



# Durable Solutions for Displaced Syrians Assessing Protracted Displacement and Resettlement in Host Countries

**About the Durable Solutions Platform:** The Durable Solutions Platform (DSP) is a joint initiative of the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), and International Rescue Committee (IRC). Based in Amman, the DSP team conducts research and convenes strategic dialogue on durable solutions for displaced Syrians, as well as supporting Syrian civil society research and advocacy efforts.

**About the Seminar:** The DSP convened an online seminar on 28 April, 2020 in order to present the findings of three recent DSP research reports; and foster discussion of these findings with key Brussels-based stakeholders. The seminar was held online due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A total of 46 individuals participated in the seminar, including stakeholders from the European Union (EU), European governments, international NGOs, and Syrian civil society organizations. The event was broken into two sessions, each focused on different DSP research themes. The first session focused on DSP's two research reports exploring medium-term solutions for displaced Syrians in hosting countries, while the second session explored issues related to the strategic use of resettlement.

## SESSION 1

### MEDIUM-TERM SOLUTIONS TO PROTRACTED DISPLACEMENT A PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF DSP'S LEBANON AND JORDAN REPORTS

The research reports can be accessed here:

- [Addressing Protracted Displacement in Lebanon: A Medium-Term Outlook for Refugees and Lebanese Host Communities](#)
- [In My Own Hands: A Medium-Term Approach Towards Self-Reliance and Resilience of Refugees and Host Communities in Jordan](#)

#### Overview:

This presentation presented the findings from the two reports above. Over the course of 2019, the DSP conducted two research projects in Lebanon, with the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, and in Jordan, with Columbia University. Both country-specific studies drew lessons learned and identified ways forward to support resilience of Syrian refugees and host communities over the next 3-5 years. The presentation highlighted comparative findings and recommendations on legal protection, education, livelihoods and social assistance. (Please see the presentation slides for more details)

## Discussion:

**On the impacts of COVID-19:** The isolation of refugees in Lebanon began long before the current COVID-19 pandemic. At the current time, refugees are not allowed to leave their camps, even while Lebanese are gradually being granted greater freedom of movement. Actors on the ground have been told that there are no or “only one” cases of COVID-19 in refugee camps. However, no testing among refugees is being done and anecdotal evidence suggests that refugees fear to disclose that they are feeling sick. There is also a fear of hunger, and of the crisis exacerbating precarity within camps. There is anecdotal evidence that some families who were planning to return to Syria have now put those plans on hold. In addition, prior to the pandemic there was very little online service provision, which means that humanitarian organizations are now trying to quickly move things online. Actors on the ground have also seen an overall escalation of violence across Lebanon, and fear that this will greatly affect already vulnerable Syrians.

**On localization:** The current crisis has been a test of ongoing efforts as well as donor flexibility. Multi-year approaches are always needed, but it is also essential that multi-year funding is flexible and localized. One recent report showed that 38% of Syrian refugee respondents want more information on COVID-19, while a larger percentage do not know who to contact for more information. This also underscores the relevance of local actors, who are well-placed to provide such information support.

**On funding:** Predictable and long-term funding is important, but so is the need for additional funding for COVID-19 specific responses. These funds should not be diverted from existing programs, but rather should be added on. Funding should also be focused on the right priorities. Some activities, such as returns planning, are not relevant at the moment. It is also critical the monitoring of around COVID-19 should not be co-opted by authorities as a pretext to forcibly deport Syrian refugees.

The main instrument for non-humanitarian assistance for Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon is the EU Regional Trust Fund. It was set up specifically for the Syria crisis, and is in line with the overarching recommendations made in DSP’s reports. For example, it allows for funding from different donors (mainly the EU and EU member states). It is also flexible and multi-year. Its main sectors are education, livelihoods, health, social protection, and WASH.

**On future programming:** When the COVID-19 crisis ends, response actors will have to focus on livelihoods and education as core sectors, as they will present major challenges for refugee communities. Social assistance will also be key. A recently published study on the impact of COVID-19 in Lebanon by showed that 80% of respondents had lost their main source of income due to lockdown measures that have made it impossible to work.

The EU Trust Fund has had some challenges in fostering an integrated approach to service provision over the long-term. Only the Lebanese and Jordanian governments can make the decision to integrate refugees into their plans, and to date that has not happened. However, the EU Trust Fund is working with parallel systems and trying to support “cross-fertilization” of practices. For example, in Lebanon there is support of cash assistance for both refugees and vulnerable Lebanese. They are separate systems, but their existence supports this “cross-fertilization” concept. In Jordan, the Trust Fund works directly with the government to provide education services to both refugees and host communities. Beyond “cross-fertilization”, this also gives EU actors more leverage for policy dialogue on topics such as monitoring education quality.

**What can be done to better link programming to local governance?** There has been criticism of some municipalities (in Lebanon) for discriminating against Syrians, but at the same time these municipalities are key partners for responses such as education programming. The best approach so far is to work in coordination groups with various stakeholders, and continuing to work towards harmonizing the response. Some initial steps have been taken to look at “micro-localization” on a scale smaller than municipalities, and based on what works this approach may be scaled up. It is also important to note that local authorities often lack the financial resources or administrative capacity to tackle a problem, even when they have acknowledged its existence and wish to address it. Funding approaches need to take this reality into account.

**How can vocational training be better tailored to local economies?** The most obvious way is to link training to sectors that Syrians can work in, and sectors that have economic growth potential, that is currently untapped or under-explored. COVID-19 may even lead to enhanced growth in some sectors, such as agriculture, over the long term. The DSP will soon be publishing a brief related to livelihoods in Jordan that will also help to address this topic.

**Are refugees in Lebanon facing forced returns since the pandemic began?** The border between Lebanon and Syria is officially closed. There have been anecdotal accounts of unsuccessful attempts to cross the border informally from Lebanon to Syria. However, on 27 April the Syrian Embassy in Lebanon issued a document saying that it would “evacuate” Syrians from Lebanon to Syria. The document outlines protocols for a 14-day isolation period for repatriated Syrians, after which they would have 15 days to settle concerns (i.e. army service). Civil society is following up to better understand this document and its ramifications.

## SESSION 2

### THE STRATEGIC USE OF RESETTLEMENT: LESSONS FROM THE SYRIA CONTEXT

Research report:

- [The Strategic Use of Resettlement: Lessons from the Syria Context](#)

#### Overview:

The presentation focused on findings in the report above. This research was conducted in summer and fall 2019, and was based on a desk review of relevant resettlement literature as well as key informant interviews with resettlement policy makers.

#### Discussion:

##### **Linking to current resettlement ‘strategies’ in Sweden and UK:**

Overall, there has been an increase in global need for resettlement while the total number of resettlement spaces has decreased. Resettlement of refugees has been a key priority for Sweden for many years, which has more than doubled its national resettlement quota from 1,900 to 5,000 places per year. Currently the outbreak of COVID-19 has in a very short time led to severe disruption of resettlement operations, and resettlement has temporarily been suspended since mid-March. However, Sweden is still receiving submissions from UNHCR and processing dossier cases. Sweden had 1,300 quota refugee arrivals in 2020 up until March, and a further 1,500 have been accepted and will travel to Sweden when it is possible to do so.

For Sweden, resettlement is focused on offering protection for persons in vulnerable situations. The aim is to maximize the strategic impact of resettlement and to show solidarity with the major refugee hosting countries, as well as providing a durable solution for the refugees most in need of resettlement. Planning for the annual quota is done in close cooperation with UNHCR. Swedish resettlement specialists follow UNHCR’s lead in prioritizing needs and identifying where protection risks are the greatest. The country has three priority situations for 2020: the central Mediterranean, Syria, and the CRRF. In addition, there are 500 unallocated spaces that can be used in a flexible way, including for processing urgent and emergency cases from outside the three priority areas. This is in line with UNHCR’s recommendations to the EU. Sweden is currently the co-chair of the priority situations core group, with Ireland, which is used as a platform for discussions on various topics including the strategic use of resettlement.

The UK’s approach to resettlement is similar with some differences. The UK’s resettlement program is designed with a strong humanitarian focus, and includes partnering with local entities in the UK in the provision of support to resettled refugees, for example through the country’s community sponsorship program. It is one of the few countries to reach international targets to

meet development spending, and at least half of this spending goes to fragile states and regions. Resettlement is seen to complement this approach, offering a safe and legal route for those who can no longer remain in a country of asylum.

The UK asks UNHCR to put forth a profile of cases for resettlement each year which will reflect their global resettlement priorities and, often, the availability of other durable solutions in a given host country. Alongside the Swedes, the UK sees itself as part of a global community of resettlement states who should work together collectively to address resettlement needs.

**How can resettlement countries be strategic when also coping with rapidly dwindling resettlement spaces?** It may not be feasible to both implement strategic use of resettlement while also responding to diminished resettlement spaces. However, decision-making on this topic needs to happen at the level of resettlement countries themselves. Stakeholders from resettlement countries interviewed for this report were clear that they do not resettle “strategically” as defined by SUR.

Two persistent topics were highlighted by the report: 1) there are challenges in coming up with a common definition of SUR. It may be feasible to implement SUR if the concept is re-defined to mean smaller-scale gains, and not only expansive benefits; 2) there is a lack of evidence that SUR actually works inside host countries.

**What are some smaller scale benefits that were uncovered during the research?** Small scale benefits could be anything or everything, as there is no clear definition of what is or is not due to resettlement programming. One thing that is frequently referred to are the resettlement of targeted medical cases, which in turn free up hospital beds or niche medical capacities in host countries. Another hypothetical that came up was the possibility of focusing on a specific location (ie a neighborhood in a city) and resettling cases intentionally from that area. However, this has the potential to be problematic so it is unlikely to ever happen.

**If SUR becomes “successfully coopted” as a concept, how should the sector respond?** Interventions such as the EU-Turkey deal are sometimes characterized as “strategic” in nature, but they serve the purpose of forwarding goals other than increased protection benefits for host countries and resettled refugees. Often, these goals are to keep refugees from entering Europe. This concept is sometimes characterized as the “strategic mis-use” of resettlement. Doing so appears to result in UNHCR’s definition of SUR becoming blurred, misunderstood, or eclipsed by alternative definitions. Some stakeholders, when asked to define SUR, point to examples such as the EU-Turkey deal, which suggests that this cooptation has had some degree of success. At the same time, there is no hard evidence that deterrent measures have been a success even by these skewed metrics.

**Could it be considered “SUR” if, for example, a country resettles refugees who are more likely to integrate? And what are some possible ways that states could conceptualize small-scale benefits?** Small-scale benefits are open to interpretation. Anything the EU perceives as positively influencing protection in a host country context, which is linked to resettlement programming in some way, can theoretically apply. Timeframe is also something that should be considered – are these benefits in the short, medium, or long term? When thinking about the impact of resettled refugees, it is often best to take a long-term perspective. For example, resettled refugees can be key to helping rebuild their home countries post-conflict.

**In the EU context, talking with key European stakeholders about resettlement often includes a “socializing” aspect – one needs to explain what resettlement is, its benefits, etc. To what extent do Europe-based advocates find that part of this process is about explaining the long-term benefits of resettlement, especially for countries that don’t have much prior experience?** The long-term benefits of resettlement, in particular the economic benefits, is an interesting topic. In particular because there often needs to be a critical mass of resettled refugees, over an extended period of time, before such results could be detected. For these reasons, the US is possibly the best location to research such topics. IRC has conducted some research on this topic.

**What are some other examples of SUR besides India (the example frequently cited by research respondents)?** A challenge with SUR is that it has never been evidenced. So, for example, a survey among UNHCR staff provided more than 30 “examples” of SUR – however there was no evidencing of the degree to which these examples did, in fact, line up with SUR criteria. Some examples given were disputed by others, including contributors to this research study, as actually representing a strategic benefit.

The logo for the Durable Solutions Platform, featuring the text "DURABLE SOLUTIONS PLATFORM" in white, stacked vertically, on a teal square background.

DURABLE  
SOLUTIONS  
PLATFORM

The Durable Solutions Platform (DSP) generates knowledge and convenes dialogue on the long-term future of displaced Syrians. Established in 2016, the DSP has conducted research on all three durable solutions (repatriation, resettlement, and local integration) as they pertain to the Syrian crisis. In addition, the DSP promotes the inclusion of Syrian civil society in policy discussions by investing in the capacity building of Syrian civil society organizations.

For any questions about this document or DSP's work in general, please contact us via email or Twitter, below.

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