

EVALUATION DEPARTMENT



REPORT 4/2016



‘Striking the Balance’ Evaluation of the Planning, Organisation and Management of Norwegian Assistance related to the Syria Regional Crisis

Volume I: Evaluation Report

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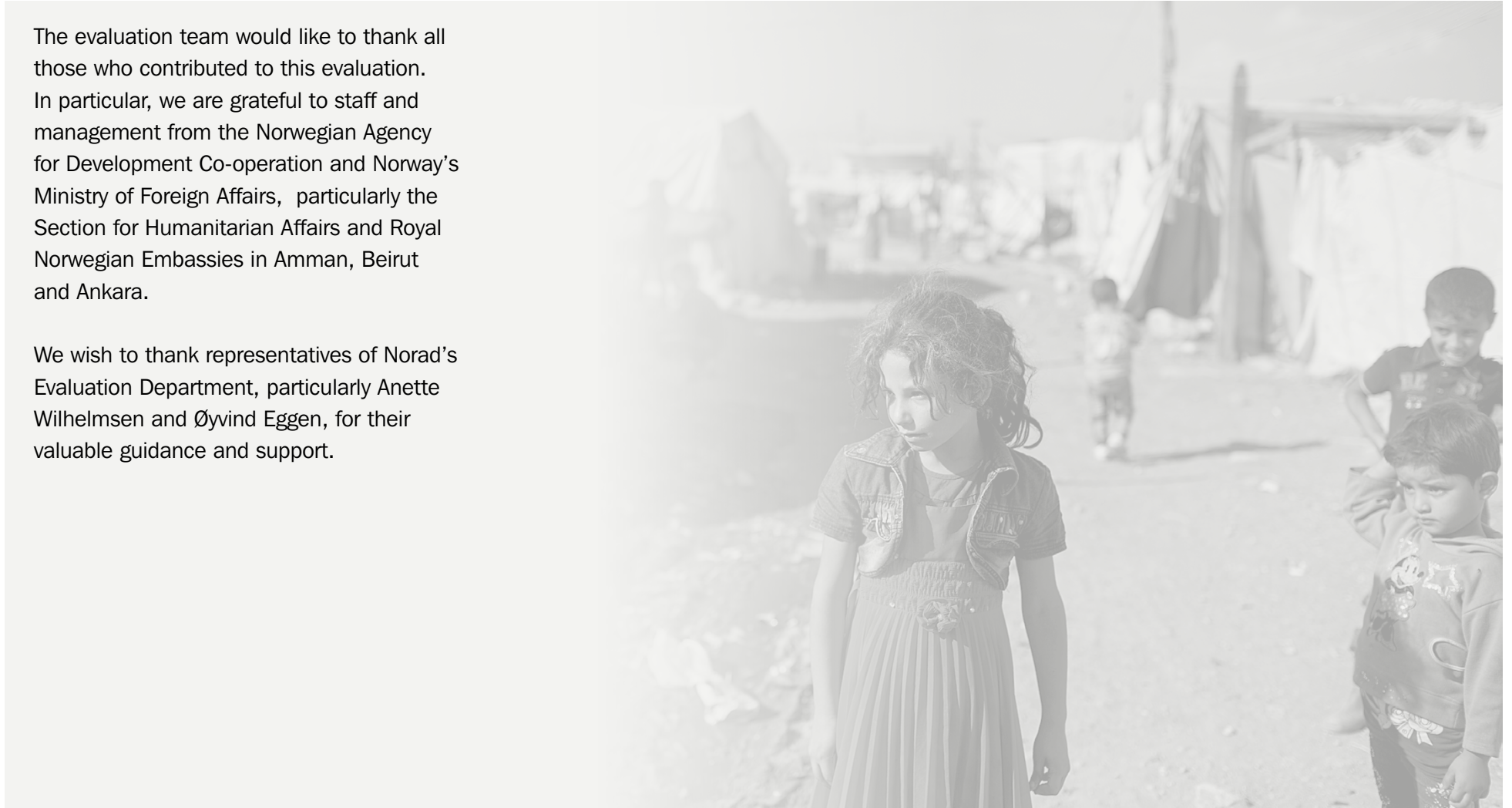


PHOTO: ESPEN RØST

Executive Summary

Norad's independent evaluation of the planning, organisation and management of Norway's assistance to the Syria regional crisis was conducted from October 2015 to March 2016. The evaluation's purpose was: *'To contribute to effective and high quality Norwegian assistance to Syria and the neighbouring countries in the future.'*

The overarching questions for the evaluation were firstly: *To what extent does Norway's aid management system, reflected in the planning, organisation and management of its assistance, support and enable the delivery of 'good aid' to the Syria regional crisis?*¹ Secondly, *To what extent does Norway's aid management system - once again, reflected in the planning, organisation and management of its assistance - support and enable Norway to be a 'good donor'² (or at least the best donor it can be) - to the Syria regional crisis?.'*

1 Defined as a system which supports and enables adherence to relevant international principles and commitments (e.g. International Humanitarian Principles, Do No Harm, fragile situations) for working in complex crises

2 Defined as a system which supports and enables adherence to Good Humanitarian Donorship and the priorities set out in Norway's 2008 Humanitarian Policy of flexibility and predictability, further development of the Norwegian (partnership-based) model, and more efficient administration and learning.

The evaluation focused on Official Development Assistance (ODA), to Syria and neighbouring countries, specifically Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, from 2011 to 2016. Data sources included: a mapping exercise of assistance to the crisis 2011-2015 (available as Volume II to the evaluation); analysis of 25 partner framework agreements and a structured sample of 45 projects; interviews with Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Norad staff plus key Oslo-based partners; and field study in Beirut, Amman, and Ankara/Istanbul/Gazantep. Some limited comparison was carried out with Swedish, Danish and Dutch arrangements for their assistance to the Syria regional crisis.

A systematic approach was adopted to the evaluation methodology, including quantitative analysis of financial and project data; structured documentary analysis of strategic, project and framework agreement documents; and semi-structured interviews. An analysis workshop was attended by Norad Evaluation Department staff; and a workshop was held with key stakeholders from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to validate findings and confirm recommendations. The key limitations to the evaluation are information constraints, including limited documentation and unavailability of some stakeholders for interview.

KEY FINDINGS

Planning of the assistance

Strategic framework: Norway's strategic approach to the planning of its Syria response lacks an overarching 'whole of Norway' written strategy or intended results for its assistance to the crisis. Instead, it prioritises a responsive and opportunity-based approach. There is evidence of more structured planning within humanitarian assistance since 2015.

Needs analysis: The responsive and opportunity-based model relies on partner assessments of needs. These have suffered from the limited information available within Syria itself, and weaknesses in forecasting systems in some cases.

Use of evidence: Norway's aid management system places few formal demands on partners for evidence to inform planning, instead relying most heavily on informal learning systems. These are considered an important dimension of partnership but have resulted in a patchy evidence base to inform planning.

Organisation of the assistance

Partner selection: Norway has continued its trust-based model of partnership within the Syria crisis, prioritising shared values, solidarity and mutual respect. However, this approach has not been fully differentiated for the conditions of a highly politicised conflict, with capacities being assumed rather than explicitly tested. Attention to operational risk management and mitigation has increased since 2015 within humanitarian assistance.

Allocation of funds: Norway's aid management system does not apply formalised decision-making criteria for funding. Allocations broadly reflect the priorities of international strategies, but emphasise emergency assistance, rather than explicitly framing the response within the international discourse of resilience. Some earmarking, alongside less formal guidance to partners, has also structured the response.

Internal coherence: The Syria response has not adopted a 'portfolio' approach to organisation, being implemented on a largely Section-by-Section, rather than 'whole of government' basis. However, it has been shaped in part by a set of implicit principles, including balanced approaches to allocation, a focused approach to strategic priorities and a set of underlying characteristics.

External alignment: Norway is a lead actor in strategic and political co-ordination for the Syria crisis. However, it is not driving the external alignment of its own ODA, either from within MFA or Embassies. Instead, it depends on partner recognition of the need to align with others – with mixed success. Yet as the international response evolves, alignment of assistance internally is becoming more important.

Management of the assistance

Staffing: Norway's staffing has not caught up with the evolving scale of the crisis. Staff are heavily overstretched, with commensurate effects on risk (strategic, operational, financial and political). Mixed skillsets are available, with Embassy staff being primarily diplomatic and political, rather than technical humanitarian experts. Available external technical resources have not been used to maximum extent, risking the quality of the response.

Decision making: Norway has a highly flexible and agile model of decision-making. Turnaround times are comparatively swift, and the system is very open to adaptation. Partners highly value Norwegian assistance for these characteristics. However, whilst it has been highly appropriate in terms of the fluid needs of a complex crisis, this flexibility risks compromising rigour and reducing accountability. It also acts as a disincentive to the more strategic approach required for a now-protracted crisis.

Performance measurement: No overall performance management systems exist in relation to the Syria crisis and few demands are placed on partners to report on delivery and effectiveness. This aspect of the control environment has been undifferentiated from standard approaches, despite intensified needs for robust accountability.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the evaluation finds that Norwegian assistance has been planned, managed and organised in relation to the Syria crisis to mixed effect. Specifically: whilst many aspects of the Norwegian aid management system are conducive to servicing the complex crisis of Syria, this is the result of a responsive model, rather than arising from proactive differentiation for a complex emergency. As the crisis evolves to become protracted, this model's advantages may become less relevant to needs.

Secondly, the aid management system in relation to the Syria crisis is experiencing imbalance, being weighed down by the lack of differenti-

ation. This is constraining its strengths, which permit principled, swift and often courageous responses.

The evaluation finds that some significant strengths in the Norwegian aid management system have enabled a high quality response in many areas to the Syria regional crisis:

- *A principled (but pragmatic) approach* (an emphasis on doing the right thing, for the right reasons, rather than for political or other more immediate benefit);
- *Prioritizing balance as part of fairness* (for example, regarding resources channelled through different types of partners);
- *Constancy of partnership*, even when causes or issues become less fashionable;
- *Leading by example*, breaking ground in the hope of encouraging others to follow;

- *Risk-willing and tolerant of failure*, funding comparatively high risk activities for the greater good, such as cross-border work;
- *An emphasis on ‘quiet diplomacy’* (undertaking actions without the demands for visibility which characterise many international actors currently).

Key aspects where Norway’s aid management system is experiencing strain are:

- Safeguards such as an overarching strategic statement of intent are not in place, opening up vulnerability to accusations of less-than-impartial choices.
- A culture of ‘mutual respect’ and trust surrounding partnerships places few demands on partners, an aspect which is highly valued – but overrides e.g. demands for systematic justification for approaches, or accountability imperatives.

- Insufficient human resources and limited use of intellectual resources available means that assistance is not as *‘intelligent’* as it could be.
- Procedural safeguards are not in place to ensure adherence to the International Humanitarian Principles throughout the

implementation chain, as well as provide the necessary degree of separation from short-term or political interests.

The evaluation characterises assistance in relation to the Syria crisis as illustrated below:

SEEKING BALANCE – NORWEGIAN AID MANAGEMENT IN THE SYRIA CRISIS

- Principled
- Trust-based
- Responsive
- Flexible
- Catalytic and leveraging
- Constant
- Risk-tolerant willing to accept failure
- Timely
- Courageous



- Lacking strategic framework
- Lack of rigour in planning and allocation
- Overstretched staff
- Mixed use of external technical resources
- No specific screening for conflict sensitivity
- Lack of emphasis on learning and accountability
- Limited oversight

Overall, the evaluation responds with a **‘qualified yes’** to the overarching question *‘Does Norway’s aid management system enable ‘good aid to the Syria regional crisis?’* However, it also finds that Norway’s aid management system also renders the Syria crisis response inconsistently and incompletely *‘intelligent’* aid. Challenges including lack of preparation to respond to a blended crisis at scale, in politically volatile middle income

countries; systemic limitations in its aid management model; and the lack of differentiation for a complex crisis are constraining Norway’s ‘good donorship’ to the Syria regional crisis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The full Recommendations are available in the Evaluation Report. They are targeted in part to leaders within the system. They do not propose

any major strategic overhaul, nor any major change of direction. Instead, they aim to redress the imbalance identified in the evaluation by introducing the differentiation for an extraordinary crisis; and incorporating greater structure whilst respecting and preserving the Norwegian system’s inherent strengths. They also serve as safeguards for enhanced accountability.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS ARE AS FOLLOWS	
Planning	Who?
<p>1. Surround flexibility with structure Develop (consultatively) an explicit strategic statement of intent of Norway’s intentions regarding the Syria regional response. This does not have to be rigid or restrictive: it should articulate the dilemmas of the context and be revisited on a regular basis.</p>	Section for the Middle East and North Africa.
<p>2. Acknowledge that the crisis is here to stay Increase the volume of assistance available for multi-year agreements to 30% of resourcing.</p>	Section for Humanitarian Affairs/MFA political leadership.
Organisation	Who?
<p>3. Structure, and make transparent, allocations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a clear set of criteria for funding different strategic priorities, and clarify the balance of prioritisation between them. Make decision points explicit. • Require partners in future funding agreements to justify a) how they will respond to the strategic priorities set and b) the evidence base for their requirements. • Develop a communications plan to clarify how the International Humanitarian Principles are upheld in funding decisions, and their separation from political concerns related to the crisis. 	MFA sections funding Syria-related initiatives.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS ARE AS FOLLOWS (CONTINUED)

<p>4. Be transparent and accountable for partner selection Increase the transparency on partner choice without introducing competition. Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate (and apply) clear rationales/criteria for partner selection, which include conflict sensitivity, risk management and mechanisms for recruiting local partners. • Prepare a matrix of comparative advantages required in relation to strategic priorities which can inform partner selection on a rapid basis. 	<p><i>Section for Humanitarian Affairs and other sections appointing partners.</i></p>
<p>Management</p>	<p>Who?</p>
<p>5. Accept that complex crises are resource-intensive Immediately augment the staffing available to the Section for Humanitarian Affairs in particular and, where appropriate, at Embassy level. Consider short-term appointments, contracts for Norwegian academic institutions or consultancy firms, the appointment of expert individuals, or the appointment of national officers within Embassies.</p>	<p><i>MFA political leadership.</i></p>
<p>6. Respect the intellectual demands of the Syria crisis Develop a structured learning system for the response, drawing on external technical resources, including Norad.</p>	<p><i>Section for the Middle East and North Africa/Section for Humanitarian Affairs.</i></p>
<p>7. Be honest on risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a statement of risk (strategic, political, operational and financial) in the strategic framework, above. • Develop a 'risk framework' which partners must complete as a condition of funding. • Institute regular review meetings to consider how risks are being addressed. 	<p><i>Section for the Middle East and North Africa and Section for Humanitarian Affairs.</i></p>
<p>8. Make expectations clear</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For all new agreements, partners should be required to demonstrate how they will contribute to the achievement of strategic priorities. • Enhance fit-for-context monitoring and evaluations demands for partners which responds to these results, whilst recognising the access difficulties within Syria. • Partners who are engaging intensively on Syria-related work, and who receive three or more consecutive years of funding, should have their performance reviewed. 	<p><i>Section for Humanitarian Affairs and other sections appointing partners.</i></p>
<p>9. Accept accountability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a review mechanism for the strategy and use this to inform its revision. • Develop minimum reporting standards for partners e.g. an annual template. 	<p><i>Section for the Middle East and North Africa and Section for Humanitarian Affairs.</i></p>

1. Introduction, context and methodology

‘Norway focuses on and contributes strategically to global issues that are important for the country...This enables Norway to punch above its weight on the global stage’.³

‘Norway aims to be a good humanitarian donor. Our main focus is to ensure a rapid, flexible and effective response to changing humanitarian needs in both sudden and protracted crises’.⁴

‘Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching’.⁵

INTRODUCTION

Now into its sixth year, the Syrian civil war continues unabated. Images of suffering and of hunger; evidence of extreme violence on all sides; and the plight (and dilemmas) caused by the refugee crisis, are testing the international community to its limits.

The complexities of the crisis are creating quandaries for the even most experienced international actors. Facing a brutal war in a volatile yet middle-income region, with a multiplicity of protagonists, changing alliances and shifting frontlines, governments and the humanitarian community are finding that familiar modalities no longer apply. Convoluted regional, national and sectarian geopolitics make for deeply complex operating terrain. Risks - and stakes—have never been higher.

With no solution in sight, and complexities deepening by the day, the patience and generosity of governments hosting the refugee exodus, is being stretched to the limit. Having initially struggled to find momentum, the international community are looking to the medium term. The Syrian crisis is now officially recognised as ‘protracted’ – requiring a sea-change in the international response.

Meanwhile, in camps and communities across the region, the affected populations of the civil war are also bedding down for their sixth year of suffering. With borders closing, insecurity deepening, and welcomes diminishing, Syrians’ hopes for refuge, for building lives and livelihoods outside their own frontiers, are fading fast.

Amongst this complex geometry of forces, factions and unprecedented need, Norway – with its long and proud tradition of peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance - has intervened to help. This report considers the extent to which Norway’s planning, organisation and management of its assistance to the Syria crisis has enabled the delivery of ‘good aid’ in a context of exceptionally high strategic and operational risk. By extension, it considers the extent to which Norway’s aid management system, as reflected in its Syria response, has thus far helped fulfil the country’s reputation as a ‘good donor’ – or at least the best donor it can be, to the most complicated humanitarian crisis of our times.

³ OCED DAC (2013) Development Co-operation Peer Review: Norway 2013

⁴ Government of Norway (2008) St. Meld 40 White Paper on Humanitarian Policy

⁵ CS Lewis

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

This report comprises an independent evaluation of the planning, organisation and management of Norway's assistance to the Syria crisis. It was conducted from October 2015 to March 2016. The evaluation firstly **mapped** the organisational set-up underpinning Norwegian assistance related to the Syria crisis, and key aspects of its strategic planning and management. It secondly **assessed the quality** of the current arrangements in relation to the Syria crisis.⁶ Its purpose was: *'To contribute to effective and high quality Norwegian assistance to Syria and the neighbouring countries in the future.'*

The evaluation is presented in two parts. The mapping exercise is presented in Volume 2 of the evaluation (though summarised in Section 3 below). Its findings have informed this report, which addresses the second objective above.

This report is organised in six sections. Firstly, the context of the crisis is briefly described. Section 2 presents the evaluation object as well

⁶ Terms of reference – see Annex 1

as the methodology adopted. Section 3 briefly sets the scene of the evaluation, and Section 4 contains its main findings. This is followed by Sections 5, Conclusions and 6, Recommendations.

CONTEXT OF THE EVALUATION

The civil war in Syria has shifted from an acute humanitarian emergency to a complex and protracted crisis. It has major regional (and now European and global) consequences. Its unprecedented breadth, depth and duration, as well as its political complexities, are stretching the capabilities of the international community globally.

The context of the Syria crisis has been extensively documented.⁷ Key features include:

- **An emergent crisis:** Student protests in 2011 evolved into armed insurrection and counter-insurgency, and finally civil war in 2012. Within Syria, widespread insecurity, upsurges of violence and human rights

⁷ See for example the Syria Common Context Analysis, which provides a full narrative account of political events, available at https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/syria_crisis_common_context_analysis_june_2014.pdf

violations are now continuous features of an effective political vacuum. The crisis is now considered protracted;⁸

- **Extreme political complexity:** The involvement of multiple actors and regional powers with diverse agendas and intentions, as well as the rise of Daesh/ISIL, has greatly complicated the humanitarian landscape. Sectarian divisions, the role of jihadist groups and foreign intervention, latterly including air strikes by Russia, are all additional complicating factors;
- **A multi-country, middle income crisis:** The regional dimensions of the emergency have particularly affected Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt.

The crisis has two distinct humanitarian facets. Firstly, **internally to Syria**, the armed conflict has impacted civilians, both in Government and

⁸ Co-hosts declaration (including Norway) from the Supporting Syria and the Region Conference, London, February 2016. <https://www.supportingsyria2016.com/news/co-hosts-declaration-of-the-supporting-syria-and-the-region-conference-london-2016/>

opposition held areas. As of February 2016, more than half of all Syrians have been internally displaced. Inside the country, 13.5 million people now require humanitarian assistance – a twelvefold increase since 2011.⁹ Of these, 4.6 million – around a quarter of the country’s population – live in areas considered ‘extremely hard to reach’, and some 422,000 reside in besieged areas.

Humanitarian space in 2016 is limited by shifting frontlines, violence along access routes and security concerns, especially in areas controlled by terrorist groups. The political environment is deeply hostile to humanitarian aid, with the Syrian government licensing and controlling activity in areas still under its authority, and restricting access to others. Humanitarian workers operate in an environment of very considerable danger.

TABLE 1: REGISTERED REFUGEES AS OF MARCH 2016

Lebanon	Turkey	Jordan	Iraq	Egypt	Total
1,067,785	2,688,686	637,859	245,543	118,512	4,786,412

Secondly, the crisis has had major **regional effects**. 4.2 million registered Syrian refugees now reside mainly in five host countries.¹⁰ Some live in camps in Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq, but the vast majority are dispersed in cities and host communities. The most recently available data¹¹ is above.

Pressures in host countries are rising, with strains on services and jobs markets causing social and political friction.¹² Until recently, refugees were formally prevented from earning livelihoods. Borders are closing, with Jordan intermittently closing entry since 2013; Lebanon fully shutting off access to Syrians in late 2014.¹³ Tensions in Europe are also high. It is increasingly difficult for Syrians to find safety, including by seeking asylum.

⁹ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> accessed 03.03.16

¹⁰ In addition to approximately 75,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria

¹¹ Source: Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal for the Syria Regional Refugee Response, available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>, accessed 29.02.16

¹² Syria Needs Assessment Project: Regional Analysis Syria – Part II: Host Countries, Geneva, February 2014.

¹³ Other than in exceptional humanitarian circumstances

The international response

The international response has struggled to keep pace with the emerging scale and complexities of the crisis. A Level 3 emergency was declared in January 2013, but poor early co-ordination, uncertainty around the legalities of providing cross-border support and differing responses from regional governments resulted in gaps in systemic co-ordination.¹⁴ The crisis has been complicated by its unfolding across middle-income countries, where agencies have less experience, where traditional modalities are less appropriate, and where some costs are higher.

Following a series of UN Security Council resolutions, notably that in 2014 allowing cross-border assistance, humanitarian actors launched the “Whole of Syria” (WOS) approach in September 2014. WOS encompasses both in-country and cross border operations. However funding deficits have been a feature of the crisis, with UN appeals for 2015 only 56% funded.

The Fourth Pledging conference of February 2016, co-hosted by Norway alongside Germany, Kuwait, the UN and the UK, raised over \$12bn in pledged assistance to the crisis as well as over \$40bn in loans. Norway’s contribution was announced as NOK 10 billion. In return regional governments committed to lifting work restrictions, and improving regulation and the investment climate in their countries. Yet even as discussions took place in the meeting halls of London, the concurrent Geneva-based peace talks temporarily broke down.

At the time of writing, highlighted in part by refugee flows into Europe and also by related security concerns, the Syria crisis has become a matter of public consciousness. Norway, in common with other bilateral donors, confronts the challenge of balancing political reactions to the domestic effects of the crisis with its long and particularly proud tradition of humanitarian and development assistance. This evaluation is accordingly situated within this wider context.

¹⁴ See for example Inter Agency Standing Committee: Operational Peer Review: Response to the Syria Crisis, July 2015

2. How the evaluation was conducted

CONCEPTS AND KEY QUESTIONS

This evaluation was tasked to assess the *planning, organisation and management* of Norway's assistance to the Syria regional crisis. However, these are not merely functional or technical issues. Rather, they are fundamentally *political* concerns. Two dimensions are important here:

- Firstly, the evaluation object – the planning, organisation and management of the assistance to the Syria crisis - *does not take place in a vacuum*. It is part of a wider organisational system - here, that of Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and, to a lesser degree, it's Agency for Development Co-operation (Norad).

All aid management systems, dealing as they do in sensitive international relations, are embedded in webs of fundamentally *political* relationships. Here, this is explicitly the case, with Norway's assistance being planned, managed and organised directly from a government Ministry.

- Secondly, studying the elements of any aid management system contains the embedded assumption that the system should be geared to the purpose of delivering '*good aid*' – defined for the relevant context. Norway rightly takes pride in its reputation as a '*good donor*', reflected for example in its endorsement of the Good Humanitarian Donorship principles and in its definition of 'good donorship' within its 2008/9 Humanitarian Policy.¹⁵ This aspect is not separate from elements of the aid management system, but inextricably entwined with it.

The point of departure for this study is therefore the extent to which Norway's aid management system provides an enabling environment for the delivery of '*good aid*' to the Syria crisis, and consequently supports and enables Norway to act as a '*good donor*' to the crisis. The two overarching questions, and associated definitions, for this report are as follows:

¹⁵ See Government of Norway (2008) op.cit.

¹⁶ See Annex 3 for list of relevant principles and commitments

Q1. To what extent does Norway's aid management system, reflected in the planning, organisation and management of its assistance, support and enable the delivery of '*good aid*' to the Syria regional crisis?

Defined as a system which supports and enables adherence to relevant international principles and commitments (e.g. International Humanitarian Principles, Do No Harm, fragile situations) for working in complex crises¹⁶

Q2: To what extent does Norway's aid management system - once again, reflected in the planning, organisation and management of its assistance – support and enable Norway to be a '*good donor*' (or at least the best donor it can be) - to the Syria regional crisis?

Defined as a system which supports and enables adherence to Good Humanitarian Donorship and the priorities set out in Norway's 2008 Humanitarian Policy of flexibility and predictability, further development of the Norwegian (partnership-based) model, and more efficient administration and learning.

Around these central questions, the theoretical basis of this study can be articulated (briefly) as follows:

FIGURE 1: LOGIC MODEL FOR EVALUATION OF NORWAY'S SUPPORT TO THE SYRIA CRISIS



EVALUATION SUB-QUESTIONS AND CRITERIA

Within the evaluation's two overarching questions, sit a series of sub-questions.¹⁷ Answering these against a systematic framework geared to relevant evaluation criteria (see Evaluation Matrix at Annex 4) has enabled the evaluation to respond to the overarching questions above.

TABLE 2: EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND CRITERIA

Evaluation Questions	Criteria
Planning	Criteria: <i>Relevance, Appropriateness, Coverage</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent is Norwegian aid to the Syria crisis guided by a <i>strategic approach or intended results</i>? To what extent has the planning of Norway's assistance been undertaken with a view to <i>ensuring appropriateness</i>? (e.g. <i>sector of intervention, targeting to areas / groups of greatest need</i>)? To what extent does the current aid management system emphasise the <i>use of evidence and learning</i> in planning Norwegian assistance to the crisis? 	
Organisation	Criteria: <i>Coherence, Connectedness</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent does the Norwegian aid management system enable an appropriate <i>choice of partners</i> for the delivery of assistance? To what extent does the aid management system enable funds to be allocated according to needs? To what extent are activities being implemented as part of a <i>coherent portfolio</i>, rather than as piecemeal individual activities? To what extent does the aid management system require the <i>alignment of activities</i> with key partners? 	
Management	Criteria: <i>Relevance, Effectiveness, Efficiency</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent does the aid management system enable <i>appropriate use of available human resources and expertise</i> to facilitate efficient Norwegian assistance? To what extent do existing institutional systems and structures for Norway's assistance to the Syria crisis enable <i>flexibility and adaptation of response</i>? To what extent do Norway's decision-making processes enable <i>swift and timely delivery of assistance</i>? To what extent does the aid management system emphasise <i>follow-up on the quality and results</i> of assistance? 	

¹⁷ Adapted from those in the Terms of Reference and agreed with Norad's Evaluation Department through the Inception Report

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

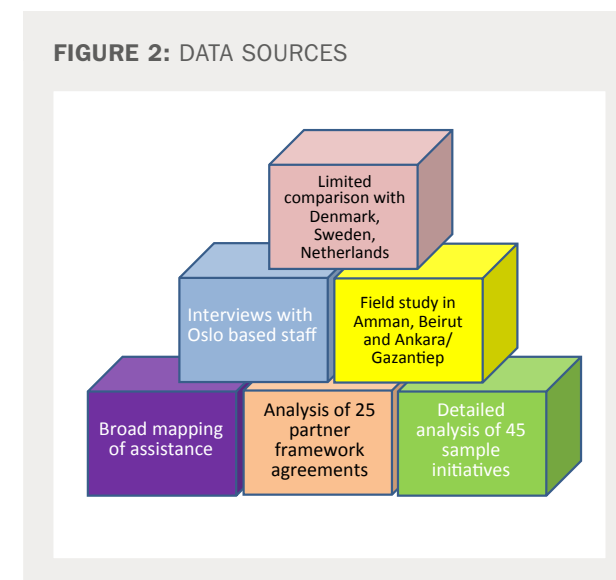
The **scope** of the evaluation is as follows:

- The **evaluation object** is the *planning, organisation and management of Norwegian assistance to Syria and neighbouring countries*. The evaluation was explicitly **not** tasked to address the relevance of Norway's assistance to partner government strategies and plans, nor its effects on beneficiaries (results).
- The **timeframe** of the evaluation is 2011-end 2015, with a focus on the current status, and recognising that data from 2011 and 2012 is less available.
- **Geographically**, the evaluation covers the countries of Syria and neighbouring countries including Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.

- Its **content** includes:
 - > Official Development Assistance (ODA) – i.e. excluding other activities relating to the Syria regional crisis in which Norway is engaged.
 - > ODA which is directly traceable to the Syria crisis response, rather than that contributed through, for example, core contributions to UN agencies.
 - > ODA targeted to the crisis, rather than regionally, or nationally, focused initiatives which are not connected to the Syria response.

The evaluation emphasises the systems of Norway's MFA, rather than those of Norad. This is because the vast bulk of Syria-related assistance is channelled through MFA, particularly humanitarian assistance (see Section 2 below). Nonetheless, a view across the system is provided where feasible.

The **evidence base** for the evaluation comprises the following data sources:



The evaluation applied a mixed-method approach to maximise validity. The full methodology and data sources are provided at Annexes 4 and 5, but include:

- Quantitative analysis of financial and project data
- Structured analysis of strategic, project and framework agreement documents
- Semi-structured interviews (MFA and some Norad staff at HQ and Embassy level: partners at HQ and Embassy level)
- A limited review of three other agencies supporting the Syria response: Sweden, Denmark and (to a very limited degree) the Netherlands
- Three field missions of five days each, to Amman, Beirut and Ankara/Gazantep/Istanbul respectively. Embassy staff, as well as key implementing partners, were interviewed.

A workshop to validate findings and generate institutional ownership of the Recommendations was also conducted in March 2016.

LIMITATIONS AND INTENT

Finally, while its authors hope that this report provides a useful contribution to discussion around Norway's aid management for its Syria regional crisis assistance, it is important to be clear on its boundaries.

Firstly, as an evaluation of Norway's aid management in relation to the Syria crisis (rather than its aid management system more broadly), this evaluation is comparatively internally-focused. It does not speak to the external effects of Norway's assistance to the crisis.

Secondly, this report considers Norway's aid management system in relation to a particularly complex humanitarian crisis. Whilst some findings here may have broader relevance to Norway's aid management system, they do not address Norway's assistance to other crises, nor its assistance as it functions within more stable governance contexts.

As a limitation, the evaluation has struggled with access to information. Norway's archive system suffers from a complicated architecture (see Annex 6) and many archive files contained little to no information. It was difficult, in many cases, to gain a clear picture of the decision processes surrounding interventions and partnerships, and their subsequent unfolding. Time pressures on staff also constrained the participation of some stakeholders.¹⁸

Nonetheless, in drawing together evidence from multiple streams, generated through systematic process, this evaluation hopes to provide a useful evaluative statement on whether and to what extent Norway's aid management system has thus far enabled the delivery of 'good aid' to the Syria crisis. By extension, it provides insight into whether and how one of the world's leading donors has been able, through the lens of its own internal systems, to fulfil its ambitions to be a 'good donor' to one of the most challenging humanitarian crises ever faced.

¹⁸ Efforts were made to interview the current and former Special Envoys to the crisis, plus the Charge d'Affaires for the Damascus Embassy, but time constraints prevented their engagement. Interlocutors from some MFA sections also did not respond to interview requests.

3. Setting the stage

As Section 1 outlines, the planning, organisation and management of Norway's assistance to the Syria crisis needs to be set within the context of its broader aid management system. This brief introduction therefore frames the findings of the evaluation which follow.

NORWAY'S AID MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND THE SYRIA RESPONSE

Norway's political and strategic architecture is fundamentally responsive to humanitarian crisis. This is linked to the Norwegian political and, to an extent cultural, identity as an international actor. Norway's principled position and long history of engagement in humanitarian crises and peace negotiations, as well as its role as a generous donor more broadly, are part of its public consciousness. *'The tradition of solidarity and philanthropy still has deep roots in the Norwegian population, and the humanitarian organisations enjoy strong support.'*¹⁹ The priority accorded to Norway's role in humanitarian and

development action is reflected in the high proportions of its foreign affairs budgets dedicated to ODA.²⁰

At operational level, Norway has a comparatively small Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), with Embassies often comprising only two or three diplomats. Accordingly, and in common with other small administrations, such as Denmark, Norway delivers its assistance through partners such as UN agencies, International and Norwegian NGOs (INGOs and NNGOs), and on occasion the private sector. The relationship can be a complex one: NNGOs for example – a major delivery agent to the Syria crisis – function both as independent advocates and, at delivery level, provide the state with a delivery arm for assistance.²¹

Both MFA and Norway's Agency for Development Co-operation (Norad) are involved in the

response to the Syria crisis. Specifically, two main MFA departments have responsibility for the Syria response – firstly, the Department for Regional Affairs, and particularly the Section for the Middle East and North Africa and secondly, the Department for UN and the Humanitarian Assistance, and particularly the Section for Humanitarian Affairs. The latter has responsibility for the bulk of the financial response. Embassies in the Middle East region then take responsibility for a share of MFA resources allocated to the region, e.g. through the management of grants to partner institutions.

Norad also operates framework agreements for partners, mainly through the Civil Society Department, some of whom are undertaking Syria-related activities. The Department for Global Health, Education and Research also allocates funding to partners who are undertaking Syria-related initiatives.

The number of Sections involved in the response has increased since 2013, with 12 MFA and Norad Sections, plus regional Embassies, now involved.

¹⁹ See Government of Norway (2008) op.cit.

²⁰ 80% of MFA's budget in 2016 is directed towards ODA; NOK 30 of 37 billion is defined as development assistance. Dagbladet 13.02.2016.

²¹ The tension integral to this relationship has been widely discussed. See for example Bistandsaktuelt, 'Bistandsarbeidere er ikke diplomater', 18.02.2016, <http://www.bistandsaktuelt.no/nyheter/2016/kritikk-av-norsk-fredsmegling/> accessed 23.2.16

FIGURE 3: MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND NORAD DEPARTMENTS AND SECTIONS INVOLVED IN THE SYRIA CRISIS RESPONSE IN 2015²²

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS	Norad
Department for UN and Humanitarian Affairs	Civil Society Department
Section for Humanitarian Affairs ²³	Section for civil society strengthening
Section for UN Policy	Section for Development Initiatives
Section for Global Initiatives ²⁴	Dept. for Global Health, Education and Research
Section for Human Rights and Democracy	Education Section
Department for Regional Affairs	
Section for the Middle East and North Africa ²⁵	
Section for Peace and Reconciliation	
Department for Economic Relations and Development	
Section for Multilateral Development Banks ²⁶	
Department for Human and Financial Resources	
Section for Recruitment and Personnel	
Department for Culture and Protocol	
Section for Cultural Affairs	
Royal Norwegian Embassies	
Ankara (Turkey)	
Beirut (Lebanon and Damascus)	
Baghdad (Iraq)	
Amman (Jordan)	

Given its high profile, the Syria crisis response also benefits from a Special Envoy sitting within the MFA. The Envoy's role is to act as an interlocutor between the wider political and diplomatic processes which surround the crisis, and the operational Norwegian assistance provided by MFA, including ODA.

HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

Norway's response to the Syria regional crisis comprises two main streams:

- **Humanitarian assistance**, particularly for refugees and internally displaced *populations*. This has comprised approximately 75% of financing contributions since 2011 – a total of NOK 2.6 billion.

²² Developed by Evaluation Team

²³ Formerly the Department for UN, Peace and Humanitarian Affairs. Current names used for sections where appropriate.

²⁴ The Section for Global Initiatives and the Section for Humanitarian Affairs co-funded the 2015 support for education of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The funds are managed by the Section for Humanitarian Affairs.

²⁵ The significant increase in Middle East and North Africa budget in 2013 and 2014 reflects the costs of transporting chemical weapons in relation to UNSCR 2118

²⁶ Formerly the Section for Multilateral Finance and Global Economic Issues.

- **Development assistance**, comprising a range of activities, such as bilateral contributions to World Bank Trust funds for peacebuilding in Iraq and Lebanon, and capacity development to local councils within Syria itself. In 2013 and 2014 development assistance included the removal and maritime transport of chemical weapons from Syria under UN Security Resolution 2118. Total volumes of development assistance totalled over NOK 900 million 2011-2015.

A detailed profile of Norwegian assistance to the Syria crisis is provided in Volume II: Mapping. Its key features however are:

- In common with other major bilateral actors, funding for the Syria regional crisis has increased significantly since 2011, from NOK 66.6 million in 2011 to more than NOK 1.6 billion in 2015.²⁷ The level of support doubled between 2014 and 2015. Norway was the

27 The actual level of support is higher, taking into consideration Norway's 'unearmarked' contributions to the Syria crisis via core contributions and framework agreements with Norwegian and international organisations working in the humanitarian sphere in Syria. The Section for the Middle East broadly estimated 1.5 billion NOK support to the Syria and Iraq response in 2015

eighth biggest bilateral donor to the crisis in 2015.²⁸ The Government of Norway proposed for 2016 the largest humanitarian budget increase ever, by one billion kroner in 2016, to a total of 4.8 billion kroner.²⁹ Significant proportions of this are expected to be dedicated to the Syria response.

- Of funding dedicated to the Syria crisis, just over 45% 2011-2015 was implemented through agreements with UN agencies, and just over 36% through agreements with Norwegian NGOs. International and local NGOs, and the private sector, as well as the Norwegian public sector, also implement small amounts of the assistance.
- In terms of affected countries: Syria received the highest volume of assistance 2011-2015, at just over NOK 600 million; Lebanon and Iraq received over NOK 200 million each. Jordan received NOK 162 million and Turkey NOK 42 million.

28 https://fts.unocha.org/pageloader.aspx?page=search-reporting_display&C-Q=cq020315114425TxF7oSvtRX accessed 01.13.16

29 Historic Increase in Humanitarian Aid: <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/increase-humanitarian-sid/id2455931/> accessed 18.11.15

- The main sector of assistance 2011-2015 has been emergency response, with an increasing focus on education since 2015.

Finally, and as for all other bilateral actors, the Syria regional crisis, with its domestic and geopolitical implications, is closely connected to Norwegian foreign policy. In Norway's case, the 2008 Humanitarian Policy is explicit on the intersections between humanitarian assistance and Norway's political role: *'As a political actor, Norway does not wish to be neutral, but we will respect the humanitarian organisations' need to preserve their independence and integrity. The key to good cooperation between the Norwegian authorities and the humanitarian organisations lies at this intersection between political and humanitarian principles.'*³⁰ This evaluation is mindful of this intersection.

30 See Government of Norway (2008) op.cit.

4. The planning, organisation and management of Norway's assistance to the Syria crisis

'The Norwegians fully understand that they are not a world power... Norway brings reputation, moral commitment and a willingness to apply what resources they can muster to the table.'³¹

PLANNING OF NORWEGIAN ASSISTANCE TO THE SYRIA CRISIS

This section of the report considers Norway's **planning** of its assistance to the Syria crisis.

Three areas are considered: the use of a *strategic framework*; efforts to ensure the *appropriateness* of the assistance including targeting; and use of *evidence and learning* to inform planning.

KEY FINDINGS

Strategic framework: Norway's strategic approach to the planning of its Syria response has the following characteristics:

- No overarching 'whole of Norway' written strategy or intended results for its assistance to the crisis, resulting in a 'strategic gap' in the system
- Prioritisation of a responsive and opportunity-based approach
- Evidence of more structured planning within humanitarian assistance since 2015

Needs analysis: The responsive and opportunity-based model above relies on partner assessments of needs. These have suffered from the limited information available within Syria itself, and weaknesses in forecasting systems in some cases.

Use of evidence: Norway's aid management system places few formal demands on partners for evidence to inform planning, instead relying most heavily on informal learning systems. These are considered an important dimension of partnership but have resulted in a patchy evidence base to inform planning.

³¹ Taulbee, J.L, Kelleher, A, Grosvenor, P.C. (2014) Norway's Peace Policy: Soft Power in a Turbulent World'.

To what extent is Norwegian aid to the Syria crisis guided by a strategic approach or intended results?

Section 1 above has made clear that the international response has struggled to keep pace with the unpredictable and emergent nature of the Syria crisis. Questions about Norway's planning and preparedness for the Syria crisis must therefore be seen in this light.

A strategic gap

The strategic architecture for the Syria response is as follows. Firstly, the *annual State budget* sets the policy and strategic direction for MFA. Budgets from 2011-2013 do not reference the Syria crisis. Those for 2014-2016 do so in broad terms in relation to ODA, as follows:

The White Paper to Parliament on Norway's Humanitarian Policy³² was written prior to the Syria crisis and accordingly does not contain reference to it or guide the response. However, its con-

2014	<p><i>Development financing:</i> Acknowledges that the humanitarian situation in Syria and neighbouring countries will likely worsen in 2014, and particularly the refugee crisis. The need for acute lifesaving initiatives in Syria and stabilising initiatives in neighbouring countries is signalled. A budget of NOK 193.1 million (domestic budget lines) is identified, of which 93.4 million will be reported as ODA.</p> <p><i>Humanitarian financing:</i> Recognises the potential for the situation in Syria to worsen. The Government proposes to continue a high level of humanitarian aid at NOK 2.4 billion.</p>
2015	<p><i>Humanitarian financing:</i> Mentions Syria as one of four concurrent humanitarian crises. The Government proposes to increase funds for humanitarian aid and emergency by approximately 420 million NOK, to more than 3.3 billion NOK.</p>
2016	<p><i>Humanitarian financing:</i> An increased contribution for humanitarian and emergency aid is proposed, to over NOK 4.3 billion. This is a historically high level and a significant amount will go towards helping the Syrian population in Syria and neighbouring countries. A proposed NOK 0.3 billion is proposed as increased expenditure for the Syria crisis specifically.</p>

tent reflects Norway's overarching approach to its humanitarian assistance, e.g. 'protection of civilians in complex conflicts' is identified as a priority area.

Section budget propositions: Below the State budget, annual 'fordelingsnotater', or budget propositions, are prepared from Sections to MFA setting out priorities for the year in response to the State budget. These contain information on context, priorities for the year and allocations (including a rationale for the choices made). They are produced for MFA leadership between January and March.

For Sections dealing with development assistance, these propositions relate to individual projects rather than a response to the Syria crisis as a whole. The *fordelingsnotater* of the Section for Humanitarian Affairs include separate notes developed in relation to Syria; these indicate an *increasingly structured approach* to planning as the crisis unfolded:

³² See Government of Norway (2008) op.cit.

2012 and 2013	Priorities and budget allocations are generally broad
2014	No Syria-specific <i>fordelingsnotat</i> was produced due to high demands on that year on the staff of the Section for Humanitarian Affairs (though in January 2014 Norway committed NOK 460 million for Syria and neighbouring countries)
2015 and 2016	Highly specific thematic and country priorities, with associated budget allocations, based on detailed context analyses of the crisis.

Embassy **Annual Plans** (*Virksomhetsplan*) are submitted to the relevant geographical department (thus the Section for the Middle East and North Africa in the case of Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, and the Section for South East Europe in the case of Turkey). Sample plans from Beirut, Amman and Damascus for 2015 articulate clear intended goals for the respective Embassies, with specific sub-goals and objectives. Broadly listed, these come under three headings: Stabilization, the humanitarian situation and democratization/human rights. However, Embassy staff agree that in practice, these goals serve less as

‘strategic drivers’ and more as ‘general reference points’ for planning.

Finally, no **separate written strategy** exists for the Syria crisis response. Efforts were made during 2014 to develop a strategy, but this did not materialize. Instead, the main planning instrument, below the State budget, has comprised the *fordelingsnotater*.

Other institutional mechanisms reflect a responsive and opportunity-based approach to the crisis rather than a highly strategized or planned model, as follows:

- **Extraordinary budget memos** are produced to respond to arising needs. Six Syria-related memos were circulated 2013-2015,³³ including proposals for increased funding and review of partner framework agreements from the Department for UN and Humanitarian Affairs. Syria-specific humanitarian *fordelingsnotater* were also prepared for 2015 and 2016.

³³ Three in 2013, including a strategy note and proposed budget increases, and three in 2015 (in March, August and September)

- **Framework agreements:** Norway’s framework agreements with its partners form its major delivery channel for assistance. Two types of framework agreements are applied:

- > *General framework agreements* with partners (both multilateral and NGO), managed by Norad in the case of NGOs and by MFA in the case of UN agencies. These include agencies such as WFP, UNOCHA and UNICEF, as well as NNGOs who have been closely involved in the Syria response.
- > *Specific framework agreements* operated by the Section for Humanitarian Affairs, often with the same organisations but explicitly geared for delivery of assistance to humanitarian crises.

- **Addendums** for existing agreement partners are also used to channel additional assistance as the crisis unfolded.

- **Decision memos** (*beslutningsdokumenter*) are used when funding is not allocated through already existing framework agreements. For the Syria response, those seen by the evaluation relate to funding allocations for particular initiatives, such as the transportation of chemical weapons from Syria in 2014.
- **‘Reserve’ humanitarian budget** Since 2015, and at Ministerial direction, 25% of the annual resources for the Section for Humanitarian Affairs have been retained for flexible use, including new and unanticipated priorities. This is broadly in proportion with the amounts retained for such use by other bilateral agencies, including Sweden and Denmark.

Overall, therefore, from a Norwegian government point of view, the State budget provides the main overarching direction for the Syria crisis. However, beneath this, the main indication of strategic planning is the *fordelingsnotater*, which in the case of the Section for Humanitarian Affairs provides increasingly structured direction for this aspect of the assistance.

Between the state budget and the bottom-up developed *fordelingsnotater*, however, no explicit or ‘whole of Norway’ statement of intent in relation to the Syria crisis exists, including Norway’s intended aims: what choices have been made and why (based on Norway’s comparative advantage); and how humanitarian and development assistance will intersect and be applied to achieve these aims. Despite the undoubted merits of the responsive and opportunity-based approach for a complex crisis, discussed below, this constitutes a *strategic gap* in terms of providing both direction and accountability for the allocation of ODA resources to the crisis.

OTHER AGENCIES:

There is a growing trend in the donor community towards the development of such strategies, e.g. **Sweden** has recently produced a five-year strategy for assistance to the Syria regional crisis (2016-2021). **Denmark** is currently updating its existing strategic framework for its stabilisation work in Syria (2015-2016).³⁴

To what extent has the planning of Norway’s assistance been undertaken with a view to ensuring appropriateness? (e.g. sector, targeting)

Analytical basis for planning

At strategic planning level, the main source of context and needs analysis to inform decision and choices is present in *fordelingsnotater* of different Sections; to a more limited extent, in the justification provided in the State budget; and finally in Embassy Annual plans and other documentation.

³⁴ The UK is also currently undergoing a strategic exercise to bring its humanitarian, development and stabilization assistance under a single strategic framework.

All these items contain context analyses, though these vary in depth and detail. All make use of wider sources available (e.g. political information, UN situation reports and context analyses etc). The most detailed observed by the evaluation are contained with the Syria-specific *fordelingsnotater* of the Section for Humanitarian Affairs. In all cases, the intentions set out in the relevant planning document, including the strategic direction provided by the State budget, the intentions indicated in *fordelingsnotater* related to the Syria; and the goals and sub-goals of Embassy Plans for Jordan, Lebanon and Damascus for 2015, clearly and closely reflect the context in relevant countries at the time in broad terms, and identify needs in specific terms.

Trust in partner identification of needs (targeting)

More operationally, the Norwegian aid management system takes a 'needs-based' approach,³⁵ with partners responsible for identifying and targeting needs. In 40 interviews with partners for this study, all respondents were clear that no

³⁵ See Government of Norway (2008) op.cit.

steering took place by MFA towards particular sectors or groups, instead trusting partners to explain requirements on the ground. Information-gathering by Embassies and Oslo-based staff then helps triangulate and verify these needs.

Immediate needs: Of a sample of 45 projects from 2011-2015 funded by Norwegian assistance all (100%) either supply or reference needs analyses. However, they generally focus on *immediate* needs of target groups, rather than being analysing potential changes and threats in the medium to longer term. The *fordelingsnotater* of the Section for Humanitarian Affairs also reflect a strong emphasis on current needs.

Forecasting: In general, broader evidence finds the horizon scanning of needs – by the UN particularly, but also by NGOs – to have been weak in the context of the Syrian crisis. Refugee flow numbers have been repeatedly underestimated or inaccurate; and the difficulties confronted by host countries in absorbing their volumes insuffi-

ciently anticipated.³⁶ The major information gaps arising from restricted access to areas within Syria itself have exacerbated the difficulty;³⁷ the UN's 2014 Comprehensive Humanitarian Needs Overview had confidence intervals even for the more reliable data of 20%, translating into +/- 2.5 million people. The evaluation has not encountered evidence of demands from MFA or Norad for improved forecasting of needs by partners.

Whilst Norway's partners provide comprehensive information on *immediate* needs, therefore, the aid management system itself does not demand rigorous analysis of *future* needs, in keeping with the responsive model above. Planning for appropriateness is therefore only as good as partners' own efforts, which have at times been

³⁶ See for example Oxfam (2013) Humanitarian Quality Assurance: Lebanon Evaluation of Syria Crisis Response and Mowjee, T (2015) Evaluation of the Danish Strategy for Humanitarian Action: Syria Case Study. The evaluation of UNOCHA's response to the Syria crisis points out that 'The UN's inability to properly assess need in the Syria context is worrying. Large amounts of assistance are being delivered inside Syria, with very light independent monitoring based on incomplete or non-existent assessment analysis.' UNOCHA (2016) Evaluation of OCHA's response to the Syria crisis p37

³⁷ Though there are exceptions to this, e.g. the Joint Rapid Assessment of Northern Syria (J-RANS) illuminated needs in previously unknown territory, and serving as a catalyst for action.

found wanting in the (very difficult) conditions of the Syria crisis. Yet with the crisis now firmly protracted, preparing in a systematised way for future needs is becoming increasingly important.

To what extent does the current aid management system emphasise the use of evidence and learning in planning Norwegian assistance to the crisis?

Few formal systems (or demands on partners) for evidence and learning

Also in keeping with the responsive model above, the aid management system places few requirements on the *use of evidence* to inform planning for the Syria response – although this is stated as a priority as part of Norway’s ‘good donorship’ under the Humanitarian Policy.³⁸ None of the extensive documentation reviewed references wider studies or evaluations conducted in relation to the Syria crisis, although a growing

body of evidence is available.³⁹ Of 45 sample initiatives analysed, only 17 were found to provide an explicit and detailed evidence base to underscore planning. Partners in-country agreed that demands for evidence-based planning were light, with reliance instead on faith in partners’ knowledge to ‘*know what is best*’.

This pattern extends to the use of learning, with only a minority (13/45) of sample initiatives analysed showing evidence of lessons from previous or broader experience being explicitly taken up and used in intervention designs. Approaches ranged from systematic recording of lessons learned, including from beyond the Syria crisis, to shorter ‘context analyses’ which incorporated learning from previous phases of the same initiative. Field visits for this evaluation also indicated much informal learning informing design and implementation, and some strong approaches by in-country (particularly NNGO) partners, though this was not always documented in communica-

tion with MFA or Norad. All agreed, however, that the use of learning is not a condition of funding.

Example: A final report from Norwegian Church Aid for support for cross-border activities contains a useful section on lessons learned with wider relevance for these sorts of risky initiatives. A Norwegian People’s Aid application for a food security and livelihoods initiative within Syria 2015-2016 contains a detailed analysis of lessons learned from both context and previous initiatives.

In terms of learning systems: just three of 45 initiatives and two out of 15 framework agreements sampled described explicit systems for extracting, collating and applying lessons, including feedback loops. Presence of such systems, as discussed below, may not be explicitly recorded in documentation – but is also not condition of Norway’s funding in relation to the Syria crisis.

A collective partnership for information

Documentation alone however provides a very partial picture of the knowledge flows which actually surround Norway’s aid management in relation to the Syria crisis. Field visits for this evaluation clearly established that, as well as

³⁹ See for example the Syria Portal for Co-ordinated Accountability and Lesson Learning (CALL) (the main multi-agency forum for evidence and learning on the Syria crisis which produced the Syria Common Context Analysis.)<http://www.syrialearning.org/>

³⁸ See Government of Norway (2008) op.cit.

close links between Oslo-based MFA and Embassy staff, information-gathering on the political, humanitarian and development aspects of the Syria crisis is an expected and integral dimension of partnership arrangements at country level. This is channelled through the very frequent field visits taking place, both by Embassy and Oslo-based staff, who in turn convey policy and strategic updates to partners.

Information flows are therefore multi-way; they provide not just 'raw' information but a means of triangulation for other sources of data.⁴⁰ This 'information partnership' plays a major role in the decision-making which surrounds the Syria crisis response. A reflection of the comparatively non-bureaucratic system which characterises Norwegian assistance, the reduced burdens and 'partner-dependent' approach are appreciated by Norway's partners, but risk limiting the transparency and accountability of planning choices.

40 Documented elsewhere e.g. Norad (2014) Evaluation of Norway's support to Haiti after the 2010 earthquake.

ORGANISATION OF ASSISTANCE TO THE SYRIA CRISIS

This second area of findings considers Norway's **organisation** of its assistance to the Syria crisis. Four areas are considered: the *choice of partners*; the *allocation of resources*; the *coherence* of the portfolio; and *alignment with partners*.

KEY FINDINGS

Partner selection: Norway has continued its trust-based model of partnership within the Syria crisis, which prioritises shared values, solidarity and mutual respect. However, this approach has not been fully differentiated for the conditions of a highly politicised conflict, with capacities being assumed rather than explicitly tested. Attention to operational risk management and mitigation has increased since 2015 within humanitarian assistance particularly.

Allocation of funds: Norway's aid management system does not apply formalised decision-making criteria for funding. Allocations broadly reflect the priorities of international strategies, but emphasise emergency assistance, rather than explicitly framing the response within the international discourse of resilience. Some earmarking, alongside less formal guidance to partners, has also structured the response. Funding models are evolving to provide more predictable financing.

Internal coherence: The Syria response has not adopted a 'portfolio' approach to organisation, being implemented on a largely Section-by-Section, rather than 'whole of government' basis. However, it has been shaped in part by a set of implicit principles, including balanced approaches to allocation, a focused approach to strategic priorities (though with changes in this in 2015); and a set of underlying characteristics.

External alignment: Norway is a lead actor in strategic and political co-ordination for the Syria crisis, reflected for example in its co-hosting of the 2016 Donor Pledging Conference. However, it is not driving the external alignment of its own ODA, either from within MFA or Embassies. Instead, it depends on partner recognition of the need to align with others – with mixed success. Yet as the international response evolves, alignment of assistance internally is becoming more important.

To what extent does the Norwegian aid management system enable an appropriate choice of partners for the delivery of assistance?

Partnerships and agreements

Significant increases in support to the Syria crisis have been channelled through multilateral agencies, including the UN, and through NNGOs 2011-2015 (see Volume II, Mapping for more detail):

- Over NOK 4.6 billion has been channelled through multilateral agencies 2011-2015, rising from NOK 11.1 million in 2011 to NOK 817.5 million in 2015.
- NOK 1.3 billion has been channelled through NNGOs 2011-2015, rising from NOK 14.2 million in 2011 to NOK 612.3 million in 2015.
- The number of agreements with partners being managed in any one year tripled between 2011 and 2015. The average value of each

TABLE 3: NORWEGIAN (DEDICATED) SUPPORT FOR THE SYRIA REGIONAL CRISIS⁴¹

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Total funds allocated (1000 NOK)	66,558	217,830	842,664	799,355	1,614,587	3,540,994
Number of Agreements	46	68	94	107	150	N/A⁴²

Syria-related agreement has increased sevenfold, from NOK 1.4 million to NOK 10.8 million during the period.

A trust-based model

To accommodate the very large increases in resources being channelled to the Syria crisis, the selection of Norway’s partners follows the model described within the 2008 Humanitarian Policy.⁴³ This prioritises trust, based on shared values, commitment to the humanitarian principles, and the importance of solidarity, rather than formal/objective criteria for selection. This model is, as widely documented elsewhere, forms part of the

⁴¹ See Volume 2 for a description of the methodology applied to generate these figures, including the approach to 2015

⁴² Agreements may represent continuations of those in previous years; therefore these figures are not aggregated due to the risk of double-counting.

⁴³ See Government of Norway (2008) op.cit.. p11

wider functioning of State-society relations in Norway.⁴⁴

Multilateral agencies and NNGOs are cornerstones in the ‘collective partnership’ that comprises Norway’s aid management system. Analysing the allocation of resources to partners reveals a *balanced approach* to allocations for the Syria crisis. Whilst funding for the Syria crisis response has increased dramatically since 2014, the rise in resources to different partner types has occurred proportionately, as Figure 4 below makes clear. Volume II, mapping, also highlights how allocations to multilateral agencies have remained relatively constant over time.

⁴⁴ See Bistandsaktuelt (op.cit). accessed 23.2.16

FIGURE 4: AGREEMENT PARTNERS 2011-2015

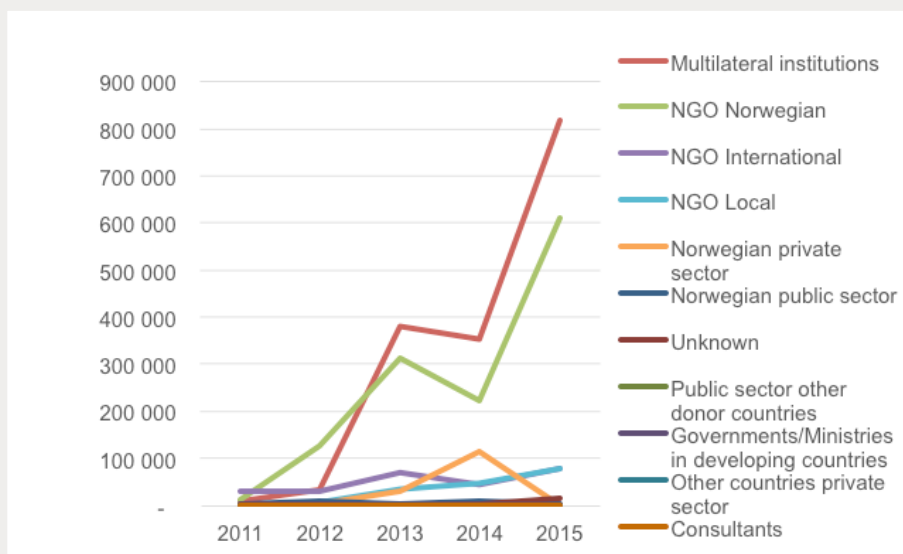


TABLE 4: MAIN INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS NORWAY USES TO OPERATIONALISE PARTNERSHIPS

Type of agreement	Processes
MFA framework agreements (UN/NGO partners), including those of Section for Humanitarian Affairs	No formal criteria are employed to objectively assess capacity and expertise but agreements are based on extensive dialogue and annual consultations between the MFA and the management of the partner institution, as well as specific requirements for action. Decisions are based on partner reputation, experience of joint work, specific capabilities in relation to Norway's priorities, strategic fit of intentions, etc. Framework agreements are reviewed annually.
Norad framework agreements	Systematic criteria are applied within agreements, including demands to demonstrate logic models and intended results, and clear reporting requirements on progress.
Addenda	Added to existing framework agreements to fund specific areas of work or to increase funding in relation to need e.g. as refugee flows increased. Not based on formal applications, but rather legitimized by the prior framework agreement, and presuming capability to deliver.
Specific initiatives	A standard grant form is required to be completed. This includes areas such as financial management, risk management etc.
Embassy-managed initiatives	Articulated preference to work with 'known' partners, though accompanied by a grant application process and efforts made by staff to develop proposals with partners.

Annual reviews of framework agreements take place amid a process of ongoing dialogue with partner organisations. The selection of partners for the Syria response therefore does not seek to be a *competitive* one. Several partners report being approached by MFA as a trusted partner to absorb new funds (and they, in their turn, felt free to approach MFA as needs arose). The only area where a competitive element occurs is in Calls for Proposals at Embassy level. However, Norway has experienced mixed success with these: In Amman, a Call for Proposals received 110 applications, of which 1-2 were eventually funded. The merits of the exercise were questioned by staff, particularly given the limited human resources available to the Embassy (see Section 4.3 below). In Beirut, particular efforts had been made by staff to bring proposals up to the standards required by the Embassy.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ The Beirut Embassy is also planning to conduct a review of its grant portfolio in 2016.

Undifferentiated approaches to partnership

Norway has therefore continued to select for its Syria response 'known' partners, prioritising UN agencies and NNGOs particularly, and increasing resources proportionately to them. Its use of framework agreements has supported the Humanitarian Policy's commitment to predictable financing.⁴⁶ However, it has not *differentiated* the specific types of partners needed to respond to the complex dynamics of the Syria crisis. Partner capacity for operational effectiveness and efficiency, and the expertise to work under extreme political complexities and conflict conditions, such as experience with Do No Harm principles, has been *presumed* within the aid management system, rather than explicitly *tested*.⁴⁷

Operational effectiveness and efficiency: The Humanitarian Policy notes that, as well as prioritizing a trusted relationship with partners, 'At the same time, however, we must focus on goal

⁴⁶ See Government of Norway (2008) op.cit.

⁴⁷ A finding also noted by the Mid Term Review of the Humanitarian Policy. See Millard, A and Bang, T (2011) op.cit.

attainment, quality assurance and efficiency.'⁴⁸

Norway also places very considerable faith in the UN system as part of its long history of support to the international system.

Yet a growing body of evidence, particularly since 2014, has found – alongside many strengths – operational limitations in UN responses to the Syria crisis. Specifically, areas such as speed of response, co-ordination and communication, planning, approaches to protection, and contingency planning, have all been found wanting.⁴⁹ Whilst MFA staff both in Oslo and in Embassies are aware of these concerns, and they are reflected in dialogue notes with some multilateral actors,⁵⁰ they have not acted as a determining factor for partnership arrangements, as the

⁴⁸ See Government of Norway (2008) op.cit.

⁴⁹ See Culbertson, S et al (2015) Evaluation of UNICEF's Emergency Education Response for Syrian Refugee Children and Host Communities in Jordan Amman: UNICEF; Inter Agency Standing Committee (2015) Operational Peer Review: Response to the Syria Crisis, July 2015; Hidalgo, S and LaGuardia, D (2015) Independent Evaluation of UNHCR's response of the refugee influx in Syria and Lebanon; Drummond, J, Khoury, R, Bailey, S, Crawford, N, Fan, L, Milhem, R and Zych, S (2015) An Evaluation of WFP's Regional Response to the Syrian Crisis 2011-2014; Lawry-White, S and Schloffer, M (2015) Real Time Evaluation: Response to the Syria Crisis 2012-2014.

⁵⁰ Such as those with WFP and other UN agencies involved in the Syria response

increased funding volumes above reflect. In the absence of formal criteria, this brings into question the *rigour of the decision-making process* for allocations to multilateral agencies, as other evaluations and reviews of bilateral actors' Syria responses have also pointed out.⁵¹

Conflict and fragility expertise: The capability and expertise of partners to work under the highly challenging and volatile conditions of the Syria crisis, including in neighbouring countries, is part of the 'trust-based' approach above. Evidence from framework agreements and projects finds that conflict expertise, and experience with Do No Harm principles do not comprise formal screening criteria for partners or a basis for partner choice. The implementation of conflict- and fragility-sensitive approaches cannot therefore be guaranteed.

51 Denmark's 2015 evaluation of its overall Humanitarian Strategy recommended that 'Danida consider whether its level of humanitarian funding to UN agencies is appropriate, given efficiency considerations and that they often fail to pass on the benefits of Danida's adherence to the GHD principles to their implementing partners' (Danida (2015) Evaluation of Danida's Humanitarian Strategy 2010-2015 Copenhagen: Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark). A 2015 evaluation of the Swedish humanitarian strategy in 2015, which included a Syria case study, raised similar concerns (InDevelo (2015) Evaluation of Swedish Humanitarian Assistance 2011-2014: Syria case study Stockholm: InDevelo). Also see Giesen, P and Leenders, R (2015) Review of the Netherlands contribution to the humanitarian response to the Syria crisis 2010-2014.

Field study for this evaluation found some strong examples of experienced partners (both UN and NNGO) consciously and explicitly applying Do No Harm principles and approaches for working in fragile situations, for example in relation to the potential for localised conflict between refugee populations and host communities in Lebanon. However, these were a) varied and b) dependent on partners' own expertise and experience. Their application did not form a condition of Norwegian funding. Moreover, the subcontracting of *local partners* takes place at arms' length from MFA and Norad; the conflict and fragility expertise of these partners is, in turn, dependent on requirements from the main agreement partners. The risk of a lack of conflict sensitivity is therefore increased.

Impartiality: Finally, the Syria crisis has highlighted the challenges of assuring impartiality – even for some of the world's most experienced humanitarian actors – in a highly contested political space. Recent evaluations of WFP and UNHCR's respective Syria responses have raised exactly these issues.⁵²

As the WFP's evaluation recognises, the special conditions of the crisis mean that international actors must manage complex trade-offs under '*complex and competing pressures*'. Norway strongly protects its hard-won stance as a principled and impartial actor, as the Humanitarian Policy reflects. It therefore needs to be especially cognizant of how these trade-offs are being managed; and how (and arising from what choices) the International Humanitarian Principles are being upheld. Evaluations of other donor assistance have also raised these challenges.⁵³

52 See Hidalgo, S and LaGuardia, D (2015) op.cit.; Drummond, J et al (2015) op.cit.

53 See Danida (2015) op.cit; and InDevelo (2015) op.cit. and Giesen, P and Leenders, R (2015) op.cit.

The complex nature of the crisis means that identifying and employing impartial partners, particularly within Syria, is highly challenging, and is mostly supply-driven. The importance of ensuring the integrity of the International Humanitarian Principles is noted in the Section for Humanitarian Affairs' grant agreement letters from 2015. Yet this is not a formal requirement for the contracting of Norway's main partners, and they are not required in turn to ensure that local partners implement the Principles. Yet the complexities of the Syria crisis mean that risks of aid diversion – particularly within Syria - and other similar concerns, are magnified. This risk is compounded by limited monitoring, evaluation and lesson-learning procedures, below.

Organising for risk

Finally, there has been a limited (but, in the case of humanitarian assistance, growing), attention to *risk management and mitigation* in relation to the Syria crisis. Analysis of 45 initiatives and 15 framework agreements finds that just under half (27/60) reference risk. However, approaches are highly variable, ranging from detailed and comprehensive risk assessment and proposed

management models, through to very light-touch approaches. Most concentrate on operational (delivery) rather than the kinds of strategic or political risks described above. No strategic-level risk assessments for the Syria response were made available to the evaluation.

In a sign of change to come, and following the politically-sensitive experience of Norwegian support, via an agreement partner, to a hospital in an area which was then overtaken by Daesh/ISIL, there is evidence of an increased emphasis on risk within the Section for Humanitarian Affairs. This is referenced in the 2015 *fordelingsnotat*; and grant agreement letters from 2015 specifically request that the Ministry is 'kept informed' on security and risk assessment information. Any significant changes in the security/political situation are requested to be communicated to the Ministry. A tighter approach to operational risk (if not strategic, financial or political risk) is therefore being taken going forward.

MFA has recently issued a direction to reduce the *quantity* of partnership agreements. This is for efficiency reasons, but a benefit in relation to the Syria crisis is scope for greater scrutiny of partner operational capacity, political nuancing and risk management/mitigation, to meet the complex risk thresholds that the Syria crisis demands.

OTHER AGENCIES:

Denmark's assistance is also implemented through partners, including private sector consultancy firms. Denmark adopts an 'aggressive' risk strategy in relation to partner selection which incorporates strategic, fiduciary, institutional and political risk.⁵⁴

The Syria case study of **Sweden's** 2015 Evaluation of Humanitarian Assistance 2011-2014 found that (despite having fewer staff than Norway) Sweden had undertaken due diligence in partner selection and followed up on partners' measures for avoiding aid diversion, in proposals and discussions.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Danida (2015) op.cit.

⁵⁵ InDevelop (2015) op.cit.

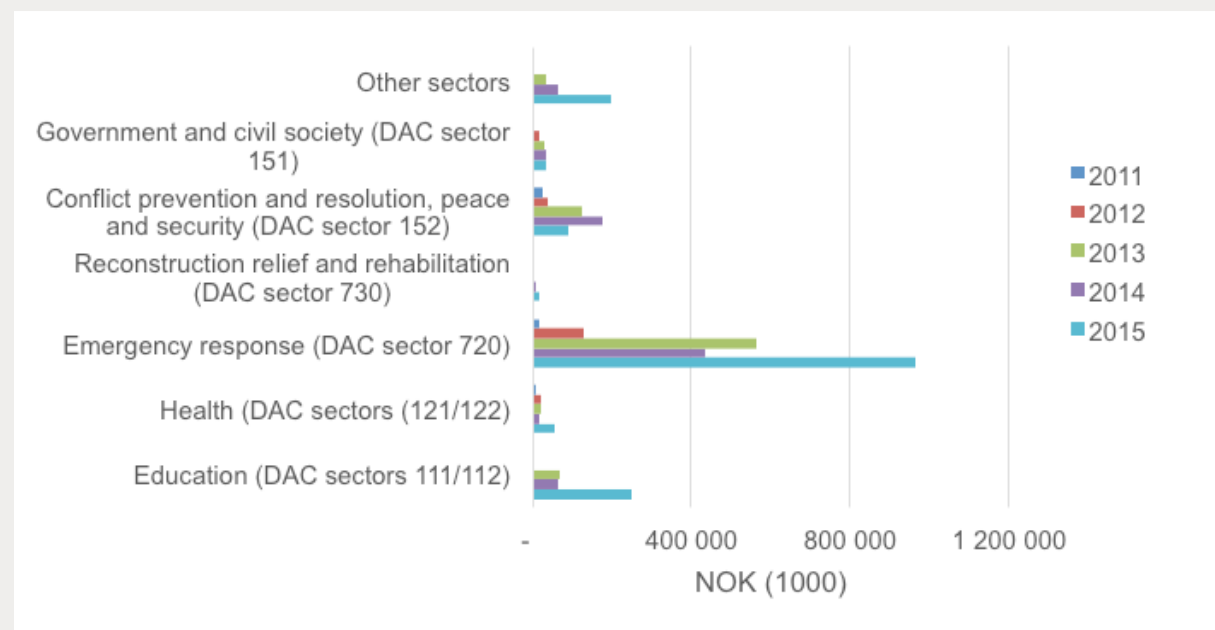
To what extent does the aid management system enable funds to be allocated according to needs?

No formal decision making criteria for funding; emphasis emergency-focused

In line with the limited planning architecture, above, no formal set of ‘allocation criteria’ exist for funding decisions. Rather, within the overall architecture set out in Section 4.1 above, assistance adopts the ‘needs based’ approach described, and as advocated by the Humanitarian Policy.

Whilst specific allocations for thematic areas are not available, Figure 5 below describes Syria-related expenditure by OECD DAC sector between 2011 and 2015 (for more detail, see Volume II: Mapping):

FIGURE 5: NORWEGIAN SUPPORT BY OECD DAC SECTOR 2011-2015



The most significant levels of support have therefore been directed towards emergency response,⁵⁶ increasing from NOK 19.1 million in 2011 to NOK 965.9 million in 2015. Support for education⁵⁷ has increased overall and particularly sharply in 2015, from NOK 5.5 million in 2011 to NOK 251.1 million in 2015. However support to ‘conflict prevention and resolution, peace and security,’⁵⁸ having increased until 2014, then declined from NOK 177 million in 2014 to NOK 92.3 million in 2015. This has been overtaken by expenditure on education, a key political priority of the current government, and an area in which Norway has taken a leading role in relation to both the Syria crisis and more broadly.

Additionally, from 2011-2014, Norwegian assistance focused on *specific areas of strategic priority* in its response to the Syria crisis, in

56 DAC sector 7205 6

57 DAC sectors 111/112: 111 - Education, level unspecified incorporates support towards: 10 - Education policy and administrative management; 20 - Education facilities and training; and 82 - Educational research. 112 - Basic education incorporates: 20 - Primary education; and 30 - Basic life skills for youth and adults

58 DAC sector 1525 8

line with the wider aid management system’s tendency to prioritise to areas of Norwegian comparative advantage, identified elsewhere.⁵⁹ The number of sectors with which it engaged remained broadly concentrated on the same areas of interest, with resources – excepting emergency response – broadly balanced, as Figure 4 above indicates.

This changed in 2015. As well as the sharp increases in assistance to emergency response and education, above, the amount of funding to ‘Other (OECD DAC) sectors’, including *Population policies/programmes and reproductive health; other social infrastructure and services, general environmental protection*, increased from NOK 32 million in 2014 to NOK 196 million in 2015. Alongside the proliferation of MFA Sections involved in the response, therefore, the assistance itself was more diversely spread across sectors.

All these areas of investment are relevant to the priorities identified by the international community and regional governments, as reflected for

59 OECD DAC (2013) Peer review: Norway 2013

example in successive UN-co-ordinated Regional Refugee and Resilience Plans (‘3RPs’). However, there are two nuances to note:

- Firstly, the international response has placed a significant emphasis on resilience, starting in 2014 with the first UN-co-ordinated Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (‘3RP’).⁶⁰ That for 2016-2017 explicitly identifies a reduced emphasis on the emergency phase of the response, and increased emphasis resilience and blended modalities (humanitarian plus development), with for example the Shelter Cluster appealing for a reduced amount in 2016 as it moves towards a maintenance phase in camps.

Norway, through the Section for Humanitarian Affairs, has directly funded the 3RPs, as well as contributing to UNICEF and WHO through the appeals process. Alongside the contributions to education, it has therefore utilized some of its funds to address the resilience

60 Launched in December 2014. Updates to the 3RP have been made in 2015 and 2016.

agenda. Yet resilience, or humanitarian-development linkages, is also not a feature of any planning documentation seen by the evaluation, including the *fordelingsnotater* of the Section for Humanitarian Affairs for 2015 or 2016. The response at a strategic level has not been explicitly framed within a resilience agenda or discourse. Moreover, within the high levels of ODA categorized as ‘emergency response’ it has not been feasible to identify the proportions allocated to resilience-oriented activities. Resilience was however identified in the 2011 review of the Humanitarian Policy as a topic requiring more attention.⁶¹

- Secondly, the rationale for the de-prioritization of funding to conflict prevention and resolution, peace and security initiatives is confusing given the widespread recognition of the importance of peacebuilding and statebuilding initiatives in the Syrian context. Even allowing for possible distortions created by the chemi-

cal weapons transportation,⁶² the importance of such initiatives in contributing towards a medium-term solution is widely recognized.⁶³

OTHER SYSTEMS

Sweden’s five-year strategic framework for the Syria crisis is oriented to **resilience**. This seeks to bridge the gap from humanitarian to development modalities. It is framed under two main thematic headings: strengthening resilience; and democracy and human rights.

Denmark’s 2015-2016 strategic framework for its stabilisation work sets as its policy priorities: A political solution: stabilisation and recovery of moderate opposition-held areas in Syria: Support to the moderate opposition: Countering violent extremism: and the promotion of transitional justice and human rights.

International good practice also strongly stresses the prioritization of promotion of recovery and resilience in humanitarian assistance.⁶⁴

Geographical allocations have prioritised Syria, Lebanon and Jordan

Geographically, support to Lebanon and Jordan have steadily increased from the beginning of the crisis in 2011. The majority of support to Iraq started in 2013, and to Turkey in 2014 (though volumes here are notably lower at NOK 42 million in 2015). Investment destined for Syria itself has increased seven-fold since 2012.

In correlation with the finding above on emergency assistance, Norwegian assistance has therefore prioritised the place of most acute humanitarian need, namely Syria itself, and secondly Iraq (arguably also the highest risk contexts). Broadly proportionate increases to Jordan and Lebanon have been made, though to a lesser extent to Turkey.

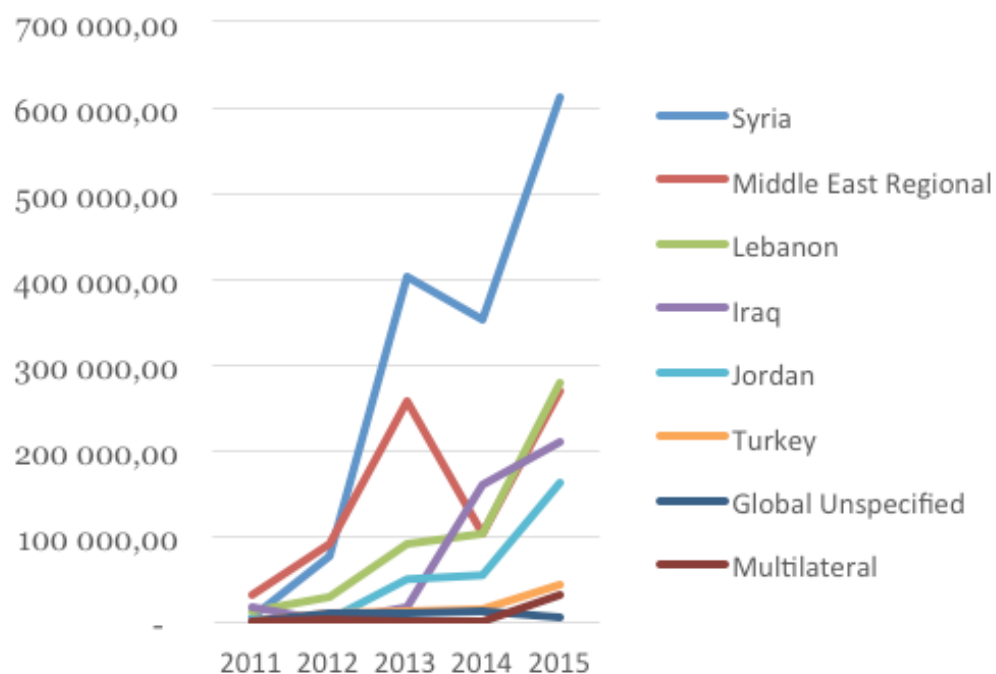
61 Millard, S, and Bang, T (2011) Mid Term Review of Norway’s Humanitarian Policy Oslo: Nordic Consulting Group.

62 Chemical weapons contributed NOK 46.7 million and 110.9 million respectively in 2013 and 2014 to the DAC sector code ‘conflict prevention and resolution, peace and security’.

63 See for example the 3RP for 2016-2017, Regional Strategic Overview:

64 See OECD (2012) Good Practice in Humanitarian Donorship: 12 Lessons from Peer Reviews

FIGURE 6: COUNTRY LEVEL SUPPORT 2011-2015



Beyond Syria itself, and in terms of responsiveness to needs, aid volumes in relation to the (blunt instrument of) refugee numbers provides the picture as shown in Table 5 (Next page).

Funding to Lebanon and Jordan has risen in accordance with increases in refugee volumes, therefore, and a similar increase has taken place in Iraq. A similar increase has not taken place in Turkey. However, these decisions are likely to have been informed by regional geopolitical factors. Lebanon is particularly vulnerable, in stability terms, to the crisis; and Turkey, in the early stages, comprised a less conducive operating context for international support to the refugee flows (as has been documented elsewhere).⁶⁵

Limited earmarking

Although Norway does not formally earmark its assistance, the evaluation finds a limited level of intra-agreement earmarking (occurring in 9/60 instances 2011-2015). This occurs mostly within framework agreements, both civil society

⁶⁵ Darcy, J, Durston, S, Ballarin, F, Duncalf, J, Basbug, B, Buker, H (2015) An Independent Evaluation of UNICEF’s response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey 2012-2015

and UN,⁶⁶ where allocations to particular countries are specified. Amounts identified⁶⁷ were as follows:

This correlates with the finding above on Syria-related assistance, therefore, with comparatively high aid volumes specifically earmarked for Syria and to some extent Iraq. Notably the majority of earmarking occurred in 2014 and 2015, as the crisis grew. Partners in-country agreed that some assistance, whilst not formally earmarked, was sometimes ‘encouraged’ by MFA to be allocated in particular directions.

Some more recent grant agreements specify political considerations also. An example comes from a 2015 ICRC grant,⁶⁸ where the majority of contributions are earmarked. Documentation records that ‘*Earmarking is made according to humanitarian needs as identified by the ICRC*

66 Partners receiving earmarked contributions were: NPA; NCA; ICRC; NRC; WFP; Norwegian Red Cross; UNHCR; Save the Children

67 These figures exclude contributions to the Middle East regionally: they are also reliant on documentation in archives which is incomplete/inconsistent in some cases.

68 QZA 15-0216

TABLE 5: FUNDING COMPARED TO REFUGEE NUMBERS

		2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Lebanon	Refugee numbers ⁶⁹	74,537	156,612	326,000	1,147,244	1,075,637
	Aid volumes (NOK 1000)	12,973	30,361	92,611	103,648	279,880
Turkey	Refugee numbers	884,084	137,756	515,000	1,065,279	2,181,293
	Aid volumes	250	9,992	12,000	15,000	42,535
Jordan	Refugee numbers	94,059	144,997	550,000	620,441	633,644
	Aid volumes	1,345	116	47,794	53,771	162,999
Iraq	Refugee numbers	30,554	65,527	205,000	228,484	244,765
	Aid volumes	15,742	-	16,950	158,872	209,626

TABLE 6: EARMARKED FUNDING PER COUNTRY (MNOK)

Syria ⁷⁰	Jordan	Lebanon	Iraq	Turkey
437	25	40	111	0

and Norwegian Red Cross and based on Norwegian political priorities.’ Donor dialogue notes for WFP, also in 2015, emphasise the importance of education as a political priority for Norway, and how WFP may support this agenda.

69 Figures from UNHCR response plans 2012-2016

70 Includes support to within Syria and support to Syrian refugees and IDPs via WFP and UNHCR

Funding modalities are evolving to match the evolution of the crisis

In common with other humanitarian and development actors, Norway's funding mechanisms are evolving. As well as wider MFA and Norad framework agreements, the Section for Humanitarian Affairs has implemented multi-year funding agreements to enable more predictable and flexible funding.⁷¹ Partners interviewed in-country greatly welcomed these, though also pointed out that many of Norway's flexible humanitarian resources continue to be only available on an annual basis. The tension between short-term funding streams and protracted needs such as in education have created negative effects on the ground, including high transaction costs for partners (and therefore compromised efficiency); and reduced leverage and credibility with government partners in particular.

As the crisis evolves, some bilateral actors have already moved towards 'blended' responses, combining humanitarian and development

⁷¹ A commitment under the Humanitarian Policy and also under Good Humanitarian Principle 12

resources. Norway thus far has retained these as separate, – in part due to the absence of an integrated strategic framework - though the resilience discourse provides an opportunity for their combination.

OTHER AGENCIES:

Denmark has commissioned a paper to inform its thinking on the need for 'blended' humanitarian and development responses in the Syria crisis, with reference to other emergencies globally. **Sweden's** five-year Strategy for the Syria crisis, whilst it references development rather than humanitarian financing, seeks to connect the two through the framework of resilience.

To what extent are activities being implemented as part of a coherent portfolio, rather than as piecemeal individual activities?

A key contextual dimension of the Syria crisis has been its diversity. Unfolding differently in each affected country, it is now understood as a set of varied but inter-related crises, each shaped by differing dynamics and variables. These include national and sectarian politics and

policies; social and economic factors; geopolitical relationships; and other factors.⁷²

Thus, no assumption can be made that interventions supported by Norway could, or should, be implemented as a single unified portfolio. The *degree of structure* in the interventions which comprise Norway's 'portfolio' in relation to the Syria crisis, is therefore considered here.

Not a 'portfolio' approach

Given the responsive approach adopted, Norway's assistance to the Syria crisis has therefore not been proactively or explicitly organised by applying a 'portfolio' model. Instead, its prioritization of responsiveness means that its content comprises an assortment of initiatives, woven together by a common thread of responsiveness to needs, but which are not explicitly, or intended to be, implemented as a synergistic model.

⁷² As documented for example in the Syria Common Context Analysis (Slim, H and Trombetta, L (2014) op.cit)

Diverse institutional arrangements

The institutional arrangements of the Syria response are comparatively unstructured⁷³ within the Norwegian aid system. Until 2013 Syria-related meetings were held, but these were discontinued due to the increasing numbers attending and resulting challenges to decision-making. The reporting line of the Ankara Embassy to the South East Europe section, and the relative separation of activities funded through Norad framework agreements, have not helped coherence.

Within MFA itself, the proliferating number of Sections involved in the Syria response (12 plus Embassies in 2015), combined with the absence of an overarching strategic statement, means that the response has been managed largely Section-by-Section. A core group of those involved – particularly the Section for Humanitarian affairs and Middle East and North Africa – are in regular contact and the Section for Humanitarian Affairs requests commentary across

⁷³ Many of those interviewed were not clear about what these arrangements were.

MFA, including Embassies, on proposed actions and initiatives. Archival information finds a largely bilateral model however between partners and the relevant MFA Section, Norad, or Embassy.⁷⁴ Partners interviewed were clear that their main, and usually only, interlocutor is the funding Section or Department. The Section for the Middle East and North Africa takes an overview, but under intensive time constraints, cannot provide active oversight, of the response.

Not a comprehensively ‘regional’ approach

Beyond the mixed approach to alignment undertaken above, Norway’s assistance to affected countries does not appear to have been organised through a ‘regional’ approach. The fact that the response in Turkey formally reports to the South East Europe Section of MFA is indicative of this.⁷⁵ Moreover, the different profile of activities implemented in countries – with e.g. gender as a priority in the strategic objectives for Jordan

⁷⁴ Of 60 in total initiatives and framework agreements analysed, only four reference in written form co-ordination or communication with other parts of the aid management system beyond the immediate funding source

⁷⁵ Though Humanitarian Section are clear that contact with the Ankara Embassy is frequent.

for 2015 but not elsewhere in the region – also suggest a comparatively individualised approach.

As the crisis has evolved, however, the importance of a regional dimension to organising assistance has grown in importance. It is reflected for example in the development of the collective 3RPs, where the involved countries’ response plans, including Turkey, all come under a single (UN-housed) umbrella. Norway’s model of assistance – perhaps because of the overarching strategic gap above – has not yet caught up with this development.

Embassy-managed initiatives – varied levels of coherence

On a smaller scale, Embassy-managed projects, whilst they include many valuable initiatives and some examples of innovative/ catalytic efforts,⁷⁶ do not in any of the four cases examined aggregate up to a portfolio greater than the sum of their respective parts. Overall, these comparatively small-scale efforts spread a diverse

⁷⁶ For example from Beirut, the National Agenda for the Future of Syria, being implemented with ECSWA

range of initiatives (though some individual grant streams funded by MFA Sections do present coherent intended aims as an organising framework e.g. Peace and Reconciliation initiatives managed by the Beirut Embassy).

The evaluation has also encountered some Embassy-funded initiatives whose contribution to the overall strategic intent is unclear. The table below illustrates the financial volume of the respective portfolios and the range of initiatives

incorporated within them (in Turkey, the Embassy had funding for only three initiatives):

In management, rather than substantive terms, locally-administered portfolios reflect greater coherence than at central level, with staff working more closely together to implement grant management streams. Reporting however still takes place upwards to the individual MFA Section from whom funds have been drawn down, rather than to an ‘oversight’ function within the Ministry as a whole.

An implicit organising framework

Nonetheless, it would be inaccurate to characterise Norway’s assistance to the Syria crisis as somehow ‘incoherent’ or lacking any structure at all. Some *implicit principles* have provided, in fact, an organising framework.

- Firstly, the balanced approach to resource allocation to partners, above, provides an important organising principle. Whilst the degree of intent behind this is uncertain, the evidence is clear that this has structured delivery to the Syria regional response
- Secondly the adoption, at least until 2015, of a *focused approach* to strategic priorities. Whilst similarly implicit, this has also provided a means of structuring the assistance (though this appears to be changing in 2015 at least)
- Thirdly, less related to bureaucratic systems but more to the underlying culture of Norwegian ODA, some apparent characteristics of its assistance, identified in evidence base studied here, also appear to influence choices. These are summarised in Box 1 (Next page).

TABLE 7: EMBASSY MANAGED GRANTS

Embassy	Portfolio value (Syria-related) (NOK)	Stabilisation/peace-building	Resilience	Food security	Host government infrastructure/capacity	Civil society capacity	Education	Cultural heritage/media	Gender
Amman	13 mill.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Damascus ⁷⁷	12 mill.	✓						✓	
Beirut	18 mill.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Turkey	6.45 mill.				✓		✓		

⁷⁷ In practice, the distinction between projects managed by the Beirut and Damascus Embassies is blurred, as they share a single grants officer, hosted at the Beirut Embassy

BOX 1: CHARACTERISTICS OF NORWAY'S ASSISTANCE TO THE SYRIA CRISIS

- **A principled (but pragmatic) approach:** Several examples from the Syria response are available: for instance, the transportation and removal of chemical weapons during 2013 and 2014, where Norway, alongside Denmark, stepped forward to respond to this pressing and politically sensitive need in relation to UN Security Council Resolution 2118. By any standards, this activity marks a major contribution to building the pathway to resolve the crisis. It is an example of the sort of quiet but pragmatic diplomatic action on which Norway's international reputation for peacebuilding has been built.
- **Constancy of partnership:** Norway's willingness in the Syria crisis to stand by commitments to causes and target groups which become – in the fluid dynamics of a complex emergency – less fashionable or prioritised among donors, is evident. Norway is one of the very few donors in the region who have continued to provide significant support to Palestinian groups, whose difficulties have been exacerbated by the Syria regional crisis. This is an area where funding is increasingly hard to find.
- **Risk-willing and tolerant of failure:** Norway has embarked on high-risk, but potentially high-gain, activities which have pushed the boundaries of the international response. It was an early actor, in cross-border interventions from Turkey, which then encouraged others to join. It has also funded, from the Amman Embassy, comparatively high-risk interventions relating to the provision of services to Syrian survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, through UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women.
- **Leading by example:** Norway has acted as 'first responder' in many Syria-related instances, encouraging others to follow. Examples include its NOK 30m contribution to the World Bank Trust Fund in Lebanon, to which it was the first (and for a time the only) donor. Norway made early contributions to the pooled fund managed by UNOCHA for the cross-border work; it has also provided considerable support to the Red Cross, for work in both government-controlled areas of Syria, and zones where the government lacks overall control.
- **Embedding democratic values:** Many of Norway's Peace and Reconciliation-funded projects reflect efforts to ensure the embedding of democratic change into peacebuilding and state-building efforts in Syria. The long tradition of work with the media (the 'fourth power' in the Norwegian democratic model) has continued in the Syria crisis, for example the training of journalists through projects funded by the Amman and Beirut Embassies.⁷⁸

The *lack of demand for visibility* is also a feature of Norwegian assistance. There are signs that this is under pressure, with some Embassies building communication activities into their future plans, but partners universally praised Norwegian assistance for its willingness to '*do the right thing for the right reason*', imposing fewer requirements for visibility than other donors.

To what extent does the aid management system require the alignment of activities with those of key partners?

More externally, the international response to the Syria crisis has moved from an initially fragmented approach to prioritising external co-ordination as a substantive area in itself, for example through the Whole of Syria approach. Norway is playing a major role in this strategic and political-level co-ordination, reflected, for example, in its co-hosting, alongside Germany, the UK, the UN and Kuwait, of the February 2016 pledging conference, which raised \$12 billion in pledges.

⁷⁸ The 2016 Strategy on the Freedom of Speech and Independent Media emphasises increased international support to these areas: https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/pm_ytringsfrihet/id2470543/ accessed 18.2.16

Currently, the 2016-2017 3RP,⁷⁹ including its component Country Plans, provides a coherent (and for neighbouring country plans, nationally-owned) vehicle for directing assistance to the crisis. Norway's efforts to ensure external alignment of activities have taken place within this wider context. However, co-ordination structures are of varied levels of maturity within countries and sectors, meaning that the conditions for external alignment are varied.

Alignment dependent on partners

MFA framework agreements reviewed do not include alignment with partners as a condition for funding. This is in contrast to Norad civil society framework agreements, which require alignment as part of funding requirements. Nonetheless, of 45 projects analysed, over half (26) recognize external alignment as an important dimension of their response. Varied approaches are adopted, however, with some partners interpreting it as engagement with other 'in-house' initiatives, whilst others reference participation in wider sector plans, such as that for education in Lebanon.

⁷⁹ United Nations (2016) op.cit.

Field visits also indicated a strong emphasis in practice on alignment, particularly as its emphasis in the international discourse has grown. Examples include the use of the relevant Country Plan of the 2016-2017 3RP as a guiding framework, and the importance of coordination for NGOs working on cross-border responses from Turkey. The drive for alignment was agreed to come from two sources however: a) the demands of context e.g. sector working groups for health or education, or the relevant cluster mechanism for humanitarian assistance and b) from partners themselves, as part of good humanitarian and development practice. Alignment was not 'pushed' by the relevant Embassy or MFA Section.

Varied approaches have been adopted by Embassies, with the Ankara Embassy proactively making efforts to ensure co-ordination or a 'cross-Norway' approach to delivering assistance in-country, for example in hosting regional meetings to discuss specific issues. In Beirut, however, partners recollected attending only one joint meeting in the Beirut Embassy during the last year. However, partners did cite co-ordina-

tion being 'generally encouraged' in discussions with Embassy staff; who themselves play major roles in strategic and political co-ordination at the country and regional level.

Overall, therefore, ensuring external alignment has not been a focus of Norway's aid management in relation to Syria. Where it has occurred, it has happened responsively, through partners' recognition of it as part of good humanitarian and development practice.

MANAGEMENT OF NORWEGIAN ASSISTANCE TO THE SYRIA CRISIS

'Our humanitarian engagement must be based not only on principles and values but also on knowledge and expertise. Our management of humanitarian funds must lead to desired and measurable results'⁸⁰

As Section 4 above explains, no single co-ordinating body exists to *actively manage* Norway's ODA to the crisis, with the Section for the Middle

⁸⁰ See Government of Norway (2008) op.cit.

East and North Africa taking an overview, rather than oversight role. This section of the evaluation assesses how Norway's response to the crisis has been managed through its *human resources; decision-making processes* in terms of flexibility and timeliness; and *requirements on partners for performance reporting*.

KEY FINDINGS

Staffing: Norway's staffing has not caught up with the evolving scale of the crisis. Staff are heavily overstretched, with commensurate effects on risk (strategic, operational, financial and political). Mixed skillsets are available, with Embassy staff being primarily diplomatic and political, rather than technical humanitarian experts. Available external technical resources have not been used to maximum extent, risking the quality of the response.

Decision making: Norway has a highly flexible and agile model of decision-making, arising from the responsive and opportunity-based model adopted. Turnaround times are comparatively swift, and the system is very open to adaptation. Partners highly value Norwegian assistance for these characteristics. However, whilst it has been highly appropriate in terms of the fluid needs of a complex crisis, this flexibility risks compromising rigour and reducing accountability. It also acts as a disincentive to the more strategic approach required for a now-protracted crisis.

Performance measurement: No overall performance management systems exist in relation to the Syria crisis and few demands are placed on partners to report on delivery and effectiveness. This aspect of the control environment has been undifferentiated from standard approaches, despite intensified needs for robust accountability.

To what extent does the aid management system enable appropriate use of available human resources and expertise to facilitate efficient Norwegian assistance?

Staffing volumes have not kept pace with the scale of the crisis

In common with many small administrations,⁸¹ Norway has limited staff to manage its Syria crisis response. Increases in aid volumes as the crisis unfolded, as well as the growing complexity required from the response, have not been matched with commensurate human resourcing.

⁸¹ The 2015 evaluation of Sweden's Humanitarian Strategy found a similarly 'stretched system'. See InDevelop (2015) op.cit.

TABLE 8: SECTION FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS - AID VOLUMES, AGREEMENTS AND STAFFING

Section for Humanitarian Affairs	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Total (NOK)	34,911	147,657	652,400	482,485	1,325,670	2 billion
Total number of agreements	7	14	23	33	60	Unavailable
Staff	1	1	1	2	3	3 +

TABLE 9: ROYAL NORWEGIAN EMBASSIES - STAFFING

Embassy	2015
Damascus	1.5
Ankara	2
Amman	5 in total
Beirut	2.5

It has not been feasible to acquire precise numbers of staffing available to the crisis, since for most Sections, existing staff manage ‘Syria-related’ projects as part of their ongoing tasks. Instead, staffing from the Section for Humanitarian Affairs (representing 60% of aid volumes) and Embassies are used as a proxy. Table 8 reflects the Section for Humanitarian Affairs’ aid volumes and number of agreements per year, in relation to staffing available (full time equivalents).

Table 9 shows embassy-staffing in 2015 available to support the management of ODA (alongside other duties).

The steep and sharp increase in resourcing and, more relevantly, agreements, has therefore not been matched by staffing increases, with three staff in the Section for Humanitarian Affairs managing, for 2016, amounts approaching NOK 2 billion.

OTHER AGENCIES (HQ FUNCTIONS):

Sweden have one desk officer supported by a team of grant officers to manage humanitarian funding, plus five people to manage the development funding to the Syria crisis regionally.

Denmark employ two staff members to manage their humanitarian assistance, and a team of two, plus one full time project co-ordinator, to manage development funding.

All partners referred to the immense overstretch of MFA staff, including in local Embassies, whilst also praising their high levels of commitment and responsiveness. This overstretch has had several effects:

- Limited time to ‘plan ahead’ – important for a now-protracted crisis.
- Limited scope to conduct detailed decision-making processes around partner choice, resulting in sometimes default decisions to work with familiar partners.
- Insufficient opportunity to conduct detailed scrutiny of proposed initiatives, including screening for conflict/fragility and political sensitivity.

- Limited ability to provide close oversight of partners and funded initiatives, such as on their selection processes for local partners.

This limited staffing is of particular concern for the kind of high-risk and politically sensitive response that the Syria crisis presents. They are exacerbated by the kind of highly devolved aid management system which the Norwegian model practices. Limited staffing, by necessity, reduces safeguards and increases the full range of risks. However, there is some evidence of MFA recognition of this: the Beirut Embassy will shortly receive an education specialist to support its growing portfolio; the Damascus Embassy will receive one additional staff member; and the Section for Humanitarian Affairs will also receive additional staff.

Skillsets of mixed appropriateness for the crisis response

Within MFA and particularly at Embassy level, staff possess primarily diplomatic and political training. Whilst these are valuable assets in a highly politicised crisis such as Syria, they do not always offset the technical capabilities required

to appraise and assess (particularly humanitarian) project design and implementation in complex operating environments - an issue on which several partners commented.

Within the Section for Humanitarian Affairs, some staff have longstanding technical expertise. These abilities are appreciated by partners, who refer to *'speaking the same language'* as the staff of the Section for Humanitarian Affairs.

Mixed use of external technical resources

A range of external technical resources are available to support the organisation of the Syria crisis response. Yet these have not been comprehensively utilised, as follows:

- *Norad technical expertise on conflict and fragility* – particularly important in a complex protracted crisis – has not been engaged in the humanitarian dimension of the Syria response, other than a request to technically appraise projects following the London pledging conference. Yet this specialised advice – which is part of Norad's formal remit

within the aid management system⁸² - would add valuable technical input to a response which requires an increasing level of sophistication.

- There is evidence of external technical resources being used by Humanitarian section to inform the Syria response, such as seminars and the funding of humanitarian research by universities and research centres.⁸³ A working group dedicated to better coordination between humanitarian and longterm aid in protracted crises has been discussing the Syria crisis. However, the extent to which this thinking is subsequently taken forward and utilised in implementing responses is unclear.

The deployment of such professional knowledge is potentially immensely valuable as the crisis moves into protracted territory. Technically

⁸² The division of responsibilities between Norad and MFA has been under discussion for some time, and will be discussed at a governmental conference in April 2016

⁸³ Tufts University/Feinstein International Center (<http://fic.tufts.edu/>) and Overseas Development Initiative (<http://www.odi.org/programmes/humanitarian-policy-group/>) and Humanitarian Policy Group (<http://www.forskningradet.no/prognett-norglobal/HUMPOL/1253968150256>).

intricate responses are required, which blend humanitarian and development thinking.⁸⁴ Insufficient use of these assets, particularly in a context of overstretched staffing, risks undermining the quality of the response and also contributes to a higher risk profile.

To what extent do existing institutional systems and structures for Norway's assistance to the Syria crisis enable flexibility and adaptation of response?

A highly flexible and agile decision-making system which is opportunity-based and supports adaptation

The flexibility and agility of the Norwegian aid management system, built on responsiveness and trust, is its defining characteristic.⁸⁵ This is reflected in comparatively light procedural requirements, and the non-prescriptive approach to targeting described in Section 4.1 above.

⁸⁴ Other small development agencies have commissioned work on this e.g. Danida (2015a) Coherence in Conflict: bringing Humanitarian and Development Streams together Copenhagen: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark

⁸⁵ This has been well documented – see Norad (2014) Evaluation of Norway's Support to Haiti after the 2010 earthquake.

The evidence finds Norwegian assistance to be highly supportive of *adaptation* to the needs of the crisis, in line with the trust-based approach described above. The main vehicle for this responsiveness is framework agreements, with Addendums providing a mechanism for channeling additional resources as needs and opportunities arise. This on the whole is considered by partners and staff to work well, reducing administrative burdens and enabling the kind of swift responses that a complex emergency requires. Only limited justification is required for changes, according to multiple partners interviewed. The recent adoption of framework agreements within the Section for Humanitarian Affairs has further facilitated this responsiveness.

These factors combined render Norwegian assistance highly popular with partners in the Syria crisis, who often employ it to 'gap-fill' more demanding requirements of other donors. The limited administrative burdens it creates is much appreciated. It is moreover in stark contrast with more demanding donors, who approach partners

less as trusted equals, and more as sub-contractees.⁸⁶

The retaining of 25% of reserve humanitarian funding for unanticipated needs further supports flexibility. This supports the potential – though unproven however through this study – to respond as needs arise in e.g. sudden-onset crises. In the absence of any kind of rigorous allocation formulae, however, it also opens up scope for this resourcing to finance 'pet' or politically expedient initiatives, something which clear allocation criteria would offset.

OTHER SYSTEMS:

Sweden's humanitarian funding is subject to a strict allocation process which operates on an annual basis. **Denmark** is discussing how to more closely link humanitarian assistance to the crisis with effectiveness and efficiency issues. 80% of Danish humanitarian assistance now goes to protracted crises.

⁸⁶ Evaluations of Danish and Swedish humanitarian assistance note similar findings. See - InDevelop (2015) op.cit.; Syria case study and Mowjee, T (2015) op.cit.

The limitations of flexibility

The much-lauded and highly-valued flexibility of Norwegian assistance therefore has rendered it both *appropriate* for a complex and politically-sensitive emergency and *highly valued* by its partners. However, particularly as the Syria crisis is now firmly protracted, there are two areas which suggest limitations.

Firstly, and at times as a result of sudden inflows of resources, high volumes of addendums within short periods of time have been used. For example, in June 2015, an additional NOK 500 million was granted by Parliament to the Syria response. To successfully disburse this money, responses to ICRC global appeals for 2015 include addendums to the framework agreement in September 2015 (additional contribution of NOK 150 million of which 35 million was earmarked for Syria); November 2015 (additional contribution made to an HQ appeal for NOK 20 million); and December 2015 (additional NOK 10m). An Addendum had already been made in May 2015 contributing an additional NOK 189 million to global appeals.

This frequency indicates that the strengths of a responsive system at times tip over into a *reactive one*, with resulting effects on transaction costs for staff and partners. It also creates a disincentive for partners to forward plan.

Analysing expenditure in the most recent year for which data is available, 2015, against intentions set out in that year's *fordelingsnotat* of the Section for Humanitarian Affairs, finds that amounts dedicated considerably exceed the allocations identified for affected countries, particularly Syria as shown in Table 10.

Therefore, the adaptation permitted by the aid management system, whilst it has permitted very considerable flex in terms of changing needs of a complex crisis, also constrains the adoption of a more *structured approach*, with resources allocated against strategically and politically agreed priorities ex-ante. This is particularly important now that the crisis is firmly protracted, and a more coherent and co-ordinated international response is gathering pace.

TABLE 10: FUNDING AGAINST INTENTIONS BY COUNTRY

Country	Funded	Requirements identified
Syria	612,906m	Exceeds (more than five times)
Lebanon	279,880m	Exceeds (more than twice)
Jordan	162,999	Exceeds
Turkey	42,535m	Exceeds

TABLE 11: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES IDENTIFIED OF FLEXIBILITY

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to respond swiftly when important needs arise as in for example the transportation of chemical weapons • Ability to adjust targeting responsively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of structure in terms of alignment of resources with intended achievements • Scope for becoming reactive rather than responsive to needs (reflected in frequent Addendums)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited demands on partners in terms of justifying adaptation, which make Norwegian assistance highly valued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited demands on partners can also imply reduced accountability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ability for partners to approach MFA as needs arise, which makes for greater agility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarity with this system creates a disincentive to forward planning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited time demands on hard-pressed staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of rigour in decision-making and oversight
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credibility and leverage – in spheres beyond aid and moving into diplomacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norway can be seen as a ‘soft touch’ when it comes to funding requests

Advantages and disadvantages of flexibility

Key overall advantages and disadvantages of Norway’s highly flexible approach to managing its Syria-related assistance identified by the evaluation are shown in Table 11.

To what extent do Norway’s decision-making processes enable swift and timely delivery of assistance?

Swift, but individualised, decision-making

Within the Norwegian aid management system, decision-making is comparatively individualised. Interlocutors for this study, as documented elsewhere,⁸⁷ agree that the system prioritises professional judgement rather than systematised assessment or decision-making. Much autonomy is vested in individuals.

⁸⁷ See Norad (2014a) Evaluation of Norway’s support to Haiti after the 2010 earthquake.

This individualised character supports comparatively swift turnaround times. Field study found partner assessments of MFA (including Embassy) responsiveness and decisions to be consistently highly positive. Of 40 interviews with partners conducted, only 5 referenced delays in responsiveness, though observations were made regarding ‘last minute’ requests for funding submissions to be drawn up.

This degree of responsiveness has arguably facilitated precisely the kind of agility that the Syria regional crisis demands. Analysis of 45 projects found only four uses of no-cost extensions; and no partners interviewed had experienced major delays in implementation due to issues in the aid management system. This agility is also reflected in the way that Norwegian assistance has been able to respond with such swift pragmatism to important yet politically sensitive needs: such as cross-border assistance, and the transportation of chemical weapons.

Lack of a defined sign-off threshold

The lack of a clearly defined sign-off threshold for funding allocations also provides scope for agility, permitting the kind of rapid decision-making so essential in an acute humanitarian crisis. It presents an equal scope for bottlenecks, however, should senior managers or politicians opt to intervene.

The evidence of this study (based on archival correspondence and partner perception) is that this lack of specific bureaucratic requirements have facilitated rather than impeded the kind of decision-making needed by the Syria crisis response. However, as a trade-off, they have also opened up scope for close engagement by political representatives in funding decisions, something which most interlocutors agree is comparatively intensive under the current administration.

To what extent does the aid management system emphasise follow-up on the quality and results of assistance, including of partners' efforts?

Monitoring and evaluation has been an ongoing challenge in the international Syria crisis response, particularly within Syria itself, where access is highly constrained. Many areas of Syria simply lack any form of reliable information. However, this is changing with the advent of the Whole of Syria Approach; and a growing body of evaluative evidence is available. The Norwegian aid management system's approaches are therefore assessed in this light.

No aggregate-level results based management and few demands on partners

In common with other evaluations of the Norwegian aid management system, this study finds weak performance management systems in relation to the Syria crisis.⁸⁸ The lack of a strategic overview with clear intended results compromises the basis for accountability of the response at aggregate level. No annual reports appear to issue on the performance of the funding overall. Even in 2015, where the *fordelingsnotater* of the Section for Humanitarian Affairs provided a more structured approach to assistance, no intended results are identified and no formal performance reporting is available.

Demands on partners are few: whilst grant letters contain a standard clause, stating that 'follow up' may be conducted by the Ministry, the specifics of 'follow up' are not defined. Whilst both Oslo and Embassy-based staff invest much time in visiting initiatives at field level, no

⁸⁸ See for example Norad (2014b) Can we demonstrate the difference that Norwegian Aid makes; Lindkvist I & Dixon, V (2014) 'To 'feel good', or to 'do good'? Why we need institutional changes to ensure a results focus in Norwegian development assistance,' *Journal of Development Effectiveness*, 6:4, 350-360,

objective selection or performance criteria are applied, meaning that no systematic overview is available. In a highly individualised system, this presents risk.

Within a structured analysis of funded initiatives, detailed results frameworks are also observed in a minority of agreements (14/45). These vary in quality, with some being detailed and sophisticated, and others mostly input/output focused.⁸⁹ Grant agreement letters also require final narrative and financial reports, including audits, to close projects. In a sample of 45 projects, however, narrative reports were present in only nine cases. These were also of highly varied depth and quality. Notably, Embassy-managed initiatives face higher demands, with all 'closed' grants managed by the Amman and Beirut Embassies including final narrative reports. The Embassy in Amman has undertaken an evaluation of some of its Syria-related projects; and Beirut Embassy are planning to conduct review of its grants stream. Norad requirements, reflected

in both agreements and partner accounts, are more demanding here.

Consequently, the results measurement aspect of the control environment has not been fully differentiated or intensified for the Syria regional response. Yet high-risk and politically complex operating environments open up greater scope for compromised effectiveness and efficiency, and the violation of Do No Harm principles. The needs for robust accountability procedures – particularly in relation to impartiality, discussed in Section 4.2 above – are therefore intensified.

⁸⁹ These findings broadly accord with Norad (2012) Evaluation of monitoring and evaluation in six Norwegian civil society organisations and Norad (2014b) op.cit.

5. Conclusions

This evaluation finds overall, in the complex, risky and dangerous operational theatre of the Syria regional crisis, Norwegian assistance has been planned, managed and organised to mixed effect. Its overall findings are:

- Firstly, whilst many aspects of the Norwegian aid management system are conducive to servicing the complex crisis of Syria, this is the result of a responsive model, rather than arising from proactive differentiation for a complex emergency. As the crisis evolves to become protracted, this model's advantages may become less relevant to needs.
- Secondly, the aid management system in relation to the Syria crisis is experiencing imbalance, being weighed down by the lack of differentiation above. This is constraining its strengths, which permit principled, swift and often courageous responses.

Planning

Norwegian assistance adopts an approach of responsiveness – working through often-familiar partners to deliver assistance on a ‘needs arising’ basis. It has not opted to define or adopt a coherent overarching framework for its Syria regional response, though humanitarian assistance (which comprises the bulk of the response) shows signs of a more structured approach to planning since 2015. Whilst this approach has facilitated a ‘closer to the ground’ approach, and with its responsiveness very highly valued by partners, it is currently experiencing a strategic ‘gap’. This is likely to become more significant as the crisis continues to be protracted; being needed to help to clarify goals, prioritise actions and communicate intent to others.

Organisation

Norway has continued to adopt its trust-based approach to selecting partners for the Syria response. This is linked to wider political legitimacy issues in the Norwegian context of State-society relations. Yet the systems to ensure that the specialised approaches required for working in

fragile, conflict-affected and politically sensitive environments, are implemented, are not yet in place. Attention to risk management and mitigation has been limited but is increasing in relation to humanitarian assistance.

Norway's aid management system does not apply formalised decision-making criteria for funding. Allocations have prioritised emergency response and humanitarian assistance rather than conflict prevention and resolution. The response has not explicitly been framed in terms of resilience. Coherence and co-ordination are not strong features of the assistance, with the responsive model taking precedence. However, a set of implicit principles have shaped the response, including a balanced approach to resource allocation; a focused approach to strategic priorities (though with changes in this in 2015) and a set of characteristics which prioritise principled, risk-tolerant and often courageous activity. External alignment is largely occurring in response to context, and on the basis of partner recognition of its importance.

Management

The complexities of the Syria crisis make it highly demanding on staff resources. Norway's aid management system in this respect has been vastly overstretched. This, and the lack at Embassy level of an humanitarian skillset, are contributory factors to the high risk profile of the assistance. Likewise, the limited reflection of engagement with external technical expertise in implementation is contributing to a weak control environment.

Positively, limited procedural requirements have permitted timely and flexible responses.⁹⁰ Institutional mechanisms such as increased reserve funding and the lack of defined sign-off thresholds in theory support swifter and more agile responses. However, in a highly individualized system, they also open scope for individual or political interests to influence decision-making. Performance reporting requirements are similarly undifferentiated from Norway's standard approaches. Yet in high-risk and politically complex operating environments, the scope for compro-

⁹⁰ See Good Humanitarian Donorship principle 5

mised effectiveness and the violation of *Do No Harm* principles is increased. Greater attention to these issues throughout the implementation chain is therefore needed.

Characterizing Norwegian assistance to the Syrian regional crisis

Overall, this evaluation finds evidence of some significant strengths in the Norwegian aid management system. These have enabled a high quality response in many areas to the Syria regional crisis. They include:

- A principled (but pragmatic) approach (an emphasis on doing the right thing, for the right reasons,⁹¹ rather than for political or other more immediate benefit).
- Prioritising balance as part of fairness (for example, regarding resources channelled through different types of partners).
- Constancy of partnership, even when causes or issues become less fashionable.

⁹¹ As per the international humanitarian principle of humanity

- Leading by example, breaking ground in the hope of encouraging others to follow.
- Risk-willing and tolerant of failure, funding comparatively high risk activities for the greater good, such as the major increases in funding to Syria itself, and to cross-border work.
- An emphasis on 'quiet diplomacy' (undertaking actions without the demands for visibility which characterise many international actors currently).

However, the system is also experiencing challenges, mostly related to the undifferentiated approach described above. Despite its very significant strengths to date, the protracted nature of the crisis in 2016 brings into question the continued relevance of the model. Limitations include:

- Safeguards such as an overarching strategic statement of intent are not yet in place, opening up scope for overly opportunistic and unstrategised choices.

- The culture of ‘mutual respect’ and trust surrounding partnerships place few demands on partners, an approach which is highly valued – but overrides e.g. demands for systematic justification for approaches, or accountability imperatives.
- Insufficient human resources and mixed use of external technical resources to inform implementation, means that assistance risks lacking technical rigour.
- Procedural safeguards, such as to ensure adherence to the International Humanitarian Principles throughout the implementation chain, as well as to provide the necessary degree of separation from short-term or political interests, are not yet in place.

Overall, the system does not prioritise the promotion of accountability, efficiency and effectiveness.⁹²

⁹² Good Humanitarian Donorship principle 15

Seeking balance

Bringing these factors together, Norway’s planning, organisation and management of its assistance to the Syria crisis might be characterised as experiencing imbalance. The strengths of the system, which have enabled principled, swift and flexible responses to needs within the Syria crisis, are weighed down by an undifferentiated

approach. In the highly complex and politically sensitive arena of the Syria crisis, this is exacerbating risk.

Accordingly, amid the unprecedented challenges of the Syria crisis, these principles and values, alongside the aid management system itself, are coming under strain.

FIGURE 7: SEEKING BALANCE – NORWEGIAN AID MANAGEMENT IN THE SYRIA CRISIS

- Principled
- Trust-based
- Responsive
- Flexible
- Catalytic and leveraging
- Constant
- Risk-tolerant willing to accept failure
- Timely
- Courageous



- Lacking strategic framework
- Lack of rigour in planning and allocation
- Overstretched staff
- Mixed use of external technical resources
- No specific screening for conflict sensitivity
- Lack of emphasis on learning and accountability
- Limited oversight

Risk

This strain comes into sharpest focus in Norway's approach to **risk** in the Syria regional crisis. Norway's willingness to undertake high-risk activities for the greater good is admirable, reflecting a principled and high-minded approach. Yet this should not preclude robust and comprehensive systems to identify and manage operational, financial, strategic and political risk. Whilst a tighter approach to operational risk is evident within humanitarian assistance since 2015, Norway's 'safety mechanisms' continue to be largely implicit (experienced partners, staff commitment, a balanced approach to resource allocations). This may well be appropriate in other development and indeed many humanitarian contexts. For the complex geopolitical terrain of Syria, however, they are insufficient and incomplete.

Intersections with the political narrative

Moreover, the highly politicised nature of the crisis and its domestic implications, have brought ODA into close connection with the political and diplomatic spheres of the response. Assistance to the Syria crisis is, quite clearly, closely entwined with the prevailing political narrative, reflected for example in its prioritisation of education. The tension between Norway as a political actor and the need to ensure the impartiality of humanitarian organisations is well recognised in Norway's Humanitarian Policy. Ensuring 'clear water' between political priorities and the Syria response can be safeguarded through items such as a strategic statement of intent relating to ODA (for which the conditions are now right); more transparent allocation formulae for dividing available resources to different aspects of the crisis; and a more explicit rationale for partner selection.⁹³

⁹³ 'Objective and rigorous decision-making criteria are required for donors to make impartial, equitable and proportionate resource allocations, to avoid the politicisation of aid, and to protect against "forgotten emergencies' OECD (2012) Towards Good Humanitarian Donorship: Lessons from 12 Peer Reviews p22

Limited transparency

Finally, the current aid management system, in the experience of this evaluation, obscures much from view. Informalised and individualised decision-making; unclear criteria for partner selection and allocation; confusing and incomplete archiving of information; few demands for accountability; and a lack of learning systems all restrict transparency. 'Freedom of information' is illusory when limited information is actually available to access. Greater explicitness will make for improved transparency – and ensure that the sorts of values, above, which underlie the particularly Norwegian approach to aid, are given due credit.

Do Norway's systems provide an enabling environment for 'good aid' to the Syria regional crisis?

Norway's aid management model is therefore being tested by the intensities of the Syria crisis as never before. To return to the fundamental questions of this study, then: *Has Norway's aid management system, reflected in the planning, organisation and management of its assistance to the Syria crisis, provided an enabling environ-*

ment for 'good aid' to a highly complex – and highly political – humanitarian crisis?

The answer, on the evidence of this study, is Yes – but a qualified yes. By any standards, and particularly those set out at the start of this evaluation report, Norway's aid management system supports and enables 'good aid' to a complex regional emergency. It prioritises above all humanitarian needs. Its responsiveness enables the flexible approach so essential for a complex crisis. It advocates courage, and seeks out catalytic and important initiatives. It does not seek loud demonstrations of effectiveness, but prioritises quiet diplomacy. It is unafraid to lead the way, willing to take risks and accepting of potential failure.

Yet Norway's aid management system also renders the Syria crisis response inconsistently and incompletely 'intelligent' aid. Norway, in common with other bilateral actors, has not been prepared to respond to what has become a blended crisis at scale, occurring at a regional level, in politically volatile middle income countries. The Syria paradigm does not fit Norway's

familiar operating models, being neither a 'pure' humanitarian crisis, nor a traditional development challenge.

Norway's efforts to address this complex new paradigm have been hampered by its lack of differentiation for a complex crisis. Factors such as a lack of rigour in planning and allocation; the prioritization of relationships over systematic and evidence-based choices and the use of external technical resources; and a pressure for balance at the (theorized) expense of 'doing the right thing' have undermined the scope for a mature response. Acutely insufficient human resources are significantly exacerbating risk. The system does not consistently ensure the delivery of conflict- and fragility-sensitive aid, and is under-prepared to confidently ensure the implementation of Do No Harm. In these respects, it can learn from others.

By extension, these challenges have the potential to constrain Norway's 'good donorship' to the Syria regional crisis. Norway rightly takes pride in its hard-won reputation as a 'good donor' and a leading actor on the international stage. Yet

whilst its flexible and needs-based assistance, as well as its strong partnerships, are marks of its strengths,⁹⁴ other fault lines in the system – which the Syria regional crisis has thrown into sharp relief – means that Norway is not, at the current time, the 'best donor it can be' to this most complex of crises. An undifferentiated approach, combined with the insufficient safeguards described above, are constraining scope for excellence.

⁹⁴ See Good Humanitarian Donorship principles 6 and 12; see also OECD DAC (2012) op.cit. Lesson 7: Build Strong Partnerships (p25)

6. Recommendations

“Det vanskelige kan man gjøre med en gang, det umulige tar bare litt lengre tid”
[‘The difficult can be done straight away, the impossible just takes a little longer’]⁹⁵

The challenges to Norway’s aid management system highlighted by the Syria crisis are in many cases systemic. They have been thrust into sharp relief by the advent of an extraordinary regional crisis, which has both domestic and global ramifications.

These challenges go beyond the purely functional; they are fundamentally political. In some cases, they also speak to the core values and principles which underlie the composition of Norway’s aid management system.

Based on the findings and conclusions above, the question for aid managers and leadership within the Norwegian system, is therefore whether the current status quo is ‘good enough’. A sense of caution, and hesitancy to adapt, may constrain the appetite for change. Indeed, the evaluation team notes that other recent evalu-

ations of Norwegian assistance have identified similar issues, and made similar recommendations, to those presented here.⁹⁶

The Syria crisis is an unprecedented challenge. It has tested, and will continue to test, the Norwegian aid management system to its limit. Yet with increasing and persistent instability likely in this regional and elsewhere, the difficulties raised here are dilemmas which Norway will likely confront in the future.

Moreover, the amount of Norwegian resources being channelled to the crisis is increasingly vast. The responsibility on MFA for public accountability is thus acutely high. It will be important to demonstrate that the Norwegian aid management system has made the necessary changes, if it is to rise to meet the challenges which the future will likely present - as well as to deliver the kind of ‘intelligent aid’ to Syria and the region on which its international reputation as a ‘good donor’ rests.

Content and targeting of the recommendations

The recommendations below go both beyond the short term, and above individual aid managers. They are directed in part to both those with ability, should they choose to deploy it, to adapt the way that Norwegian assistance to the Syria crisis is planned, managed and organised.

The recommendations below seek to redress the current imbalance above. They do not propose any major strategic overhaul, nor any major change of direction. Rather, they aim to introduce the differentiation that an extraordinary crisis requires; incorporating greater structure whilst respecting and preserving the Norwegian system’s inherent strengths. They also serve as safeguards for enhanced accountability.

Some recommendations are straightforward to implement, others present more difficult choices. All, however, are feasible. Their implementation will support the future-proofing of a currently high-potential, but as yet imperfect, system for the Syria response.

⁹⁵ Fridtjof Nansen

⁹⁶ See for example the evaluation of assistance to Haiti post-earthquake (Norad 2014 op.cit).

RECOMMENDATIONS	
Planning	Who?
<p>1. Surround flexibility with structure</p> <p>The conditions are now right,¹⁶ and international good practice advocates, for an explicit strategic statement of intent of Norway's intentions regarding the Syria regional response. This does not have to be rigid or restrictive: it should articulate the dilemmas of the context and be revisited on a regular basis. But its presence will ensure that priorities are explicit, transparent and appropriately synergised with the international response. Key elements should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norway's vision for its assistance (explicitly linked to the resilience agenda) • Rules of engagement • Risk thresholds (what is an acceptable level of risk for Norway in the Syria crisis context) • Key intended strategic priorities • How a blended approach will be adopted <p>The strategy development process should be inclusive, involving consultation with Norway's key partners.</p>	<p><i>Section for the Middle East and North Africa</i></p>
<p>2. Acknowledge that the crisis is here to stay</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the volume of assistance available for multi-year agreements, in line with the protracted nature of the crisis and the actions of other bilateral actors, to 30% of available resourcing. However, make this condition upon partners' participation in the Whole of Syria response through the cluster system, and share information that will benefit all. • Re-balance financial resourcing to recognise the continued importance of conflict prevention and resolution, peace and security initiatives as part of the peacebuilding and statebuilding agenda. 	<p><i>Section for Humanitarian Affairs/ MFA political leadership</i></p>
Organisation	Who?
<p>3. Structure, and make transparent, allocations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a clear set of criteria for funding different strategic priorities, and clarify the balance of prioritisation between them. Make decision points explicit • With the strategic framework in place, require partners in future funding agreements to justify a) how they will respond to the strategic priorities set and b) the evidence base for their requirements. This does not need to be in detail, but a simple provision of the evidence base will enable MFA and Norad oversight of targeting and improve accountability and transparency of decision-making • Develop a communications plan to clarify how the IHPs are upheld in funding decisions, and their separation from political concerns related to the crisis. 	<p><i>MFA sections funding Syria-related initiatives</i></p>

<p>4. Be transparent and accountable for partner selection</p> <p>Within the context of highly valued relationships, recognise the public demand for, and right to, accountability for decision-making, and thereby increase the transparency on partner choice. This does not imply introducing a competitive element, but simply introducing greater structure and clarity. Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulate (and apply) clear rationales/criteria for partner selection in relation to the Syria crisis, which include conflict sensitivity, risk management and mechanisms for recruiting local partners • Prepare a matrix of comparative advantages required in relation to strategic priorities, above, which an inform, and provide a rationale for, partner selection on a rapid basis. 	<p><i>Section for Humanitarian Affairs and other sections appointing partners</i></p>
<p>Management</p>	<p>Who?</p>
<p>5. Accept that complex crises are resource-intensive</p> <p>Immediately augment the staffing available to the Section for Humanitarian Affairs in particular and, where appropriate, at Embassy level. Consider short-term appointments, contracts for Norwegian academic institutions or consultancy firms, the appointment of expert individuals, and/or the appointment of national officers within Embassies.</p>	<p><i>MFA political leadership</i></p>
<p>6. Respect the technical demands of the Syria crisis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Valuable learning is being lost through inadequate systems. A structured learning system needs to be developed, which could be designed and supported by an external body. • Make more systematic use of, and develop a better quality response through, the external technical resources available to MFA from Norad and other resources in Norway. This implies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Norad /academic /partner involvement in the development of the strategic framework for the Syria crisis response and in the structured learning system above. b) Inclusion of these resources in review meetings for the strategic framework above. 	<p><i>Section for the Middle East and North Africa and Section for Humanitarian Affairs</i></p>
<p>7. Be honest on risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a statement of risk (strategic, political, operational and financial) in the strategic framework, above. • Develop a 'risk framework' which partners are required to complete, as a condition for at least the first round of funding under the new strategic framework. This should be specifically geared to the Syria crisis; reflect the risk thresholds in the framework; and recognise strategic, political, operational and financial risk. It should also include a required statement on risk assessment procedures for assessing local partner suitability to deliver • Institute regular review meetings (as part of strategy framework review meetings, below) to consider the risks arising, and how these are being addressed. 	<p><i>Section for the Middle East and North Africa and Section for Humanitarian Affairs</i></p>

8. Make expectations clear

Whilst the fluidity of the Syria crisis has thus far rendered it difficult to define intended results ex-ante, its protracted nature and likely trajectory in neighbouring countries at least, means that intended achievements can now be reasonably defined. Thus:

- For all new agreements, once intended achievements are defined, partners should be required to demonstrate how they will contribute to their achievement
- Enhance monitoring and evaluations demands for partners which respond to these results. These should not be burdensome but appropriate to the operating context i.e. more systematic and rigorous in host countries, and recognising the access difficulties within Syria
- Partners who are engaging intensively on Syria-related work, and who receive three or more consecutive years of funding, should have their performance reviewed.

Section for Humanitarian Affairs and other sections appointing partners

9. Accept accountability

- Set up a review mechanism for the strategic framework, which includes partners and the external technical resources above. Review progress annually and report – what progress, what bottlenecks, what changes and shifts? Use this collective process to adapt/revise the strategic framework as appropriate
- The Syria crisis makes complex humanitarian crisis makes a structured approach to results based management difficult, but this should not curtail at least minimal efforts to a) define broad intentions in terms of achievement and b) review progress towards these intentions at the end of the funding cycle. Norway could develop minimum reporting standards for partners e.g. an annual template, specifically geared to the crisis and which requests evidence of contribution to Norway’s intended strategic priorities, as well as making better use of performance reports, independent evaluations and other material available.

Section for the Middle East and North Africa and Section for Humanitarian Affairs

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Acronyms and abbreviations

CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
HQ	Headquarters
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross
IHP	International Humanitarian Principle
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation
NORVAC	Norwegian Aid Committee
NPA	Norwegian People's Aid
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
ODA	Official Development Assistance
3RP	Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Programme
UNOCHA	United Nations Office of Co-ordination for Humanitarian Affairs
WFP	World Food Programme
WOS	Whole of Syria

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