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## Promoting the Cultural Rights of Refugees in the Context of the Syrian Crisis: the case of the Ideas Box

Deniz Gürsoy

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### Abstract

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This article is framed by the legal concept of 'protracted refugee situation' (PRS), and the strategic means by which Cultural Rights has been interjected as a factor in refugee support. With particular reference to the project Ideas Box, developed by the German Goethe-Institut (initiated by Libraries Without Borders (LWB) in 2014), the article attempts to define how the project flags up the centrality of information, education and social interaction with effective strategies for providing a humane and productive refugee support. Access to information and education plays a crucial role in providing a basis for the exercise of Cultural Rights, and where Rights become a precondition for developing strategic long-term planning and responding to the fundamental needs of subjects like refugees in PRS situations.

### Author

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**Deniz Gürsoy** the Ideas Box Country Project Coordinator at the Goethe-Institut Ankara:

<mailto:deniz.guersoy@goethe.de>

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## Introduction

It has been frequently stated that the multidimensional characteristic of human rights is all too easily ignored in the face of the natural, political, economic or social forces that cause refugee outflows. Most particularly, during a protracted refugee situation (PRS), the full character of cultural rights is not immediately clear, but in relation to refugees and displaced people – consequently resident in either urban centres or refugee camps – it is significant and should be underlined. As the Syrian conflict (commencing in the Spring of 2011) became a refugee crisis, the crisis became a recognised ‘PRS’ during 2016, a condition that this article will explore; an exploration of the concept of PRS will then be followed by a focus on the characteristics and the changes of the definition of PRS (in a historical perspective), articulating an understanding on the importance of promoting cultural rights. Specifically regarding social cohesion between refugee and host communities, the article will attempt to develop a new perspective on the refugee population both in camps and urban centres pertinent to the socioeconomic contexts of the host countries.

As a result of the refugee influx to neighbouring countries of Turkey, Northern Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan, the socioeconomic challenges of a refugee influx, as much as the political attitudes of the relevant governments, are currently generating the conditions for a lack of permanent and durable solutions. In more concrete terms, the refugees in the aforementioned countries are faced with a lack of durable options themselves because of a broad political unwillingness and/or a socioeconomic incapability on the part of host countries.

It is clear that the access to information plays a crucial role in providing a basis for the exercise of cultural rights. This article argues that conceptualising the access to information as a fundamental human right is a precondition for developing a long-term perspective and responding to the various needs of subjects like refugees in PRS comprehensively.

The Goethe-Institut – as the international representative cultural institution of the Federal Republic of Germany – is conducting various cultural and educational projects with its local, regional and international partners for refugees in primary receiving countries. One project is the ‘Ideas Box’, launched by Libraries Without Borders (LWB) in 2014 and aims to extend the benefits of libraries to isolated communities, providing access to information in post-disaster contexts. The project Ideas Box is conducted in cooperation with local partners, LWB and the financial support of German Federal Foreign Office. The focus of this article is the Goethe-Institut's response to the Syrian refugee crisis, where the Ideas Box project is an effect object of evaluation. The criteria of evaluation is simply how this project articulates the importance of promoting the cultural rights of refugees in the context of the Syrian crisis.<sup>1</sup>

## Protracted Refugee Situation (PRS): definition, approaches and features

Definitions can be problematic as well as explanatory: but it is clear, that a critical-historical understanding of how the changes in a definition occur can effectively lead us to understand which tendencies have been dominated and what conditions, and what enables such a definition (if by definition we mean a consensus of understanding).

In defining PRS, UNHCR indicates that it is “a crude measure of refugee populations of 25,000 persons or more who have been in exile for five or more years in developing countries” (UNHCR, 2004: 2). The quantitative, temporal and territorial criteria of this definition are three conditions of understanding a PRS at a given time. However, in their 2009 publication, *Global Trends 2008*, UNHCR made two considerable changes in the quantitative and territorial criteria, defining a PRS as “one in which 25,000 or more refugees of

<sup>1</sup> The project is evaluated by a contracted company that makes an impact assessment with set criteria. It is aimed to assess the impact of Ideas Box on the participants by carrying out a retrospective collected qualitative data analysis by sex and age groups, nationalities, employment status and the time that the refugee participants spend in the given asylum country. Focus group discussions and face-to-face structured interviews are made with participants, their parents and project implementors.

the same nationality have been in exile for five or more years in a given asylum country' (UNHCR, 2009a: 7). According to the new definition, the refugees in question must belong to the same nationality, and not only in a developing country but a protracted refugee situation in a given asylum country, and as long as they last five years or more. These two revised criteria had a two-sided effect on the conceptual framework of PRS: the scope of the definition of PRS was limited by a "same nationality" regulation as it was extended by the new territorial criterion. In a 2017 publication UNHCR added an adjective to this definition: "Traditionally, a protracted refugee situation has been defined by UNHCR as one in which 25,000 or more refugees from the same nationality have been in exile for five *consecutive* years or more in a given asylum country" (UNHCR, 2017: 22, my italics).

However, regardless of the differences between the aforementioned definitions, a characteristic of PRS was described by UNHCR in 2004 (as Milner emphasized: Milner, 2014: 152) as "one in which refugees find themselves in a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo". UNHCR described the situation of refugees in "a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo" as follows:

Their lives may not be at risk, but their basic rights and essential economic, social and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile. A refugee in this situation is often unable to break free from enforced reliance on external assistance (UNHCR, 2004: 1).

A state of limbo can be considered as "a state of uncertainty" that makes it impossible for refugees in this situation to begin developing a new life or new perspectives on their life. Characterised by uncertainty, PRS may continue for many years without durable solutions that are developed by host countries and/or the international community. The primary reasons for the lack of durable solutions are recognised as a political unwillingness and/or the incapability of host countries to fully recognise the human rights of

refugees. In this sense, PRS was defined by UNHCR once again in a document dated 2009 as a situation that millions of refugees are trapped in for 5 years or more after their initial displacement, without immediate prospects for implementation of durable solutions (UNHCR, 2009b).

The time that refugees spend in PRS depends on essentially political decisions and socioeconomic circumstances of the host countries, and it has a tendency to increase because of this dependency. As a commentator stated (Schall, 2013), indeed, not only has the percentage of refugees affected by PRSs increased, the average time they spend in exile has too. UNHCR estimates that the average duration of major refugee situations, protracted or not, has increased from 9 years in 1993 to 17 years in 2003 (UNHCR, 2004). In 2015, U.S. Department of State notified that UNHCR estimated that the average length of a major protracted refugee situations is 26 years.<sup>2</sup> According to UNHCR Report *Global Trends 2016*, in which it is stated that the definition of PRS has limitations as displacement situations are dynamic, there are several situations lasting 20 years or more:

Based on the existing definition, 11.6 million refugees, representing some two-third of all refugees, were in protracted refugee situations at the end of 2016. Of this number, 4.1 million were in a situation lasting 20 years or more. The situation of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran has involved large numbers of people - combined, more than 2 million - and has lasted more than 30 years. There were 5.6 million people in protracted situations of shorter duration (between five and nine years), most of them Syrian refugees. (UNHCR, 2017: 22).

<sup>2</sup> 'Protracted Refugee Situations' at U.S. Department of State website, <https://www.state.gov/j/prm/policyissues/issues/protracted/> [accessed 18th September, 2017].

At this point, it should be noted that Palestinian refugees in Egypt are the longest protracted situation under UNHCR's mandate (UNHCR, 2017) and Palestinian refugees as a whole, who fall under the mandate of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), represent the world's oldest and largest protracted refugee situation (UNHCR, 2006: 106).

Despite the fact that most PRSs are in Africa, particularly in North and sub-Saharan Africa, PRSs can be found all across the world, such as in Asia and Latin America. Despite the change in territorial criterion of the definition – from “in developing countries” to “in any given asylum country” – a territorial pattern can be observed. According to the statistics, it is remarkable to note that most of the existing PRSs take place in developing and under-developed countries. The main reason for this pattern is that most refugees, in an attempt to escape violence and persecution, flee to neighbouring states (Schall, 2013). It should be pointed out that regardless of the development level of the host countries, PRSs are problematic with regards to sociopolitical, economic and security factors, as well as from a human rights standpoint. The most important challenges that refugees face in this situation are physical and sexual violence, limited access to legal employment and justice systems and the lack of legal protection. Restricted movement is also a fundamental human right challenge not only for refugees in camps but also for urban refugees. In addition to the humanitarian concerns, Milner explained how PRSs can lead to political and security concerns for host countries, the countries of origin, and the international community:

The long-term presence of large refugee populations has been a source of tensions between states and regional instability, especially through the militarization of refugee camps. Armed groups have used refugee camps as a base to launch attacks against their country of origin. Other security concerns, such as arms trafficking, drug smuggling, human

trafficking, and the recruitment of child soldiers, have also been documented in protracted refugee situations. In addition to these direct security concerns, protracted refugee situations also have indirect security implications. Tensions between refugees and the local population often arise as refugees are perceived to receive preferential access to social services such as health and education. Over time, competition between refugees and the host population over scarce resources can also become a source of insecurity. (Milner, 2014: 155).

The Syrian refugee crisis became a PRS – the situation of Syrian refugees qualified as being protracted – in 2016, five years after the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War and the first beginnings of the influx of Syrian refugees forced to flee from the conflict in 2011.

### **Syrian Refugee Outflow to Neighbouring Countries: the current situation in primary receiving countries**

The outbreak of the Syrian Civil War is generally dated to 15th March 2011, the day that protests in Damascus began. Since then, the armed conflict and generalised violence has caused millions of people to flee their homes, and millions of people have been displaced in Syria, as millions have fled to Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey. Unlike refugees, who have crossed international borders, numerous internally displaced people (IDPs) have remained inside Syria. In a 2016 document, UNHCR estimated that there were 6.5 million people, including 2.8 million children, displaced within Syria, representing the biggest internally displaced population in the World (UNHCR Syria, 2016). According to this document, 50 Syrian families have been displaced every hour of every day since 2011.

IDPs are among the most vulnerable people in the world, as they stay within their own country and remain under the ‘protection’ of the government

even if that government is the reason for their displacement (UNHCR, 2014). Syrian refugees have fled for similar reasons as IDPs and they have crossed the international borders to neighbouring countries. Representing the neighbouring countries, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq are the primary receiving countries in the context of Syrian refugee outflow. As stated, refugees in mentioned countries are in PRS as of 2016 and faced with the lack of durable solutions because of political unwillingness and/or incapability of host countries. For the reason, it can be stated that they are extremely vulnerable, as the internally displaced population in Syria.

UNHCR states that 5, 233,712 registered Syrian refugees represent total persons of concern in the region as of 28/09/2017.<sup>3</sup> This number includes more than 120,000 refugees who registered by UNHCR in Egypt, as well as more than 30.000 Syrian registered in North Africa. As neighbouring countries, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq host almost 97% of registered Syrian refugees registered by UNHCR this is except for more than 3 million Syrian refugees living under temporary protection in Turkey, who were registered by the Government of Turkey. According to the Ministry of Interior Directorate General of Migration Management, there have been 3,141,380 officially registered Syrians under temporary protection in Turkey as of 17/08/2017.<sup>4</sup> In Lebanon, 1,001,051 Syrian refugees were registered by UNHCR; however UNHCR Lebanon has temporarily suspended new registration as per Government of Lebanon's instructions as of 06/05/2015, and so accordingly individuals awaiting to be registered are not included in this number.<sup>5</sup>

Jordan hosts more than 650,000 officially registered Syrian refugees, while Minister of State for Media Affairs and government's spokesperson Mohammad Momani states that there are around 1.3 million Syrian refugees in Jordan, representing

almost 20 per cent of the country's population (Ghazal, 2017).

According to the UNHCR, 244,235 Syrian refugees were registered in Iraq<sup>6</sup> and it is estimated that 97 per cent of Syrian refugees in Iraq reside in Kurdistan (Kurdistan Regional Government). Several permanent or transitional camps have been built in the primary receiving countries to accommodate the refugee population, however only 9 per cent of registered refugees are registered as in-camp population. The rest of them represent the urban refugees who live in urban, peri-urban and rural areas. Demographically, female refugees constitute more than 48 per cent of the refugee population and nearly half of the total persons of concern are children.

Demographic statistics reveal the vulnerability of refugee communities, and by extension, the urgency of educational and cultural actions to be taken in primary receiving countries. In the next section, conceptualizing the access to information as a fundamental human right and the importance of cultural rights of refugees in PRSs will be theoretically assessed in consideration of the current situation in primary receiving countries.

### The Importance of Cultural Rights in Protracted Refugee Situations

As developing countries, neighbouring countries of Syrian Arab Republic already had socioeconomic problems and difficult conditions before the Syrian crisis began. The effects of the Syrian refugee crisis, which has been described by International Labour Organization (ILO) as “one of the largest, most protracted and complex humanitarian emergencies of modern times” is increasingly spilling over into economic and social spheres – leading to stalled economic activity, loss of income, and shrinking access to quality public

<sup>3</sup> 'Syria Regional Refugee Response' at Inter-agency sharing portal, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> [accessed 29th September, 2017].

<sup>4</sup> 'Temporary Protection', [http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/temporary-protection\\_915\\_1024\\_4748\\_icerik](http://www.goc.gov.tr/icerik6/temporary-protection_915_1024_4748_icerik) [accessed 22th September, 2017].

<sup>5</sup> 'Syria Regional Refugee Response' at Inter-agency sharing portal, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> [accessed 29th September, 2017].

<sup>6</sup> 'Syria Regional Refugee Response' at Inter-agency sharing portal, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> [accessed 30th September, 2017].

services in host countries.<sup>7</sup> As mentioned in the first section, one of the most important challenges that refugees face in protracted situations is limited access to public services; and public services are not limited to immediate needs, including food, medical aid and shelter, but are also legal protection, education and healthcare. Conventional definitions of “life-saving” aid refer only to basic needs of survival including “food, medical supplies and equipment, vaccines, water and sanitation items” (UN News Centre, 2016). These needs are, of course, all-important to survive, however an approach based on these needs is inadequate in any significant response to the needs of refugees in protracted situations. Not only refugees resident in camps, but also urban refugees, spend five years or – generally – more in receiving countries, largely without access to information or consistent education. This is a critical period, especially for the children and young refugees. In fact, almost half of the registered Syrian refugees in primary receiving countries are under the age of 18, which means that the children and young refugees spend their formative years either in camps or in urban, peri-urban or rural areas without the access to information and consistent education. For this reason, the accessibility of libraries, internet and digital resources – access to information – should be regarded as a critical need in protracted situations. Such an understanding would refer to the significance of public services and the urgency of having access to them. Living in a protracted refugee situation as “a long-lasting and intractable state of limbo” makes such a conceptualisation much more important for refugee communities, to enable them to begin developing new life perspectives but also to promote social cohesion between refugees and between them and host communities. With the challenges caused by refugee outflows, the multidimensional characteristic of human rights can be easily ignored, most particularly during protracted refugee situations it is all important to promote cultural rights.

<sup>7</sup> ‘ILO’s Response to Syrian Refugee Crisis’ at ILO Turkey website, [http://www.ilo.org/ankara/projects/WCMS\\_379375/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/ankara/projects/WCMS_379375/lang-en/index.htm) [accessed 5th October, 2017].

As a fundamental human right, access to information provides a basis for the refugees to exercise their cultural rights. Access to information is one of the most important pre-conditions of the exercising civil and political rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights – all of which are formally recognized by the International Bill of Rights (specifically, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights<sup>8</sup> and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights).<sup>9</sup> They both articulate the principle of self-determination, which enables everyone to determine their political status and pursue their economic, social and cultural development freely, and also facilitates the right of freedom of expression (the freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media). Regardless of frontiers, access to internet specifically as a cultural right reveals the multidimensional character of human rights and so plays a critical role in social participation. As a central means of being part of a given community, the internet enables an access to culture, education and discourse; it is a basis for social participation (Kettemann, 2015). In a 2012 Resolution, the UN Human Rights Council cited the internet as “an issue of increasing interest and importance as the rapid pace of technological development” and called upon all states “to promote and facilitate access to the internet” (UN, 2012). Two years later, the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe pointed out the relationship between internet access and fundamental rights is internal to democratic development; the resolution stated that:

The Internet has revolutionised the way people interact and exercise their freedom of expression and information as well as related fundamental rights. Internet access therefore

<sup>8</sup> ‘International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights’, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx> [accessed 7th October, 2017].

<sup>9</sup> ‘International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights’, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CCPR.aspx> [accessed 7th October, 2017].

facilitates the enjoyment of cultural, civil and political rights. Consequently, the Assembly emphasises the importance of access to the Internet in a democratic society in accordance with Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5). (Council of Europe, 2014).

The accessibility of information-related public services – including internet and libraries – provides a socio-legal basis for a political struggle



against socioeconomic inequalities, and could have a positive impact in contributing to the integration of refugees and host communities – by promoting social participation and emphasising the multidimensional character of fundamental human rights and the importance of exercising them. Particularly in protracted refugee situations caused by refugee outflows to developing countries, these sources can make a crucial difference in education, employment and integration. Despite the change in definition of PRS that not only exile situations in developing countries shall be considered as protracted refugee situations, but also in any given asylum country as long as they last five years or more, most existing cases of PRS take place in developing and under-developed nations since most refugees, in an attempt to escape violence and persecution, flee to neighbouring states (Schall, 2013). It should be noted that in such cases the access to information can play a more critical role, as one commentator states (Hayes, 2016: 236), the accessibility of libraries means

they are acutely positioned to combat misinformation as well as socioeconomic inequality (Hayes, 2016: 236).

The Ideas Box is a project that is “acutely positioned” to provide access to information, culture and education for both host and refugee communities and to promote the cultural rights of refugees and development of new perspectives. The Project Ideas Box was launched by Libraries Without Borders (LWB) in 2014 to extend the benefits of libraries to isolated communities and provide access to information for them in post-disaster contexts and is carried out by the Goethe-Institut in cooperation with local partners, LWB and the financial support of German Federal Foreign Office in primary receiving countries for Syrian refugees. The next section will briefly assess the Goethe-Institut’s cultural and educational framework and priorities along with Ideas Box as an exemplar in promoting the cultural rights of refugees in the context of the Syria crisis.

### **Goethe-Institut's Response to Syrian Crisis and Ideas Box Project as an Example to Promoting Cultural Rights of Refugee Communities**

As the cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany with a global reach, the Goethe-Institut promotes knowledge of the German language, fosters international cultural partnerships and conveys an up-to-date image of Germany. Goethe-Instituts are active in 98 countries worldwide and its network includes more than 1,000 points of contact, consisting of examination Centres, teaching materials centres, German reading rooms, partner libraries and information centres, Goethe-centres, foreign-German learning centres and language learning centres (The Goethe-Institut, 2017). In parallel with the aim to foster international cultural cooperation, the Goethe-Institut encourages intercultural dialogue and contributes to development of structures in civil society, as well as cultural exchange by implementing cultural and educational projects and programmes with its local, regional and international partners in related fields.

Within the institutional framework, and with over 60 years experience in international cooperation in the field of culture, education and language, the Goethe-Institut carries out its projects and programmes in Germany and 12 regions around the world according to various regional concerns. The Syrian Crisis is also one of the mentioned concerns, but it is not limited to be a regional concern in the Southeastern Europe and North Africa/Middle East regions. As a result of the outbreak of Civil War and generalised violence in Syria, millions of people were forced to leave the country and flee to the primary receiving countries. Many of the Syrian refugees live in protracted refugee situations in primary receiving countries as some of them are in exile in Europe. The Goethe-Institut Damascus, which is established in 1955 (and was one of the first institutes worldwide) was closed in 2012 due to the security situation; however, cultural, educational and civil society-oriented projects and programmes carried on. In Germany and other regions, the Goethe-Institut has responded to Syrian Crisis by carrying out several projects: in 2016 it created a symbolic place for cultural encounters in Berlin, a project consisting of discussions, workshops, film series, installations, exhibitions, concerts and performances, as a part of its response to the forced displacement and exile.<sup>10</sup>

Besides its projects in Europe, the Goethe-Institut also implements cultural and educational projects in primary receiving countries for refugee communities both in camps and urban environments. According to UNHCR, over 60 per cent of the world's 19.5 million refugees and 80 per cent of 34 million IDPs live in urban environments and refugees living in urban areas may be vulnerable as well:

Unlike a camp, cities allow refugees to live anonymously, make money and build a better future. But they also present dangers. Refugees may be vulnerable to exploitation, arrest

<sup>10</sup> 'Damascus in Exile – Berlin', <https://www.goethe.de/en/uun/ver/dix.html> [accessed 16th October, 2017].

or detention, and can be forced to compete with the poorest local workers for the worst jobs.<sup>11</sup>

Both urban refugees and refugees living in camps can face the abovementioned problems, most particularly in PRS responding to the needs of refugee communities should be taken into account with a long-term perspective. One of the most important points to be emphasised is that once the immediate needs have been met, communities need to begin rebuilding themselves and too often, the tools to build the future are lacking.<sup>12</sup> In this regard it should be noted that a need for a new model of education emerges in post-disaster contexts to enable refugee communities to begin rebuilding. Hayes states, that Libraries Without Borders is particularly committed to the transformative, lifesaving relief that alternative library spaces can provide in post-disaster contexts:

As an organization committed to the recognition of education as a human right, as outlined in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Libraries Without Borders works to bring adaptable, technologically empowered education solutions to the most isolated and under-resourced communities worldwide (Hayes, 2016: 237).

The Ideas Box is one of mentioned solutions which is created by Libraries Without Borders along with the UNHCR and the French Designer Philippe Starck in 2014, a portable multimedia toolkit, a mobile classroom and media centre that fits on two shipping pallets and can be set up in less than 20 minutes. Standardized, easily movable and deployable in the field, energetically self-sufficient, easy to use and solid, Ideas Box is a major innovation for access to culture and

<sup>11</sup> 'Urban Refugees' <http://www.unhcr.org/urban-refugees.html> [accessed 16th October, 2017].

<sup>12</sup> 'Discover the Ideas Box' <https://www.ideas-box.org/index.php/en/the-ideas-box/discover-the-ideas-box>. [accessed 18th October, 2017].

information in crisis situations.<sup>13</sup> As a unique concept of multimedia libraries for people in post-disaster context the Ideas Box includes four appealingly designed boxes full of paper and electronic books, laptops, tablets, cameras, GPS devices, games, a satellite internet connection and a large screen for film screenings. The equipment includes also a preloaded digital server that creates a Wi-Fi hotspot that enables the beneficiaries to connect to the digital educational resources including Coursera, Wikipedia and Khan Academy. Furthermore, Ideas Box contents are customized to the needs, the expectations and the language of the communities. With the equipments corresponding to various needs of communities, Ideas Box's self-paced, diverse contents allow users of all ages to craft a personalized educational experience (Hayes, 2016: 237).

The Ideas Box can be described as a mobile classroom, which can be constructed in less than 20 minutes. Each 'box' is customized for a specific usage, but can also be reorganized as needed. The 'orange' box is the library module and which can contain up to 300 paper books and a dozen board and community games. The 'blue' box houses a video projector with a sound system, a HD television and a generator, all of which make outdoor screenings possible. Laptops, tablets, GPS devices and cameras are in the 'green' box, where all the equipments are protected in foam encasing. The administration module, the 'yellow' box, contains the network and power systems.

The Project is regionally coordinated by a Regional Project Coordinator from Goethe-Institut in Ankara/Turkey and locally coordinated by the Country Project Coordinators in the capitals of Turkey, Kurdistan Region of Northern Iraq, Lebanon and Jordan. In Turkey the project is implemented in cooperation with YUVA Association and the Ideas Box is located in the

Community Center of YUVA Association in Hatay, a southeastern city of Turkey. In Northern Iraq the local partner of the project is Terre des Hommes Italy and the Ideas Box is in service in Debaga Refugee Camp. The Goethe-Institut Libanon implements the project in cooperation with InterSOS in Beirut; and in Jordan the project is carried out in the Community Center of Care International in Azraq City.



The Ideas Box activities at all IDB-locations are carried out by the IDB-Managers, who manage the boxes and prepare weekly schedules in consultation with project coordinators and education and livelihood officers of partner organisations. Weekly schedules provides an overview of courses offered and the times when the equipment can be used (Hesen, 2017) and they are updated accordingly to the need-based concerns in each location. According to weekly schedules reading circles, tablet, computer and camera classes, film screenings, groups for community and video games are supervised by IDB-Managers and additionally training courses on various subjects including storytelling, pantomime

<sup>13</sup> 'Libraries Without Borders and Philippe Starck Develop Ideas Box: Multimedia Libraries in Kit Form for the Refugees Populations', <http://www.starck.com/en/?i=libraries-without-borders-and-philippe-starck-develop-ideas-box-multimedia-libraries-in-kit-form-for-the-refugees-populations&q=ideas%20box>. [accessed 18th October, 2017].

and radio-workshops are organized. Through the weekly-planned activities and training courses the participants are not only acquiring technical and foreign language skills; in addition, they are taking part in the reading circles and discussions, and thus the boxes help interested persons develop their own ideational spaces (Hesen, 2017).

At this point it should be noted that the Goethe-Institut aims to ensure that the project enables not only refugee communities but also vulnerable populations in any given project country to develop their technical and learning skills and, above all, that the boxes become 'meeting points' for both, refugee and host communities. In this regard it can be stated that one of the main objectives of the project Ideas Box is to strengthen social cohesion between refugee and host communities in urban environments by implementing project activities. This objective is directly linked to the response of international community to socioeconomic problems that increased after the refugee outflow in primary receiving countries. Both in camps and urban environments it is of paramount importance for employment and social cohesion to help people who have not yet had training to integrate into the labour market. As stated in annual report of the Goethe-Institut, the materials of Ideas Box break up the monotony of everyday life in the camp and offer interested people a chance to prepare themselves for modern working life (Hesen, 2017). In urban areas, similarly, the Ideas Boxes are a safe place for informal education, information and training for children, adolescents and adults who have limited or no access to libraries or other sources of informal education, and also offer refugees and disadvantaged groups the opportunity to meet and interact. As Philippe Starck, creator of the Ideas Box stated, breaking up the monotony of everyday life and creating creative spaces for the people who were forced to flee their homes, is all important in the sense that:

Above all, this project's essence is about dreaming. This dream is particularly important when one loses everything. When you lose everything you had, the only thing

you cannot be deprived from is dreaming<sup>14</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

There remains an urgency for new approaches to cultural rights as exemplified by the unprecedented situation of refugees during PRS and the response in the form of the Ideas Box. The project is an example of cultural rights through information, learning and communication, and creates an improvised social space for refugees in a state of transience because of the Syrian crisis. In parallel with this aim, the characteristics of PRS need to be subject to further analysis, as the current situation in primary receiving countries for Syrian refugees is expanding and becoming more complex. The Goethe-Institut's response is perhaps a model of implementation and a conceptualisation of the needs of refugees.

The activities carried out within the frame of the project not only help the participants to develop their communicative and technical skills, but also familiarise them with the necessity for cultural diversity (Hesen, 2017). This is particularly true for the children who attend the project activities, learning the value of sharing and solidarity through experience, which is a significant long-term goal. In parallel with the aim to promote social cohesion, the importance of long-term planning should not be ignored.

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<sup>14</sup> 'Libraries Without Borders and Philippe Starck Develop Ideas Box: Multimedia Libraries in Kit Form for the Refugees Populations', <http://www.starck.com/en?=libraries-without-borders-and-philippe-starck-develop-ideas-box-multimedia-libraries-in-kit-form-for-the-refugees-populations&q=ideas%20box> [accessed 19th October, 2017].

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