



EUROPEAN UNION



EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis

## OUTCOME DOCUMENT

Lessons learnt event:  
Aid delivery within the humanitarian-development nexus

13 September 2019

### Summary

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This outcome document presents a non-exhaustive sample of good practices identified by partners funded by the *EU Regional Trust Fund in response to the Syrian Crisis*, shared as written contribution prior to, or during the event. More than 180 participants, representing over 70 of the Trust Fund's implementing partners, its Board members, representatives from host governments, and the EU discussed in plenary and break-out groups (on wash & health, education, livelihoods and social stability) on how their activities had contributed to aid delivery with a development approach in the Syrian refugee response. Observations across all sectors included:

- engage stakeholders from all strands from the outset for joint assessment, design and programming
- engage with local and national governments to ensure funding and ownership for sustainability
- avoid creating parallel systems for the refugee response, but integrate into national systems
- focus on local capacity building and decentralisation to bring response closer to beneficiaries
- seek innovative ways to ensure protection outcomes
- work on twin track approach – supporting in parallel short term needs and longer term system strengthening
- contribute to formalisation of refugee response by bridging the divide between formal and informal systems
- contribute to strengthening national systems towards access to affordable and equitable quality services
- work with exit strategies to ensure sustainability of efforts.

In addition, participants noted that the Trust Fund had enabled partners to operationalise the humanitarian-development nexus, offering necessary flexibility to allow partners to deliver sustainable aid in a protracted displacement situation.

## 1. Summary of discussions

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### 1.1 Presentations

In his opening statement the Deputy Director-General for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), **Mr Maciej Popowski**, recalled the reasons for the creation of the Trust Fund, its added value and achievements as an innovative EU crisis instrument, already reaching over 3 million beneficiaries. He reassured that, regardless of future instrument under the next Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, the EU response to the Syrian crisis will continue to focus on delivery and impact on the ground as the needs are still there.

Deputy Director-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Operations (DG ECHO), **Mr Michael Köhler** touched upon the evolution of the Trust Fund since 2014 and underscored that the Trust Fund was created as the existing tools did not allow the EU to respond to the Syrian crisis adequately, recognising early on that the crisis inevitably would become protracted.

**Ms Erika Ferrer**, Head of Unit Middle East and North Africa at the European External Action Service (EEAS) noted that the needs in neighbouring countries will remain, given the tense political situation inside Syria. She highlighted the momentum generated at the Brussels III Conference on the future of Syria and the region, with EUR 8.3 billion pledged. She recalled that though all refugees have the right to return to their place of origin, the conditions for safe, dignified and voluntary return are not in place.

Trust Fund Manager **Ms Claudia Miller** (DG NEAR) gave an overview of the current state of play of the Trust Fund, with more than EUR 1.8 billion in budget, EUR 1.6 billion has already been committed and, so far, nearly EUR 1 billion disbursed for concrete actions in support of refugees from Syria, host communities and national administrations in Syria's neighbourhood. She also informed about the ongoing process to extend the Trust Fund with one year until December 2020, as well as the outlook for 2019-2020.

In his closing remarks, **Mr Michael Miller**, Head of the Middle East Unit at DG NEAR, emphasised that the meeting reflected the evolution of the EUTF from a crisis response to a systems strengthening instrument, in close dialogue with host governments. Mr Miller welcomed the practical sharing of experience on how to achieve impact and recalled the Mid-term evaluation of the Trust Fund that will be taken into account for future programming. Finally, he stressed that EU support to the crisis will continue and strengthen national responses to the refugee crisis.

During a TED style talk based on his own research on the Syria crisis, **Dr Nasser Yassin**, Director of Research at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, made a recollection of the past nine years since the outbreak of the Syrian insurgency, elaborating on the impact it had on the host communities as the crisis became protracted.

A panel discussion focused on three crosscutting issues that are mainstreamed across all EUTF's interventions: the **humanitarian-development nexus, women's rights and gender, and protection:**

**Ms Karin Eriksen**, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark elaborated on how the **humanitarian-development nexus** (the nexus) has evolved from a capital based, theoretical concept, to providing a platform for humanitarian and development actors in the field to jointly assess the needs from the outset of a crisis. With the number of displaced persons increasing every year and many crises lasting for decades, means no longer met the needs, and hence, there is a need to think smarter about how to address a displacement situation. The sequential crisis response where humanitarian assistance precede development aid in silos does not match the reality on the ground. Funding must be multiannual and flexible, and not programmed in silos. The nexus approach is ultimately about achieving better outcomes.

**Ms Nada Nader**, EuroMed Feminist Initiative (EFI) recalled that women and girls face greater hardships than men during a crisis, and hence the need to always ensure that **women's rights and gender considerations** are at the centre of a crisis response. Major gaps between the realities of women in the Syria crisis and international standards such as access to services, legal assistance, protection and cultural barriers persist. But the crisis can also be an opportunity to address the systemic challenges and lacunas that discriminate against women and girls, through the revision of national legislation and structures to ensure that women's rights are included.

**Ms Gabrielle Fox**, Mercy Corps, described through a story of a refugee woman with seven children, the **protection needs** amongst populations in displacement, often lacking their legal documents. Without these, their right to basic services, such as health and education, is infringed, they cannot return easily, and if they manage, they will have difficulties to prove their property rights and find decent work. Community level interventions that prioritize social cohesion, livelihood and basic services are therefore vital both during displacement and to prepare for durable solutions.

## 1.2 Good practice shared by Trust Fund partners

### 1.2.1 Humanitarian Development Nexus

From the rich experience of partners and good practice shared, a number of core elements were identified during the event, including what the humanitarian-development nexus actually means to Trust Fund partners on the ground. The Trust Fund describes itself as “the bridge” between the humanitarian and development support, and for the operationalisation on the ground, several partners described the specificity of the nexus as a twin track approach, addressing the immediate, short term needs of the refugees and host communities, while strengthening the capacities of the systems in the longer term. As one partner described it: *“integrating a short-term assistance in a longer-term approach, aiming to meet urgent needs and put in place durable solutions for displacement, as well as supporting resilience and institutional capacity”*. In order to succeed with a strong nexus approach, partners reconfirmed the need for humanitarian and development actors joining up from the start; joint needs assessments, programming and design, even if the activities in the end are carried out separately, but in communicating parallel tracks. Many partners noted that the flexibility of the Trust Fund and the funding of bigger programmes managed by consortia, where actors from various field have brought their expertise, were important features that had facilitated for them to implement with a nexus approach.

Participants agreed to the importance of the nexus approach and the need to ‘think out of the box’ - and to change the mind-set of practitioners and donors. Protection interventions, and how to address protection needs of displaced people, is for instance generally considered as one of the more challenging elements of the nexus. One partner shared a good example on how they had successfully ensured protection outcomes in their Trust Fund project, by training practitioners on how to detect protection needs amongst refugees and vulnerable people, while primarily working on other sectors. Integrating protection awareness in this way, by mainstreaming protection throughout all interventions, has proven an efficient way to identify and reach beneficiaries with protection needs. Other participants voiced caution that the transition to a nexus approach does not happen naturally and, therefore, it is important to ensure that also donors are onboard – predictable, longer term funding was mentioned as a core element to facilitate a nexus approach.

Many also pointed out that for the nexus to be successful it needs to be tailored to the local reality, with a particularly contextual focus. Some participants considered local knowledge a door opener and a safeguard for sustainability. This was mentioned in relation to the localisation agenda, where local partners are at the forefront as direct contractors and recipients of funds. This big question and commitment in the Grand Bargain<sup>1</sup> has been challenging for the Trust Fund; an instrument

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1 Grand Bargain, Workstream 2: “More support and funding tools to local and national responders”.

created to reach economy of scale and with a current budget of EUR 1.8 billion. Nevertheless, partners recognised that context specific programmes with local ownership has been achieved through multi-stakeholder partnerships, and consortia that includes local partners. Many good examples were shared on how this has been achieved, *inter alia* by placing the local and national authorities at the centre of the planning and monitoring of the action, sometimes through formal Memoranda of Understanding with local authorities, or in close collaboration with line ministries.

Some partners exemplified, through telling their own stories of development, how localization of aid had supported them to grow from being small service deliverers to become implementers of aid and recipient of international aid. Projects achieving this often included a component of capacity development of local and national partners, to strengthen their capacities, but also a new mind-set and risk taking of the 'bigger' partner and donor. Other partners presented good community based initiatives, with a stronger participatory component that actively included the beneficiaries. Also, closer cooperation with the private sector was considered a good example on how to deliver on the localization agenda, since it nurtures the local economy and ensure sustainability of the interventions. All these examples are good practice that have longer-term positive effect both on the beneficiaries and on the host countries.

Examples shared by partners also demonstrated that the Trust Fund has delivered on innovative solutions, beyond traditional aid methodologies, using for instance advocacy, communication as a means to reach refugee and host community beneficiaries. Information sharing, including the access to formal legal advice to increase awareness of rights and options among the refugees, is also an important protection mechanism, which enhances the position of the refugee, allowing her/him to take a more active role vis-a-vis their situation. Many partners noted that this was also an important contribution to social cohesion that can be used to stimulate a correct refugee narrative.

Participants recognised that, in general, women and girls were more at risk than men and boys, since the crisis had accentuated patriarchal traditions and social norms that often restricted women and girls from exercising their rights and having access to resources. Still, participants also shared good experience on how the projects had contributed to positive changes of gender roles and norms, and empowered women and girls by offering them tools and skills to earn their own money and define their own lives. It was noted that in order to ensure actions that address the needs and explore the full potentials of women, it is important to work in parallel at different levels to achieve complementarity of approaches and sustainability of actions. In the Syria response, it was therefore crucial to work at the overarching (3RP) level to ensure gender sensitive programming and planning throughout the response, in parallel with specific activities at project level. The recently adopted legal framework for women in Lebanon including the creation of the first national Observatory on women's rights in the MENA region was mentioned as a good example of how the crisis had contributed to a positive change on strengthening the awareness of women's rights.

Participants mentioned that over the years, the Trust Fund has evolved from providing early recovery assistance addressing basic needs of refugees from Syria and their host communities, including through more informal, ad hoc approaches, to supporting host countries with strengthening of their national systems, in particular the public sector service delivery capacities, including *inter alia* in social assistance, reinforcing the National Poverty Targeting Programme (NPTP) in Lebanon; in water, by securing revenues to the Regional Water Establishment in Lebanon; in education with the nationalisation of the Makani centres in Jordan, to allow for refugee support to be integrated into formal structures and systems, and in the health sector in Iraq, to increase the reception capacity and quality of health services of Duhok Emergency and Trauma Hospital and Akre Emergency Hospital, just to mention a few. The 'transition to formality' was repeatedly mentioned by the Trust Fund's implementing partners as an important feature not only to ease the pressure on Syria's neighbours that are hosting the refugees, but also to enhance the self-reliance and resilience of refugees, facilitating their transition from being aid-dependent to becoming self-reliant.

In general, partners considered that supporting integration of beneficiaries into formal structures was relevant for programmes in all sectors: *inter alia* for children being supported with informal education to facilitate their enrolment in the formal education; for young adults being supported with technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to facilitate for them to find job on the formal market; and to ensure same treatment of refugees and local population as regards access to primary health services contributing to the overall progress of Lebanon towards achieving Universal Health Coverage.

## 2. Breakout group discussions

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### 2.1 Livelihoods and Social Stability

This breakout group discussed the following issues: *entrepreneurship and job creation, employability and labour market access, social stability and cohesion, local development, social safety nets and a focus on Syria.*

On *entrepreneurship and job creation*, participants advocated for increased support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and social enterprises (SEs) in sectors where Syrian refugees have legal permission to work, while ensuring that the focus should not only be on labour-intensive jobs since they might exclude women. Partners underscored that when providing support to Syrian refugees SEs and SMEs, transferable skills and experiences must be taken into consideration. Participants also explored targeted and effective approaches to job creation and recommended that labour market analyses should be centralized on a platform bringing together all stakeholders; including donors, private sector, job seekers, educational institutions, public sector. This analysis should in turn align with job creation efforts, with any available public economic policies or job creation data.

On employability and labour market access, a key recommendation was to engage vulnerable groups in programming aimed at offsetting negative coping mechanisms. Participants suggested that this can be achieved by targeting parents and working children, addressing the issue of early marriages and traumatized youth and subsequently developing inclusive systems. Other suggestions included apprenticeship programmes for women and salary incentives, small grants and equipment for female-run home-based businesses. Trust Fund partners further identified several merits and drawbacks of investing in skills training to vulnerable populations such as: skills training based on market needs, development of suitable curricula, provision of a skilled labour force and financial incentives to companies, field advocacy efforts for governments and employers, and, most importantly, working within a conducive political environment.

One of the key challenges identified by participants as regards *social stability and cohesion* was access to communities that are hard to reach for outsiders. It was suggested to start working through local community based organisations to gain access to hard-to-reach communities. Participants brought forward several good practices such as arts and sports based interventions, centres for women to meet, information and training sessions for journalists, youth-led initiatives that are combined with advocacy training and campaigns to foster social stability and stimulate interaction between different population groups.

When addressing challenges for *local development* and the pros and cons of *cash for work* initiatives, participants agreed that cash interventions can indeed offer quick income, but not longer-term sustainability. According to the discussions, cash for work can meet the needs of local infrastructure and refugee populations and even reduce tensions within the household, though difficult to reach the wider community without advocacy campaigns. In order for cash for work initiatives to be successful, experience show that clear policies and guidelines need to be in place,

including selection criteria of beneficiaries, eligibility of inclusion etc. and combining the efforts with strategic advocacy initiatives providing concrete information to the wider community.

As to *social safety nets*, it was highlighted that structural changes in host countries were indispensable, while acknowledging that it takes time to change laws, regulations and to tackle complex and sensitive issues. Given political and societal resistance to extending social protection to refugee populations, participants recommended to build on already existing structures.

In the discussion on *transferable skills for Syria* it was noted that the priorities of refugees (as well as implementing partners and donors), i.e. skills to have a better chance to find decent work in the host communities, do not always match policies and priorities of governments. It was noted that many programmes aim at offering tools and skills for refugees and local communities to restore their dignity by addressing their immediate needs to make a living. Needs of refugees are evolving quickly: women are less interested in cooking and sewing classes, but request IT skills, household economy and English. Participants recommended that programmes should evolve according to demands.

While conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified return to Syria do not currently exist, it is not too early to talk about transferable skills for a return to Syria, and it is crucial to design programmes that address immediate and future needs. Especially for children and youth, participants also stressed the importance of creating links with Syrian culture as to maintain a basic connection to their homeland. Emphasising Syria's historical and cultural heritage can also facilitate trust and strengthen self-esteem for the future generation.

## 2.2 Basic and Higher Education

In this breakout group, partners addressed the following key issues: *referrals from non-formal to formal education, the quality of education, and access*, in particular the gap between primary and secondary education, and cost efficiency.

Participants noted the need to explore flexible strategies to enlarge the possibilities of referral between non-formal (NFE) and formal education (FE), and to remove bottlenecks and find alternative pathways. This could include filling the gap between basic literacy and numeracy classes (BLN) and advanced learning programmes (ALP) to decrease the risk of drop out, through *i.e.* homework support, language or study programmes; follow up with families to decrease social pressure; and strengthening the capacities of teachers (training) and schools. For example, the Makani centers in Jordan and the mobile schools in Lebanon were good examples on how to reach out of school children. Other partners suggested that the use of school councilors had proven a successful way to help students with the transition to FE, or reintegration in the case of drop out.

For higher education, good practices mentioned were the examination of students (in Arabic, English and Turkey) to access university in Turkey without requirement of diploma or certification, and the experience of using successful refugee students as role models in mentoring programmes.

Partners invited the EU to consider supporting primary and tertiary education for high-risk groups, as well as the non-formal education methodology for budget support in Jordan (eg. Makani centers that link referral to the formal national education system, supported through budget support). Several challenges to the *quality of education* were discussed, noting that it was decreasing. The stigma around technical and vocational training and education (TVET) was problematic, as it was not fully accepted in the region as formal education. Hence, the need for context specific design of TVET was emphasized.

Partners shared several good practices such as involving families, communities and supporting schools in small villages to improve the quality of curricula, teachers and teaching methods. Greater focus on child protection and inclusive education for both refugees and children from host communities, as well as the introduction of innovative methodologies for non-formal education, such as learning with LEGO and the use of tablets to learn maths, had also proved to be effective.

In the discussion around *access and gaps* in primary, secondary and tertiary education, it was noted that challenges remain and participants called for flexible approaches. This could include financial incentives for attending school instead of working, career and study counselling, providing information on student pathways, following up on student paths up to employment and addressing structural barriers to accessing education. Access is also directly linked to the quality of information. Furthermore, partners observed that, as host community fatigue is on the rise, discrimination is increasingly an obstacle to address.

Participants considered cost efficiency to be challenging and it raised many questions around priorities, value for money, how to address different needs of different target groups, quality versus cost etc.

### **2.3 Stabilisation projects in the WASH sector**

The session focused on three key questions: How to reach the most vulnerable? Has the protection space increased as a result of these projects? What can be done to improve the situation?

Discussions as to *whether interventions reach the most vulnerable* suggested that projects in the WASH sector should better integrate existing coordination structures in place. Participants suggested that donors should work with Governments, both at central and local level, to ensure refugees benefit from WASH interventions and to maintain the balance between refugees and host community beneficiaries. Projects embedded into government planning are more likely to secure beneficiaries' buy-in from the outset and hence support a transition towards local ownership. Adding to this, partners can play a key role in building trust within local communities, linking host communities and refugees, thus using WASH interventions to mitigate tensions, increase protection and ensure education on the use of water resources in a holistic manner.

The question of whether projects have reached the most vulnerable also depends on the countries of interventions' geography and the projects' scale as some areas host more vulnerable refugees than others. In addition, depending on the country of intervention, the situation differs in urban settings and informal settlements, making precise targeting more difficult. Multi-stakeholder approaches should be considered, such as harvesting rainwater and ensuring cities have separate storm water and wastewater systems, depending on the setting. Furthermore, informal settlements are in greater need of sanitation, while vulnerable populations in urban settings need financial access to services such as water. Partners concluded by pointing out that WASH interventions provide an entry point towards strengthening protection spaces, particularly in terms of referrals and in tackling issues of dignity and health.

In discussions about how the *situation can be improved*, participants noted the need to share skills and knowledge at local level between local staff and partners. Having central and local authorities on board is also indispensable to allow for a transition and sustainability. Increase in ownership and accountability of involved local actors play a leading role in the development and maintenance of community infrastructure. Participants advised donors to engage in a constant policy dialogue with the respective governments, ensuring that the longer-term development aspect of the intervention as well as capacity building of the authorities are part of the conversation.

Lastly, participants agreed that a *comprehensive approach* to humanitarian-development nexus should be promoted in all advocacy efforts towards host governments, including linking water, sanitation and waste management stakeholders at government level.

## 2.4 Health

This group discussion focused on *universal access to affordable, equal and quality healthcare*. Challenges invoked by participants included political commitment, multi-sector coordination among donors, partners and local authorities, and lack of trust in health systems. Participants also shared specific good practices based on their experience at country level.

A recurrent aspect of EUTF partners' interventions and good practice in the health sector referred to the need for programmes to have the twin track approach of the nexus referred to above: elements of systems strengthening, capacity building, livelihood support and community projects with a long-term perspective, and at the same time offering short-term assistance. In this way, a project contributes to ease the burden of the national systems and promotes and supports the peaceful co-existence between refugees, Internally Displaced People (IDPs) and their host communities needed on the long term, while addressing immediate needs of individuals affected hardest by the crisis.

Another aspect of successful interventions in the health sector presented by partners was access to information. Depending on the local context and the community profile, adequate access to information, through the appropriate communication channels and addressing the vulnerability of affected people is paramount to address needs.

Discussing infrastructure, partners stressed the need for a holistic approach guaranteeing the possibility of replication and extension of the action outcomes. In addition, infrastructure development should be implemented per phases, to prevent interruption of health centres or hospital activities, as well as enabling resource planning.

Another important aspect of sustainable health intervention mentioned by participants was capacity building of local professionals. To do so, the expatriate personnel should work alongside local medical practitioners in the daily work, transferring both clinical and managerial competences. In addition, equipment needs to be suitable to the context in terms of usability, technological appropriateness, ability to be maintained and competitiveness with existing equipment stock.

The example of a flat fee model providing health services, tailored to reducing barriers for accessing health care for vulnerable people, while increasing equity and affordability, was also presented during this session. Subsidised consultation fees, full coverage of costs of essential diagnostic and lab tests and free medication, encourages timely access to affordable healthcare. Refugees and vulnerable populations' risk of poverty thereby decreases. The model focuses also on system strengthening of the primary health sector, improving overall quality through capacity development of primary health care actors to provide quality services. This way it contributes to the overall progress towards universal health coverage.



## Annex

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### Participating organisations

#### Partner Organisations

Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED)  
Action Against Hunger  
Agenzia Italiana per la Cooperazione allo Sviluppo (AICS)  
Akkar Network for Development  
Association for Solidarity with Asylum Seekers and Migrants (ASAM)  
Association of Volunteers in International Service (AVSI)  
Associazione Italiana per la Solidarietà tra i Popoli (AISPO)  
Baghdad Women Association (BWA)  
Biladi  
Business Development Center (BDC)  
Campus France - HOPES project (Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians)  
Comitato Internazionale Sviluppo dei Popoli (CISP)  
Concern Worldwide  
Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere (CARE International)  
Coordinamento delle Organizzazioni per il Servizio Volontario (COSV)  
Danish Red Cross  
Danish Refugee Council (DRC)  
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)  
Durable Solutions Platform (DSP)  
Euromed Feminist Initiative (IFE-EFI)  
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)  
Expertise France - ABAAD (Resource Center for Gender Equality)  
Expertise France  
Expertise France - Akkarouna  
Expertise France - Mouvement Social  
Fundación Promoción Social - FPS  
Generations For Peace (GFP)  
German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) - HOPES project (Higher and Further Education Opportunities and Perspectives for Syrians)  
German Development Bank (KfW)  
German Jordanian University (GJU)  
Gruppo Volontariato Civile (GVC)  
Hungarian Interchurch Aid (HIA)  
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)  
International Labor Organization (ILO)  
International Medical Corps (IMC)  
INTERSOS  
Jordan River Foundation  
Kafa  
Lebanese Red Cross (LRC)  
Legal Action Worldwide (LAW)  
Luminus Technical University College  
Medair  
Mercy Corps  
Mine Advisory Group (MAG)  
MUDEM - Refugee Support Center (RSC)  
Norwegian Red Cross (NRC)

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)  
OXFAM  
Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS)  
Particip  
Premiere Urgence Internationale (PUI)  
Regional Development and Protection Programme (RDPP)  
SPARK  
Tamkeen Fields for Aid  
Terres des Hommes (TDH)  
The Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering (RDFL)  
The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)  
UN Habitat  
UN Women  
United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)  
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)  
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)  
United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)  
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)  
United Nations World Food Programme (WFP)  
Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten (VNG) - MASAR (Maintaining Strength and Resilience for Local Governments)  
War Child Holland  
Water Authority Jordan  
WeWorld  
Women Empowerment Organization (WEO)  
World Bank  
World Health Organisation (WHO)  
World Vision International (WVI)  
Zarqa University

## **EU Institutions**

European External Action Service  
Directorate-General for Budget  
Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development  
Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, Migration and Home Affairs  
Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations

## **Trust Fund Board**

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