and reports of many starvation-related deaths.

With regard to refugee protection in the countries bordering Syria, the UNHCR RTE highlights the relationship between protection and the practical support available to refugees and their hosts. Writing in mid-2013, the authors praise the generosity of the host countries, commenting that: *"Despite the fact that they have not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention, host governments largely promoted a positive protection environment, granting access to territory, registration and public services."* Yet as the influx had continued, infrastructure and services for health, education, shelter, water and sanitation faced increased pressure; competition for jobs had increased, wages had fallen and the cost of basic goods had risen. *"This has tested the absorption capacity of host communities and fuelled emerging tensions between refugees and local populations."*

These strains, the authors note, have not only undermined the protection environment for refugees, but have also contributed to a hardening of official attitudes towards refugee protection and assistance. This has included the closure of borders (either temporarily or indefinitely), the creation of camps in Jordan and Iraq, and limitations on assistance to out-of-camp refugees. The authors express the fear that *"Without a visible and tangible demonstration of international solidarity and responsibility sharing, the protection environment for refugees can be expected to deteriorate rapidly."* The report concludes that it must be a strategic priority to *"swiftly and substantially"* increase the level of support available to host states and communities throughout the region, in order to mitigate the socio-economic and political pressures generated by the refugee influx.

Some two and a half years later (as at the time of writing), this issue has intensified and become more a matter of wider public consciousness, highlighted by the crisis of Syrian asylum seekers seeking entry into Europe, often via dangerous and illicit routes. Deteriorating living conditions for refugees in host countries within the region are causing many to seek refuge elsewhere, in some cases returning to Syria itself – although the extent of this phenomenon is not yet documented.²⁰ The relationship between effective

²⁰ By way of illustration, a BBC online news report titled 'Desperate Syrian refugees return to war zone' (15 October 2015) reported that "Increasingly, Syrian refugees in Jordan are in dire financial straits. The UN says 86% now live below the Jordanian poverty line of 68 Jordanian dinars (\$96; £63) a month. The government does not allow most to work legally and no longer provides free medical care. At the beginning of last month, 229,000 living outside refugee camps had their aid from the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) totally cut due to a lack of international donations." The Free Syrian Army was reported to be advising against return on safety grounds. UNHCR likewise "does not promote or facilitate returns to Syria" in light of the ever-worsening security, human rights and humanitarian situation. But in November 2015 UNHCR noted that "A limited but increasing

asylum and access to work and services continues to cause concern. Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon have had access to (limited) services but have been denied access to work in the formal sector, although some have found work in the informal economy. In Turkey, the Temporary Protection Regulation of October 2014 formalized the grant of temporary protection to Syrian refugees as well as guaranteeing them access to services, but it *“did not guarantee an explicit and unlimited right to work, education, and social assistance.”* These depend on the Government’s permission; but in August 2015, it decreed that refugees would *not* be granted permission to work outside of the refugee camps.²¹ Domestic political pressures have evidently weighed more heavily than the case made on humanitarian and social cohesion grounds by many external agencies.

As this makes clear, the relationship between protection and assistance is a close one: being given asylum without the means to support yourself or your family is not true asylum. With such restricted livelihood options, and limited access to services, assistance becomes for many an essential lifeline. Thus questions concerning the adequacy of funding, assistance and access to services have a direct bearing on protection. The reports also note a number of status-related factors that cause groups and individuals to be vulnerable. The OPR report notes one factor that has compounded vulnerability – that *“hundreds of thousands of people have lost vital documents that render them unable to establish their identity and credentials.”* The associated lack of status is a major source of insecurity for refugees. For some refugees, status may depend on ability to pay. In Lebanon, a residence permit is required, valid for six months and six months renewal. As the protection meta-analysis comments: *“Subsequent extension is unaffordable by most refugees, stripping them of their legal status.”*

The security of aid agency staff and their partners in Syria is surprisingly little covered in the material. As the CCA 1 report notes, most INGOs that have not been able or willing to register in Damascus have built their operations on partnership with local and diaspora groups. *“Many of these Syrian humanitarian workers have been threatened, detained or killed. Several international humanitarian workers have been kidnapped, including five members of a Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) team in January 2014.”* The CCA notes that some jihadist opposition groups had made clear that there is no place for Western agency staff in the areas under their control zones.

Among the reports that form the core reference material for the ESGA, the IASC OPR is a rare exception in covering this subject. It documents the causalities among aid workers, recording that 79 humanitarian aid workers had been killed since March 2011, including 17 staff of the United Nations, 47 members and volunteers of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, 8 volunteers and staff from the Palestinian Red Crescent Society and 6 staff from INGOs. The particular issue that is highlighted is the vulnerability of Syrian staff working for UN agencies, international NGOs, and Syrian NGOs. *‘In government-controlled areas, Syrian staff are at times called in for questioning by government officials, and sometimes detained. Many have also had to contend with threats from NSAGs when conducting cross-line missions. In non-government-held areas Syrian staff are bombed and face the consequences of war on a daily basis. In all of Syria, staff take tremendous risks to maintain their presence in conflict zones. Numerous staff and their families have lost their lives.’* The report stresses the need for appropriate care and welfare programmes to be developed for Syrian staff, including psychosocial support.

number of Syrian refugees is reported to be returning to Syria by their own means from host countries in the region” – *International Protection Considerations with Regard to People Fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic Update IV.*

²¹ Reuters report, August *‘Turkey will not give Syrian refugees right to work’*. “Turkey’s Syrian refugees will not be granted special work permits, the labour minister said on Friday, explaining that such a programme would be unfair to Turks seeking work... Communities in the border areas, where the migrants are concentrated, have complained that Syrians working illegally accept lower wages and push Turks out of the labour market, resulting in animosity and sometimes violence between the communities. However, the ORSAM/TESEV study of January 2015 found that Syrians are generally employed in areas that locals are not willing to work in and that they meet a demand for unskilled labour...”

Thematic Cluster 2: Strategy and planning, coordination and leadership

Themes

- 2(i) **Preparedness and contingency planning**
 - Evidence strength 1/3
 - Covered in 4/24 reports (including 1 full-scale evaluation)
- 2(ii) **Strategy and planning**
 - Evidence strength 3/3
 - Covered in 12/24 reports (including 7 full-scale evaluations)
- 2(iii) **Transitional and longer-term planning**
 - Evidence strength [...]
 - Covered in [...] reports (including [...] full-scale evaluations)
- 2(iv) **Coordination and Leadership**
 - Evidence strength 3/3
 - Covered in 12/24 report (including 7 full-scale evaluations)

Introduction

With the exception of preparedness, this is one of the thematic clusters that is more thoroughly covered in the available reports. The material on leadership and coordination tends to view these topics very much from a United Nations perspective. Questions about how well the United Nations as a whole led and how well individual United Nations agencies fulfilled their coordination roles feature noticeably less in the NGO evaluations. Consideration of joint strategy is largely limited to the United Nations evaluations (mostly OCHA and the IASC OPR), focused on the joint planning and resource mobilizing processes (SHARP, RRP/3RP, Whole of Syria, CRSF), and to a lesser extent on the Sector Working Groups. The strong impression arises that NGOs have felt rather a distant relationship to these processes, despite being included in them – as well as being in many cases key “implementing” or “cooperating” partners of the United Nations agencies and receiving much of their funding through them. This sense of “disconnect” between the multilateral United Nations-led response, the response of the INGOs and (to some extent) that of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement is considered further in the gap analysis section below.

The topics of resilience and longer-term planning are covered in some detail in the reports, particularly those commissioned by the United Nations. A number describe the institutional and funding challenges involved, working across the humanitarian-development divide, as well as the need to better integrate international and national planning. The way in which humanitarian and “dual mandate” organizations collaborate with UNDP, the World Bank and other key development actors emerges as a particular theme.

Preparedness and contingency planning

Relatively little attention is given in the evaluations to this aspect of the programme cycle – and this has a parallel in the relatively weak treatment of situational monitoring (*see below*). In emergent and protracted crises of the kind involved here, responses have to account both for the potential deterioration of existing situations over time (e.g., for refugee numbers to grow incrementally), and for new critical situations to emerge quite suddenly – e.g., a sudden new influx of refugees, or the polio outbreaks that occurred in Syria in 2013/14. Plans based on an extrapolation from the *status quo* that are not flexible enough to respond to emergent or sudden changes tend to become inadequate or even irrelevant to the new situation. This is particularly problematic in light of the time lag between programme planning, resourcing and implementation.

This problem is illustrated by the Oxfam GB Lebanon evaluation, in its discussion of a contingency planning process: “...it appears that the staff and partners who participated in the process underestimated the emerging crisis, citing ‘up to 100,000 refugees as potentially the worst-case scenario’ – a number that would be exceeded barely two months later and would increase ten-fold by the end of the following year.”²² The same evaluation notes that “the revised contingency plan lacked a specific trigger for further responses,” which explains to some extent why Oxfam GB’s early reaction to the emerging crisis did not translate into a timely scale-up. The importance of existing institutional links and partnerships also emerges from this report, as it does from the Oxfam evaluation of its response in Jordan, where the agency’s “global preparedness capacity” is also cited as a significant factor.

A dominant theme in discussion of contingency planning in this context is the failure to anticipate the scale of need, and the need for general plans (such as the RRP) to be supplemented with specific operational contingency plans. The UNHCR RTE (written in mid-2013) reports that “The organization has largely been in reactive mode since [the second half of 2012], endeavouring to keep up with the mounting scale and scope of the crisis.” While the RRP5 required significant forward thinking, its purpose was primarily to raise funds for a limited time horizon – i.e., to the end of 2013. “As such, it does not constitute a practical contingency plan that can be translated into operational preparedness...”

Where preparedness and contingency planning are considered in the material, it is largely judged against whether a suitable preparedness process is in place, rather than against the actual utility of such planning in facilitating subsequent responses. The UNHCR RTE notes that while “A regional contingency planning exercise is currently underway it has yet to translate into an operational plan” that would allow response to a large new influx of refugees or to meet the growing needs of host communities. The report suggests that contingency planning and preparedness measures “must be based on an on-going analysis of the situation within Syria and of cross-border dynamics, a task that will require effective information sharing and management” as well as a concerted effort to undertake joint planning with national and local governments, United Nations agencies, donors and NGOs with the greatest operational capacity.

The IASC OPR, written at a later date (June 2015), notes that “the absence of contingency plans in a rapidly changing environment is a concern relevant to all hubs.” While some contingency stocks were in place, “contingency plans with clear roles and responsibilities were not in place,” although this was being remedied during the period that the OPR mission was taking place. Much remained to be done on preparedness across the region and this would require flexibility and perhaps additional resources from donors.

One of the key elements of preparedness consisted in ensuring that staff had an understanding of the capacities needed to respond and of an agency’s own response capacity. As the UNICEF Regional Evaluation describes, limited understanding of available organizational emergency response capacity in 2012 and 2013, and understanding what response capacity was required to deliver programming in the prevailing contexts “hampered UNICEF’s ability to make informed decisions on programme targets & priorities.”

The importance of planning for funding shortfalls is noted in the WFP evaluation: “Contingency plans for shortfalls in donor funding should have been developed earlier, and medium-term transition plans are urgently needed for countries hosting refugees, given the protracted nature of the crisis and anticipated funding limitations.” The cutting of rations or reducing the value of vouchers, as happened in Syria in January 2015, is by implication partly a result of a failure of contingency planning.

²² By contrast, planners in Jordan in 2013 overestimated the scale of refugee flows, not reckoning on the closure of the border by the Jordanian Government. As one UNHCR official put it: “based on earlier flows, we were projecting 1 million refugees by the end of 2013; we currently [August] have around 540,000 registered or awaiting registration” [DEC]. Elsewhere, the tendency was to underestimate future demand.

Strategy and planning

Most of the evaluations consider in some detail the question of whether the organization(s) in question had the right response strategy. There are at least two levels to this: whether the organization adopted an overall approach and objectives that were appropriate to the context, its mandate, resources, etc.; and whether the particular programme approaches adopted were the right ones to achieve the objectives identified. Both depend on correct “diagnosis” of the situations in question, which itself depends on good enough information and strong analysis – and so the questions considered in following sections about assessment, analysis and information are closely related to the evaluation of strategy. Also considered here is the question of coherence of strategy within and between organizations.

Clarity and coherence of strategy

Many of the evaluation reports highlight the lack of a written overall strategy to guide agencies’ decision-making and provide coherence and continuity of approach. With regard to United Nations strategy, the OCHA report notes that there was limited written Syria strategy, and a long gap between the initial strategy produced by OCHA in 2012 and what was written in 2014. This made evaluating the strategy challenging.

This is a common theme, and a number of reports suggest that the lack of an explicit and coherent strategy was an obstacle to effective decision-making. The UNICEF Turkey report, for example, suggests that the lack of a written strategy had *“hampered [UNICEF] in its ability to make strategic judgements, to influence agendas and to seize opportunities as they arose.”* The SNAP report notes a similar gap and recommends the formulation of a written strategy which articulates SNAP’s vision and identifies a set of principles or parameters *“to ensure the coherence of its work, future-proof it against a loss of institutional memory ... and militate against the potential for SNAP to expand into areas that are outside its interests.”*

The various UNICEF evaluations reinforce this point. The UNICEF Regional evaluation notes that little evidence was found of a clear UNICEF specific rationale that *“connects UNICEF sector responses and informs programming and advocacy choices, and ... translates overall sector strategy into a UNICEF-specific strategy that is based on contextual analysis, systematic needs and vulnerability assessment, and definition of UNICEF’s organisational capacity.”* This had led to programme choices that were largely *“opportunity-based and reactive,”* with a lack of clear priority-setting.

The UNICEF Turkey report focuses on strategic coherence. It comments that, without an overall strategy to unite its two main programme strands (education and child protection), the programme has lacked coherence – something that was exacerbated by the initial decision to separate the emergency response from the regular programme, and to manage the two programme strands separately. Both this report and the UNICEF Jordan report note the lack of an explicit theory of change that would allow weak links in the causal chain to be identified and strengthened. Interestingly in the Jordan report, although the 3RP was acknowledged by respondents as *“ground-breaking”* in creating a government-led, unified and overarching strategy for the multi-sectoral refugee response, *“some donors criticised it as ... a ‘wish list and not a strategy’, with too much emphasis on conducting activities favoured by the service providers as opposed to focusing on evidence-based needs.”* Justified or not, this echoes the critique often made of the old CAP process.

The reports describe a variety of ways in which different agencies approached the task of defining their programme strategies. The DEC report, for example, notes that the approach of United Kingdom-based INGOs was *“informed by an analysis of vulnerabilities and gaps, particularly those left by the wider system of support coordinated by UNHCR.”* In practice, this gave rise to a common focus on support to rent payments as a key intervention, through conditional cash transfers; along with mostly unconditional cash transfers and/or vouchers to cover other essential costs. Inside Syria itself, the DEC report notes, the use of

cash transfers has been controversial, mainly on accountability grounds. Here, more traditional forms of aid delivery, including food distribution, were being used.

Coherence of United Nations-led strategy (strategic alignment)

As described in the OCHA evaluation, the United Nations had four main initial concerns: (1) scaling up and increasing the capacity of the system; (2) getting to the people who needed assistance the most (access); (3) working out medium-term solutions for refugees and refugee-hosting countries; and (4) unifying the various aspects of the Syria response. But this “system” view presents only one dimension of the United Nations perspective. Individual United Nations bodies – including UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF – have been heavily engaged (and perhaps preoccupied) with their own operational responses that have dominated their thinking and planning.

The extent to which these agencies have been good “team players” when it comes to strategic coherence is only lightly covered in the available material (mostly by the IASC OPR). In the absence of a system-wide evaluation, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions about this aspect of collective performance, including the INGOs. In short, the strategic coherence of the “system” cannot be properly analysed from the available material, just as its overall performance cannot (*see above*). But some areas of strategic “disconnect” are apparent – e.g., between UNHCR and OCHA (*see OCHA report*), UNHCR and UNICEF (*see UNICEF Turkey*), the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and the United Nations (*see IFRC report*) and more generally between the United Nations and INGOs (*see the gap analysis in the next section*).

The idea of a comprehensive regional strategic framework (CRSF) was introduced in late 2013 by the Emergency Directors Group (EDG) but proved controversial from the start (OCHA). *“It was seen by UNHCR as an attempt to insert OCHA into the coordination of the refugee response that they had hitherto dominated.”* The CRSF, when it was eventually produced, was *“largely ignored by the operational agencies,”* according to the OCHA report. UNDP and UNHCR formed a partnership to create a regional resilience and refugee plan, adopting some of the elements envisaged by the CRSF. The role envisaged within the CRSF for the RHC at the apex of the response machinery in the region did not come to pass. The UNHCR evaluation comments that the push for the CRSF *“was seen to be initially donor driven. The Regional HC’s means to deliver against the CRSF’s objectives were ... regarded as minimal for the task at hand. In the end, the process was considered time-consuming for all actors involved, including UNHCR, with limited results.”* However, one positive result as described in the OCHA report was the establishment of the principle of national leadership, as reflected in government co-ownership of the 3RP planning process.

The Whole of Syria approach, introduced in 2014 and connected to the United Nations Security Council resolutions authorizing cross-border operations, was an attempt to unify the disparate components of the response to the crisis in Syria. As the OCHA evaluation points out, *“it is strange to say the least that after almost four years of a multi-billion dollar aid operation a process is needed to join up various parts of the same response.”* In fact, as the report makes clear, there had been no real joined-up response: this had been a *“uniquely fragmented operation where even the basics were missing – there was no serious estimate of numbers and profile of need across Syria for instance until the middle of 2014.”* Part of the reason for the fragmentation was the separate evolution of the NGO-led cross-border responses into opposition held areas. By 2014, these had come to rival the United Nations operations from Damascus in scale and budget – and as the OCHA report describes it, *“Perceptions (of the other) in both operations became characterised by mistrust and suspicion, fuelled in part by separation and in part by the dynamics of the conflict.”* The Whole of Syria approach has been OCHA’s attempt to overcome this division (*see further on this under “coordination” below*).

Transitional and longer-term planning

Although it features in the more recent joint planning documents, the topics of resilience and longer-term planning are not covered in great depth in the available evaluation reports. Commenting on the need to

link emergency and development objectives, the Danida report notes that both in Jordan and Lebanon, the host governments “*are driving the shift towards a longer-term approach to the refugee crisis.*” It comments that aid agencies faced two main challenges with adopting longer-term approaches in these two countries – the lack of development funding and the limited capacity of (already stretched) government institutions to provide basic services. Because the evaluations take an essentially humanitarian perspective, little consideration is given to the strategic and institutional links between humanitarian and developmental approaches, including the growing role of UNDP and the World Bank alongside more traditional humanitarian interventions.

As understood in the 3RP document, the resilience agenda demands consideration of the wider impact of the refugees’ presence on the host communities: “*The resilience-based response will enable the international community to extend its support to the most affected local populations with reference to basic needs, public water and waste management, health care, education and livelihood initiatives, jointly devised with the relevant authorities.*” There is clearly a strong link to the topic of social cohesion here (see 2.5 below), and this wording echoes the challenge noted in the Danida report. But the question of how the various components of the international system are to achieve this support, and with what funding streams, remains to be fully addressed. It may be that another round of evaluations will be required before we can begin to answer the question of how successfully this wider agenda has been addressed.

The UNHCR regional evaluation addresses the question of UNHCR’s role in this wider agenda. UNHCR had recognized that the “*involvement of development actors, financial institutions, donor states and the private sector is crucial.*” It had played a key role in Lebanon (where the concept of longer-term national programmes was “*virtually non-existent*”) in highlighting the scale of local needs including social cohesion, and had attempted to rally development actors to meet them. UNHCR’s strategy in Lebanon had relied on a strong partnership with the World Bank to provide development support that can complement immediate humanitarian actions. Despite considerable efforts there had been “*limited progress towards securing development financing*” and many “*political and structural obstacles*” remained to be resolved if development financing was to be mobilized. In Jordan, more needed to be done to integrate refugee concerns into the Government’s National Resilience Plan; the Government having been “*cautious in accepting that this crisis would cause the need for a shift in long-term development plans.*” More generally, the evaluation notes that there are few comparable examples of where UNHCR, or any other humanitarian actor, “*has made a smooth transition from emergency relief to direct government involvement and development.*” The report concludes with regard to UNHCR’s role that it “*should not entail a burgeoning of activities and scope*” but rather a much stronger focus.

Those organizations with a dual mandate have theoretical advantage here, at least where they had pre-established programmes in the countries concerned. The UNICEF Turkey evaluation notes that the organization’s experience in Turkey and the wider region “*gives it a comparative advantage in terms of combining emergency relief and ‘resilience’-related approaches.*” So, for example, the child protection emergency response was planned from the outset to be integrated into the regular country programme with a medium-long term perspective, in close collaboration with the Government of Turkey. In education, the evaluation notes, UNICEF “*could have done more to build on the established relationships of the regular programme*” and a move away from the “*education in emergencies*” approach was now warranted.

The WFP evaluation considers the agency’s programme strategy particularly in terms of coverage and transition planning. With respect to coverage, WFP’s initial response, particularly during peak periods of new displacement, “*understandably focused on breadth over depth.*” The report argues that targeting should have happened sooner, given that levels of food insecurity were known to be variable among beneficiaries, and donor support could not be expected to continue on the same scale in the medium to long term. With regard to transition planning, as the first financial pipeline break approached in September

2014, WFP “*focused on short-term contingency plans such as cutting rations.*” Longer-term plans for transitioning to a more sustainable assistance model had yet to emerge at the time of the evaluation.

Coordination and leadership

Some of the aspects of inter-agency coordination covered in the reports were noted above. Most of the material is written from either (i) a system perspective (OCHA/OPR), or (ii) the perspective of United Nations agencies, with a focus on bilateral coordination issues between individual agencies. There is little in the INGO evaluations concerning coordination, either with regard to the contribution of the agency in question to “system” coordination, or with regard to the adequacy of coordination mechanisms more generally.

The issue of leadership and the respective roles of UNHCR and OCHA/Humanitarian Coordinator dominate the discussion of coordination. The UNHCR evaluation notes the negative views of respondents on the way in which UNHCR, OCHA, HCT and Humanitarian Coordinator/Regional Coordinator coordinated at various levels. Much of this is framed in terms of “turf battles,” which, as the report points out, may not be a fair judgement of the difficulties involved, but reflects prevailing frustrations. The report also notes (commenting on Jordan) that sector-level coordination has been relatively successful and that the coordination, management and leadership of sector working groups “*have worked well,*” although NGOs and donors tended to have a rather more negative view.

Both the OCHA and UNHCR evaluations note the frustrations that persist regarding the ambiguity (and related disputes)²³ over core roles, something that needs to be resolved at the level of IASC. The UNHCR evaluators comment that, in particular, the role of HC and HCT in a refugee emergency needs clarification, and that it was this ambiguity that lay behind the reported coordination tensions in 2012–2013. They believe that the CRSF process (*see above*) led by RHC and OCHA only increased these tensions “*since the core ambiguity was not resolved*”; and note that the ongoing attempt to put in place a One UN approach in Jordan and Lebanon is generating similar tensions for the same reasons. Interestingly, a loose “division of labour” had been agreed in Lebanon, with the HC and OCHA more involved in stabilization issues, vulnerable host communities and humanitarian issues affecting all of Lebanon and UNHCR focused on refugee-related issues. The UNHCR-OCHA regional agreement of April 2014, designed to clarify responsibilities in different settings, “*was unfortunately not seen to provide the requested additional clarity,*” the regional dimension of crises adding an additional layer of complexity. While progress had been made in achieving greater clarity on role in Jordan, in Lebanon “*the role of OCHA is probably the least clear of any office in the region*” (OCHA).

More positively, efforts to improve coordination in Lebanon and respond to stakeholder concerns had “*borne positive results*” (UNHCR), and respondents acknowledged the key role of the dedicated senior inter-agency coordinator and skilled technical coordinators in sectors, separating the coordination role from UNHCR’s implementation role, enhancing data analysis and information management, and a more participatory RRP. Although in both Jordan and Lebanon questions had been raised about UNHCR’s perceived “double/triple hatting” as implementer, coordinator and funder, the UNHCR evaluation did not find any instances of abuse of power such as to substantiate these concerns. It did, however, note criticism from several quarters of UNHCR’s approach to coordination “*when it comes to issues which it considers and treats as its exclusive realm,*” in particular issues of access to territory and protection. Several respondents had expressed uneasiness and frustration and what they perceived as a lack of transparency on UNHCR’s concerning its “*response to the shrinking protection space and its advocacy efforts with the GoJ.*”

²³ The UNHCR evaluation cites “the frustration and exasperation associated with the wrangling of authority and power between UNHCR, OCHA, and, more recently, UNDP”, the results of which have been “exceptionally negative” in wasted time and in other ways.

The coordination and leadership issues have not been confined to OCHA and UNHCR. The UNHCR evaluation comments on the competition for leadership between UNICEF and UNHCR (“mainly on issues other than protection – e.g., WASH”). From a field perspective, this “*creates confusion and ambiguity and in some cases has delayed the response.*” This was said to be particularly true for partners that implement both UNHCR and UNICEF-funded projects who “*felt they were caught in what they perceived to be a fierce fight for leadership between the two agencies.*” While this issue appears to have been partly rectified – at least at country office level – in the case of Lebanon and Jordan, this concern about poor collaboration between UNICEF and UNHCR is echoed in the UNICEF Turkey report.

Noting that “*Inter-sector coordination is notoriously weak in most humanitarian responses,*” and has been so in Lebanon, the UNHCR evaluation suggests the need to “*find ways of encouraging integrated comprehensive approaches within a refugee response coordination model from the start,*” which would sit well with UNHCR’s less “*silos-ed,*” more programme-based approach. These would include geographic-based approaches, greater field presence and a decentralized approach.

Box: The complexity of coordination (from UNHCR Lebanon evaluation)

“Over 60 partners contribute to the humanitarian response in Lebanon in RRP6. An extensive coordination system is in place, led by UNHCR and the Government. Coordination is across eight main service sectors (protection, food, core relief items, shelter, water and sanitation, health, education, and, social cohesion and livelihoods). Dedicated sector leads drawn from UNHCR and other specialized UN and NGO partners bring together partners to identify priority needs, design and cost appropriate interventions, and monitor implementation. Thematic working groups were also set up to complement the work of the sectors, e.g., on information management, public communication, targeting and cash transfer programming. Sectorial coordination occurs in Beirut to set up nation-wide policies and strategies, and in all field locations to operationalize the response taking into consideration the specificities of each region.”

“At the time of the field phase of the Evaluation, UNHCR decentralization had mixed results. Partners raised communication problems and issues related to coherence. Implementing partners did not necessarily have the same capacity as UNHCR in the field requiring Beirut to repeat tasks several times, sending essential staff around for various meetings. The capacity of UNHCR for sector coordination was lower in the field (in terms of both number of staff and their capacities).”

Thematic Cluster 3: Programme delivery, effectiveness, coverage and quality

Themes

- 3(i) **Programme delivery, target achievement**
 - Evidence strength 3/3
 - Covered in 10/24 reports (including 6 full-scale evaluations)
- 3(ii) **Effectiveness, outcomes and impact**
 - Evidence strength 2/3
 - Covered in 10/24 reports (including 3 full-scale evaluations)
- 3(iii) **Timeliness and responsiveness**
 - Evidence strength 3/3
 - Covered in 11/24 reports (including 6 full-scale evaluations)
- 3(iv) **Coverage of response**
 - Evidence strength 2/3
 - Covered in 9/24 reports (including 5 full-scale evaluations)
- 3(v) **Quality of aid, compliance with standards**
 - Evidence strength 2/3
 - Covered in 8/24 reports (including 3 full-scale evaluations)

Introduction

The OECD DAC evaluation criteria²⁴ of timeliness, effectiveness and coverage each receive a fair degree of attention across the evaluation studies, and results of analysis based on these criteria are reviewed here. Relevance and efficiency are considered in the sections that follow.

All of the programme-related evaluations and studies consider the question of programme delivery and achievement of objectives, although they do so in different ways and in varying degrees of depth. Some take agencies' *delivery of outputs* against targets (as revised taking account of funding shortfalls) as the basis for assessing performance, although few delve deeply into the reasons behind delivery shortfalls, even where these are substantial. Actual programme *effectiveness* – the extent to which those outputs achieved the intended objectives – is less thoroughly considered. Wider *impact* is covered hardly at all, though this is less surprising given the context and the nature and scope of the evaluations concerned.

Where there have been clear failures of coverage or effectiveness, the reasons are often hard to make out from the reports. In particular, the relative contribution of shortcomings in programme design or implementation, resource limitations or external operational constraints is hard to determine. Just as effectiveness is inconsistently covered in the material, so too *quality* – in the sense of conformity to standards and best practice – is only patchily evaluated. Some of the more useful and relevant material is considered here. Issues of timeliness and coverage of response are fairly well covered, and the findings on these topics are quite consistent.

Programme delivery, target achievement

Most of the United Nations-related reports take the statement of targets and objectives in the common planning documents (RRP/3RP and SHARP) as the benchmark for their assessment of effectiveness; but they use various methods in making this judgement, and the depth of evidence and analysis involved is highly variable. As would be expected, the sector-specific evaluations go into much greater depth and use

²⁴ As set out in *Guidance for Evaluating Humanitarian Assistance in Complex Emergencies*. OECD/DAC 1999.

surveys, direct observation and other techniques to probe the question of effectiveness. Others are more subjective and rely heavily on a limited range of key informant interviews and (sometimes questionable) reporting data.

Most reports cover at least the achievement of output targets, but more than one evaluation notes the problems associated with lack of clarity or inconsistency in setting objectives and indicators. The UNHCR Jordan and Lebanon report notes with regard to Jordan: *“There are duplicate, competing and sometimes contradictory indicators for various aspects of the Syria response in Jordan. This, as with the differing and changing objectives, causes a lack of focus and can promote indicators that match what has happened rather than progress towards common objectives.”* In addition to this, there was a lack of alignment between the outputs included in the RRP and UNHCR’s internal results framework, *“causing a dilution of their management strength and increasing unnecessary reporting requirements.”*

The UNICEF Turkey report notes a similar confusion and adds some additional complicating factors: a lack of clarity on purpose and intended outcomes; the lack of baseline and other data against which to gauge progress; the lack of consistent programme monitoring against objectives; and the fact that the programmes themselves evolved according to context and available resources. While some degree of flexibility was necessary and desirable in a fluctuating context, *“the lack of a settled, resourced programme made planning and programme management difficult.”* From both a management and an evaluation perspective, the combination of targets for which UNICEF had direct responsibility for delivery and those for which it had either joint or indirect responsibility compounded the difficulty of gauging its performance.

While acknowledging the difficulties of evaluating agency performance even in delivering against output targets, most reports suggest that agencies delivered well considering the operational constraints they were faced with. The extent of underfunding complicates this picture, with targets frequently being revised down, sometimes several times over. The UNICEF Regional report considers the agency’s target setting up to 2013 to have been “aspirational” (based on what it ought to do under its mandate) rather than based on a realistic assessment of what it could achieve within the prevailing constraints (resource, contextual, etc.); and that indicator targets were subsequently lowered in 2014 to become more realistic and achievable. It gives the example of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) targets in Syria where UNICEF achieved 34.1 per cent of its target for emergency-affected people accessing safe water in 2013. In 2014, by contrast, WASH targets in Syria were dramatically reduced from 9.5 million to 2 million and 121.1 per cent of the target was subsequently achieved.²⁵

UNICEF is not alone in facing this problem. While in general the setting of manageable targets for individual agencies within a wider cross-agency plan of action seems sensible, it is essential to consider what part they constitute within the overall response. The relationship between assessed need and related sector-based plans on the one hand, and individual agency target-setting and actual programme coverage on the other, remains obscure. The statements of intent in the joint planning and appeal documents appear to have been highly compromised in reality, but in ways that are often hard to follow in practice. There is an important accountability dimension to this. While it is not possible to analyse the issue in detail

²⁵ This raises an important issue, and there are two ways of looking at this. One is to accept that UNICEF made a pragmatic and realistic decision to downscale its ambition, and improved its delivery success rate as a result. But another is surely to say that the “need” remained 9.5 million, that UNICEF is the lead WASH agency in Syria and (in theory) provider of last resort; and that its target (in partnership with others) should not have been reduced. If the necessary financial, human and other resources were lacking, this should be noted as a critical deficit and one that was a priority to try to fix in discussion with donors and others. (As the UNHCR evaluation points out, in discussing targeting, “It would ... be problematic were UNHCR to define protection needs as a function of its financial capacity to meet them.”). If, on the other hand, the obstacles were political and concerned access, it should surely be an advocacy priority with the governing authorities.

here, it is a subject that surely demands further investigation across the board. A focus on individual agencies reveals only fragments of the picture.

Effectiveness, outcomes, impact

Few of the evaluations considered here included wider programme impact within their scope, so it is not surprising to find little evidence on aid impact – although this remains an area that seems to demand further investigation. What is more surprising is the relatively limited depth of evaluation of programme effectiveness, in the sense of achievement of objectives, and of related outcomes. Sometimes the logical leap from the delivery of outputs (e.g., provision of shelter, non-food items, cash or food) to conclusions about enhanced well-being is a relatively short one, assuming that the outputs are well targeted, programmes are monitored and feedback obtained. In other sectors, such as protection, education and health, the assumption that outputs delivered will lead to the desired outcome is less justified and requires a greater depth and breadth of analysis, given the multiplicity of factors involved in achieving the desired outcomes. The fact that most of the evaluations considered here cover single agency or single programme responses does not allow full consideration of the collective effectiveness of multiple interventions.

The UNICEF evaluation of the emergency education response in Jordan (2012–2014) recognizes the multiplicity of factors involved in considering the question of effectiveness and impact of a given intervention. While it judges the emergency response effective in securing access for 130,000 Syrian children, *“having at least 97,000 Syrian children out of formal school requires urgent action. Improving access depends on understanding determinants of access that include location, characteristics of education provision, and family and child characteristics.”* Addressing this, the report says, demands a combination of policy change and collaboration across multiple sectors of intervention.

The NGO evaluations appear to probe the question of effectiveness more deeply than others, and this relates in part to the quality and extent of the data gathered. The crucial importance of good data-gathering before, during and after the course of programme is highlighted in the Support to Life evaluation, which observes that *“well-established beneficiary identification and monitoring systems has increased the effectiveness of the program.”* Not only is such data-gathering essential for effective programming, it also enables meaningful *evaluation* of effectiveness. In this case, the evaluation was able to draw on both baseline and post-distribution surveys. The STL report notes that all of the e-voucher beneficiaries interviewed *“confirmed that cash-based assistance was the preferred modality of assistance compared to food package distribution.”* STL’s own post-distribution monitoring results showed that 71 per cent of the beneficiaries were very satisfied and 28 per cent were satisfied with the assistance provided through the voucher programme.

Timeliness and responsiveness

An analysis of the timeliness of humanitarian response features in many of the reports. If there is an overarching conclusion, it is that agencies were on the whole slow to wake up to the scale of the crisis both in Syria and beyond, particularly in 2012. The scale of the subsequent refugee crisis in 2013 took many by surprise; and delays in operational scale-up meant that there was a lag between awareness of the magnitude of the required response and delivery to scale. As the Oxfam GB Lebanon report concludes, *“Oxfam’s first reactions were rapid and appropriate [but] its transition from early warning and situation monitoring to proportionate response was slow...”*

They were not alone in this. In Syria itself in 2012, apart from the delaying tactics of the Government, as reported above, the international system was struggling to gear itself up to the scale of response required. As the OCHA report puts it, *“The UN was seen as ‘being late, and not having the impact expected of it’.”* Even with the subsequent Level 3 declaration in January 2013, it took time for the necessary people and management structures to be established, as well as for funding to be secured and programmes brought to scale. The UNICEF Regional evaluation concludes that *“UNICEF was initially late to respond but, triggered*

by the deteriorating situation and L3 declaration of January 2013, the organization incrementally developed capacity and improved performance throughout 2013, with significant scale-up and reach of programming achieved beginning in 2014.”

The WFP evaluation suggests that the agency generally achieved a timely response, particularly with its in-kind food assistance, but its vouchers were subject to delays *“resulting from slow UNHCR registration processes, particularly in Lebanon, where refugees could not apply to receive WFP vouchers until they had completed UNHCR registration.”* Beneficiaries described waiting *“two to six months to register with UNHCR and another two months to receive WFP vouchers.”* Overall, the report concludes that *“WFP responded to a fast-evolving, complex crisis ... The response was scaled up quickly, assisting 4.25 million people in Syria and 2 million refugees across the region in 2014...”*

UNHCR too is judged to have responded for the most part in a timely way to the emergent refugee crises. The UNHCR (J&L) evaluation comments of the agency’s assistance programme in Jordan: *“Ample evidence illustrates that, in most cases, UNHCR and its partners provide a timely response regarding both planning and delivery.”* On the protection response, while UNHCR faced difficult protection challenges *“it has been relatively responsive to protection issues as they emerge. All evidence points to a swift response to issues even if a different strategic tack may provide better results.”*

Some of the reports point out that timeliness and responsiveness were often a function of government policy and processes. So for example, the UNHCR evaluation commenting on the education and health responses in Jordan, says: *“The timeliness of the response in these sectors largely depends on the Jordanian government. In health, access of refugees in host communities is linked to refugee registration and GoJ health system performance.”* Similarly, the UNICEF Turkey report notes that, while slow delivery was attributable in part to lack of adequate delivery capacity and other internal factors, some of it was attributable to delays in securing governmental permissions and other external factors.

On the INGO side, delays seem to have been a function of various factors, including lack of existing presence or established humanitarian partnerships in the country, and delays in government registration or project approval. In what appears to have been a fairly typical pattern, the Oxfam evaluation of its Jordan response notes that after conducting a timely assessment, Oxfam lost some of its initial momentum [in mid-2012] *“probably due the fact that it did not have a permanent team in Jordan or an office from which to develop a response, and its partner, ARDD, did not have any experience in emergency work.”* Funding uncertainty and government bureaucracy also slowed down work in host communities, but Oxfam used the delays for beneficiary selection and procurement, and was ready to start distributions of cash/hygiene items immediately after approval to operate was received.

Several reports note the delays experienced in planning and delivering effective “winterization” programmes for refugees, which were often delivered late into the winter season (January/February). This seems particularly strange given the inherent predictability and plan-ability of such programmes. Delays in getting government-agreed beneficiary lists are given as one explanation (UNICEF Turkey), but lack of forward planning and fragmentation of responsibilities appear to be at least as much to blame.

Finally, the potentially crucial importance of timely information is raised by the SNAP evaluation. In this case, the J-RANS process²⁶ shone a light on what had previously been largely unknown territory in terms of assessed need, and served as a significant catalyst to action on a number of fronts. *“It is difficult to overstate the timeliness of the information that came from the two J-RANS [assessments] that were undertaken. Review participants spoke of a multitude of uses of the information,”* including donors and INGOs. While some had questioned aspects of the methodology, *“there was consensus over the timeliness of the exercise as a means of promoting a shared analysis of the situation and in galvanizing much-needed*

²⁶ Joint Rapid Assessment of Northern Syria, undertaken in January and March/April 2013.

action.” The report attributes similar importance to the SNAP report on Border Crossings, which was not only timely but also *“provided a common language for the humanitarian community”* on official and unofficial border crossings.

Coverage of response

The theme of coverage is understood here to mean the scale of programming relative to the extent of need in a given sector, or more generally, relative to the number of “people in need of assistance.” The theme is reasonably well reported in the refugee-hosting countries, but coverage inside Syria – where the issue is most crucial – is only covered in very general terms. Some of the uncertainty concerning coverage, particularly in Syria, relates to uncertain baselines: where need is only partially assessed, it is hard to make meaningful statements about coverage. Some reports use the idea of programme scale (typically the number of beneficiaries) as a proxy for coverage; but without the “denominator” of numbers requiring assistance (or protection), the results are hard to interpret. Of course, for most agencies and sectors, programme coverage will only represent a proportion of the total need; but again, the proportion is usually unstated – and often, by implication, unknown. The relative *priority* or acuteness of needs, and related issues of vulnerability and targeting, are evaluated only to a limited extent when coverage is discussed in the reports (*see Thematic Cluster 4 below*).

Among the international agencies, WFP has one of the strongest claims to have achieved good coverage. According to the evaluation, *WFP covered an impressive number of beneficiaries and scaled up its interventions quickly amid rising demand, particularly where vouchers, especially e-vouchers, were used...* In 2013, WFP reached 98 per cent of all registered refugees in Jordan. In 2014, in Syria it served 4.25 million beneficiaries out of an estimated 4.5 million people in need of food assistance. WFP’s initial response *“understandably focused upon widespread coverage and prioritised breadth over depth.”* Where the breadth of WFP assistance was limited, this primarily reflected compliance with government policy. For instance, Turkish and Iraqi/KRG policies led to the exclusion of non-camp refugees, and authorities in these countries blocked WFP from assessing needs among non-camp refugees. But the WFP report also notes some *“trade-offs between the scale (coverage), depth (quality), and sustainability of WFP programmes,”* related largely to effective vulnerability analysis and targeting.

The UNICEF Turkey evaluation, in discussing coverage, comments that have a *“Lack of baseline information and inconsistent collection of monitoring data²⁷ made impossible a comprehensive analysis of the coverage of the programme.”* However, it notes that coverage of the child protection programme in the host community was *“extremely limited”*. The evaluation concludes that, to some degree, *“a lack of ambition on the organisation’s part”* with regard to scale and coverage was a contributory factor to the slow evolution of the programme in 2012–2013, while recognizing that resource constraints posed a major challenge. The extent of unmet (indeed, largely un-assessed) need of the more than 1.5 million refugees in host communities in Turkey is a recurrent theme of the evaluation.

The UNHCR evaluation for Jordan notes that *“All evidence suggests adequate coverage for registered refugees.”* This was supported by the improved registration system, the progress in need assessments and targeting, and the use of the online inter-agency Information portal used to facilitate partner work. Call centres and outreach activities run by UNHCR and its partners further support coverage. However, gaps existed *“primarily in non-camp settings where refugee communities are often hard to reach, dispersed, transient, and largely reliant on Jordan’s services. This is most noticeable in the health sector ... and in education.”* The report argues that UNHCR’s capacity to meet these needs is now stretched to the

maximum and that, without “*comprehensive and informed strategies by the GoJ and relevant Ministries,*” these gaps would increase and might fuel tensions with host communities.

In Lebanon, UNHCR, like other agencies, has been faced with a difficult and complex situation “*with refugees dispersed across widely varying contexts in the country, present distinct coverage issues*” (UNHCR J&L). With increased focus on targeting and diminishing funding available, coverage becomes an increasing concern. For UNHCR, decentralization efforts aim, among other things, “*to enhance coverage and ensure better targeting of vulnerable groups.*” However, the report notes that *current interventions are insufficient to respond to the increasing refugee numbers.* In the shelter sector, “*existing shelter options are limited and the reception capacity of host families exhausted.*” New arrivals would continue to resort to often sub-standard shelter options, mainly informal settlements.

The UNHCR report points out that responses across the various sectors have not always covered the range of needs; and that UNHCR has faced the challenge of finding sufficient partner capacity to cover needs in certain sectors across all geographic areas – for example in WASH and essential services. There were, by contrast, “*too many actors involved in the provision of non-food related cash assistance,*” non-food items and other transfer-based assistance.

Quality of aid, compliance with standards

The issue of programme quality is given inconsistent coverage in the reports. Some take compliance with standards (internal and external) as a core criterion for their evaluation. Others make passing reference to standards like Sphere or to best practices without providing any detail or depth of analysis with regard to the quality of particular programmes.

Oxfam GB has a systematic approach to assessing quality, using consistent criteria including reference to established [internal] quality standards and evaluation methods across a range of programmes.²⁸ This tool seems to enable a relatively high degree of consistency in the process of “humanitarian quality assurance” run by Oxfam, and is used in their evaluations of programmes in Lebanon and Jordan. With regard to external standards, the report notes that *all sectors of Oxfam’s response in Lebanon were designed to reflect Sphere standards.* In some cases the Sphere standards are referenced explicitly, *but in most instances they are embedded in key documents and basic approaches.* Some of the key related indicators were adapted for contextual reasons.

Others cover quality less systematically. Some, like the UNICEF Turkey evaluation, make fairly extensive use of internal standards and commitments²⁹ as a benchmark against which to judge quality and performance. The UNHCR (Lebanon and Jordan) evaluation explicitly addresses the question of whether satisfactory humanitarian standards (e.g., Sphere and/or UNHCR) been met. It concludes that humanitarian standards have been met except in the shelter sector where Sphere standards have been not been maintained and in the education sector due to the low coverage and quality.

The difficulties encountered with regard to common standards between agencies working in partnership are highlighted by the HelpAge International evaluation. It notes that while “*HelpAge and Handicap International are both committed to quality standards and codes of conduct at the organizational level,*” these may not be the same standards; for example, Handicap International (unlike HelpAge) uses the Groupe URD quality standards, and has internal commitments on protection of staff and beneficiaries; risk management; and anti-corruption. It also notes that many field staff were not trained in refugee protection and humanitarian principles, or quality standards; and HI staff consulted “*were found to be unaware of the HelpAge code of conduct, prompting recommendations for training and compliance.*” By

²⁸ An extract from the Oxfam GB evaluation of its Lebanon programme is included in the Annex, showing the evaluation of performance using the agency’s own Global Humanitarian Indicator Tool.

²⁹ In this case, UNICEF’s Core Commitments for Children in Humanitarian Action – the “CCCs”.

extension, the challenges of ensuring quality compliance between international and local agencies may be even greater, although this is raised only in passing in the reports.

A fairly consistent theme appears to be the trade-off noted above in the WFP evaluation between coverage or delivery and quality. Commenting on UNICEF's emergency education response in Jordan (2012–2014), the evaluation notes: *"Quality of education provided to Syrian refugees has been a secondary consideration to access [to education]. It has been below desired levels, with quality challenges also affecting Jordanians."* Although there has been *"limited use of quality measures,"* the report goes on to list such things as low test scores, crowded classrooms and poorly maintained facilities.

Thematic Cluster 4: Protection, vulnerability and humanitarian principles

Themes

- 4(i) **Protection of civilians in Syria**
 - Evidence strength 2/3
 - Covered in 11/24 reports (including 6 full-scale evaluations)
- 4(ii) **Protection of refugees**
 - Evidence strength 3/3
 - Covered in 11/24 reports (including 6 full-scale evaluations)
- 4(iii) **Gender, age and vulnerability analysis**
 - Evidence strength 2/3
 - Covered in 7/24 reports (including 3 full-scale evaluations)
- 4(iv) **Humanitarian principles**
 - Evidence strength 1/3
 - Covered in 4/24 reports (including 2 full-scale evaluations)
- 4(v) **Advocacy**
 - Evidence strength 2/3
 - Covered in 9/24 reports (including 4 full-scale evaluations)

Introduction

Protection of civilians and refugees are two of the more substantially covered topics in the evaluations. Some of the analysis is legal and technical – for example, concerning the legal and policy frameworks within which refugees have (or have not) been able to find adequate protection – and this is partly covered in the context findings section above. Some analysis concerns protection interventions, including advocacy and programmatic approaches, which are reviewed here. With regard to Syria itself, the analysis tends to be less detailed (the IASC OPR and OCHA reports are exceptions to this) and concerned primarily with breaches of international humanitarian law and related advocacy efforts, including those concerned with denial of access to adequate assistance.

Analysis of humanitarian principles and their application in practice is harder to find in the available material. Most of what is found concerns breaches of fundamental principles of international humanitarian law and customary refugee law (e.g., *non-refoulement*). Regarding the principles of humanitarian action – specifically impartiality, neutrality and independence – some limited discussion of the challenges of independence for the United Nations agencies is found, but surprisingly little on the limits of impartial aid delivery in Syria. Related to this, there is almost no discussion of the “do no harm” principle and the challenges of delivering aid accountably (*see the gap analysis in section 3*).

Discussion of protection advocacy is also limited. There is quite an extensive discussion of the process of joint advocacy in some respects – for example, concerning the Human Rights Up Front initiative – but little attempt was made in the published reports to assess the effectiveness of particular advocacy and influencing initiatives.

Concerning vulnerability, there is a considerable depth of analysis both in the evaluative reports and in other publicly available studies, assessments and surveys, some of which are also referenced here. The process of targeting assistance and its relationship to vulnerability analysis is also covered in some detail in the reports. Age and gender-related analysis features in some but not all of the reports, itself largely a reflection of the extent to which the programmes in question themselves considered the issues and generated relevant data. The situation of child refugees and related protection issues is well covered; the

situation of elderly or disabled refugees much less so. Gender analysis tends to concentrate on areas like sexual and gender-based violence, and there is relatively little analysis of gender-related vulnerability more generally.

Protection of civilians and refugees

The protection of civilians in Syria represents the greatest humanitarian challenge and the most frustrated agenda of the international system. This more than any other part of the humanitarian agenda lies firmly in the political domain. As the IASC OPR says, in calling for a range of actions by humanitarian agencies on protection, *“it should be made clear that this is no replacement for political action at the global level.”* Yet the ability of the humanitarian system to influence political and military action by the parties to the conflict has proved extremely limited; and its influence on external political action has also been limited, even taking into account the 2014 United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Within the reference material for the ESGA, the two main sources on protection of civilians in Syria (the IASC OPR and OCHA) are broadly consistent in their analysis. The IASC OPR notes that, despite the high profile of the Secretary-General’s Human Rights Up Front initiative to prevent serious and large-scale human rights violations, there is a perception that the United Nations has not yet delivered on its commitments in Syria. The report concludes that the initiative is *“not satisfactorily bringing the different parts of the UN system together – humanitarian, political, human rights, development – to address human rights and protection issues unequivocally.”* There is also a feeling that discussions need to deliver *“more actionable commitments than normative statement.”* A lack of concerted, senior-level advocacy is noted.

The OCHA evaluation comments that OCHA has been “relatively outspoken” on protection issues from an early stage, the ERC always including protection as a central issue in public statements, reports to the SG and the Security Council, and in private diplomacy with belligerents and their backers. The statements involved have tended to be rather “diplomatic,” talking about abuses on both sides and couched in rather general language. But as the situation deteriorated they became less equivocal:

The use of car bombs, barrel bombs, aerial bombardment and mortars in residential areas, with no distinction between military targets and civilians, are violations of International Humanitarian Law. The use of siege as a weapon of war, the recruitment of children for combat, and the subjection of women and girls to sexual and gender-based violence are abhorrent and must end immediately.

The ERC and OCHA were also expending ever-larger amounts of energy and political capital on the access issue – itself a matter of protection. But while OCHA did well on raising the issue of civilian protection, trying hard to keep it on the political agenda, the evaluation concludes that it did not do so well *“in practical and planning terms.”* The OCHA report notes that despite the 2013 statement on making protection central, there has only very recently been a protection strategy. It cites the ‘Whole of System Protection Review’: *“Under these conditions, current leadership practice and support has not better positioned the system to avoid a systemic failure as occurred in Sri Lanka. There are limited incentives for the HC or HCT to take bold decisions.”* The report notes that similar concerns, combined with the lack of consensus within the IASC and the challenge of parallel coordination mechanisms, are *“inhibiting bolder, collective, and proactive leadership in the Syrian crisis today.”*

Protection of refugees

The protection of refugees is relatively well covered in the reports. UNHCR is commended for its efforts in this regard. In Lebanon, the UNHCR evaluation reports that the organization has *“performed extremely well ... given the complexity and challenges posed by the context”* and that it has *effectively prioritized protection in Lebanon, in line with its mandate. Strong and effective mechanisms for registration have been put in place under incredibly difficult circumstances’*. In Jordan too, UNHCR’s performance is judged to be

strong, founded on a “strong bilateral relationship” between UNHCR and the Government; but despite this, there were reported to be serious and growing protection issues in Jordan, including tight border controls, inadequate coverage of protection issues in non-camp settings, and inadequate input and monitoring of protection issues at the border.

The overall picture that arises is one of international agencies struggling to define and implement an effective protection agenda in Syria and beyond, despite the best efforts of UNHCR and others. In part this can be attributed to lack of information, lack of access and lack of resources. But more importantly, it relates to the highly constrained (and sometimes frankly hostile) political environments within which such efforts have been pursued. Agencies’ ability to influence policy and practice in these environments has been strictly limited; and beyond advocacy, their programmatic responses on protection have tended to be limited in scope. Within these limits, vital work has been done on general information provision (particularly to refugees), on safe spaces and psychosocial support for children, and specialist case referral of those with particular vulnerabilities.

Humanitarian principles

The most fundamental issues of humanitarian principle have arisen in Syria itself. Foremost among these have been the failure to respect the most basic elements of international humanitarian law, including the distinction between civilian and military targets, proportionality and precaution in the use of force, and the ban on the use of inhumane weapons. This is discussed above in the context section. Much of the subsequent humanitarian fall-out, including human displacement, has come from the failure to observe these basic norms.

The core principles of humanitarian action – understood here to include humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence – have themselves been placed under severe strain during the course of the Syrian conflict. But the related issues for international agencies are covered only in passing in the published evaluations, and there is less analysis of impartiality in particular than one might expect (*see gap analysis section below*).

The question of independence arises in some of the United Nations-related evaluations. In the WFP evaluation, the authors note that Syrian refugees, some United Nations officials, donors and NGOs had “*expressed concern that WFP is seen as having a close relationship with the Syrian Government and not making sufficient use of the influence its large-scale contribution should bring to advocate for humanitarian space and unhindered access.*” This perception that WFP was too closely aligned with the Syrian Government had implications for its reputation. The management response to this was that as a United Nations agency, WFP’s role in delivering food to the maximum number of people in need was “*best served by maintaining relations with the Syrian Government and negotiating access.*” WFP reported that this approach, which includes lobbying by senior staff, had maximized access to affected populations.

The UNHCR evaluation raises somewhat similar issues with regard to UNHCR “near exclusive” bilateral relationship with the Government of Jordan. While understandable in the early days of the crisis, the report comments that this is now “*questionable given the increasing protection issues in Jordan.*” Various respondents to the evaluation called for a broader strategy, using different stakeholders to advocate on behalf of the refugees. While UNHCR should be “*lauded for the relationship it has built to date,*” it could not let the safeguarding of that relationship impede the need to advocate and lobby on behalf of the refugees.

The WFP evaluation discusses the trade-offs required by the “complex and competing pressures” faced by WFP, particularly in Syria. These came from a range of factors: i) WFP’s commitment to humanitarian principles, including humanity, impartiality and neutrality; ii) its mandate to assist the most vulnerable and food-insecure people; iii) the limitations on its operations set by national governments; iv) its obligation to

work with the United Nations Country Team; and v) the priorities of different donors. The evaluation found *“quite widespread concerns about how WFP had managed these trade-offs”* and whether it had missed opportunities to influence the Government of Syria. The opening up of cross-line routes after Security Council resolution 2165 suggested that access was *“being withheld for other than genuine security concerns”* and that the Syrian Government was willing to expand humanitarian access when international pressure was applied. This perceived closeness between WFP and the Syrian Government has been *“bolstered by WFP’s strong, but now declining reliance on the SARC,”* which has been responsible for distributing more than 60 per cent of WFP in-kind food assistance since 2011.

A concern that aid might be manipulated and that delivery partners may themselves be politically motivated – or at least may lack the capacity to ensure adherence to humanitarian principles – is considered in only a few of the reports (*see gap analysis below*). The DEC comments that *“the political and sectarian dimensions of the conflict shape the attitudes of ordinary men and women and also of civil society organisations, a complicating factor in the search for impartial humanitarian partners.”* But while INGOs have sought local partnerships, for others, including United Nations agencies and the ICRC, the SARC has been the main or exclusive partner in aid delivery inside Syria, the Government of Syria having pronounced it the lead humanitarian agency and given it oversight responsibility for foreign assistance (IFRC). As an “auxiliary” to the Government of Syria, it has been subject to some scrutiny in this regard, but has for the most part been considered impartial and effective in its assistance role. As the CCA 1 report puts it: *“SARC has had an operational monopoly on humanitarian aid, but it proved to be a more effective and impartial agency than was initially feared by international agencies.”* While it has strong political ties to Government and military at senior level, *“On the ground, SARC’s 9,000 staff and volunteers have proved to be professional, well connected and extraordinarily committed”* [CCA1].³⁰ Nevertheless, as the WFP evaluation notes, SARC is *“seen by a number of international NGOs and Syrians as an arm of the Syrian government”*; though others note that ICRC partners with SARC and that no other body has SARC’s reach around the country.

Gender, age and vulnerability analysis

The Danish-commissioned protection meta-analysis is one of a number of reports that highlights the specific threats faced by children and women. Listing some of the key protection issues that have emerged across the region, it cites *“large numbers of children who are not attending school; recruitment by armed groups, including of under-aged refugees; labour exploitation, including child labour; early marriage; as well as domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, particularly targeting women and children.”* It also notes the pressures brought to bear in some locations by political and criminal elements within the exiled population.

The UNICEF Jordan report cites the priorities listed by the child protection sub-working group: unaccompanied and separated children; children with disabilities; children who are out of school (if schools have opened); (4) child survivors of gender-based violence, including early marriage; (5) children engaged in labour or at risk of it; and (6) boys (and girls) who are at risk of, or already recruited by, an armed group or armed force. The evaluation reports a number of findings in relation to these groups.

The threat of violence faced by women and children is highlighted in the REACH report, which cites the United Nations Commission of Inquiry and other bodies that have documented the use of rape as a systematic and widespread method of war in Syria. It describes particular issues of violence in detention facilities and at checkpoints, but says that *“under-reporting and delayed reporting of sexual violence continues to be endemic,”* often because medical documentation does not exist *“or because assistance is*

³⁰ Indeed, as the CCA points out, despite the public emphasis on the role of SARC and international agencies, *“most humanitarian work at the community level in Syria and across the wider refugee crisis has been initiated and managed by local grassroots organizations.”* [CCA1, p.] This should be borne in mind when considering the analysis presented here, based as it is on international perspectives.

denied to women held in detention facilities." The report notes the deteriorating situation of children, including recruitment of children by armed actors and abduction of children, as well as their unlawful detention; and correlates this with the growing number of children who remain out of school in Syria.

Some aspects of vulnerability relate to ethnic and religious identity, but this is not an aspect of the subject that is well covered in the evaluations – suggesting that the programmes in question were perhaps not as sensitive to this issue as they should have been. The Oxfam Lebanon evaluation is unusual in noting that the agency *"demonstrated a strong understanding of vulnerability within the general context of the refugee crisis."* Specifically, Palestinian-Syrians (Palestinian refugees from Syria) were *"correctly identified as a highly vulnerable group,"* partly for reasons of historic discrimination but also because they were required to renew monthly visas at significant cost (\$35 per person) in order to avoid deportation. The Danish Commissioned Meta-Analysis provides some further analysis of vulnerability related to ethnicity.

Advocacy

The subject of advocacy and its effectiveness receives only limited depth of analysis in the available reports. While this is a notoriously difficult subject to evaluate, more analysis might have been expected given the centrality of influencing efforts to so many of the international responses. Part of the difficulty relates to the lack of clear advocacy strategy and objectives against which to evaluate performance. The other main challenge is to demonstrate plausible causal connections between advocacy and changes in policy and practice. But this is also an area where sensitivities are such that approaches have to be flexible, taking advantage of opportunities as they arise and finding the right balance between public and private engagement.

Some organizations (typically among the INGOs) have a fairly rigorous approach to this subject. For example, the advocacy components of Oxfam programmes in Lebanon and Jordan are evaluated against strict criteria that include formulation of a strategy with appropriate input from different parts of the organization; key staff in place to support it; an adequate budget; a plan of media engagement; and an evaluation strategy with specified evidence criteria for gauging the impact of advocacy. But Oxfam is not typical in having such explicit criteria, and indeed the subject of advocacy is not routinely dealt with in the programmatic evaluations.

Some of the relevant advocacy work is multi-agency, which increases the potential impact but also the complexity from an evaluation perspective. An example is the No Lost Generation initiative jointly championed by major donors and agencies. Prompted by UNICEF's two-year report on the regional Syria crisis, this multi-partner initiative was launched in October 2013 by United Nations agencies and NGOs, together with leading governmental donors (including the United States, European Union and United Kingdom). As the UNICEF Turkey evaluation describes, the purpose was to focus a spotlight on two relatively neglected but critical areas of the crisis response: education and child protection, including psychosocial well-being. *"The idea was partly to try to generate more resources for these sectors, but also to raise their policy profile by creating a consortium of partners and providing a basis for common advocacy."* The initiative combined elements of both humanitarian and development analysis, and had considerable success as a fundraising platform *"but less as a policy-advocacy one at country level."* Largely defined at headquarters level, each country was left to interpret the initiative in its own way; and the impression is left that the initiative did not quite fulfil its potential as a policy advocacy vehicle.

The UNICEF regional evaluation notes that advocacy efforts towards governments *"have been key to UNICEF's ability to influence national plans, priorities and legislation"* and provide appropriate assistance to affected populations across the region. Yet this judgement is based mainly on anecdotal evidence since *"these efforts are rarely documented."* The report cites, among other examples of effective advocacy efforts, the inclusion of child protection elements and psychosocial support in the response (Syria and Turkey), the changing of the juvenile law to allow for more child-friendly community-based programmes

(Jordan), the immunization of all children (Lebanon, Syria and Jordan), and the adding a '2nd shift' for refugee children in schools (Lebanon and Jordan). It concludes that, since little detail on advocacy efforts and their impact is documented, *"further in-depth assessment would be required to formulate meaningful detailed findings and conclusions."*

The IFRC report includes some analysis of the humanitarian diplomacy role of the Federation, which includes *"influencing decision makers to address the interests of vulnerable people and maintaining the public visibility of the RCRC."* The report notes that the highly sensitive environment in and around Syria *"places restrictions on what public statements from the RCRC can say, in order to avoid compromising the host national society, or its beneficiaries and volunteers."* Even so, the IFRC and the ICRC had been active in increasing the visibility of the RCRC and, in particular, promoting the neutral role of the SARC in the Syria crisis, using press releases and other briefings, which has been seen as successful both internally and by United Nations partners.

Thematic Cluster 5: Targeting, accountability and community engagement

Themes

- 5(i) **Targeting and relevance of aid**
 - Evidence strength [...]
 - Covered in [...] reports (including [...] full-scale evaluations)
- 5(ii) **Supporting refugees in host communities**
 - Evidence strength 2/3
 - Covered in 8/24 reports (including 2 full-scale evaluations)
- 5(iii) **Community engagement and accountability**
 - Evidence strength 3/3 [check]
 - Covered in 11/24 reports (including 4 full-scale evaluations)
- 5(iv) **Support to host communities and social cohesion**
 - Evidence strength 1/3
 - Covered in 4/24 reports (including 2 full-scale evaluations)

Introduction

This cluster of topics receives only a moderate degree of attention in the reference material. A greater depth of analysis can be accessed in the range of studies to be found in the wider literature, some of which is referenced here. Given the challenges associated with providing assistance and protection to non-camp refugees (those living in host communities), it is surprising that more attention is not devoted to this topic, which has a strong degree of overlap with the subject of urban-based assistance programmes. Where it is covered, it tends to be in the context of either cash/voucher programmes or in terms of access to shelter and rent payments.

Accountability to intended beneficiaries is covered quite fully in some reports (particularly those of the INGOs, UNHCR and the IASC OPR) and less well in others. There is more consistent coverage of community mobilisation and participation – and important lessons seem to emerge from some of the programme-specific evaluations on the process of consultation, design and modification of programmes based on beneficiary feedback.

Social cohesion between refugee and host communities is a subject of growing concern. Some attention is given to this in the evaluations – for example, in relation to education programmes and complementarity of approaches to building social cohesion (e.g., in the UNICEF Turkey report). But this discussion is rooted in relatively little evidence; and there is a lack of consistency in the use of criteria for assessing social cohesion and the relative effectiveness of different approaches to tackling it.

Targeting and relevance of aid

This topic is partly covered in the strategy section above, and also in the section below relating to needs assessment. A number of the reports note that the flexibility offered by provision of cash or vouchers as opposed to in-kind assistance. As the Support to Life evaluation puts it, *“The decision to start a voucher program instead of distributing in-kind food and non-food items increased the relevance and appropriateness of STL’s response.”* All voucher beneficiaries interviewed had confirmed that the electronic card was the preferred modality of assistance compared with food package distribution since vouchers enabled them to buy what they need *“according to their own needs, priorities, choice and taste.”* A well-established monitoring system for the voucher programme had enhanced its appropriateness, enabling staff to *“find evidence for the appropriateness of distribution methods and validity of beneficiary expenses, monitor the attitude of the shop owners towards the beneficiaries, collect data on the most*

consumed food and non-food items ... gauge and resolve any problems within the system, and monitor the monthly and regional price fluctuations in food and hygiene items." The Support to Life report also notes the importance of community meetings, both as a vehicle for expression of needs and priorities and as a forum for programme development. The issue of how far potential beneficiaries are asked about their preferences and priorities is considered below under "community engagement."

The UNHCR evaluation describes the multi-sectorial household survey – the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon – undertaken by UNHCR in collaboration with UNICEF and WFP in Lebanon in 2013 and 2014. The intention was to gain knowledge of the living conditions of Syrian refugees and inform decision-making and programming. More specifically, the objective of the survey was to *"provide a multi-sectorial profile and to determine vulnerability criteria of the refugee population, in order to enable humanitarian stakeholders to improve their programming and to target assistance for the most vulnerable."* The report comments that while the surveys helped inform targeting, *"assessments undertaken for the purpose of reducing the caseload are unlikely to result in better targeting and will probably precipitate under-inclusion."* Nevertheless, the effects of underfunding were putting inevitable pressures on agencies to tighten their eligibility criteria.

Better targeting, the UNHCR report concludes, requires a significant expansion of outreach capacity and a *"far better level of monitoring, assessment and especially analysis."* Data collected had to be translated into meaningful information, and a comprehensive system of needs assessment monitoring was required to keep pace with the changing profile of needs across Lebanon.

The DEC report describes some of the ways in which INGOs targeted their assistance. It describes the approach of CARE Jordan, which developed an impressive system of needs identification based on a combination of reception centres and outreach, together with a "vulnerability scorecard" used as part of the case management decision-making framework. This approach and the related system of vulnerability criteria had been widely adopted by other agencies, using their own variations according to organizational priorities. The method involved allocating a vulnerability "score" to particular criteria, and then calculating the total score for the applicant in question. The most vulnerable were then deemed eligible for cash assistance, including some pre-defined categories such as women at risk.

For UNHCR, as for WFP, the shift to targeted non-food support to refugees in Lebanon was forced in large part by financial constraints. The HCR report notes the *"considerable unease amongst UNHCR and partner staff about the process and implications of this shift."* Such concerns related in particular to the fact that the vulnerability criteria on which the targeting is to be based were not yet clear and that insufficient data were available to undertake targeting in a satisfactory manner. There was also unease with respect to the fact that WFP would simultaneously be shifting to targeted assistance. The importance of collaboration and *"a strong communication strategy to keep refugees fully informed of these changes"* is noted. The report concludes that *"Given the highly precarious situation in which many refugees live and the tense atmosphere that already exists in many refugee-populated areas, a thorough analysis should be made of the potential impact of targeted assistance on vulnerable refugees and host communities."* Contingency plans should be drawn up and close coordination would be required with WFP *"as targeting plans are formulated and implemented."*

Supporting refugees in host communities

The UNHCR RTE, discussing the situation in spring 2013, raised many of the issues that have since continued to affect attempts to bring assistance and protection to non-camp refugees, who far outnumber camp refugees throughout the region. Concerning Jordan, it notes that *"Shelter outside camps is expensive and inability to pay rent is a major concern amongst refugees."* It also notes that, while refugees have free access to public healthcare, the national system *"is increasingly coming under*

pressure, both in terms of financial and human resources.” These two factors (cost of living and access to services) have remained a focus of concern and are the subject of much of the support offered to non-camp refugees in Jordan and Lebanon.

With regard to Lebanon, the UNHCR RTE commented that shelter was the greatest concern in relation to the refugee response in Lebanon. *“No camps have been established and refugees are found in many different types of accommodation of varying quality. These include rented rooms, abandoned and refurbished buildings, collective centres and informal settlements.”* The increased demand and limited supply of housing was causing rental prices to soar with the consequence that *“poor Lebanese and Syrian refugees are increasingly unable to cope with the rising costs.”* Those unable to afford the rents have lived in *“informal tented settlements”* that involved *“makeshift shelters with access to very rudimentary water and sanitation services.”* Many of these were established in flood-prone areas, and refugees in these settlements have endured successive winters in conditions far worse than those found in refugee camps in the region. Some two years later, the UNHCR evaluation of its Lebanon programme found that *“housing remains the most pressing issue for refugees,”* the rental market in some areas having become saturated with rents rising fourfold in some cases. *“Syrians with no income are increasingly indebted or risk eviction.”*

With the great majority of refugees living in either host communities or (in the case of Lebanon) in informal tented settlements, the lack of commensurate support to these refugees is reported by many of the evaluations. In Turkey, where refugees living in host communities constitute around 85 per cent of the more than 2 million Syrian refugees in the country, the scale of provision made for these dispersed communities falls well below that given to refugees living in government camps. This is largely a function of the policy of the Government, which, while generous in its reception of new refugees in camps, was slow to acknowledge the scale of the problem outside camps – and slow to accept international assistance in dealing with it. United Nations agencies have been invited to assist, but in practice the scope for this (including carrying out related needs assessment) has been limited. With regard to the NGOs, UNICEF Turkey evaluation comments that *“international NGOs have not been granted permission to work in the refugee camps and have only limited reach in the host communities – where they are often dependent on partnership with Turkish NGOs to deliver services.”* The report highlights the crucial roles played by the Turkish Red Crescent Society and Turkish civil society, and notes that their role *“is likely to increase in importance as greater attention is paid to the situation of refugees in host communities.”*

The UNICEF evaluation notes that information concerning the refugees living outside camps is one of the limiting factors in the response: *“There remain critical gaps in information ... about the situation and priorities of refugees and host communities. Greater emphasis on programme monitoring is required, together with a renewed push on joint needs assessment to help fill the major gaps in data and community profiling, without which the programme cannot be properly targeted or equity-focused.* While non-camp refugees *‘now outnumber the camp refugees by around 8:1’*, the lack of any systematic needs assessment and socio-economic profiling meant that their assistance requirements *‘are still largely undefined and un-quantified.’* This is echoed in the WFP report, which notes the need for further analysis on (*inter alia*) gender as well as on host community relations.

The imbalance in access to services is noted in the UNICEF report. *“Access to education ... remains severely unbalanced as between camp and non-camp refugees, the latter (who constitute the great majority) having much lower levels of enrolment: around 30% as against 85%+ in camps.”* The report attributes this to a number of factors including limited school and teacher capacity in host communities, lack of accurate data concerning the scale of the issue in host communities, and the rapid increase in numbers of Syrians coming to Turkey. The imbalance *“also reflects the time taken to situate international assistance (including that of*

UNICEF) in the response outside camps, and the limited scope and pace of registration of NGOs working in this field.”

The UNICEF report also highlights the problem of trying to use the same approaches in camp and non-camp settings. So for example, the use of Child-Friendly Spaces (CFS) in host communities *“proved to be more difficult [than in the camps] and had limited reach – especially for girls and children with disabilities.”* While an integrated operational model based on interaction between schools and CFS was used to the extent possible, *“enrolment rates of Syrian refugee children have (to date) been so low as to limit the suitability of this approach as a primary strategy.”*

Community engagement and accountability

This is a topic better covered in the INGO reports than in others, and this seems to reflect the relatively higher priority given to this aspect of programming by international NGOs and their local partners. The DEC Review found a number of impressive examples of community mobilization (e.g., ActionAid in Lebanon), while noting that mobilisation could have come earlier in some instances. Oxfam GB in Lebanon treated community engagement as integral to the process of assessment, using a methodology that *“promoted beneficiary and wider stakeholder consultation through focus group discussions with refugees (men and women) and members of host families, household surveys, and community mapping activities.”* The findings allowed Oxfam to design a programme of support around the expressed priorities of the refugees (shelter, food and some WASH).

The UNHCR RTE comments on the relatively low initial priority given to community engagement. Discussing Zaatar camp in Jordan, it says *“Camp interventions have hitherto primarily been focused on the installation of infrastructure, while community engagement and development have assumed a lower priority. This has led to a lack of community ownership over camp services and infrastructure and considerable frustration on the part of refugees.”*

The resulting legacy took time to be turned around. Conscious of a history of tensions, vandalism and mistrust of NGOs in Zaatar, Oxfam GB³¹ incorporated a component of social mobilisation *“into what was a public health engineering intervention.”* This involved training and deploying a team of *“social workers”* to be present in the camp, promote ownership and maintenance of the WASH facilities being constructed, and develop a continuous dialogue with the refugees so that any concerns could be addressed. The report describes in some details the interaction of these workers with street leaders and with separate focus groups of men and women; and the subsequent establishment of *“WASH committees.”*

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The HelpAge report describes how the agency developed *“minimum accountability standards”* for the cash transfers, based on the DEC accountability framework requirements and HAP standards, and covering participation; complaints and response; standards; monitoring, learning and evaluation; and coordination. However, in the actual implementation it was recognized that there was *“room for further improvement in accountability.”*

Accountability to aid recipients is another subject that features more in the NGO reports than in others. Commenting on the performance of United Kingdom-based NGOs, the DEC report notes that, *“On*

³¹ The Oxfam reports on the agency’s responses in Jordan and Lebanon provide a useful *“checklist”* of requirements to meet their own internal standard on community engagement (see *the Annex*).

accountability to beneficiaries, DEC members appeared to be performing relatively well in Lebanon and Jordan, in both cases putting great emphasis on outreach and information dissemination.” Most of the agencies reviewed had established appropriate feedback mechanisms. Concerning Syria, the report comments that *“Perhaps inevitably, inside Syria itself agencies have struggled to ensure that their usual standards of accountability to beneficiaries are maintained. Beneficiary lists and entitlements cannot be published and feedback mechanisms are relatively weak.”* Yet based on what some of the faith-based agencies had achieved, the report notes that there is *“scope for improvement.”*

The IASC OPR devotes considerable space to the issue of accountability to affected populations (AAP). Acknowledging the challenges to accountability in Syria itself, where foreign agencies have had limited direct contact with beneficiaries, the report nevertheless concludes that more could be done – including better collation of information from different partners to inform the overall response. Even for cross-border operations there were possibilities, and the report notes the example of GOAL, which established a feedback mechanism for its cross-border operations in the form of help desks at distributions, by phone, email or directly at offices.

Support to host communities and social cohesion

As the Danish-commissioned Meta-Analysis describes, RRP6 included *“an increased focus on early recovery, social cohesion interventions and a transition from assistance to development-led interventions.”* As the refugee situation became ever more prolonged, and with refugees in host communities far outnumbering camp refugees, the question of integration has become a *de facto* priority – even while the great majority of refugees hope and expect to return home to Syria in the medium term. Relations between refugees and hosts have become strained in a variety of ways, including around (perceived) competition for low-wage jobs and access to services. Fears for a breakdown of social cohesion are common to Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey; and programming in ways that reduce tensions, support local communities as well as refugees, and allow some kind of graduation from relief to developmental modes or operation, have become a priority. Central to this is the effective integration of refugees into local services.

The UNHCR evaluation for Lebanon describes the related response in this way: *“While a great deal of work is being done, a more comprehensive and detailed strategy should be developed for social cohesion in Lebanon. [The] various initiatives ... are not coordinated effectively nor are their targets and expected results sufficiently harmonised...”* The social cohesion strategy needed to account for the *“complexities associated with different contexts/locations”* and the different forms of government engagement. This should include *“refined indicators and monitoring systems to ensure that mid-term adjustments can be made.”* The report notes the potential for conflict between refugees and host communities, and argues that as *“social cohesion remains an important protection objective it should be established jointly by UNDP and UNHCR.”*

With regard to social cohesion in Turkey, the UNICEF evaluation encountered negative attitudes towards Syrians, especially in double-shifting schools; but found some positive approaches to addressing social tensions, such as sports events, which brought Syrian and Turkish children together, and the presence of Turkish language teachers (who had clearly befriended Syrian teachers) in Syrian shifts. *“However, the enormous material gulf between the two groups was evident, especially when discussing their accommodation and certain cultural differences relating to family circumstances.”* The evaluation concluded that there was scope for education and child protection initiatives concerned with social cohesion to be better aligned within an overarching strategy.

Even the pragmatic response of segregated “double shifting” designed to allow Syrians access to education in Turkish schools raises *“concerns about social cohesion”* according to the UNICEF evaluation of its education programme in Jordan. *“UN officials and donors raised concerns that double-shifting with segregation by nationality will create longer-term risks to social cohesion, with Jordanians and Syrians*

educated in separate and unequal schools. Separation into morning and afternoon shifts creates two schools that barely mix, limiting the scope for longer- term building of mutual understanding and trust.”

There are evidently tensions between different priorities here, or at least between particular solutions to addressing them: the immediate priority of providing access to education and the longer-term priority of social cohesion.

Thematic Cluster 6: Staffing, partnerships and operational efficiency

Themes

- 6(i) **Staffing and human resources**
 - Evidence strength 2/3
 - Covered in 8/24 reports (including 5 full-scale evaluations)
- 6(iii) **Partnerships**
 - Evidence strength 3/3
 - Covered in 12/24 reports (including 6 full-scale evaluations)
- 6(iv) **Operational efficiency**
 - Evidence strength 2/3
 - Covered in 9/24 reports (including 5 full-scale evaluations)

Introduction

This cluster of issues receives moderately full coverage in the reports. While many of the management and structural issues in particular are unique to the organizations concerned, in other areas of analysis there is much overlap across organizations both in the challenges faced and in the attempted solutions.

In the area of staffing and human resources, a number of recurrent challenges can be identified, and these are illustrated in the synthesis below. They include the overall shortage of staff in certain key roles and the wider issue of organizational overstretch; gaps in organizations' ability to fill senior management roles in the region; and heavy reliance on internal and external surge deployments, with consequent problems related to multiple short-term deployments.

With regard to partnerships, many reports consider the issue, though only a few have any depth of analysis. Some important lessons emerge across a range of partnership types, particularly between United Nations agencies and NGOs, INGOs with one another, and INGOs with local partners. They illustrate both the central role that partnerships play in the delivery of international assistance, and the challenges of meeting different organizational requirements within a single delivery model.

On the subject of operational efficiency, there is a considerable amount of evidence in the reports, although most of it is not considered under this specific heading. This is a topic that only really emerges when reading across the topics of human resources, finance, logistics and partnership. To that extent it is difficult to specify, but remains an important factor in assessing the efficiency both of individual organizations and a partnership-based model of international assistance.

Staffing and human resources

This is a subject covered in reasonable depth in a number of the reports. While some of the findings are specific to the organizations concerned, some have a wider relevance, and a number of points of convergence can be found.

The problem of staff shortages and difficulty of filling posts is a common theme. Oxfam found that its limited staffing capacity in Lebanon in the early days of the crisis was a significant limiting factor, causing it to miss opportunities for scaled-up programming and related funding. With the "upgrading" of the status of the response in January 2013, it had greater call on organizational resources, crucially including the deployment of a number of "humanitarian support personnel" that constitute the agency's main global surge capacity. This allowed the necessary technical as well as managerial capacity to be put in place to

allow the programme to grow and meet Oxfam's quality standards. Recruiting suitable national staff was more difficult, leaving Oxfam "*almost entirely*" reliant on partners for information and access to the affected population.

The United Nations agencies too have sometimes struggled to deploy the staff needed to run their programmes. The WFP evaluation notes that, according to WFP staff in all six countries in the Syria sub-region, "*the numbers, profiles and tenures of staff mobilized for the emergency were often inadequate, leading to overburdening of other staff and high turnover in core positions.*" The example is given of the head of office for WFP in Lebanon, which had six post holders in the course of two years, while the head of programme post in Turkey "*was often vacant.*" The evaluation describes this as an "*institution-wide challenge*" in emergency settings.

The UNICEF Turkey evaluation echoes this concern, and points out the seven-month gap between the departure of the former Country Representative and the arrival of his permanent successor – leaving the Deputy Country Representative having to cover both her own role and that of the Representative. The simultaneous loss of the Education Section Chief and Education in Emergencies Chief placed a major strain on other staff. The other factor stressed by this and other reports is the effects of high staff turnover and reliance on short-term surge deployments. Apart from the discontinuity involved – something felt both internally and externally – each new recruitment or surge deployment required considerable induction and training in local systems and procedures, "*as well as getting up to speed regarding their own sectoral responsibilities.*"

The OCHA evaluation notes that managing human resources is "*in effect OCHA's main activity during a crisis*" – and the Syria crisis has been perhaps its greatest challenge during the period in question, including the deployment of "*many of OCHA's best staff*" and a call on the skills of many more. It has relied heavily on surge deployments – a total of 83 surge deployments to Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Egypt between 2012 and 2014. These have not been particularly short-term (averaging around 6 months), and have served a valuable purpose in filling key posts; but they are relatively costly and result in discontinuities of various kinds.³²

The OCHA evaluation is one of the few that considers in some detail the question of staff morale and well-being. It notes that, "*The high stress and high pressure environment seems to have led to quite low staff morale at times, and a higher than normal rate of attrition amongst staff.*" The high intensity and exceptionally high volume of work that the crisis generated meant that staff worked long and irregular hours. Particularly in Damascus, where the intermittent shelling and restrictive security gave little opportunity for time out, managing staff "burnout" has been a major challenge. The long time taken by OCHA to establish a stable leadership in the region did not help in this regard, although this has now been rectified.

The OCHA and WFP reports are among the few to refer to the wider problem of organizational overstretch. As the OCHA report comments, "*There appears to be an over-reliance on a few individuals*" who are pulled from one crisis response to another. "*As soon as one hole is covered another is exposed.*" This had led to a perception among some of the interim country managers that they were "*in competition with one another for permanent positions,*" something that did not enhance team building.

With regard to national staff, the OCHA report notes a different set of issues. Due to OCHA's lack of local registration, national staff are employed by UNDP, usually on short contracts. This leads both to a feeling of job insecurity and a lack of connection with OCHA. Compounding this is a sense that there is "*no*

³² By way of comparison, the UNICEF regional evaluation reports that from February 2012 to September 2013 (around 18 months), UNICEF deployed 400 staff (internal and external stand by partners) on surge assignments. 'The normal surge period of three to four months was extended substantially'.

clear career progression for national staff into international positions,” which limits the use of a possible pool of talent – particularly in the case of senior national staff who have worked for the organisation for many years and constitute a major asset for OCHA.

Partnerships

The subject of partnerships is covered (in variable depth) by half of the reference reports. Each has a quite different perspective on the subject, so that the results are hard to compare. Following are some of the observations that appear to have wider relevance.

In Syria, the partnership options for those operating from Damascus and those working across borders have been very different. For the former, working with and through either government bodies or through SARC has been the default option. Cross-border work, on the other hand, has meant partnering with civil society organisations operating in opposition-held areas. As the Common Context Analysis describes, the crisis has *“mobilized and enhanced the plethora of small fragmented religious organizations and informal charitable associations”* that characterized local civil society before 2011. These local initiatives have been complemented and supported by humanitarian initiatives run by the Syrian diaspora and Muslim solidarity groups from the Middle East and Europe. *“Most INGOs that have not found it possible or desirable to register in Damascus have built their operations on these local and diaspora groups.”* The CCA goes on to note that relationships between cross-border agencies and activist humanitarian partners *“have not been easy”* and that fulfilling donor accountability expectations in particular has been challenging. The DEC review notes that the partnerships formed by the faith-based agencies (Islamic and Christian) appear to have a significant advantage, being able to tap into pre-existing local networks to identify and respond to needs as they arise.

While most of the detail concerning cross-border partnerships is not in the public domain, it is known that *“remote”* partnership (here as elsewhere) has caused very considerable challenges. A variety of techniques, including the use of third party monitors (*see the next section*), have been used to try to overcome these, and much learning remains to be captured from this. The DEC review comments that, given the limits of coverage through existing partnerships in Syria, *“new forms of partnership and joint venture (including with government ministries) should urgently be considered by DEC members.”*

The Danida evaluation sheds some light on the partnership between donors and operational agencies. The evaluation comments that Danida’s trust in its partners to make the right programming decisions and choice of implementing partners *“appears to be justified.”* It concludes that longer-term framework agreements with NGO partners bring multiple benefits, notably in terms of predictability and flexibility, although those benefits were not always transferred to those NGOs’ own partners. Danida’s United Nations partners highlighted the donor’s willingness to accept consolidated reporting on its contributions as an example of good practice. Again, however, *“UN agencies do not extend the same reporting flexibility to their implementing partners,”* requiring detailed and frequent reporting the details of which are not reflected in United Nations reporting to donors. Acknowledging the efforts that Danida’s partners had made to monitor their work or that of their partners, including some good use of technology, the report notes that evaluation and lesson learning had been given less priority.

United Nations agency implementing partnerships with NGOs (or *“cooperating partnerships,”* as WFP terms them) are not deeply analysed in most of the reports (*see gap analysis below*). One exception is the UNICEF evaluation of its psychosocial support programmes in Jordan, which went to some lengths to consult partners about their experience of partnership with UNICEF. The feedback is generally positive, with particular appreciation given to the support and capacity building provided by UNICEF, and to the organization’s role in facilitating communication and coordination between partner organizations. Despite the generally positive conclusions, the evaluators also *“heard many complaints about duplication of*

services due to a lack of coordination among UN agencies,” as well as about the “poaching” of partner staff by United Nations agencies that could fill vacancies by offering higher salaries. While UNICEF’s own record in this and other areas was good, its relatively standardized approach to partnership, as reflected in its partnership agreements, was not always felt to reflect the actual needs and capacities of its partners.

The Support to Life evaluation illustrates some of the points of added value in partnership between international and national NGOs. According to staff consulted from its international partners, having a partnership with the Turkish NGO *“has had both advantages and disadvantages.”* Implementing through local partners lessened burdens related to legal status, hiring employees and social security issues, allowing the international agencies to focus on more strategic issues, thereby making programme management *“easier in many ways.”* From Support to Life’s point of view, partnerships with INGOs brought much-valued technical expertise. Some challenges were also noted, *“especially when the partner organisation also acted as co-implementer.”* Working with multiple INGO partners could require alignment with multiple different policy requirements, and ways needed to be found of facilitating such partnerships without needing to change internal policies with each new partner.

The HelpAge International report provides an interesting window on the workings of a partnership between two international NGOs (HAI and Handicap International). The collaboration made theoretical sense in a number of ways. It reinforced and built on the global partnership between the two agencies; allowed a sensible division of labour with respect to the joint programme of cash-based assistance and inclusion advocacy; and provided *“strategic learning opportunities”* for the two agencies, especially in cash transfers. However, the report finds that, in practice, *“the mutual benefits of partnership are much less clear.”* The two agencies struggled to harmonize their different management styles, organizational cultures, programming and advocacy approaches, and methods for identifying the most vulnerable. *“Both partners seem to have underestimated the time needed to manage the partnership,”* including through internal communication, information provision and technical advice. The evaluation concludes that the partnership reflected a shared vision at the global level, and provided the basis for a successful programme, but in practice it had involved *“substantial practical difficulties and missed opportunities.”*

Operational efficiency

The subject of efficiency is addressed in a number of different ways in the evaluation reports, and the analysis depends in part on reading across a range of topics, including human resources, financial management (on which there is relatively little material), procurement and partnership arrangements. The results are often organization-specific and hard to compare, but some common themes emerge.

The UNHCR evaluation is one of the few to examine the question of financial management, and it reaches the interesting conclusion that budget-based financial management in contexts of this kind is not sufficiently flexible or responsive to ensure that money is used to greatest effect. *“This assessment calls upon managers to use the cash they have as a vital performance tool.”* Such an approach would require a move away from budgetary spending and allocations *“to using money to analyse what is working and what is not,”* and allocating it in such a way as to *“achieve the greatest impact.”* With regard to this and other areas of operation, the report recommends that UNHCR *“conduct a business process efficiency review,”* which should be designed to *“decrease costs (indirect and direct) related to these processes without sacrificing quality.”* Among its immediate recommendations is a review of terms with all commercial suppliers, including key performance indicators and cost efficiencies over time. The report concludes that the *“lack of an integrated, operational focus on efficiency is due to the lack of sufficient attention, management skills, and available information,”* but also to the nature of UNHCR/United Nations accounting standards and approaches that separate overheads and other indirect costs from operational budgets. The evaluators recognise that these issues are by no means unique to UNHCR.

Another issue raised in the UNHCR report is the high cost of short-term arrangements, as for example when *“a mobile unit is often rented at a high cost instead of leased or purchased.”* Other reports also note the relative inefficiency of such short-term approaches. Some agencies learned this lesson, and the WFP evaluation praises WFP logistical arrangements in this regard, even in Syria, where *“several good-practice approaches were developed to increase efficiency and cost-effectiveness while mitigating risks.”* WFP built a complex transport and logistics network across the country, working with trucking firms in Syria, negotiating reduced costs for ground transport, and *“preventing companies or drivers from establishing inappropriate relationships with armed groups or others by rotating companies, drivers and routes.”* The report concludes that WFP deserves credit for implementing *“new approaches in a difficult environment.”*

The WFP report describes the challenge of evaluating efficiency in the sense of cost-effectiveness. *“Measuring efficiency and cost-effectiveness in the regional EMOP is difficult as WFP cannot provide data for comparing the per-beneficiary costs of the three delivery modalities used: food, paper vouchers and e-vouchers.”* On the other hand, the report suggests that with regard to losses, the WFP programme had been highly efficient. WFP data indicated that *“97 percent of food rations dispatched were distributed among beneficiaries, suggesting a very low level of loss for an operation of this complexity.”* The report qualifies this by acknowledging the difficulties of reliable monitoring in Syria, and that WFP staff were able to undertake only one quarter of planned field visits in the period July 2013 to March 2014 because of security conditions.

The UNICEF Jordan evaluation of its education programme suspected that there were several areas where efficiency could be improved. *“The evaluation found little evidence that options are fully appraised, with optimal approaches adopted in the face of resource constraints.”* Yet based on the available data, it concluded that *“a cost effectiveness analysis is not possible.”* Developing the evidence base to allow this *“should be a focus in the future,”* and many of the components required to deliver value for money were either in place or being developed. *“Further donor confidence would be achieved by sharpening the focus of monitoring towards delivering outcomes.”*

Thematic Cluster 7: Assessment, monitoring and evaluation

Themes

- 7(i) **Needs assessment and situational analysis**
 - Evidence strength 2/3
 - Covered in 7/24 reports (of which 3 were full-scale evaluations)
- 7(ii) **Programme monitoring, reporting and evaluation**
 - Evidence strength 3/3
 - Covered in 13/24 reports (of which 7 were full-scale evaluations)

Introduction

This cluster of themes is reasonably well covered in the evaluation reports, although there is a lack of related enquiry (apart from the SNAP evaluation) into the evidence base on which programmes were built and developed. Put another way, while the process of assessment and monitoring is well addressed, the question of whether or not response decisions were well informed by contextual evidence is not much addressed in the available reports. This may be explained in part because decision-making processes are themselves not transparent: the basis on which decisions are made is rarely documented in a way that allows the rationale for a given decision to be fully understood. This makes it difficult to evaluate the extent to which question of decision making has been genuinely evidence-based.

While many stand-alone assessments concerning the Syria crisis contexts are available in the public domain, these tend to reflect the situation in a particular location at a specific point in time, often with a specific sectoral 'lens'. Only a few are inter-agency or multi-sector assessments, among which the two Joint Rapid Assessments of Northern Syria (J-RANS) undertaken in 2013 are among the most significant.

Concerning information management, there is too little evidence to draw any firm conclusions – and again, this is a topic that is largely absent from the evaluation reports.

Needs assessment

This is an area where the evaluations point to significant under-performance of the system as a whole (particularly in the earlier stages of the crisis) and of the United Nations in particular. While circumstances have presented major challenges to needs assessment, more could have been done – as evidenced by more recent progress in this area, particularly on joint assessment.

The OCHA evaluation is candid in its review of assessment performance with regard to Syria itself: *“One area where the system (and OCHA) did not deliver was in assessing needs. Over five years into the conflict there is still not an accurate picture of needs, meaning much of the aid operation remains guesswork. Since 2012 the Syrian government has effectively blocked attempts to do proper needs assessment, and access and security constraints have been huge.”* Nevertheless, the report concludes, the fact that the first unified assessment was only produced in 2014 indicates that *“more commitment and resource is still required.”*

The OCHA report describes the troubled early history of needs assessments from Damascus in 2012, mounted jointly by the Government, the United Nations and the Officer In Charge. The assessment was able to reach some but not all of the conflict areas, and while it highlighted serious need, the objectivity of the results was questioned and relations were left strained. There were no further joint needs assessments from Damascus until 2014, but in early 2013 there was the first of a series of joint needs assessments in

opposition areas (the J-RANS), organized through the Syrian Opposition Coalition's Assistance Coordination Unit with backing from DFID and USAID. This was done jointly with some of the INGOs working cross-border, and used *"professional"* needs assessment methods drawing on expertise from ACAPs and Map Action. As described in the OCHA report, this exercise *"found serious unmet need, but was viewed by many as a political exercise and therefore had a somewhat diminished impact."* The SNAP mid-term review is much more positive, concluding that it is *"difficult to over-state the pivotal role that the J-RANS played"* in providing for the first time a reasonably comprehensive picture of need in the northern opposition-held areas, and thereby unlocking significant donor funds. The INGOs and donors in particular seem to have relied on the results to inform their decisions on this aspect of the Syria response.

As the OCHA report describes, over the course of 2013, many more needs assessments were carried out in opposition areas by NGOs; and in late 2013, this formed the basis of the Syria Integrated Needs Assessment coordinated by OCHA, and in 2014 the Multi-Sector Needs Analysis. In November 2014, the first comprehensive humanitarian needs overview was produced, combining both areas accessible from government control and areas outside of government control – and this underpinned the 2015 Strategic Response Plan for Syria. The humanitarian needs overview combined the 2014 Multi-Sector Needs Analysis data with a set of *"governorate profiles"* compiled by OCHA Syria, drawing also on exit interviews from refugees. *"The governorate profiles are essentially a needs estimate based on secondary data – as much as possible from other UN agencies."* Given that the confidence intervals for even the more reliable data is 20 per cent (which translates into +/- 2.5 million people), the OCHA report concludes that large amounts of assistance are being delivered inside Syria *"with very light independent monitoring based on incomplete or non-existent assessment analysis."* There is also *"little evidence of what the priorities for assistance might be"* and no proxy indicators in use to determine whether need is increasing, or what the impact of the aid operation might be.

Overall, noting that the responsibility does not lie with OCHA alone, the report concludes that the *"inability of the UN to properly assess need in the Syria context is worrying"*; and that while significant progress has been made, this remains one of the weaker areas of performance. The process of assessment had been *"undermined to large extent by the politics of propaganda from the protagonists."* While the absence of accurate data in such a serious crisis should not deter urgent responses, it does cast doubt on the relevance (or at least the targeting and prioritization) of some of the aid interventions.

Beyond Syria, needs assessment coverage has been less than might be expected in the relatively secure and accessible refugee-hosting countries. This is particularly true of Turkey. The UNICEF evaluation records the problems associated with international agencies seeking to conduct needs assessment, and notes in particular that there is *"a striking absence of needs assessment data and information about the situation of refugees living in host communities."* The lack of any systematic needs assessment and socio-economic profiling for refugees in different host communities means that their assistance requirements are *"largely undefined and un-quantified."* The record of sector-specific assessments is little better, and the UNICEF report finds that no assessment of refugee needs in education has been made with involvement of the United Nations, despite the best efforts of both UNICEF and UNHCR. These efforts included development of a cross-sectoral tool for rapid needs assessment (Education and Child Protection) that was submitted to the Ministry of National Education, but *"permission was not granted to conduct an assessment using the tool."*

The situation has been better in Jordan and Lebanon. The UNHCR evaluation of Jordan notes that HCT and its partners *"developed a broad infrastructure of assessments and targeting to identify refugee needs,"* and that *"every sector included an assessment,"* although the quality of assessments is judged to be mixed and widely divergent methodologies are used for data collection and subsequent analysis, making inter-comparability difficult. An example is given of the different approaches and findings of the Multi-Sectoral Assessment Report produced by Première Urgence and the Government's own Needs Assessment Review.

It is also noted that some criticism has been made of the assessments conducted on the ground that they appear to be primarily exercises in resource mobilization – although this is hard to substantiate. The report concludes, however, that *“All evidence suggests that assessments and targeting are sensitive to the local context and customs”*, and this appeared to be confirmed by the opinions of respondents to the UNHCR evaluation survey.

Monitoring and evaluation

While many of the evaluations make reference to programme and situational monitoring, only a few provide an analysis of the quality and utility of these processes. Some of the more interesting observations are included here. Overall, the reports tend to indicate that monitoring has not been given the priority it deserves, and that the results have been used more for reporting than for learning and programme adaptation.

The WFP evaluation includes useful analysis of the challenges of monitoring distributions inside Syria. While WFP staff monitor the situation *“when feasible,”*³³ most monitoring is conducted by partners and a third-party monitoring firm – although the report notes that this firm also has limited direct access to beneficiaries. Systematic monitoring of food distributions began late (only in mid-2013) for the regional EMOP, and it did not *“prioritize important indicators such as encashment of assistance.”* The report also highlights some methodological shortcomings with the system of monitoring, notably the absence of baselines: *“Credible baseline data were not gathered until 2014.”* Most significantly, perhaps, WFP staff noted that *“monitoring was primarily for reporting purposes, but doubted that it had led to programme adjustments other than in response to findings on voucher encashment. Monitoring was not structured or managed to inform programming.”* This is echoed in the UNICEF Turkey report, which comments that monitoring and evaluation effort is *“focused more on reporting than on learning and accountability.”*

The use of third-party monitors (or “facilitators”) is described in the UNICEF Regional evaluation. These are people with *“specific expertise, credibility and a broad network.”* They carry out a range of duties to support UNICEF’s work in project monitoring and programmes in areas that are not accessible to UNICEF staff. Facilitators have a *“solid knowledge of the area in which they operate”* and are able to liaise with different partners. They combine a range of tasks, including: situation monitoring, with a focus on the unmet needs of women and children; project monitoring, including post-distribution monitoring; and reporting on programme delivery and validation of progress reports prepared by implementing partners. But the report does not evaluate the performance or credibility of this system, so it is difficult to draw conclusions as to whether this met basic accountability requirements, particularly with regard to work inside Syria.

The DEC review considers the variety of means used by United Kingdom INGOs to monitor programmes. In Jordan and Lebanon, follow-up visits to beneficiaries’ houses form an important part of the monitoring system, together with standard reporting formats for staff and partners. In Syria itself, *“agencies are heavily reliant on partner reports together with sporadic staff visits.”* Some novel approaches are reported, including the use of photographs of project outputs and communication via social media to demonstrate progress. Nevertheless, the report concludes, many agencies are not able to meet their normal standards of monitoring and reporting in Syria, and *“some have had to re-define their bottom line requirements in this regard, in discussion with their donors.”*

On the subject of evaluating specific programme approaches, the UNHCR report notes the lack of organizational consistency in this regard. *“Even possible positive economic impacts of conditional and unconditional cash on some sectors (rent, retail, supplies and additional demand) are barely documented.”*

³³ The report notes that WFP staff were able to undertake “only one-quarter of planned field visits between July 2013 and March 2014 because of security conditions.”

This topic links closely to programme monitoring, and the HCR report notes that in this respect WFP is “*doing relatively better*” than UNHCR, with systematic post-distribution monitoring and price monitoring.

The importance of compiling lessons learned is also commented on in the UNICEF Turkey evaluation. While noting that some aspects of the programme (for example, the use of CFS) have yet to be evaluated, it lists a number of areas of potential good practices that deserve to be consolidated and documented, including (inter alia) incentive payments for Syrian teachers that allowed them to earn enough to stay within their profession pending discussion of full employment options.

SECTION 3: GAP ANALYSIS

Overview

This section considers the gaps in the available evidence concerning the international response to the Syria regional crisis, based on a review of the publicly available reports (the core reference material for the ESGA). The basis of the gap analysis is twofold:

- (i) Missing themes, or themes covered only lightly
- (ii) Significant weaknesses in the evidence concerning the themes that are covered

Some of the gaps involved have been noted above in the Synthesis section, and these are explored in greater depth here. Others are new, based on an overview of the evidence, consideration of the context and a judgement about humanitarian priorities.

One overarching question should be borne in mind in reading this section: How far do gaps in the analysis point to gaps in the response (and related data); and how far do they point to limitations of the evaluation process? The two are connected, of course. Evaluations focus on certain topics at the expense of others, but even on the topics they do cover, they are limited by the availability of relevant data. Given the narrow scope for generating primary data in the course of an evaluation (other than data arising from consultation with respondents), this is often a major limitation. Both the availability of data and the strength of available evidence are considered in this section.

Major missing themes and evidence gaps

Analysis of the humanitarian response inside Syria

Though it may seem strange to list this as a major gap, a reading of the publicly available material actually reveals surprisingly little analysis of the humanitarian response inside Syria. While several accounts are given of the operational challenges involved and of the lack of coverage, there is little detail about the programmes actually mounted, their relevance and effectiveness, and the extent to which they met priority needs. Other related issues – for example, the need to build capacity of Syrian NGOs, are raised by some of the reports (e.g., REACH, IASC OPR) but with little analysis of either the work being done in this regard or the nature and scale of the capacity deficit.

For some aspects of the response, notably the **cross-border work** and (to some extent) the cross-line work, there is almost no analysis at all – and indeed little description prior to 2015. This is less surprising given the high degree of sensitivity attached to these subjects. Since the passing of United Nations Security Council resolutions 2139, 2165 and 2191 in 2014, and the mandating of United Nations cross-border operations into opposition-held areas, one might have expected a more transparent approach. But sensitivities remain high, and maintaining good relations with the Damascus authorities (which do not accept the legitimacy of such operations) has been a priority for many. For United Nations agencies (despite the Whole of Syria approach) and for INGOs, there appears to remain an effective “firewall” between operations undertaken from Damascus and those managed from outside the country.

Some internal reviews of these highly sensitive operations are known to have been undertaken or to be planned by the agencies concerned (United Nations and INGO), and given the significance of both the accountability and learning aspects of these operations, this is a crucial area of joint reflection. Meanwhile, increasingly detailed factual accounts of United Nations-led operations undertaken to northern Syria (from Turkey) and southern Syria (from Jordan) are available, thanks in particular to fact sheets from OCHA.

Though these contain limited analysis, they include some consideration of potential aid gaps and future priorities.³⁴

Some sensitivities also affect the evaluation of work in Government-held areas. But the main reason for the lack of proper evaluation appears to be the security situation, which has meant that few evaluation teams have been able to access Syria – or else they have been largely confined to Damascus. High levels of insecurity and limited access also accounts in large part for the shortage of monitoring data. Heavy reliance on SARC and local NGO partners has left limited scope for verification and programme monitoring. Even Syrian staff face severe restrictions in their ability to travel, and cross-border programmes in particular have been run on a “remote” basis by INGOs through local partners.

On this as on some of the other “missing” topics, further analysis can be found in other sources. So for example, a series of useful articles in the Humanitarian Exchange magazine (HPN/ODI, November 2013) considers the practicalities of working across borders and sheds light on the operational, legal and policy issues involved. But these do not substitute for analysis of the content and effect of the programmes mounted in Syria.

3.2.2 Closely related to the above, the “**do no harm**” principle and related aspects of **risk management** do not receive the attention they should in the public evaluations. Given the multiple potential ways in which warring parties can abuse aid by in a context like this, this is a major gap. An analysis of risk management is something that should be expected to appear not just in “downstream” documents such as internal audits, but also in evaluation of the adequacy of “upstream” control processes such as due diligence in partner sections, financial management systems and project monitoring mechanisms. Although little evidence has appeared in the media of aid diversion, or the abuse of aid machinery, the question naturally arises as to how the operational agencies satisfy themselves and their donors that their aid and related mechanisms are being used for the stated (humanitarian) purposes, that aid is benefiting the intended targets, and is not being abused in order to advance the interests of one party or another – e.g., by withholding aid from some areas and allowing it to others. The apparently arbitrary nature of the Government of Syria’s process of granting permission for humanitarian access, noted in some of the reports, should in itself give rise to concerns in this regard. The same concern applies in opposition-held areas. Given the sensitivities involved, it is perhaps to be expected that analysis of such issues may feature more in internal (non-public) documents. But the public documents give very little sense of the control environment within which such operations were being run, and whether controls were adequate for the purpose, or the best they could be in the circumstances.

Funding shortfall implications

One of the most striking and surprising omissions from the evaluative studies is an **analysis of the effects of the dramatic funding shortfalls** that have affected almost every aspect of the international humanitarian response. Shortfalls of around 40–50 per cent have been characteristic of both the RRP/3RP and Syria appeals since 2014, necessitating quite drastic cuts in some programmes – either in terms of scale/coverage or in terms of whole programme elements or technical and management support structures. While it would be simplistic to conclude that an equivalent proportion of needs were not met, the scale of underfunding raises crucial questions both about the adequacy of assistance and the basis on which it was targeted (or in some cases, arbitrarily “rationed”).

Frequent reference is made in the material to the overall inadequacy of assistance – see for example the IASC OPR – but the more particular effects of underfunding have gone largely un-explored. The REACH report cites United Nations Security Council resolution 2191: “[U]rging once again all Member States [to provide] increased, flexible and predictable funding as well as increasing resettlement efforts,” and records

³⁴ For example, www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/system/files/documents/files/cnv_syr_xb_jordan_150907.pdf.

that since the resolution was passed, *‘Combined Syria crisis appeals were only 57% funded in 2014, compared with 71% in 2013. A twelvefold increase in humanitarian needs over the last three years (from 1 to 12 million), with funding only increasing threefold.’* Separate research and advocacy by Oxfam on the extent of individual donor governments’ contributions measured against their “Fair Shares”(i.e., relative to GDP) contains some analysis of the overall effects of underfunding. But at the level of specific programmes as set out in the joint planning and appeal documents (RRP/3RP and SHARP), the implications of dramatic shortfalls are barely analysed in the material.

This is not just a matter of (counterfactual) analysis of what would have happened had the projected programmes gone ahead as planned. It should be possible to assess what did not happen as a result of funding shortfalls and to draw some fairly robust conclusions about the implications of this. Yet little discussion of this is found in the core material, which tends to evaluate the programmes that were actually carried out *in their own terms*. As a result, the implications of underfunding – an issue of continuing and growing significance – are poorly reflected in the material. Reporting against objectives is done on the basis of revised (reduced) targets rather than the original targets set.

While the recent (February 2016) London pledging conference offers hope that such deficits may be avoided in the near future, and that refugee-hosting governments will be at least partly compensated for the huge drain on their resources, the effects of underfunding to date – and related cuts to budgets – have been real. The recent cuts to the WFP programme in Jordan (August 2015) are cited as a particular example in some external sources. As a recent news report noted, citing a UNHCR survey, *“In a recent UN refugee agency survey, 72 per cent of the Syrians making the perilous return journey to Syria cited WFP food cuts as the main factor behind their decision, while 27 per cent cited the rising cost of living in Jordan. As aid was cut gradually over the past year, Syrians piled on debt. According to UN figures, the average Syrian family in Jordan now has debts of \$1,000... and now for every Syrian who arrives in Jordan each day, three other Syrians leave... Syrians in Jordan and Lebanon are still unable to work legally, and remain dependent on the international community’s conscience and pocketbooks.”*³⁵

In another such report,³⁶ the situation of refugees in Mafraq in northern Jordan is described: *“Impoverished and burdened with debt, many saw their food rations reduced in August as the cash-strapped World Food Programme (WFP) reduced the number of Syrian refugees receiving its food vouchers in Middle Eastern host countries by a third, leaving 229,000 in Jordan without food aid as of September.”* Cuts to aid have been implicated both in the increasing trend of returns to Syria, and in the growth in numbers seeking asylum in Europe.

Analysis of unmet needs

Related to the above, while some reference is made to the **scale of (unmet) needs in inaccessible areas**, there has been little concerted effort to quantify this until recently. For example, with one or two exceptions (the WFP evaluation is one), there is no consistent attempt to evaluate coverage against a baseline of assessed need – in part because there is little such baseline data available, as many of the evaluations point out. This is related also to the lack of consistent needs assessment and situational monitoring (*see below*). Gap analysis in terms of unmet need – or at least of populations not receiving a given type of assistance – would normally be part of the work of a cluster, but this aspect of the cluster role appears to have been relatively weakly reflected in the output of the Sectoral Working Groups in the refugee hosting countries.

³⁵ *‘When refugees return to Syria, the world is silent’* – The National, 3 February 2016: www.thenational.ae/opinion/comment/when-refugees-return-to-syria-the-world-is-silent.

³⁶ Guardian (14 September 2015): www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/14/refugees-jordan-feel-compelled-return-syria.

Other available literature on Syria goes some way to filling this gap, although most of the material is qualitative rather than quantitative in nature.

System disconnects? United Nations and international non-governmental organizations

This is perhaps less a missing topic than one that arises from reading across the various studies. While the OCHA reports tend to assume a world in which strategy and planning are dictated by the common planning process, the evaluations of individual agencies (United Nations and INGOs) suggest that individual organizational factors (mandates, capacities, the search for resources and even competition for “market share”) count for far more in agency thinking. In addition to this, the INGOs appear from the available material to have only the most distant relationship to the joint planning processes, despite being (in many cases) party to them. This is not a new observation, but it is an impression supported by the current evidence.

The material reflects two particular kinds of “disconnect”: one between “central planning” and the actual drivers of agency behaviour, and the second between the United Nations and INGOs in their view of their respective roles. The former is illustrated in part by the evident discord between OCHA and UNHCR in relation to the coordination agenda, as well as between UNHCR and UNICEF as to their respective leadership roles in particular sectors.

The INGO divergence has several dimensions, of which two are most apparent from the evaluations. One concerns the relative “invisibility” in the United Nations agency evaluations of the (crucial) role of INGO and local NGO implementing partners. This distorts the reality of the way in which programmes are actually delivered. A second dimension concerns the apparently haphazard nature of some of the collaborative arrangements between United Nations agencies and the bigger INGOs with global capacities and reach.³⁷

A more system-wide analysis would enable the nature of this symbiotic relationship between United Nations agencies and INGOs to be better understood, and the barriers to improve joint performance to be tackled. At the agency-specific level, too, one would expect more analysis of this key aspect of the response mechanism. The NGOs play an essential role both as “gap fillers” and as delivery partners of the United Nations, often on the basis of their links with local civil society. But it is not possible from the available reports to tell how well this has worked in practice, or to consider the efficiency of the (often extended) delivery chains involved.

Other areas of weak evidence or incomplete analysis

Apart from the topics noted above, there are many other areas in which the evidence base appears weak, at least with regard to the published evaluations. The following list is not exhaustive, but covers some of the more striking gaps.

Accountability for financial management and results

The extent to which the agencies concerned have been able to satisfactorily account for the use of funds and the results achieved is only very patchily covered in the reports. At the level of good financial management, it is unclear whether and with what results the programmes in question have been audited, or more broadly how well finances have been managed. Considering accountability more generally, the adequacy of accountability practice is covered only by a few reports, and then not in depth. Given the

³⁷ The apparently accidental nature of the initial partnership between UNICEF and Oxfam in relation to WASH in Zaatari camp in Jordan is one example of this – see Oxfam GB Jordan evaluation.

extent of accountability challenges inside Syria in particular, this is surprising. The related questions of monitoring and reporting are slightly better covered, but tend not to be linked to accountability. Accountability to affected people – specifically to the intended beneficiaries of aid interventions – is covered well in some reports, particularly those of INGOs, but less well in the United Nations agency evaluations.

Finance and funding mechanisms

Little analysis is presented in the reports about the adequacy or otherwise of internal or external finance and funding mechanisms. The ICVA report is the obvious exception, in that it is explicitly concerned with evaluating the pooled funds – and found that the Syria Emergency Response Fund in particular played a crucial role, although somewhat hampered by slow process. One or two reports (e.g., UNICEF) consider the adequacy and use of internal advance finance mechanisms, but given that delays in securing funding are cited as one of the main factors behind slow responses, the issue of advance finance in particular deserves more attention. For the United Nations agencies, expected to lead timely and scaled-up responses, the availability of advance finance (from special funds, or funds advanced from capital reserves against funding pledges) can be critical to their effectiveness in the early stages of a crisis. For INGOs, their ability to fund their own start-ups or even to mount assessments is often the critical factor in early engagement, as illustrated by the Oxfam GB evaluation of its Lebanon response.

Organisational capacity and overstretch

During the period of the Syria crisis, agencies have had to respond to simultaneous Level 3 crises globally, including conflicts in the Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan and Yemen; as well as the Philippines typhoon, the Nepal earthquake and the Ebola crisis. Even within the Syria crisis response, there have been multiple Level 3 country-level responses. Yet there is little or no analysis of the effect of system-wide or agency-specific overstretch. With regard to system-wide effects, this is understandable: there has been no system-wide evaluation, although the OCHA and OASC OPR reports take at least a United Nations-wide perspective. It is more surprising that this topic is not better covered in the agency-specific evaluations.

Quality of aid/compliance with standards (internal/external)

Reference to quality standards and compliance with best practice is much more inconsistent than one might expect. While some reports use internal standards frameworks as a key basis for evaluating performance, others tend to make passing reference to external standards like Sphere without explicitly evaluating programmes against such standards.

Overall, the challenges associated with achieving coverage and delivering programmes in difficult contexts seem to have dominated thinking at the expense of considerations of programme quality (as noted, for example, in the UNICEF Turkey report).

Remote assistance, remote management and related partnerships

Although “remote control” was a key modality for most INGOs working across borders and across lines in Syria – and even for work in Government-held areas – the issues involved receive almost no analysis in the reports. This is paralleled by the absence of reporting on cross-border operations noted above. Valuable lessons will have been learned on this topic, including lessons from the use of third-party monitors, but this is not (yet) captured in the evaluative material.

Transition planning, resilience and relief-development programming

This topic is covered in some of the reports, but with some exceptions (e.g., UNICEF Jordan) there is little depth of analysis in the coverage of what is one of the most important aspects of the response strategy, as stressed in the latest joint planning documents (3RP, etc.). More analysis is found in the joint planning documents themselves, but the issue of how effectively agencies (individually and collectively) are pursuing this change agenda is not well described in the material.

Humanitarian principles

While issues relating to core principles of international humanitarian law, human rights and refugee law and practice are quite well covered, the principles of humanitarian action (including impartiality, neutrality and independence) are assessed inconsistently. Many reports note the challenges to impartial aid delivery in Syria, but the extent to which agencies (international and local) have been able to overcome the obstacles and deliver aid according to need and without bias is not clear from the material. With regard to the independence of United Nations agencies, some questions are raised – for example, concerning the closeness of their working relationship with the Government of Syria, as it may impinge on the agency’s ability to pursue critical advocacy. But few conclusions are reached concerning the way in which this (inevitable) tension between collaboration and criticism has been – or should be – managed in practice.

Preparedness and organizational readiness

To the extent that this topic is covered in the material, it tends to be in reference to contingency planning, or the lack of it. While this is important, other aspects or organisational readiness are arguably more important, as noted above in the thematic synthesis. Under this heading would be included organizational understanding – e.g., of the resources and approaches required to respond to an emergency. Many of the offices that have been called upon to respond to the Syria regional crisis were running small, “upstream” development and policy-influencing programmes, a world away from the kind of operational response they (and their partners) have been required to mount. The profile of existing partnerships has also proved to be an essential dimension of preparedness, but little analysis of this is found in most of the evaluations.

Situation and treatment of minorities

It is clear from some of the reports that minority ethnic groups – notably, the Palestinian and Yazedi refugees from Syria – have been particularly vulnerable. But while mention is made of this, there is no analysis of how the international response has tried to address the particular needs of these vulnerable groups. This may reflect a gap in the responses themselves, or may be a blind spot of the evaluations. Either way, the situation of these groups deserves more attention than it receives. In many of the reports, “Syrian refugees” are equated with “refugees from Syria,” with little attempt to differentiate according to ethnicity, origin, priorities and vulnerabilities.

SECTION 4 CONCLUSIONS

General conclusions

How well has the international humanitarian system served the people of Syria? Only a limited and provisional answer can be given to this question on the basis of the available evaluative material. Given the catastrophic humanitarian deterioration inside Syria itself since 2012, the numbers killed and displaced, the extent of destruction and the sheer scale of human suffering in Syria and surrounding countries, it is tempting to say that the international “system” has failed Syria. Certainly at a political level this argument can and has been made. But while significant failings and limitations in the humanitarian response (from coordination to management, advocacy to service delivery, timeliness to effectiveness) can be identified from the evaluations, it would be unfair to blame the humanitarian system itself for the extent of suffering and unmet need.³⁸ Indeed, there is much to commend in the response given the major limitations of access and funding, and the evaluations overall present a picture of relatively strong performance in many areas. The big weakness has been the response inside Syria itself, particularly the evident gap between needs and coverage. The question for the humanitarian system here is: could it have done more, and done it more impartially, effectively and accountably? The answer is surely “yes” – although the available evaluations provide only limited insight as to how.

There are certainly mitigating circumstances here. With regard to coverage and adequacy of assistance, the degree of underfunding alone (40–50 per cent) points to a massive limitation, although little analysis of the implications of this is presented in the material. The constraints to access present another limitation, sometimes deliberately imposed (often seemingly in breach of international law), sometimes a result of insecurity or other circumstances. And of course the primary responsibility lies with the political actors inside and outside Syria, who must take full responsibility for the consequences of their own actions, both as belligerents and as controlling authorities. The failure of early humanitarian demarches by the ERC was perhaps inevitable, given the political context, although some argue (OCHA report) that more collective humanitarian advocacy might have achieved greater impact through the course of the crisis.

The evidence base

Based on the publicly available evaluative material that forms the basis for this report, by far the greatest volume of evidence relates to the Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. Coverage of the situation of refugees in Turkey is limited, despite it hosting by far the largest number of Syrian refugees. The situation in Syria itself and the response to it is generally covered in descriptive rather than in truly evaluative terms, partly as a result of limited access for evaluations. This is the most striking gap in the material and a major limitation in the evidence base. There is no doubt that considerably more evidence exists concerning the humanitarian response inside Syria that has not been made public for reasons of sensitivity and security, particularly with regard to cross-border programmes.

The fact that these studies have been made public while others have not raises questions about how representative the studies are. Various further questions arise from this: does the limited list of publicly available reports indicate that relatively few evaluations have been undertaken, or that organizations are unwilling to make their evaluations public? And if the latter, what are the reasons for this reluctance?

³⁸ Referring to the international humanitarian system as a whole, Antonio Guterres (then UN High Commissioner for Refugees) speaking to the UK *Guardian* newspaper in September 2015 said, “The global humanitarian community is not broken – as a whole they are more effective than ever before. But we are financially broke...” The article goes on to discuss the illogicality of the system whereby the key United Nations humanitarian agencies are dependent on voluntary contributions and annual appeals to fund responses to protracted crises like those in the Central African Republic, Iraq, Syria and Yemen: www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/06/refugee-crisis-un-agencies-broke-failing.

Among other issues, it raises questions of accountability and transparency that are beyond the scope of this current exercise.

Overall, in considering the lessons learned from the international response to Syria, the evaluations used for this synthesis can be said to provide an essential perspective but by no means a definitive one, given the limits of scope and ambition of the evaluations themselves. Many of the lessons are at a more micro-level than it is possible to record in an exercise of this kind. Some, in particular management lessons, are quite specific to particular organizations. Many other lessons will perhaps inevitably be found in un-shared lesson learning exercises and discussions within and between organizations. Perhaps most importantly, some of the most critical lessons demand consideration of the collective response and interactions between different elements of the humanitarian system, and this is a perspective that is only glimpsed in the currently available evaluations.

Capturing the learning from the Syria response

While there are many gaps in the available evidence about the Syria response, some stand out as being particularly significant, and these were explored in the gap analysis in section 3 above. In this final section, we consider the topics that deserve further exploration both because of their relevance for the Syria response and because they have wider relevance for the international humanitarian system. Some of the related learning and evidence already exists in reports, studies and other documents held by individual agencies that have not been made public; and such learning has not been compiled or synthesized in such a way as to reveal larger patterns or lessons. In some cases, new evidence would need to be generated and compiled in order to reveal such patterns and to shed light on aspects of the Syria response – including some of the most central aspects – that are currently obscure.

As noted in section 3, some of the evidence gaps concern understanding of context, notably the economic and social context of refugees in host communities. But here we concentrate on the “response” side of the equation. Two main sets of issues stand out as deserving further investigation and analysis. Each of these has a number of sub-topics, some of which are suggested here.

Humanitarian system issues

The multitude of agency and donor interventions in the Syria crisis, looked at as a whole, constitute a set of bilateral (or sometimes unilateral) responses only weakly connected through a multilateral framework. Multiple disconnects are apparent, including some between United Nations agencies and others between United Nations agencies and NGOs. But the reasons for these, and the potential remedies, are not analysed in the available literature on the Syria crisis response. While INGOs in particular may wish to preserve their independence, in practice many have a symbiotic relationship with the United Nations agencies (as well as with the donors) that is central to the delivery of international humanitarian assistance. It is suggested here that understanding more about how well that relationship works, its relative efficiency, the bottlenecks that may need addressing and possible alternative delivery mechanisms is a priority for further analysis.

The following system-related topics are suggested as needing further investigation. While many of these topics are of concern well beyond the Syria context, the Syria crisis has highlighted them in new and potentially very informative ways:

- The relationship (synergy/tensions) between the political and humanitarian components of the international response to the crisis.
- The financing of protracted responses, using Syria as a case study. There is a clear link to the work of the report of the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing, but the Syria case deserves

particular analysis. This heading should also include advance financing capacities of the larger agencies, and strategic coordination between donor governments.

- “System’ coherence and efficiency, as highlighted by the Syria crisis. This would require a review of the respective coordination and leadership roles of different United Nations agencies, particularly in refugee contexts; the added value and relative efficiency of partnership arrangements (particularly United Nations-INGO-LNGO); system capacity and its limits; and the related issue of global pre-agreements on response partnerships. There is a close link to the financing topic above.
- The respective roles of humanitarian and development actors in protracted crises, as illustrated by the Syria crisis response, including the ways in which they engage with host governments over time.

Programming and operational issues

The international response to the Syria crisis has thrown up many difficult programmatic and operational challenges. While some of these are well analysed in the available reports, others are not. It is suggested that the following in particular deserve more analysis:

- Cross-border programming and remote management. Little of the relevant experience is documented in the publicly available reports, but there is clearly much to learn, including on the question of remote partnerships and programme monitoring. This may require innovative forms of inter-agency knowledge-sharing, building on what is already happening in the region.
- Assisting and protecting people in urban settings. The Syria crisis response provides a great deal of relevant material on this key topic, but they are not yet well synthesised in the available literature. The related topic of providing aid in middle-income countries might be included here.
- Assisting dispersed refugee populations and host communities. Related to the topic above, this is another area of considerable learning. While each context will vary with regard to access and other factors, there is a growing body of evidence here that deserves to be brought together and added to.
- Programming for social cohesion. The relationship between refugee and host populations has been a source of growing concern, and some agencies have made this a specific objective of their interventions. This deserves to be better evaluated.
- Resilience programming, particularly livelihood support in restrictive environments. Given its prominence in the more recent joint strategy documents, there is surprisingly little in the evaluations and other studies on this topic to provide guidance on what can be done at the more practical end of programming.
- Sectoral programme learning. There is a considerable body of learning on some sector topics, notably concerning the use of cash and vouchers. While some work has been done to draw this together, there is considerable scope to do more.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Table of core reference documents for the CALL ESGA

Rep ort No.	Month/ Year	Commis sioned by	Title and reference period	Short Ref in ESGA
1	July 2013	UNHCR	From Slow Boil to Breaking Point: A real-time evaluation of UNHCR's response to the Syrian refugee emergency (spring 2013)	HCR RTE
2	July 2015	OCHA	IASC Operational Peer Review (spring 2015)	OPR
3	January 2015	UNHCR	Independent Programme Evaluation of the UNHCR response to the refugee influx in Lebanon and Jordan (January 2013 to April 2014)	HCR L/J
4	April 2015	WFP	An Evaluation of WFP's Regional Response to the Syrian Crisis, 2011– 2014 (2011 to end of 2014)	WFP Regional
5	January 2016	UNICEF	Evaluation of UNICEF's Humanitarian Response in Syria and the Sub-Region (forthcoming) (2012 to end of 2015)	UNICEF Regional
6	August 2015	OCHA	Evaluation of OCHA's Response to the Syria Crisis (2011 to mid-2015)	OCHA Regional
7	Novemb er 2015	UNICEF	Turkey evaluation (2012 to early 2015)	UNICEF Tur
8	2015	UNICEF	Jordan education (2012 to early 2015)	UNICEF Jor 1
9	2015	UNICEF	Jordan PSS (2013 to end of 2014)	UNICEF Jor 2
10	Decemb er 2014	IFRC	Real-Time Evaluation of the Response to the Syria Crisis 2012–2014 (2012 to end of 2014)	IFRC RTE
11	October 2013	DEC	DEC Syria Crisis Appeal. Response Review: Final Report (April–August 2013)	DEC
12	January 2014	AusAid	Evaluation of Australia's Response to the Syria Crisis (2011 to end of 2014)	AusAID
13	January 2015	DANIDA	Evaluation of the Strategy for Danish Humanitarian Action 2010–2015, Case Study Syria (2012 to end of 2014)	DHA Strategy
14	Decemb er 2013	Hayata Destek	Evaluation Study: Support to Life's Response to Syrian Refugee Crisis, Turkey 2012–2013 (2012 to end of 2013)	StL Turk
15	August 2014	IRC	An Impact Evaluation of the 2013–2014 Winter Cash Assistance Program for	IRC Leb

			Syrian Refugees in Lebanon	
16	January 2015	OXFAM	Humanitarian Quality Assurance: Jordan (2012 to end of 2013)	OXF Jor
17	March 2015	NRC	Evaluation of the Norwegian Refugee Council's Lebanon Host Community Shelter Programmes (2013 – end of 2014)	NRC Leb
18	November 2013	OXFAM	Humanitarian Quality Assurance: Lebanon. Evaluation of Syria Crisis Response (2012 to end of 2013)	OXF Leb
19	July 2014	HelpAge Intl	Evaluation of HelpAge International's Programme (2013 to mid-2014)	HAI Regional
20	November 2013	Caritas	Final Report of the participative evaluation of Caritas Jordan emergency assistance (Feb to November 2013)	Caritas Jor
21	October 2013	ACAPS	Syria Needs Analysis Project (SNAP): External mid-term review (December 2012 – October 2013)	SNAP
22	December 2014	ICVA	Review of NGOs' Experience with the Syria-Related Pooled Funds (2012 to end of 2014)	ICVA
23	March 2015	ACTED/ REACH	Failing Syria: Assessing the impact of UN Security Council Resolutions in Protecting and Assisting Civilian in Syria (February 2014 to February 2015)	REACH
24	February 2015	DANIDA	The Syrian displacement crisis and a Regional Development and Protection Programme: Mapping and meta-analysis of existing studies of costs, impacts and protection, 2014 (March 2013 to January 2014)	Protection M-A
Additional evaluation reports, received too late to incorporate in the ESGA				
A.	2014	UNFPA	Turkey: Independent Country Programme Evaluation, 2011–2015	
B.	2014	UNFPA	Lebanon: Independent Country Programme Evaluation 2010–2014	
C.	2015	DFID	Humanitarian Programme Process Evaluation – DFID Syria Crisis Unit	

Annex 2: Guiding questions

Thematic Cluster 1: Context-related findings

- How have political factors influenced the humanitarian landscape? What has been the political space for international humanitarian action?
- What is the range of host governmental policy responses to the crisis, and how have international agencies engaged with these?
- From a protection perspective, what have been the main threats to human security? To what extent have legal and policy frameworks provided protection?
- Humanitarian access: what have been the causes and implications of access limitations and other constraints for aid coverage and impartiality, particularly inside Syria?

Thematic Cluster 2: Strategy and planning, coordination and leadership

- To what extent are weaknesses in strategy and planning identified in the findings as lying behind under-performance?
- How well has the overall response been led by the United Nations?
- What picture of inter-agency coordination emerges from the material? And what picture of coordination with governments?

Thematic Cluster 3: Programme delivery, effectiveness, coverage and quality

- What does the material suggest about the overall effectiveness with which different elements of the programme cycle have been implemented?
- What conclusions (if any) can be drawn about the overall timeliness, coverage and effectiveness of the international response?
- And similarly about the quality of the aid provided?
- On what basis have these factors been evaluated?

Thematic Cluster 4: Protection, vulnerability and humanitarian principles

- What picture does the material paint of protection priorities and related responses? Which appear to have been the more effective protection interventions?
- What gaps in the protection regime emerge from the findings?
- What issues have arisen with regard to humanitarian principles? How have these been addressed?
- How consistently and how well have vulnerabilities been assessed as a basis for aid targeting? How disaggregated are the findings with regard to gender, age, disability and other relevant criteria?

Thematic Cluster 5: Targeting, accountability and community engagement

How well do agencies appear to have engaged with communities in assessing, designing and implementing their assistance and protection activities? Have they implemented effective feedback mechanisms?

- How have agencies addressed the challenges of assisting refugees in host communities (i.e., outside camps)? How effective have they been?
- What work has been done to build social cohesion and reduce tensions between host communities and displaced people or refugees? To what effect?

Thematic Cluster 6: Staffing, partnerships and operational efficiency

- What common management issues emerge from the findings?
- To what extent does the availability of different categories of personnel appear to have been a constraint on the response?
- What partnership issues arise from the findings?
- What lessons emerge about operational efficiency and cost-effectiveness?

Thematic Cluster 7: Assessment, monitoring and evaluation

- What do the evaluation findings tell us about the adequacy of needs assessment and monitoring processes in relation to the Syria crisis?
- How adequate was the evidence base? What are the main gaps in analysis? How well has information been shared across organizations?
- How well were needs understood against the backdrop of the provisions made by the governments concerned for the refugees and conflict-affected populations?

Annex 3: Other useful sources

Addressing protection needs in Syria: overlooked, difficult, impossible? ODI Policy Brief 57, April 2014.

Oxfam GB Jordan, March 2013: *Integrated Assessment of Syria Refugees in Host Communities (EFSL, WASH, Protection)*.

MercyCorps, November 2013: *Syrian refugees in the Kurdish region of Iraq: Assisting non-camp communities*.

REACH: *Syrian Refugees in Host Communities (Jordan) - District Profiles*, January 2014.

ORSAM: *The situation of Syrian refugees in the Neighbouring Countries*, April 2014.

Simone Haysom, *Sanctuary in the City? Urban Displacement and Vulnerability*, HPG Report 23, London, June 2013.

CARE *Baseline Assessment of Community Identified Vulnerabilities Among Syrian Refugees Living in Amman (October 2012)*.

Oxfam: *Refugee Perceptions Study, Za'atari Camp and Host Communities in Jordan*, June 2014.

Needs assessment lessons learned: Lessons identified from assessing the humanitarian situation in Syria and countries hosting refugees, SNAP September 2013.

Food security: *Joint Rapid Food Security Needs Assessment in Syria (June 2012)* FAO/WFP/GoS.

REACH: *Syria Crisis – Aleppo City – Key Informants Assessment Report*, June 2014.

Syria Multi Sectoral Needs Assessment. Prepared by OCHA, REACH and SNAP on behalf of the Humanitarian Liaison Group based in Turkey, October 2014.

Joint UN Needs Assessment of Displaced Syrians in Jordan - July 2012.

GoJ + UN: *Host Community Support Platform - Needs Assessment Review of the Impact of the Syrian Crisis on Jordan - November 2013 - GoJ Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation + United Nations*.

Food security: *Joint Rapid Food Security Needs Assessment in Syria (June 2012)* FAO/WFP/GoS.

HCR/UNICEF/WFP Jan 2014: *Joint Assessment Review of the Syrian Refugee Response in Jordan*.

UNHCR 'Study on the Impact of Cash Assistance on Reducing Negative Coping Mechanisms among Syrian Refugees'.

WFP 'Cash vs. E-voucher Programme in Jordan and Lebanon', undertaken in collaboration with the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation.

Annex 4: Extract from the Oxfam UK evaluation of Lebanon response

This extract from the Oxfam evaluation of its Lebanon response provides an interesting example of a quantitative approach to gauging programme quality consistently across different contexts, by scoring performance against a set of organisational standards (the same format is used globally).

QUANTITATIVE RESULT BY STANDARD

The quantitative rating given for each standard and the cumulative total are provided in Table 1.

Quantitative ratings for the Lebanon programme, using the Global Humanitarian Indicator Tool

Standard	Level of achievement	Rating
1. Rapid appraisal of facts within 24 hours of pre-defined trigger, plans in place and scale-up or start-up commenced within three days.	Partially met	2/6
2. Coverage uses 10% of affected population as a planned figure with clear justification for final count.	Fully met	6/6
3. Technical aspects of programme measured against Sphere standards.	Almost met	4/6
4. MEAL strategy and plan in place and being implemented using appropriate indicators.	Half met	1.5/3
5. Feedback/complaints system for affected population in place and functioning and documented evidence of information sharing, consultation and participation leading to a programme relevant to context and needs.	Partially met	1/3
6. Partner relationships defined, capacity assessed and partners fully engaged in all stages of programme cycle.	Almost met	2/3
7. Programme is considered a safe programme: action taken to avoid harm and programme considered conflict sensitive.	Fully met	3/3
8. Programme (including advocacy) addresses gender equity and specific concerns and needs of women, girls, men and boys.	Partially met	1/3
9. Programme (including advocacy) addresses specific concerns and needs of vulnerable groups.	Almost met	2/3
10. Evidence that preparedness measures were in place and effectively actioned.	Half met	1.5/3
11. Programme has an advocacy/campaigns strategy and has incorporated advocacy into programme plans based on evidence from the field.	Half met	1.5/3
12. Evidence of appropriate staff capacity to ensure quality programming.	Almost met	2/3
Final rating		27.5/45
Equivalent to		61%

