

DICASTERY FOR PROMOTING INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

THE CATHOLIC INSTITUTIONS RESPONSE

TO THE IRAQI-SYRIAN HUMANITARIAN CRISIS 2017/2018

ABSTRACT

The current humanitarian situation in Syria and Iraq is a **protracted and complex crisis** with a serious impact on local civilian populations and neighbouring countries. Seven years on from the start of the conflict in Syria, United Nations figures remain alarming and show how important and urgent the needs of the people affected by the crisis still are, and how much work is needed as part of the response to it.

In **Syria, more than 13 million people are in need**; 6.6 million people are internally displaced, while 5.6 million are refugees registered in neighbouring countries, mainly in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. In **Iraq, 8.7 million people are in need**, including more than 4 million children.

This third edition of the survey covers **seven countries - Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt and Cyprus** - and presents data on **the response of Catholic institutions to the humanitarian crisis in the period 2017-2018**.

The data collected were provided by **84 Catholic institutions**: 53 Catholic-inspired charitable agencies, 10 dioceses in Syria and Iraq, and 21 religious institutes operating in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan. The data refer to the funds mobilised, the beneficiaries reached, the priority sectors of intervention, the difficulties and problems encountered, and the guidelines identified for the near future.

The main **objectives** of the survey include obtaining an **overall uniform picture of the Church network's response to the humanitarian crisis** in Syria and Iraq, and identifying **common lines of reflection and shared guidelines** for action in the near future. It should be noted that, despite the high number, these institutions do not yet represent all the Church stakeholders engaged on the ground. Therefore, the data in this report are significant but partial.

Two dimensions of the Church's work coexist within and complement the survey: **humanitarian work**, carried out for all people in need, without any distinction, in compliance with humanitarian principles and standards, and the specific work of providing **assistance and support to local Christian communities** affected by the crisis. Each institution, on the basis of its mandate and mission, operates in a crisis context in accordance with its own specificities and intervention priorities. The study therefore contains elements for reflection and guidelines regarding both aspects.

On the one hand, the survey focuses on data relating to 2017 and forecast data for 2018, and on the other, analyses the trends registered since 2014. The analysis shows how the two-year period 2017-2018 is highly significant for the response to the crisis. Indeed, with its evolution the needs

of populations and the work of humanitarian actors have changed and evolved, and the differentiation between the various countries is increasingly marked.

Although **in Syria the conflict is continuing in some areas of the country** - where basic needs still have to be met - the survey shows how for the first time we are looking towards the future, including in crisis response activities, with the **end of the acute phase of the emergency** in most sectors of intervention and a **transition to the early recovery** phase.

In continuity with past years, two elements characterise the action of the Church network: **multisectorality** and **comprehensiveness**. The Church's action is spread across a wide variety of sectors of intervention and many programmes cover several sectors at the same time. The comprehensiveness may be analysed by referring to the geographical distribution of the interventions - albeit with the limitations imposed by security - and the large number of human resources employed. Geographically, the actions of the Church network cover **vast swathes of territory**. In Syria, the focus is mainly on the areas of Aleppo and Damascus, in Iraq on the north of the country and the Nineveh Plains, and in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey respectively in Beirut, Amman, Istanbul, and border areas with Syria where the largest numbers of refugees are concentrated. The data collected also bear witness to the extent to which the Church network is able to mobilise a large number of human resources involved in emergency response activities, which is constantly growing year by year. There are currently **more than 5,800 professionals and more than 8,300 volunteers in the seven countries**, who join forces with priests and religious working on the spot.

2017 DATA

According to the information gathered, **in 2017 the Church network allocated more than 286 million USD** to the response to the crisis in the seven countries and reached approximately **4.6 million beneficiaries**.

The figure is particularly significant because it is the highest since 2014 and bears witness to how the Church's commitment has not only remained constant, but has also been consolidated and strengthened over the years, while adapting to contextual changes.

The data analysed show that, in 2017, **35% of funds** (approximately 100 million USD) was allocated **to Syria**, 30% to Lebanon, 17% to Iraq and 9% to Jordan.

In 2017, the **priority sectors of intervention** were:

- **Education**, with over 73 million USD, of which 45 million allocated in Lebanon;
- **Food aid**, with more than 54 million USD, strongly influenced by operations in Syria, to which 83% of the funds in this sector were allocated;
- **Healthcare**, with approximately 30 million USD (11% of total funds allocated), of which 38% allotted to Syria.

Although these data are in continuity with those of previous years, the study notes that some early signs of new trends are beginning to emerge. Indeed, significant percentages of the aid are allocated to **livelihoods** actions (namely, all activities designed to provide and strengthen

livelihoods for families, income-generating activities, vocational training, and creation of employment opportunities), to support for **rentals and rehabilitation of houses** (especially in Iraq), to **psychosocial support** and to **legal protection** (particularly in Lebanon).

2018 DATA (forecast data, updated to July)

2018 may be described as a **year of substantial change** in the response to the crisis, in parallel with the evolution of the political context in Syria and Iraq. A purely emergency type response is steadily decreasing, whilst work on resilience and early recovery programmes is expanding, with an eye kept on actions with greater impact in the medium to long term. In Syria, there are still areas where basic aid remains a priority, but in other parts of the country, as well as in northern Iraq and neighbouring countries, the focus is on how to give families greater stability to rebuild themselves in the future. In Iraq, voluntary returns in the Nineveh Plains, where the Church's aid is concentrated in the country, has become a central issue.

According to the information gathered, **in 2018 the Church network has mobilised around 230 million USD** and reached **3.9 million beneficiaries**. Although the figure is lower than the one in 2017, it should be deemed as particularly significant, because it shows that the Church network's commitment has held up in the face of a protracted crisis.

Syria is still the country in which **the largest amount of resources is allocated** (31%), but with a more even distribution among the various countries than in the past: 25% are allocated to Lebanon, 22% to Iraq and 15% to Jordan. However, it should be noted that, compared to 2017, the funds allocated to Syria and Lebanon have decreased in absolute terms, those allocated to Iraq have remained more or less stable, and those allocated to Jordan have increased.

An analysis of the priority sectors of intervention clearly shows the changes taking place, which were still at an embryonic stage in 2017:

- **Education is still the priority sector**, with more than 46 million USD allocated, of which 50% in Lebanon;
- **Healthcare has grown** in terms of the amount of funds allocated (18% of the total), with Syria accounting for 50% of the funds allocated to the sector (on the increase compared to previous years);
- **The funds allocated to livelihoods activities** have increased (10% of the total), with programmes carried out mainly in Lebanon (41%).

On the other hand, the **funds** allocated to **food aid** (31 million USD less than in 2017, with 7% of the total used mainly in Syria), and for the **provision of non-food items** (5% of the total, mainly for Syria and Iraq), have significantly decreased.

PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED AND FUTURE PRIORITY INTERVENTIONS

The survey shows how, with the passing years, problems and difficulties have become increasingly differentiated between the various countries.

Among the main difficulties identified, in Syria the issue of **security and access** in some areas of the country is still predominant, linked to the **instability of the socio-political situation**, which is however identified as of particular concern in all countries. Limited funds with respect to the needs manifested is a cross-cutting issue, although it was identified as being prevalent above all in the countries bordering Syria and Iraq.

With regard to the sectors of intervention, the survey shows that, even though they are priority areas for the Church network, **education and healthcare** are still the ones with the greatest needs. Regarding the **livelihoods** sector and the creation of employment opportunities, there is a shared concern about the growing needs that are insufficiently covered. A cross-cutting interpretation also shows the importance of strengthening actions in the psychosocial support and peacebuilding sectors.

In line with this overview, the guidelines for the sectors of intervention on which the Church network intends to **focus and strengthen its action in the near future** include **education and livelihoods** among its cross-cutting priorities. Making a distinction between the various countries, in **Syria, healthcare and psychosocial support** continue, in **Iraq**, support for **housing and rentals** and **peacebuilding**, and in the **neighbouring countries, psychosocial support and healthcare**.

OVERALL DATA 2014 – 2018

According to the data collected, since 2014 the **Church network has mobilised over 1 billion USD for the response to the crisis**, drawing on sources of public (government funds and international institutions) and private funding (donations, foundations, Catholic Church funds). As evidence of the Church's significant commitment to this complex and long-running crisis and the attention paid to its developments, one may note an almost steady increase from 2014 to 2017 and a decrease in the 2018 forecast figure, which nevertheless confirms a substantial commitment (the figure is still above 200 million USD). The data for 2018 are still temporary, i.e. partial; an increase is therefore predicted.

ELEMENTS OF REFLECTION AND GUIDELINES FOR THE FUTURE

The survey gave rise to some common and shared reflections, and some important guidelines for the Church network's work in the near future:

- **Education, healthcare and psychosocial support are still priority sectors of intervention**, but today's **major challenge** is responding to an ever-growing need for stability for the future of families, via **agricultural and economic development programmes, relaunching the social and economic fabric, vocational training and launching of work activities**;
- **Building the capacities of local actors** is an important commitment for the Church network, which has been expanded and consolidated over the years. This is still a vital aspect for the future, especially at a time when skills and management systems on the ground are called upon to adapt to the changes taking place;
- In assisting refugees in Syria's neighbouring countries, **increasing attention should be paid to host communities**. The growing inter-communal tensions cannot be underestimated

and it is more important than ever to continue working on social cohesion, fair access to public services, support for the most vulnerable people in the host communities, and adequate support for the host countries' infrastructure, particularly in the healthcare and education sectors;

- **Return to communities of origin** is one of the central themes of the response to the crisis, and also one of the priority areas on which the Church's action will focus in the coming years. Currently the phenomenon mainly concerns **Iraq and the Nineveh Plains** (where the majority of those who return are Christian families), while it is more limited in Syria. The work that many organisations are doing is focused on responding to the most urgent needs, including support for the rehabilitation of homes, but there are also important initiatives for psychosocial support and spiritual and pastoral accompaniment activities. Combined with this are preliminary initiatives to rebuild schools, clinics and religious sites. It is also important to raise awareness in this area so that secure and dignified conditions for returns to communities of origin are guaranteed;
- Specific attention to the **needs of Christian communities** and their future in the Middle East region, as well as their material, spiritual and pastoral needs, is a special element for the Church, at the level of actions on the spot as well as at the local and international level;
- **Ecumenical and interreligious collaboration** is another important element of the Church network's work. In the majority of cases, cooperation concerns local partners with whom projects are implemented on behalf of the victims of the crisis, via a wide range of activities;
- **Religious institutes** (orders, congregations, societies of apostolic life) play a central role in responding to the crisis, both for the pastoral service they provide, and for work in specific areas of expertise, such as healthcare, education and psychosocial support;
- **Legal protection** is an area of specific interest and commitment for Church institutions. One of the priority sectors of intervention is in Lebanon, for example, but also in Jordan, Turkey and Cyprus legal assistance and representation, accompaniment of refugees in legal and administrative procedures and protection of unaccompanied minors are special aspects of the Church network's work (initiatives regarding legal protection of the most vulnerable and those without the necessary financial resources are not lacking in Syria and Iraq either). Important work in this regard is also carried out in Europe, where Church institutions are a constant reference point for migrants and asylum seekers, but also for government institutions and civil society. In this context, the **humanitarian corridors** and private sponsorship initiatives to support families with children and sick members should also be mentioned;
- The Church network is also strongly committed to **advocacy** activities, which differ according to each institution's objectives and mandate: activities and initiatives **to raise awareness of refugees' needs and rights**; **fundraising** activities for projects to be implemented in areas affected by the crisis; **activities to raise awareness and condemn the situation of Christians** in Syria, Iraq and more generally in the Middle East, often linked

to concrete initiatives to support Christian communities; **and calls for a sustainable peace in Syria** and throughout the region for a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict;

- Finally, the common and shared appeal for the level of **attention to the crisis and the situation of local populations to remain high** and for efforts to respond to their needs to be continued.