



WHAT WAYS FORWARD FOR PROTRACTED DISPLACEMENT IN LEBANON?

A MEDIUM-TERM OUTLOOK FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES AND LEBANESE HOST COMMUNITIES

POLICY BRIEF

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INTRODUCTION

Lebanon has been hosting Syrians and Palestinian refugees from Syria fleeing the crisis in the country since 2011 and has the highest refugee per capita rate in the world, around 30% of the total population.¹ As of 31 December 2019, Lebanon hosts 914,648 UNHCR-registered Syrian refugees,² while the Government of Lebanon (GoL) estimates the number to be over 1.5 million.³ As Syrian refugees' displacement is protracted, operational and policy actors continue to explore considerations around linking humanitarian and development responses in a more effective way. So far, a tremendous effort has been made to provide needed assistance to Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities in Lebanon. Nonetheless, many people continue to face limited access to services, livelihoods opportunities, and protection due to a restrictive regulatory framework, pre-existing lags in the delivery and quality of infrastructural and social services, among other challenges.

Over the course of 2019, the Durable Solutions Platform (DSP) and the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS) explored, together with a wide range of stakeholders in Lebanon, including Lebanese government officials, donor governments, international organizations and NGOs, what prioritizing 'a medium-term approach' (3-5 years) within the Syrian refugee response in Lebanon could entail. Many challenges exist within an aid response that seeks to meet protracted humanitarian needs on the one hand, while struggling to overcome structural challenges and pursue development priorities

- 1 European Commission. 2019. 'European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations.' https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/lebanon_2019-08-28.pdf
- 2 UNHCR. 2019. 'Syria Refugee Response – Lebanon Syrian Refugees Registered.' <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/73797>
- 3 UNHCR. 2019. 'Fact Sheet – Lebanon.' <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR-Lebanon-Operational-fact-sheet-January-2019.pdf>

on the other. The restrictive policy environment limits the scope of the response due to the GoL's reluctance towards certain interventions that are perceived to promote the integration of refugees. Moreover, there is also reluctance towards committing donor funding directly to state institutions due to ongoing concerns about financial mismanagement.

More recently, since 17 October 2019, widespread protests have taken place across the country in an unprecedented collective move to protest against corruption, failing public services and a faltering economy.⁴ Protesters' long-term demands include more accessible public services, better living conditions (e.g. jobs, housing, and social security), and an effective state.⁵ While the primary data collection for the DSP-LCPS study was conducted prior to the protests, the research findings and recommendations speak strongly to some of the core issues raised by the recent protests, including the need for national systems' strengthening and inclusive economic development.

Lebanon is facing deep economic and financial crises. The country's dollar-dependent economy has had a consistent capital outflow since 2011,⁶ adding strain to the Banque Du Liban's (BDL) foreign currency reserves. With a mounting debt burden of 151% in 2018,⁷ and a large and chronic fiscal deficit,⁸ the country's fiscal and monetary tracks are rendered unsustainable.⁹ As of October 2019, commercial banks imposed discretionary capital controls and the currency lost more than 50% of its value against USD as the government failed to develop an adequate plan in response to the crises. Effectively, this has strangled economic growth as firms are either closing or laying off employees, which is leading to a higher unemployment rate,¹⁰ increase in poverty,¹¹ and inequality disproportionately hurting the vulnerable communities in the country, including Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians.

In November 2019, the World Bank warned that if confidence was not restored in Lebanon's economy, the poverty rate could rise to roughly half the population, while unemployment – especially among youth – could see a sharp rise.¹² Even before the unfolding economic crisis, around 73% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, surveyed between April and May 2019, were living below the poverty line, up from 69% the year before,¹³ while in 2018 an estimated 28% of Lebanese was living below the poverty line.¹⁴ This presents new and partly unknown challenges for response actors in the medium to longer-term, as the number of vulnerable families is likely to rise and the situation for those already living in poverty will worsen.

This policy brief aims to contribute to strategic policy and programmatic thinking for the next three to five years, drawing on the full DSP and LCPS research report.¹⁵ This policy brief will highlight key research findings and recommendations in the context of the recent economic downturn in Lebanon. As Syrian refugees are facing an increasingly uncertain protracted stay in Lebanon, it is essential that the response encapsulates more sustainable approaches that address common issues faced by all vulnerable people, and contributes to strengthening national systems while continuing to address specific displacement-related vulnerabilities of refugees from Syria.

- 4 Sleiman, A. 2019. 'A Moment for Change: The Lebanese Uprisings of 2019.' Democracy Reporting International. https://democracy-reporting.org/de/dri_publications/a-moment-for-change-the-lebanese-uprisings-of-2019/ and Kranz, M. 2020. 'Poverty set to deepen with Lebanon's economic crisis.' Aljazeera English. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/poverty-set-deepen-lebanons-economic-crisis-200101093225897.html>
- 5 Sleiman, A. 2019.
- 6 Blominvest Bank S.A.L. 'Balance of Payments.' Brite Indicators and Trends. <https://brite.blominvestbank.com/series/Balance-of-Payments-2535/>
- 7 Ministry of Finance. 2019. 'General Debt Overview.' <http://www.finance.gov.lb/en-us/Finance/PublicDebt/PDTS/Documents/General%20Debt%20Overview%20Updated%20as%2031%20August%202019.pdf>
- 8 Ministry of Finance. 2019. 'Citizen Budget Lebanon.' <http://www.finance.gov.lb/en-us/Finance/BI/ABDP/Annual%20Budget%20Documents%20and%20Process/Citizen%20Budget%202019en.pdf>
- 9 The World Bank. 2020. 'The World Bank In Lebanon – Overview.' <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview>
- 10 LBC International. 2019. 'جمعية المستهلك تنشر مؤشر الأسعار ... ارتفاع بلغ 45.16% منذ بداية تشرين الأول.' shorturl.at/qvFLT
- 11 The World Bank. 2019. 'World Bank: Lebanon is in the Midst of Economic, Financial and Social Hardship, Situation Could Get worse.' <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2019/11/06/world-bank-lebanon-is-in-the-midst-of-economic-financial-and-social-hardship-situation-could-get-worse>
- 12 The World Bank. 2019.
- 13 UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP. 2019. VASYSR. 'Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.' <http://ialebanon.unhcr.org/vasysr/#/>
- 14 UNDP. 2019. 'Supporting Syrians and the Region. Results and Programme Update, March 2019.' https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/Syria/RBAS%20Brochure%202019_Syria%20Crisis.pdf
- 15 Durable Solutions Platform and Lebanese Center for Policy Studies. 2020. 'Addressing Protracted Displacement in Lebanon: A Medium-Term Outlook for Syrian Refugees and Lebanese Host Communities.' <http://dsp-syria.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/DSP-LCPS%20report.pdf>

METHODOLOGY

The research was guided by two main lines of inquiry. Firstly, this research aimed to take stock of lessons learned in policy and practice relating to the Syrian refugee response. Secondly, it aimed to identify practical entry points for support to Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities in the medium-term. Four thematic areas of focus emerged as key priorities over the next 3-5 years through extensive consultations with Lebanese and regional stakeholders, namely legal protection, education, livelihoods, and social assistance.

This research was process-oriented and draws on the perspectives of a combination of response actors, including United Nations (UN) agencies, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), GoL actors, sectoral experts, as well as vulnerable Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities at the local level. The research findings and recommendations draw on an extensive literature review, 29 key informant interviews (KIIs) and 16 focus group discussions (FGDs). Eleven FGDs were conducted with Syrian refugees, reaching 102 individuals, and five FGDs were conducted with Lebanese host communities, reaching 44 individuals. The primary data collection for this study was conducted between 21 June, 2019 and 10 October, 2019.



A child living at a collective center in Tripoli, Lebanon. Photo by: Eduardo Soteras Jalil

OVERARCHING FINDINGS

A number of overarching perspectives can be drawn out from this research. Our study illustrates the **negative consequences of the lack of local solutions for refugees in Lebanon. Deportations, shelter, and labor-related policies that emerged in 2019 exacerbated the dire conditions for the majority of refugees in Lebanon.** Operational response actors are **grappling with the ability to implement programs that can effectively and sustainably remedy the key vulnerabilities of affected populations.** This is inhibited by the restrictive policy environment and fluctuations in the enforcement of policies in Lebanon. As operational response actors are already addressing certain priorities through medium-term approaches, the lack of multi-year funding presents a growing challenge in this regard.

Syrian refugee and Lebanese host community research respondents outlined common challenges they faced, including limited job opportunities, the lack of decent work, and difficulties in accessing quality services or adequate social assistance. This research also strongly indicates that **the lack of legal protection is a major hindrance in leading a dignified life in displacement** for a majority of Syrians. A number of issues emerge when assessing the policy and response landscape. Lebanon faces the **need to adopt an integrated national economic development strategy that optimizes sustainable job creation and economic growth.**

In addition to this, Lebanon's restrictive regulatory environment on foreign employment limits the scope of existing livelihoods programs. While the education sector has made tremendous progress in absorbing a record number of children into the public education provision, **over half of school-aged Syrian children and youth are currently not enrolled** in formal education. In addition, social assistance via **cash-based interventions to vulnerable communities remains limited**, unpredictable and insufficient to relieve them from poverty and negative coping mechanisms such as debt. The political will of GoL and international donors is necessary to address the aforementioned needs and priorities.

Selected Overarching Recommendations

- **Increasing collaborative and flexible multi-year planning and funding.** International donors should make available multi-year funding that allows operational response actors to develop predictable planning and service delivery for the medium-term.
- **Strengthening accountability mechanisms relating to the response's funding, as well as the outcomes and monitoring of the implementation of response interventions.** All actors, including international donors, UN agencies, INGOs, NGOs, and the GoL, should work to strengthen accountability mechanisms, particularly in sectors where governmental institutions are engaged in the allocation of assistance.
- **Continuing to develop the capacities of national systems and institutions, in order to extend public services to all.** Operational response actors should continue employing capacity-building approaches that have the potential of improving access to and promoting the affordability and quality of services for all vulnerable people in Lebanon going forward.
- **Incorporating lessons learned from the existing humanitarian response into national service delivery systems.** The GoL is strongly encouraged to learn from the refugee response's data collection and management as well as coordination mechanisms.
- **Ensuring the effective inclusion and participation of Syrian refugees, and vulnerable host communities, in the design of policies and programming that affect them.** In line with human rights principles and obligations, the **GoL and the international community** have a responsibility toward the economic wellbeing of vulnerable Lebanese citizens and Syrian refugees in the country.

1. LACK OF LEGAL RESIDENCY: A DISTINCT VULNERABILITY FACED BY SYRIAN REFUGEES

In October 2014, the Lebanese Council of Ministers (CoM) attempted to regulate the large arrival of Syrian refugees into the country through a policy adopting harsher border and security measures.¹⁶ In May 2015, the UNHCR, as per GoL's instructions, suspended the registration of Syrian refugees.¹⁷ The **vast majority of Syrians in Lebanon today reside without legal residency**, as indicated by the Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR), which found that 78% of surveyed Syrian refugees aged 15 and above did not have legal residency when surveyed in April and May 2019.¹⁸ More recently, the **Lebanese authorities undertook a series of restrictive measures against Syrian refugees** with the GSO actively combating irregular entry and deporting "2,731 Syrian refugees from Lebanon to Syria between May 21 and August 28," 2019.¹⁹ As highlighted by KIIs, the deportations were conducted using expedited administrative processes without a due judicial process.

"It is obviously better to have a residency card; it permits us to navigate freely without the fear of getting caught at police checkpoints. It gives the feeling of relief and ease of mind. It allows us to search for work and education. It also protects us, to a certain extent, against violence."

Syrian man, Tripoli

Across FGDs, Syrian refugee respondents stressed the negative implications of the lack of legal residency permits on their daily lives. The vast majority of respondents stressed the **difficulties of accessing residency, due to high costs (\$200 per person per year)²⁰ and complicated procedures**. Syrian FGD respondents also reported that the mistreatment and inconsistency of the GSO in providing legal residency were preventing them from seeking to legalize their stay in Lebanon. Furthermore, Syrian FGD respondents stated that the **residency permit was important for mobility**, and the lack of it limited their ability to move freely in Lebanon. Additionally, the absence of legal residency permits for the majority of Syrian refugees in Lebanon was cited as a **key obstacle to completing legal papers** (such as registering marriages, issuing birth certificates, or getting official approvals for school enrollment), accessing justice, and finding decent work. The lack of residency reportedly left many Syrian refugees exposed to an **increased risk of arrest and abuse**, with FGD respondents reporting limited mobility.

The more recent economic crisis is **underlining Syrian refugees' legal precariousness**, for instance through continued mobility restrictions due to checkpoints and increased transportation costs.²¹ Due to refugees' increased financial inability to cover rent fees, the accumulation of unpaid rent has resulted in growing conflicts with landlords, which have partly ended with evictions.²² The growing protection issues for Syrian refugees may lead some to risk the journey back to Syria, despite lacking conditions for a safe and dignified return.

Selected Legal Protection Recommendations

- **Engaging different interlocutors on the importance of legal residency status, including the Council of Ministers (CoM) and Parliament.** It is important for **international donors, UN agencies, INGOs, and NGOs** to engage in a dialogue with the CoM, especially line ministries in charge of the refugee file, along with security institutions. This would potentially improve transparent and accountable decision-making related to legal residency policy.

16 UNHCR. 2015. 'Refugee Response in Lebanon Briefing Documents.' http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/documents/droi/dv/95_finalbriefingkit/95_finalbriefingkit_en.pdf

17 UNHCR. 2018. 'Operational Update Lebanon.' <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2019/07/UNHCR-Lebanon-Operational-Update-Jan-Dec-2018.pdf>

18 UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP. 2019.

19 Human Rights Watch. 2019. 'Lebanon: Deportations of Syrian Refugees Despite Warnings.' <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-deportations-syrian-refugees-despite-warnings>

20 In 2017, the GSO issued a fee waiver for a subset of the population, namely UNHCR-registered Syrian refugees who never had a sponsor. However, this procedure did not ease up the process of legalizing refugees' stay in Lebanon for the most part. See Durable Solutions Platform and Lebanese Center for Policy Studies. 2020.

21 Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon. 2019. 'Situational Update on Current Operational Environment in Lebanon – 20 Dec 2019.'

22 Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon. 2019.

- **Exploring a moratorium on arrests and detentions as a result of lacking legal residency.** The **GoL** should consider adopting a moratorium on arrests and detentions – meaning that it would temporarily not enforce immigration law violations. This would for instance entail suspending arrests, detentions, criminal charges, issuance of departure orders, and deportations based on lack of legal residency.
- **Ensuring the GoLs adherence to existing legal frameworks by addressing inconsistent application of the residency permit fee waiver, and expanding the residency permit fee waiver to cover all Syrians.** With the support of **operational response actors**, the **GoL** should further professionalize and standardize the process of issuing legal residency permits for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. This should be implemented through capacity building of security institutions on refugee protection and human rights standards.
- **Resuming UNHCR registration of Syrian refugees to ensure refugees' protection, achievement of durable solutions, and an effective management of response operations.** The **GoL** should permit UNHCR to resume registering Syrian refugees. Registration helps facilitate access to basic services, rights, and assistance and makes the persons of concern known to UNHCR and the host government.
- **Supporting due process by allocating funding and building the capacities of the Lebanese judiciary to enforce the rule of law in the longer-term. International donors and operational response actors** should scale up assistance allocated to strengthening the capacity of the judicial system, specifically the courts, in order to uphold the rule of law regarding legal residency.

2. EDUCATION: NAVIGATING KEY CHALLENGES FOR ALL CHILDREN IN LEBANON

As per the Ministry of Education and Higher Education's (MEHE) 2012 memorandum, Syrian children have been enrolled in Lebanese public schools regardless of their legal status.²³ Highly dependent on international funding, MEHE's strategy is one of the few ministerial plans **including Syrian refugees within the public service delivery system**. Despite the laudable efforts of the Lebanese education response, **our research highlighted a number of contentious issues** that require attention in the medium-term. Out of 488,000 school-aged Syrian refugee children in Lebanon (3-18 years old),²⁴ only 212,905 are enrolled in the public education system.²⁵ While the number of enrolled students in public schools has doubled in the past eight years, the **funding and capacity challenges** of the public education sector indicate the difficulties to take in more students. Moreover, non-formal education programs (NFE) targeting out-of-school children have been developed for their eventual integration in formal education or for future learning opportunities, however such programs are faced with **limited enrollment** when taking the number of out-of-school children into consideration. This is mainly due to **limited funding** available for such programs, the high-level of investment required by NFE providers to meet MEHE's standard operating procedures and issues with tracking short- and mid-term outcomes associated with these programs. **Monitoring and reporting on access to and the quality of education** is crucial to assess the response's outreach and efficiency as well as to target education interventions, and was reported to require strengthening and more transparency.²⁶

Syrian refugees expressed in FGDs that they face a **range of difficulties accessing the public education system** more broadly. Syrian parents reported that schools reached their full capacities quickly and did not take in new students. Moreover, Syrian parents of school-aged children and Syrian youth who have not completed their education, reported that missing more than one year of schooling became a major barrier for enrolling again.²⁷ A shared experience among Syrian and Lebanese FGD respondents was about **concerns around the quality of education**. Syrian FGD

23 Ministry of Education and Higher Education. 2014. 'Reaching All Children with Education.' <https://www.mehe.gov.lb/ar/Projects/التعليم%20العالم/RACEfinalEnglish2.pdf>

24 UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP. 2018. 'Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.' <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2018/12/VASyR-2018.pdf>

25 Ministry of Education and Higher Education. 2019. "RACE II Fact Sheet." <http://racepmlebanon.com/images/fact-sheet-march-2019.pdf>

26 Based on the outcomes of a research validation workshop organized by the Durable Solutions Platforms and the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies on 17 September, 2019, in Beirut.

27 54% of Syrian students in primary schools are two or more years older than their grade's standard age. UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP. 2019.

respondents reported that the second shift had overcrowded classrooms and placed an emphasis on memorization rather than understanding. A notable difference between Syrian and Lebanese respondents was that Syrian respondents believed that the quality of education in morning shifts was better than the second shift. Both Lebanese and Syrian youth who had not completed their education expressed a disenchantment with pursuing education as a beneficial pathway for job opportunities and a better future.

“When you go [to enroll your child in school], they tell you that it is not time to enroll students yet, and then when you go again a month later, they tell you they are no longer enrolling students and that the capacity has already been reached.”

Syrian mother of child enrolled in the second shift, Beirut suburbs.

Syrian parents whose children participated in **NFE programs** provided by NGOs generally perceived them to be of better quality than the second shift of the Lebanese public education. Respondents’ descriptions of these programs include them being **safe and non-discriminatory learning environments**. A sticking point for several Syrian parents was the **lack of certification of some NFE programs**. Although Lebanese are also eligible to apply to the MEHE-certified NFE programs, FGDs with Lebanese parents and Lebanese youth confirmed that they had not in fact heard about such possibilities.

The **increasing impact of the economic crisis** on the financial situation of many families may lead to an increase in school-drop rates. Indicative reports point towards a higher dropout rate for children from NGO activities due to an increase in the number of working hours or parents deciding to send their children to work instead,²⁸ a finding that could likely be reflected in the formal education system too. Moreover, the financial difficulties may lead to an **increase of Lebanese children to the public schools**, potentially leading to reduced spaces and resources for non-Lebanese children given limited spaces.²⁹ Lastly, the risk of ending up in a similar situation to October 2019 – with a delay in starting the second shift for the academic year 2019-2020³⁰ – due to teachers not receiving their salaries or further funding shortfalls may negatively impact education access.

Selected Education Recommendations

- **Continuing to support and expand enrollment and retention of Syrian students in national public schools. International donors and operational response actors** should continue to support the public education system to meet education needs for all children in Lebanon, while the **GoL and MEHE** should ensure accountability mechanisms are in place within the public education institutions.
- **Prioritizing the revision of the Lebanese curriculum to ensure an improved quality of education.** With the support of operational response actors and education experts, **MEHE and CERD** should prioritize revising the teaching curricula in order to improve the quality of education.”
- **Unifying existing data management frameworks, strengthening data collection protocols and monitoring systems, and ensuring transparent reporting of monitoring outcomes.** In line with the RACE II framework, **operational response actors, including UN and NGO partners, together with MEHE** should administer an effective education data management system. Monitoring students’ access to education should be based on enrollment numbers and learning outcomes to assess the quality of education.
- **Complementing existing NFE programs better with vocational skills that can equip youth with livelihoods opportunities.** **MEHE in coordination with Ministry of Labor (MoL) and operational response actors** should complement existing NFE programs better with vocational skills that are linked with the labor market’s needs and are in line with MoL’s labor conditions
- **Developing an education sector plan that covers all children in Lebanon and addresses longer-term capacity needs of the education sector.** In the medium- and longer-term, **MEHE** with the support of experts among **operational response actors and international**

28 Lebanon Humanitarian INGO Forum. 2020.

29 Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon. 2019.

30 Swell, A. 2019. ‘School Delayed for Syrians in Face of Funding Gap.’ The Daily Star. <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Oct-09/493129-school-delayed-for-syrians-in-face-of-funding-gap.ashx#.XZ2DzqDn-BI.twitter>

donors should develop one comprehensive national education policy targeting all school-aged children in Lebanon. Ensuring that refugee-specific needs and vulnerabilities are not overlooked will be critical. Moreover, including support for children aged 3 to 5 years in a national education sector plan is critical, as a community-based early childhood education (CB-ECE) is also required for school enrolment.

3. LIVELIHOODS: BRIDGING PROGRAMMATIC INTERVENTIONS AND ECONOMIC SOLUTIONS

Over the years, the **GoL and Ministry of Labor have issued increasingly restrictive policies**, highly limiting Syrians' access to the formal labor market and limiting the scope of livelihoods response interventions addressing the economic situation of vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugees. Moreover, the livelihoods sector faces funding limitations such as short funding cycles,³¹ and remains one of the least funded sectors of the LCRP.³² With an economy that relies largely on imports, the recent economic crisis has meant some businesses are unable to pursue their regular activities due to the shortage of dollars, and other bank restrictions like external transfers.³³ Moreover, widespread media reports point towards an increasing number of businesses and small- and medium-sized enterprises closing and a rise in unemployment due to businesses firing staff.

In FGDs, both **Lebanese and Syrian respondents expressed a wish for sustainable job opportunities**. Syrian respondents stressed their wish to be self-reliant, instead of relying on humanitarian assistance. The legal precariousness was repeatedly mentioned as limiting Syrians' freedom of movement in search of available job opportunities. Moreover, Lebanese and Syrian respondents highlighted the **lack of decent work conditions**, which were broadly characterized by long working hours, low salaries and occasional wage theft, poor health and safety conditions, and no insurance. Since the beginning of the economic crisis, Syrian refugees have reported receiving delayed payments or no payments at all should they engage in work, with employers' referring to the current crisis when delaying or avoiding paying their Syrian workers.³⁴

"I wish there were certain programs in Syrian refugee camps that enable women to work from home without being far from their children...Such jobs could include work related to mouneh [dried or preserved seasonal food]. We could sell and produce it."

Syrian woman, Bar Elias.

Syrian men and women who have taken part in **Cash for Work (CfW) and vocational training programs** pointed out several positive outcomes including monetary compensations, gaining new skills that broadened job options, and building social capital and networks with host communities. However, most Syrian respondents said that they were unable to find income-generating opportunities after participating in these programs. Despite the programs' limited impact in finding jobs, many wished they were implemented more frequently and in varied locations due to restrictions on movement and transportation costs. More recently, indicative evidence points towards **an increasing number of Lebanese wishing to access CfW**, mainly in urban settings, and municipalities calling for an increase in the percentage of Lebanese enrolled in the CfW programs.³⁵

Selected Livelihoods Recommendations

- **Increasing multi-year funding to ensure livelihoods programs can more effectively align with existing economic development plans.** International donors should provide multi-year funding for the sector, as livelihoods programs remain crucial to address job shortages in the short-term and contribute to improving the physical infrastructure and social services in areas hosting refugees in the short- to medium-term.

31 Based on the outcomes of a research validation workshop organized by the Durable Solutions Platforms and the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies on 17 September, 2019, in Beirut.

32 Government of Lebanon and the United Nations. 2019. 'Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 2019 Update.' <http://www.un.org.lb/library/assets/67780-035714.pdf>, Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon. 2019. 'LCRP 2019 Quarter 3 Funding Update.' <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/72348>

33 Danish Refugee Council. 2020. 'Lebanon Advocacy Factsheet – 17 February 2020.'

34 Danish Refugee Council. 2020.

35 Lebanon Humanitarian INGO Forum. 2020.



Syrian refugees and vulnerable local community members work on a Danish Refugee Council project in Akkar, Lebanon. Photo by: Sam Tarling

- **Harnessing the untapped potential of Lebanon’s construction, agricultural, and environmental sectors** (i.e. the three sectors currently open to Syrians). This research highlighted the need for **MoL and operational response actors** to strategically link these sectors to the available labor force in the country, including refugees. Investments in green construction, eco-agriculture, and circular economy innovations could simultaneously create a substantial boom in jobs and advance Lebanon’s commitment to SDGs.
- **Supporting Local Economic Development (LED) and Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI) and empowering local government institutions.** Particularly in areas that currently host a large numbers of refugees, the **GoL, operational response actors, and development-focused organizations** should adopt LED and ITI approaches, which have the potential of creating economic growth, attracting private capital, stimulating public-private partnerships, creating new sustainable job opportunities, and enhancing social inclusion.
- **Improving decent work standards.** **Operational response actors and donors** should prioritize programs incentivizing potential employers of Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese to implement Lebanon’s Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) legislations, and engaging in community-based decent work interventions.

4. SOCIAL ASSISTANCE: PROVIDING A LIFELINE THROUGH PARALLEL SYSTEMS

Social safety net programs, also known as social assistance, “are non-contributory transfers in cash or in-kind and are usually targeted at the poor and vulnerable.”³⁶ This research focused on the **National Poverty Targeting Program (NPTP)** addressing vulnerable Lebanese host communities, the **multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA)** targeting Syrian refugees. Social assistance in the form of in-kind and cash transfers remains limited and there is generally high reliance on non-state actors for the delivery and administration of social assistance services across the country.³⁷ In the absence of proper social spending, the private sector has the upper hand in the health and education sectors, leading to **unequal access to services for poorer and vulnerable groups**, mainly due to financial costs.³⁸

36 World Bank Group. 2020. ‘Social Assistance/Social Safety Nets.’ <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/aspire/indicator/social-assistance>

37 Lebanon Support. 2016. ‘A Shoulder to Lean On.’ <https://civilsociety-centre.org/sites/default/files/resources/shouldertoleanon-policybrief-ls2016.pdf>

38 Lebanon Support. 2016.

In FGDs, Syrian and Lebanese respondents who had recently benefited from social assistance or were currently receiving assistance at the time, raised a number of crosscutting concerns. Firstly, despite accessing parallel tracks, all respondents expressed **confusion regarding access to and eligibility for social assistance systems**. This confusion led many respondents to feel that social assistance was distributed based on luck or ‘wasta’ (connections) alone. FGDs indicated that a lack of accurate information fueled distrust and misconceptions, especially towards Syrians. More recent anecdotal evidence suggests a general perception that refugees are better off as they receive cash assistance in US dollars.³⁹ In practice, Syrian refugees are strongly affected by the economic crisis, including through the reduced value of money, restrictions on dollar withdrawals and challenges to withdraw cash overall.⁴⁰

“[People get selected for social assistance programs] in a random way. The NGOs stopped providing cash assistance to families in dire need.”

Syrian male participant, former beneficiary of MPCA, Tripoli

Overall, **Syrian and Lebanese respondents shared similar vulnerabilities**, for instance having a family member with severe or chronic health conditions, lack of education and employment opportunities, old age, or lack of a breadwinner in the household. However, **Syrian refugees faced distinct challenges due to their precarious legal status**. Syrian FGD respondents stressed that their limited mobility, due to lacking legal residency, negatively affected their access to justice and exposed them further to potential exploitation and abuse.

Both Lebanese and Syrian respondents also expressed employing negative coping mechanisms, the most common being the accumulation of debt to cover medical expenses, rent, and groceries. Other cited negative coping mechanisms were begging and child labor. Since October 2019, suggestive evidence points towards their increase among Syrians, including sending children for street work, reducing meals, burning plastic for heating, and dropouts for inability to afford transportation to/from school.⁴¹ Poor Lebanese households have reportedly been seen sleeping on the streets or unable to afford their rents, a recent phenomenon and indicator of flashing poverty rates.⁴² The continuing situation may increase economic and social pressures on vulnerable households, as well as increase the percentage of both Syrians and Lebanese living in poverty.

Selected Social Assistance Recommendations

- **Maintaining and scaling-up multi-purpose cash assistance interventions to vulnerable Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities.** This research indicates that multi-purpose cash assistance is a continued priority for the most vulnerable, as nothing could currently replace this modality. **MoSA and operational response actors** should explore how it can be leveraged as an entry point to delivering other services.
- **Incorporating lessons learned from the existing humanitarian response into the development of the upcoming National Social Protection Policy.** The **GoL** is encouraged to build on the existing infrastructure and operational lessons learned from assistance provision so far, for instance on targeting, distribution, and referrals.
- **Developing the capacities of local government service providers, including SDCs.** **Operational response actors** should continue to support frontline social assistance actors like **SDCs** through capacity-building programs, such as protection and gender mainstreaming, monitoring and evaluation, data management, and data protection.
- **Strengthening existing referral mechanisms to enable better multi-sectoral assistance for Lebanese and Syrians.** **Line ministries, UN actors, INGOs, NGOs, and national service providers** are encouraged to strengthen existing referral mechanisms that are set up through coordination structures.

39 Sewell, A. 2020. 'Lebanon's financial crisis hits Syrian refugees hard.' The New Humanitarian. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/1/9/Lebanon-financial-crisis-Syrian-refugees>

40 Sewell, A. 2020.

41 Danish Refugee Council. 2020.

42 Danish Refugee Council. 2020.

CONCLUSION

This policy brief has outlined existing challenges and explored ways to better address protracted humanitarian needs within a complex governance structure and deteriorating economic setting. The findings of the research point towards a number of potential linkages between the humanitarian response and development priorities of Lebanon. On education, the ways forward identified in the medium-term would support the Lebanese public education system and vulnerable children, by improving data coordination and analysis that can inform access to and quality of education services and revising the teaching curricula.

On livelihoods, a number of identified entry points link Lebanon's development priorities with the existing humanitarian realities. For instance, supporting local economic development plans and investing in infrastructure development projects that can stimulate the national economy should harness the untapped potential in Lebanon's construction, agricultural, and environmental sectors (i.e. the three sectors currently open to Syrians). With regards to the parallel social assistance delivery systems for Lebanese and Syrians, strengthening existing referral mechanisms to enable better multi-sectoral assistance for Lebanese and Syrians, developing the capacities of local government and service providers and incorporating lessons learned from the existing humanitarian response into the national assistance delivery present a few potential linkages.

Many interviewed experts expect that Syrian and vulnerable host communities will face increasingly difficult conditions due to the dire economic situation, which may risk increasing tensions between communities. At the time of writing, there remain critical knowledge gaps on the impact of the crisis on vulnerable groups, particularly the Lebanese. It is therefore critical to coordinate efforts among response actors and take bolder steps to ensure that everyone in Lebanon, including Syrian refugees, is able to live a dignified life.



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