

ADDRESSING PROTRACTED DISPLACEMENT IN LEBANON:

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





The Durable Solutions Platform (DSP) aims to generate knowledge that informs and inspires forward-thinking policy and practice on the long-term future of displaced Syrians. Since its establishment in 2016, the DSP has developed research projects and supported advocacy efforts on key questions regarding durable solutions for Syrians. In addition, DSP has strengthened the capacity of civil society organizations on solutions to displacement.



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Disclaimer

The primary data collection for this study was conducted prior to the protests that erupted on 17 October, 2019. Hence, the more recent economic and political developments are not reflected in the findings of this report. The key informant interviews were held between 21 June, 2019 and 10 October, 2019, and the focus group discussions were conducted between 29 July, 2019 and 22 August, 2019.

Cover picture: Eduardo Soteras Jalil

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ALP	Accelerated Learning Program
BLN	Basic Literacy and Numeracy
CB-ECE	Community Based Early Childhood Education
CfW	Cash for Work
CoM	Council of Ministers
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoL	Government of Lebanon
GSO	General Security Office
ILO	International Labor Organization
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
ITI	Integrated Territorial Investment
KII	Key Informant Interview
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan
LED	Local Economic Development
LOUISE	Lebanon's One Unified Inter-Organizational System for E-cards
MEHE	Ministry of Education and Higher Education
MOL	Ministry of Labor
MoSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
MPCA	Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPTP	National Poverty Targeting Program
NSSF	National Social Security Fund
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety legislations
Prep-ECE	Preparatory Early Childhood Education
RACE	Reaching All Children with Education strategy
RRG	Research Reference Group
SDC	Social Development Center
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations Higher Council for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
VASyR	Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon
WFP	World Food Program
Youth BLN	Youth Basic Literacy and Numeracy
3RP	Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores medium-term approaches toward the refugee response in light of the protracted displacement of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. With almost nine years since the start of the conflict in Syria, a tremendous effort has been done to provide needed services to Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities in Lebanon. Nonetheless, many continue to face difficult humanitarian conditions due to a restrictive regulatory framework, pre-existing lag in the delivery and quality of infrastructural and social services, and challenges within the humanitarian response.

This report 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), representatives of the Government of Lebanon (GoL), sectoral experts, as well as vulnerable Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities at the local level. This report explores four thematic areas of focus that 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. The research findings and recommendations presented in this study draw on an extensive literature review, 29 key informant interviews (KIs), 16 focus group discussions (FGDs), and additional consultations. The primary data collection for this study was conducted between 21 June, 2019 and 10 October, 2019.

This report reinforces the need for a two-pronged approach to address the protracted displacement of Syrians in Lebanon in the medium-term (3-5 years) and identifies areas where such an approach may be strengthened. The first suggested approach entails continued humanitarian support and identification of immediate entry-points to ensure the commitment to 'leaving no one behind', in line with one of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development pledges adopted by the 193 United Nations member states, including Lebanon. The second approach is a multifaceted development one that strengthens national governance institutions as well as supports national and local economic development, by creating new decent and sustainable jobs for all. The thematic chapters explore in detail the regulatory frameworks, policies, and response over the past years, and share the perspectives of key relevant stakeholders. Each chapter provides thematic recommendations for addressing protracted displacement of Syrian refugees in the medium-term.

A number of overarching perspectives can be drawn out from this research. The study illustrates the negative consequences of the lack of durable 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. The GoL representatives interviewed for this study expressed concerns relating to the protracted stay of Syrian refugees in the country, including some of the implications linked to statelessness and the economic impact on vulnerable host communities. Furthermore, line ministries and national institutions—who play a key role in the management of the protracted displacement—expressed the need for further support, including in relation to data management, coordination, and service delivery.

Operational response actors across the several thematic areas this research has covered, namely legal protection, education, livelihoods, and social assistance, are grappling with the ability to implement programs that can effectively remedy the assistance and priority needs of vulnerable populations. This is primarily due to 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, such as strengthening national capacities and integrated programming 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, difficulties in accessing quality services or adequate social assistance. Syrian refugees in Lebanon face an increasingly precarious protection situation due to their legal status. 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. Moreover, Lebanon's dire economic situation and the lack of secure and decent job opportunities have amplified the vulnerability of Syrians and Lebanese alike.

When assessing the policy and response landscape, a number of issues emerge. Lebanon faces the absence of a national economic development strategy and a restrictive regulatory environment, which existing livelihoods programs alone cannot sufficiently address. 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 to vulnerable communities, namely cash-based interventions, remains limited, unpredictable and insufficient to relieve them from poverty and negative coping mechanisms such as debt. In order to address the aforementioned needs and priorities, the political will of GoL and international donors is necessary.

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the recommendations made in each thematic chapter, this report makes the following overarching long-term recommendations that require the concerted efforts of all relevant national and international actors to:

- Increase 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. This report's recommendations highlight the necessity of longer-term implementation cycles and flexible funding that integrate tailored humanitarian and development interventions, in order to address medium-term priorities in education, economic development, and social assistance. This would also enable the strengthening of ties between the government and international and national NGOs, by allowing enough time for effective capacity building and learning for instance.
- Strengthen 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. In line with aid effectiveness principles, efforts to ensure transparent monitoring and reporting of funding and implementation outcomes as well as mutual accountability among international partners and GoL should be strengthened. This includes the commitments made by the international partners and GoL during the Brussels I, II, and III conferences aimed to support Syria and the region.
- Continue to develop the capacities of national systems and institutions, in order to extend public services to all.** The service delivery through national systems has been expanded in the past years within the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), especially through line ministries. **Operational response actors** should continue employing and improving 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.
- Address the acute legal precariousness of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.** This research shows how the lack of legal residency strongly impacts Syrian refugees' vulnerabilities, and identifies a number of ways forward. The **GoL** should consider a moratorium on arrests and detentions for lack of legal residency; permit the resumption of UNHCR registration; ensure the consistent implementation and an expansion of the legal residency fee waiver for Syrian refugees; and facilitate freedom of movement through alternative documentation.
- Focus on quality outcomes in addition to numerical output-driven targets.** While the scale of the humanitarian caseload requires response actors to reach bigger numbers of people, this research highlights the importance of quality outcomes for Syrian and Lebanese program beneficiaries, in education or livelihoods. **International donors, the GoL including line ministries, and operational response actors** should be careful of over-focusing on measuring achievements of the refugee response through numerical targets, such as

enrollment rates and number of beneficiaries, and instead include quality and outcome-focused indicators, such as children's learning outcomes or decent work conditions.

- **Strengthen linkages between sectors in order to better target and deliver assistance to the most vulnerable.** This is especially relevant for ensuring positive outcomes for the most vulnerable who experience multi-dimensional needs. **Operational response actors** should prioritize more coordinated social assistance, for instance through strengthened inter-sectoral referral mechanisms. **Line ministries and local level institutions** are encouraged to explore further opportunities to collaborate across sectors. For example, considering strengthening referral systems and coordination among line ministries, local level institutions—including Social Development Centers—and local NGOs is crucial to addressing multi-dimensional needs of vulnerable communities.
- **Incorporate lessons learned from the existing humanitarian response into national service delivery systems.** In light of the humanitarian response to Syrian refugees' experience in sectoral interventions and its support to national governance structures and service delivery systems, the **GoL** is encouraged to incorporate the lessons learned to further develop the national delivery of social services. As service delivery is largely conducted through parallel systems, the GoL is strongly encouraged to learn from the response's data collection and management as well as coordination mechanisms. For instance, learning from the humanitarian response's experience in social assistance could be useful for the development of the upcoming National Social Protection Policy.
- **Ensure the effective inclusion and participation of Syrian refugees 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 Syrian refugees in the country. This also includes the pledge to leave no one behind, which is contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. **All refugee response actors in Lebanon, including the GoL and the respective line ministries, international donors and operational response actors** should ensure adequate time and mechanisms for effective participation and inclusion of refugees in matters that affect them.

1. INTRODUCTION

Lebanon has been hosting Syrian refugees since 2011 and has the highest refugee per capita rate in the world, around 30% of the total population.¹ As of 30 November 2019, the country hosts 916,113 UNHCR-registered Syrian refugees,² while the government of Lebanon (GoL) estimates the number to be over 1.5 million.³ Since the displacement of Syrian refugees is protracted, considerations around linking humanitarian and development responses in a more effective way are emerging.

Critically, response efforts in Lebanon have to be closely examined within the existing and complex policy landscape. Increasingly restrictive regulations Syrian refugees face in the country mean that they often have difficulties becoming self-reliant or accessing basic services. Self-reliance is a core concept in situations of protracted displacement, and implies that an individual or household does not need to rely on any external support to be able to meet basic needs and can procure essentials in a dignified way. While it is a multi-dimensional concept cutting across legal, social, and material aspects, a precondition of self-reliance is that individuals and households are able to generate a necessary basic income, and therefore secure their livelihood in a reliable and dignified way.

In light of this reality, this report has two main objectives. First, it aims to take stock of lessons learned of the Syrian refugee response so far in the key areas of focus. This includes assessing how

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/73287>

3 UNHCR. 2019. 'Fact Sheet – Lebanon.' <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR-Lebanon-Operational-fact-sheet-January-2019.pdf>

government policies have impacted the humanitarian response, as well as broader implications on achieving self-reliance, and access to and quality of services for Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese host communities. Second, the report aims to outline ways in dealing with the protracted displacement of Syrian refugees in the medium-term. This includes examining priorities and needs as expressed by key target groups, including Syrian refugees, vulnerable Lebanese host communities, response and government actors, as well as identifying policy changes and programming options that would enable self-reliance.



An informal settlement in Zahleh, Lebanon. Photo by: Eduardu Soteras Jalil

2. SETTING THE SCENE: MANAGING THE PROTRACTED DISPLACEMENT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

The response to the Syrian displacement has been led by the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) since 2015, which is jointly run by the UNHCR, UNDP, and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) on behalf of the GoL. The LCRP is aimed toward Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities across a number of sectors, including basic assistance, education, food security, livelihoods, health, water, energy, social stability, shelter, and protection. With almost nine years into Syrians' displacement in Lebanon, humanitarian and stabilization support remain necessary, due to the persistent and significant need to strengthen the humanitarian and national systems.⁴

Although Lebanon is one of the ten countries that received 63% of country-allocable humanitarian assistance in 2017,⁵ which amounted to \$11.8 million,⁶ funding shortages have been limiting the response to mainly addressing basic needs of Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese communities. Predictable and multi-year funding is a requirement for planning in a protracted displacement context,

4 TRIAS Consult and Particip. 2019. 'Mid Term Review of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (2017-2020) and United Nations Strategic Framework (2017-2020).' <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/71543>

5 Country-allocable humanitarian assistance refers to the assistance allocated to a certain country, while excluding additional assistance not allocated to a country, such as regional programs for instance.

6 Development Initiatives. 2019. 'Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2019.' https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GHA%20report%202019_0.pdf

which increasingly requires an interconnected humanitarian and development approach.⁷ The 2018-2019 Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) echoed this message by stating that “the protracted and complex nature of the Syria crisis and the unique regional response model underpinned by the 3RP will continue to be best served by predictable and longer-term funding commitments.”⁸

It is also worth noting that while Lebanon has received a significant amount of assistance for its support of refugees, it is not a signatory of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocols Relating to the Status of Refugees that provide protection to refugees. Durable solutions remain largely unattainable to the country’s Syrian refugees, and a broad consensus exists among Lebanon’s political parties that their return to Syria is the only durable solution for them.⁹ As conditions for a safe and dignified return to Syria remain out of reach, safety and security are key concerns for many Syrian refugees.

Meanwhile, fatigue from both donors and host communities as well as increasingly restrictive policies and legislation in 2019 have exacerbated economic and safety concerns for refugees. It is therefore critical to examine ways forward for the refugee response to address the challenges and meeting priorities in the medium-term, defined as a period of around three to five years. A medium-term approach to protracted displacement seeks to integrate more sustainable and localized strategies to the response that benefit both displaced and host communities. The 2018 Global Compact on Refugees lays out a framework for international cooperation among humanitarian and development responses, while aiming to mitigate the pressure exerted on host communities and promote policies that enable self-reliance of refugees.¹⁰

The key tension in the refugee response in Lebanon today is one of juggling humanitarian needs and emergency response on the one hand, with structural challenges and development needs on the other. As Syrian refugees are facing an increasingly uncertain protracted stay in Lebanon, the challenge is in conceptualizing more sustainable approaches that address the common vulnerabilities of refugees and Lebanese host communities, as well as strengthening national systems while still ensuring that the specific displacement-related humanitarian needs of refugees from Syria are addressed.

This research aims to contribute to strategic policy and programmatic thinking for the next three to five years by assessing the concrete implications of existing governmental policies and programming on Syrian refugees’ lives and self-reliance, and laying out ways forward for improving the provision of equitable access and services in the medium term.

Box 1: Research questions

Taking stock

- > How have government policies and humanitarian programs supported or impeded self-reliance of Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities in Lebanon?
- > What impact do government policies and humanitarian programs have on access to and quality of services for Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese host communities?

Ways forward

- > What are the anticipated needs and priorities over the medium term, as expressed by Syrian refugees, vulnerable Lebanese host communities, and key stakeholders?
- > What policy and programming changes would more effectively enable Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese host communities to meet those needs and priorities in the medium-term?

7 11.11.11. 2018. ‘Long Road to Return: Towards a Durable Solutions Deal for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.’ https://www.11.be/downloads/doc_download/2095-11-dossier-long-road-to-return-english

8 UNDP and UNHCR. 2017. ‘3RP Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2018 - 2019, in Response to the Syria Crisis: Regional Strategic Overview.’ <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/3RP-Regional-Strategic-Overview-2018-19.pdf>

9 Atallah, S. and D. Mahdi. 2017. ‘Law and Politics of “Safe Zones” and Forced Return to Syria: Refugee Politics in Lebanon.’ The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies. https://www.lcps-lebanon.org/publications/1515749841-lcps_report_-_online.pdf; and 11.11.11. 2018. ‘Long Road to Return.’

10 United Nations. 2018. ‘Global Compact on Refugees.’ <https://www.unhcr.org/5c658aed4>

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is based on a qualitative research methodology, drawing on an extensive literature review, 29 key informant interviews (KIIs) with representatives of the UN, INGOs, NGOs, the GoL, academia, private sector, and thematic experts, and 16 focus group discussions (FGDs) with Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities in three different locations (Beirut suburbs, Bar Elias, and Tripoli).

The research process has been of a participatory nature through multi-stakeholder engagement. It includes extensive consultations with around 20 different agencies over the months of February to May 2019, an inception workshop on 24 May, a validation workshop on 17 September with civil society and UN colleagues, and an informal validation meeting on 18 September with donor agencies.

Moreover, a research reference group (RRG) consisting of 11 content experts, as well as INGO and UN colleagues, was established at the start of the research process to provide quality control and technical advice. As this research is qualitative, its limitation lies in the lack of representativeness due to smaller sample sizes in the KIIs and FGDs. While the findings presented in this report are not representative, they do reflect strong trends emerging across the data. For more information on the exact breakdown of KIIs and FGDs, please refer to Annex 1.

4. LEGAL PROTECTION

This section examines Syrian refugees' access to legal protection in Lebanon. The first subsection presents the national level policies pertaining to Syrian refugees, the second examines the implications of the lack of access to legal protection on their lives, and the third seeks to identify considerations for medium-term approaches.

4.1. OVERVIEW OF THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK GOVERNING SYRIAN REFUGEES' DISPLACEMENT IN LEBANON AND THE LEGAL PROTECTION RESPONSE

The 1993 bilateral agreement for Economic and Social Cooperation and Coordination between Lebanon and Syria defined conditions for the movement of people and goods, such as permitting work, residence, and economic activity for nationals of both countries.¹¹ This agreement was set aside upon the Council of Ministers' (CoM) adoption of the October 2014 policy addressing Syrian refugees, in an attempt to regulate the large arrival of Syrian refugees. The updated policy aims to decrease the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon by adopting harsher border policies and security measures, as well as ensuring Syrian refugees only work legally within the framework of the sponsorship system, used for migrant workers.¹²

Consequently, the General Security Office (GSO) has adopted border restrictions limiting the entry of Syrians to Lebanon, including various visa categories (medical, tourism, education, and business visas) and shortening the length of their intended stay.¹³ Previous research conducted by Lebanon Support in 2015-2016 shows that "borders were virtually sealed off for those wishing to enter Lebanon", and "the majority of those already residing in the country were unable to renew their residency, as conditions for the new categories appear to be rather difficult to meet."¹⁴

11 Janmyr, M. 2016. 'Precarity in Exile: The Legal Status of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.' Oxford Refugee Survey Quarterly. doi: [10.1093/rsq/hdw016](https://doi.org/10.1093/rsq/hdw016)

12 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

13 Atallah and Mahdi. 2017. 'Law and Politics of "Safe Zones" and Forced Return to Syria.'

14 Lebanon Support. 2016. 'A Shoulder to Lean On: Towards Rights-Based Interventions and Policies for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.' <https://civilsociety-centre.org/sites/default/files/resources/shouldertoleanon-policybrief-ls2016.pdf>

In 2015, the UNHCR—as per GoL's instructions—suspended the registration of Syrian refugees in May.¹⁵ This decision halts their status determination and makes their ability to seek asylum in third countries more challenging.¹⁶ Moreover, with low numbers of Syrian refugees having legal residency, the GoL does not have accurate data on Syrian refugees in the country.¹⁷ As a result, the exact number of Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon is not known to any party.

Additionally, Syrian refugees were requested to pay \$200 to acquire residency permits as of 2015, and Syrians not registered with UNHCR were required to secure a Lebanese sponsor.¹⁸ In 2017, the GSO issued a fee waiver for a subset of the population, namely UNHCR-registered Syrian refugees who never had a sponsor. The research, however, showed that this procedure did not ease up the process of legalizing refugees' stay in Lebanon. In fact, the vast majority of them reside illegally, 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 2019.¹⁹

The Lebanese authorities have undertaken 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,” 2019,²⁰ an action based on a decision of the Higher Defense Council.²¹ As per the 1962 law regulating the entry and stay of foreigners in Lebanon and their exit from the country,²² deportation can legally be put into effect only as a result of a judicial decision so legal experts assert that the GSO is breaching the principle of non-refoulement²³ which is binding for Lebanon.²⁴ The deportations were conducted using expedited administrative processes without a due judicial process. The judiciary faces several challenges that affect its ability and willingness to deal with the refugee file, such as political, capacity, and funding related difficulties.²⁵

Line ministries and security institutions have varying roles toward Syrian refugees, which are not outlined within a clear national policy. The MoSA oversees the crisis response “in partnership with the donor community, UN agencies, civil society actors including NGOs, the private sector, and academic institutions”.²⁶ The Ministry of Interior and Municipalities coordinates the implementation of relevant governmental decisions pertaining to Syrian refugees with various municipalities as well as security agencies.²⁷ The Ministry of Labor (MoL) regulates sanctions against informal labor and provides work permits to foreign workers.²⁸ The Ministry of State for Refugee Affairs' mandate is rather unclear and has recently solely focused on negotiating and developing a plan for the return of Syrian families with the Syrian government.²⁹ The GSO, which provides residency permits and controls entry and exit regulations, has been a key actor in the formulation of policies

15 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>

16 UNHCR. 'Protection.' <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/protection>

17 Interview with a security actor, 11 July, 2019, in Beirut.

18 Atallah and Mahdi. 2017. 'Law and Politics of "Safe Zones" and Forced Return to Syria.'

19 UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP. 2019. 'Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.' <http://ialebanon.unhcr.org/vasyr/#/>

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

21 On 15 April, 2019, the Higher Defense Council adopted a decision requesting that security agencies address illegal entry of Syrian nationals to Lebanon immediately (Decision No. 50/ 3ayn Alef/ dal Alef Jeen Meem / Seen of 15/5/2019 (as indicated in this document <https://legal-agenda.com/uploads/Position%20Paper%20on%20the%20decision%20to%20summarily%20deport%20Syrian%20nationals%20who%20entered%20Lebanon%20irregularly.pdf>)). This decision stated that all Syrian refugees arriving irregularly after 24 April, 2019, should be deported, irrespective of their status or whether their return would put them at risk of arrest or physical abuse.

22 Bulletin de Législation Libanaise. 1962. 'Order No. 319 Regulating the Status of Foreign Nationals in Lebanon.' <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4c3c630f2.pdf>

23 Interview with a legal expert, on 9 July, 2019, in Beirut

24 Lebanon ratified the 1984 United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, whereby Article 3 states that “no state party shall expel, return (“refouler”) or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture”. OHCHR. 1989. 'Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.' <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>

25 Interview with a legal expert, on 9 July, 2019, in Beirut.

26 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>

27 Interview with a government actor, on 10 July, 2019, in Beirut

28 Ibid.

29 Interview with a government actor, on 8 August, 2019, in Beirut.

toward Syrians.³⁰ A legal expert stated that **“the GSO elaborated policies that put security matters above any other consideration... but the law does not grant GSO authority to pass immigration laws regarding detaining and deporting refugees.”**³¹

Interviews with government actors highlight their concerns over the impact of the Syrian crisis on the country. A key worry is related to a perception of an increasing risk of statelessness amongst Syrian refugees. Referring to birth registrations, a government actor interviewed stated, **“the issue of unregistered newborns will explode as parents are taking a certificate from the hospital that states that they gave birth and it stops here.”**³² In practice, a legal expert interviewed for this research stated that a majority of Syrians manage to obtain birth certificates by a **mukhtar**, a locally elected official, but do not complete the additional administrative steps.³³ In addition, government actors also have concerns over the unknown numbers and profiles of Syrians in Lebanon, which they believe might pose a security threat, especially in the case of former fighters who cannot be resettled in third countries.³⁴ Based on an interview with a security actor, table 1 below presents the potential categories of Syrian refugees in the country.

Table 1: The different legal statuses of Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon

UNHCR-registered Syrian refugees	1	Legal residency claim processed by GSO
	2	No legal residency
Syrian refugees not registered with UNHCR	3	Illegal entrants who are not registered with UNHCR in Lebanon
	4	Legal entrants who could not maintain residency and are not registered anymore with UNHCR
	5	Holders of temporary residency cards through a sponsor • Personal / individual • Pledge of Responsibility (sponsorship)
	6	Courtesy Residency provided to a spouse of a Lebanese national or son/daughter of a Lebanese woman
	7	Holders of rent contracts or property owners
	8	Holders of bank accounts (through bank certificates)
	9	Category 1 (business owner in trade, industry, banking, or tourism with a monthly salary that surpasses three-times Lebanon’s minimum-wage)
	10	Annual residency requiring a work permit from the MoL, based on which a work residency is granted. • Category 2 (business owner in other sectors with a monthly salary that is between two and three-times the minimum wage) • Category 3 (employee with a salary close to the minimum wage) • Category 4 (domestic workers with a salary lower than the minimum wage)

Source: KIs with government and legal protection experts in Beirut, July 2019.

30 Interview with a security actor, on 11 July, 2019, in Beirut.

31 Interview with a legal expert, on 9 July, 2019, in Beirut.

32 Interview with a security actor, on 11 July, 2019, in Beirut

33 Interview with a legal expert, on 9 July, 2019, in Beirut.

According to the VASyR, the percentage of individuals having completed the various steps of birth registration in Lebanon decreases with every additional step. For instance, 97% of respondents had a birth notification issued by the doctor/midwife in 2019, 81% had a birth certificate issued by the mukhtar, 48% by the nofous (local registry office), 30% registered the birth certificate with the foreigners’ registry, while 27% had it stamped by the Lebanese Foreign Ministry, 22% had it stamped by the Syrian embassy, and 13% extracted a family booklet of individual civil extract for the child. UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP. 2019. ‘Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.’

34 Interview with a government actor, on 10 July, 2019, in Beirut.

4.2. IMPLICATIONS OF THE LACK OF LEGAL RESIDENCY PERMIT ON SYRIAN REFUGEES' DAILY LIVES

Across FGDs, all Syrian participants said the residency permit was an essential document for them. However, the legal document is very hard to get, reportedly due to high costs and complicated procedures. As put by a Syrian man in Bar Elias, “[the] residency card is definitely necessary. They [the Lebanese authorities] are not giving it to us. It is becoming increasingly difficult. The Lebanese GSO officers make us stand in a tightly packed queue; the waiting time lasted for several hours.”

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. There was consensus across FGDs on the importance for men to have legal residency, as they are more frequently targeted at checkpoints. Female FGD participants expressed that, while it was relatively easier for them to move around without legal residency compared to men, not having it left them in precarious situation too.

“It is definitely very important to have a residency card, but it is far more important for men. Men have to leave the house and work and provide for us and the whole family”

Syrian woman, Tripoli.

“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.

The absence of legal residency permits for the majority of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is a key obstacle to completing legal papers (such as registering marriages, issuing birth certificates, or getting official approvals for school enrollment), accessing justice, moving freely, and finding decent work. The lack of residency leaves refugees exposed to an increased risk of arrest and abuse and many FGD respondents reported limiting their mobility, fearing arrest.

“My son got a certificate [from a non-formal education program] and was told that it needed to be stamped but I couldn’t do that, because I am afraid of the checkpoints”

Syrian woman, Beirut suburbs.

Without a residency permit, Syrians find their access to justice hindered. Across FGDs, many participants said they would not file complaints against an abusive Lebanese or fellow Syrians, fearing arrest for not having legal residency. Many Syrian male respondents stated having already been detained for several days, and therefore restricting their movement to a limited geographical area, which subsequently limits their livelihoods opportunities and potentially further exposes Syrian women to exploitation and gender-based violence risks, as they become the primary breadwinners for the family.



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

The precarious situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has reportedly caused an unknown number of spontaneous returns to Syria, where their lives and freedoms are at risk.³⁵ Such harsh conditions on Syrian refugees' lives and dignity include the implications of the lack of access to not having legal residency and limited access to livelihoods opportunities. FGDs also showed that the access to legal residency is limited and not all applicants are equally served, as many Syrian refugees interviewed reported being refused legal residency and being given departure orders instead.³⁶

Syrian FGD respondents reported that the mistreatment and inconsistency of the GSO in providing legal residency were preventing them from seeking to legalize their stay in Lebanon.³⁷ Across FGDs and KIs, the priorities were to facilitate, professionalize, and standardize the process of issuing legal residencies. Syrian FGD respondents made a case for not treating Syrians in Lebanon as a homogenous group, as they believed policies governing their legal status currently does. For example, participants suggested that Syrians who frequently visit their homeland not be considered the same as those who have never visited Syria since they fled. Participants also suggested that young Syrian men, who are faced with military conscription once back in Syria, should also be treated differently. FGD participants suggested that more consistent and transparent procedures by the GSO as well as removing late fees for previous years could facilitate their access to legal residencies.

4.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING SYRIAN REFUGEES' ACCESS TO LEGAL PROTECTION AND RESIDENCY IN THE MEDIUM TERM

- **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. As a key entry-point for dialogue, international actors should acknowledge genuine concerns regarding the protracted caseload of Syrian refugees while upholding human rights standards when engaging with GoL counterparts.
- **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.
- **Facilitating freedom of movement of people without legal residency through permitting alternative proof of documentation to cross checkpoints set up by security agencies.** The **GoL** should consider alternative means for allowing Syrians' mobility and crossing of checkpoints. Syrian FGD respondents considered restricted mobility and fear of arrest and detention as the immediate challenges resulting from a lack of legal residency. This recommendation is closely connected to the implications of introducing a moratorium on arrests and detentions resulting from a lack of legal residency and a resumption of UNHCR registration.
- **Ensuring the GoL's 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.** Syrian respondents repeatedly raised the perceived lack of clear procedures and inconsistent application of policies by security institutions, such as the fee waiver or being requested to find a sponsor despite having UNHCR registration. With the support of **operational response actors**, the **GoL** should further professionalize and

35 Mhaissen, R. and E. Hodges. 2019. 'Unpacking Returns: Syrian Refugees' Conditions and Concerns.' Sawa for Development and Aid. https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/SAWA_Unpacking%20Return%20Report.pdf

36 Clarification provided by a legal expert on 24 November, 2019: "Departure orders cannot form the legal basis for a deportation. They simply state that the person is illegal and should regularize or leave the territory. This is legally different from a proper deportation order, which can only be issued by a judge in a court procedure."

37 Interview with a legal expert, on 9 July, 2019, in Beirut.

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 provides protection and helps facilitate access to basic services, rights, and assistance. It also makes the persons of concern known to UNHCR and the host government, enabling a clearer picture of who resides in Lebanon and needs to be assisted to find a durable solution.
- **Supporting due process by allocating funding and building the capacities of the judiciary to enforce the rule of law in the longer-term. International donors and operational response actors** should upscale assistance allocated to strengthening the capacity of the judicial system, specifically the courts, in order to uphold the rule of law regarding legal residency.
- **Developing a national refugee protection policy that enables access to asylum and legal residency in the longer-term.** The **GoL**, with the support of **international donor and operational response actors**, should create an asylum procedure under the Lebanese law that abides by principles of human rights.

5. EDUCATION

This section covers the education sector. The first subsection contextualizes the sector's policies and response over the past years, the second examines their impact on Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities, and the third highlights considerations for medium-term approaches on access and quality of education opportunities.

5.1. RESPONDING TO SYRIAN REFUGEES' AND LEBANESE HOST COMMUNITIES' EDUCATION NEEDS

Since the beginning of the Syrian refugee displacement into Lebanon, Syrian children have been enrolled in Lebanese public schools regardless of their legal status as per the Ministry of Education and Higher Education's (MEHE) 2012 memorandum.³⁸ Lebanon ratified the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1972³⁹ and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991.⁴⁰ As such, the country is bound to provide free and equitable education to all children, including Syrian refugees until the age of 18. In 2014, MEHE announced the Reaching All Children with Education (RACE I) strategy for 2014-2016, whose objective was to improve access to formal and non-formal learning opportunities for Syrian refugees, by ensuring equitable access, improving teaching and learning quality, as well as strengthening national education systems and monitoring.⁴¹

Fully dependent on international funding, MEHE's strategy is one of the few ministerial plans responding to the needs of Syrian refugees while integrating them within the public service delivery system. This strategy announced the establishment of second shift in public schools in order to increase the schools' absorption capacity. However, this policy segregates pupils, leaving mostly Lebanese students in the morning shift and Syrians and other non-Lebanese in the afternoon shift. This policy has been criticized for its unequal treatment of foreign children and for failing to integrate

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

39 OHCHR. 1966. 'International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.' <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>

40 OHCHR. 1989. 'Convention on the Rights of the Child.' <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

41 Ministry of Education and Higher Education. 2014. 'Reaching All Children with Education.'

them.⁴² RACE I was followed by the RACE II strategy for 2017-2021, with the aim of maintaining RACE I's achievements and providing equitable access to quality education to students aged 13-18.⁴³

Box 2: Enrollment in public education – in numbers

Although the number of students enrolled in public schools doubled in the past eight years, 54% of Syrians aged 15-18 were neither enrolled in any school, nor employed, nor attending any training in 2018.⁴⁴ Out of 488,000 school-aged Syrian refugee children in Lebanon (3-18 years old),⁴⁵ the public education system has succeeded in enrolling 212,905.⁴⁶ Moreover, the number of Lebanese children enrolled in public schools increased from 248,826 in 2011-2012⁴⁷ to 273,635 in 2018-2019,⁴⁸ a number that is expected to increase further due to the economic crisis.

The Lebanese public education is faced with pre-existing quality challenges, such as an outdated curriculum that was put in place as a pilot in 1997⁴⁹ and a heavy focus on subjects rather than skills.⁵⁰ Moreover, the public education system has high rates of grade repetition: In 2018-2019, 16% of students repeated their grade in primary education, 18.8% in intermediate education, and 8.3% in secondary education.⁵¹ Furthermore, research shows that the public sector is currently unable to provide crisis-sensitive education opportunities that would ensure retention, apply an adaptive curriculum, mitigate violence and bullying, and involve parents.⁵²

The RACE I and II strategies also introduced newly MEHE-accredited non-formal education (NFE) programs, with the purpose of equipping students who have been out of school with knowledge either to integrate in formal education or to be able to pursue further learning opportunities. NFE programs, which are prerequisites to access formal education, have targeted 10% of the out-of-school Syrian refugees in 2018.⁵³ The transition rate from the Accelerated Learning Programs (ALP), an NFE program, to formal education is only 37%.⁵⁴ Although NFE programs improve students' understanding and performance in public schools, experts argue that putting in place such programs as prerequisites make it harder to access formal education opportunities. Additionally, the implementation of Youth Basic Literacy and Numeracy (BLN) programs in particular has not demonstrated flexibility in terms of scheduling and does not take into consideration cases of youth employment.⁵⁵

42 Interviews with a sectoral expert and an INGO representative, on 15 July, 2019, in Beirut.

43 Ministry of Education and Higher Education. 2014. 'Reaching All Children with Education.'

44 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>

45 Ibid.

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

47 CERD. 2012. 2011-2012. 'النسبة المئوية للتلاميذ على الجنسيات بحسب قطاعات التعليم للسنة الدراسية' https://www.crdp.org/files/Page16_12.pdf

48 CERD. 2019. '2018-2019. النسبة المئوية للتلاميذ على الجنسيات بحسب قطاعات التعليم للسنة الدراسية' <https://www.crdp.org/files/201908300826465.pdf>

49 Interview with a government actor, on 8 July, 2019, in Beirut.

50 Ministry of Education and Higher Education. 2014. 'Reaching All Children with Education.'

51 CERD. 2019. '2018-2019. النسبة المئوية للتلاميذ على الجنسيات بحسب قطاعات التعليم للسنة الدراسية'.

52 Shuayb, M., N. Makkouk, and S. Tuttunji. 2014. 'Widening Access to Quality Education for Syrian Refugees: The Role of Private and NGO Sectors in Lebanon.' Center for Lebanese Studies. <https://www.lebanesestudies.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Widening-Access-to-Quality-Education-for-Syrian-Refugees-the-role-private-and-NGO-sectors-in-Lebanon-.pdf>

53 Interview with an INGO representative, on 26 September, 2019, in Beirut.

54 Interview with an operational response actor, on 1 July, 2019, in Beirut.

55 Interview with an INGO representative, on 15 July, 2019, in Beirut.

Table 2: Breakdown of MEHE-certified NFE programs⁵⁶

	Age	Implemented by	Prerequisite	Future Opportunities
Community Based Early Childhood Education (CB-ECE)	3-5 years	Education partners	No prior learning	Formal Primary Education
Preparatory Early Childhood Education (Prep-ECE)	5-7 years	MEHE-appointed schools	No prior learning	Formal Primary Education
Basic Literacy and Numeracy (BLN)	10-24 years	MEHE-appointed schools	Prior learning	Formal Education
Youth BLN	15-24 years	Education partners	No prior learning	Future learning
Accelerated Learning Program (ALP)	8 - 14 years	MEHE-appointed schools	Prior learning	Formal Education

Source: Interview with an INGO representative in Beirut, 26 September, 2019.

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. Sectoral stakeholders reported that this process generally requires strengthening and more transparency.⁵⁷ Monitoring and reporting enrollment numbers at the micro level, such as the level of the school or student, has the potential of tracking enrollment and addressing out-of-school children.⁵⁸ MEHE's RACE II framework recognizes the need for improved monitoring and evaluation, that would be done through the development of an effective education data management system administered by the Center for Education Research and Development (CERD). It would have the mandate to revise the Lebanese curriculum, develop education material, monitor protocols, and collect and analyze data on education.

Moreover, funding allocated to the education sector falls short from the sector's needs, as \$127 million were received compared to the \$381 million needed in the first six months of 2019.⁵⁹ Due to a \$9 million funding gap faced during the end of the 2018-2019 academic year, resulting to unpaid salaries to contracted teachers for the second shift, which created considerable tension and demotivation for teachers.⁶⁰ As a result, MEHE suspended the second shift for the academic year 2019-2020 in October 2019.⁶¹ Based on a joint statement from the MEHE, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, UNICEF, and UNHCR in Lebanon, alternative funding modalities were explored and the second shift for Syrian students was resumed on 14 October, 2019.⁶²

The funding and capacity challenges of the public education sector indicate the difficulties to triple the intake of students in the short term. In the medium-term, subsidizing private schools, with their capacity to absorb additional students, could provide additional accredited quality education opportunities for children who are currently out of school.⁶³ It is important to note that this is a contentious point, especially for education authorities.⁶⁴

⁵⁶ Not all frameworks for standardization have been adopted by the Lebanese education authorities yet.

⁵⁷ Based on the outcomes of the research validation workshop held on 17 September, 2019, in Beirut.

⁵⁸ Interview with an operational response actor, on 1 July, 2019, in Beirut.

⁵⁹ Inter-Agency Coordination. 2019. 'LCRP 2019 Mid-Year Funding Update.' <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/70251.pdf>

⁶⁰ Content provided by a RRG member, in October 2019.

⁶¹ The second shift was eventually resumed. 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>

⁶² Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, UNICEF and UNHCR Joint Statement. 2019. 'Public Schools for Non-Lebanese Children to Open on Monday.' <https://www.unicef.org/lebanon/press-releases/public-schools-non-lebanese-children-open-monday>

⁶³ Interview with an INGO representative, on 15 July, 2019, in Beirut.

⁶⁴ Interview with a government actor, on 22 August, 2019, in Beirut.

5.2. SYRIAN REFUGEES' AND LEBANESE RESPONDENTS' EDUCATION EXPERIENCES, NEEDS, AND PRIORITIES

Box 3: Syrian parents' education priorities

In FGDs with Syrian parents in the Beirut suburbs, the following main priorities concerning education programs were raised:

- Education certification: Parents repeatedly emphasized the importance of education certification for their children.
- Quality education: Just as important as certification is the parents' desire and expectation of quality education, including learning outcomes of their children.
- An enabling learning environment: They emphasized the importance of a safe and protective learning environment, something they take into account when choosing to register their children in education programs.
- Future opportunities: Better connecting education programs to livelihoods opportunities is a concern held by parents, which FGDs with youth confirm as a being a current gap.

Syrian refugees face limitations in accessing public education more broadly. According to FGDs conducted with Lebanese and Syrian parents of children enrolled in public schools and NFE programs, public education is widely perceived as more accessible to Lebanese than to Syrian children. Syrian FGD respondents reported that public schools prioritize the enrollment of Lebanese over Syrian students, not least as later enrollment dates are reported to be set for Syrian students. The primary data points toward nationality being a determining factor for access to public education in Lebanon.

"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.

"I don't believe there are good education opportunities for Syrians here. You feel like afternoon shift teachers are forced to teach. Teachers are aggressive; they use foul language"

Syrian youth, Beirut suburbs.

Moreover, FGD respondents reported that schools reached their full capacities quickly and did not take in new students. New Syrian students are granted access to the second shift only, as first shifts are limited to Lebanese and Syrian students who have been enrolled in schools before 2014. Moreover, some Syrian parents stated that schools have asked for unrequired documents, which caused them to enroll their children in different and sometimes farther schools based on capacity. Syrian parents also reported that the coverage of transportation costs is a key driver of retention, as they fear to expose their children to harassment and safety concerns to and from school.

"I fear for my children, especially when it is dark and raining; they cross the road by themselves. It is dangerous."

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

In addition, students' age, number of years being out-of-school, and prior education experience are also factors limiting their access to formal education. FGDs with Syrian parents of school-aged children and Syrian youth who have not completed their education reported that missing more

than one year of schooling is a major barrier for enrolling again.⁶⁵ Furthermore, prior education experience, or the lack of it, is also a determining factor to enter the public school system, leaving some children to fall through the cracks of education provision. As an education expert explains: **“Children between the ages of 8-10 years who have missed two years of formal schooling face a gap in education services. They cannot go into formal education, are considered too young for BLN which is for children 10 years or older, and might not find a space in, or a nearby school offering ALP.”**⁶⁶

During FGDs with Lebanese youth who did not complete their schooling, concerns toward quality of education, lack of orientation, and future opportunities were cited. The general perception of Syrian FGD respondents, namely youth who were forced to drop out of school and parents of school-aged Syrian refugees, is that the quality of education in public schools’ morning shifts is far better than the second shift. Moreover, Syrian FGD participants also reported that overall the quality of education in Lebanon’s first shift is better than in Syria.



Vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian girls participate in an awareness session by the Danish Refugee Council in Saida, Lebanon. Photo by: Sam Tarling

“I left school for financial reasons. I needed money and felt that if I worked it would be better than to waste my time studying. There are many people I know who have diplomas but don’t find work.”

Lebanese youth, Beirut suburbs.

“Imagine a 15-year-old who does not know how to text a message through a smartphone because he can’t read. My two younger kids also don’t know how to write. The kids stay at home all day, they do not go to school and have no work. Out of boredom, they will surely resort to fighting.”

Syrian father, Beirut suburbs.

Across the board, Syrian FGD respondents reported that the second shift had overcrowded classrooms and there was an emphasis on memorization rather than understanding in public schools.⁶⁷ They also reported an absence of follow-up with students and parents. Moreover, Syrian parents believed that public school teachers are overworked and not always sympathetic toward Syrians. Parents of Syrian children enrolled in the second shift also reported the use of violence in public schools as well as on the way to school.

65 54% of Syrian students in primary schools are two or more years older than their grade’s standard age. UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP. 2019. ‘Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.’

66 Content provided by a RRG member, in October 2019.

67 Ibid.

“My children are very happy in the [NFE] program and want to stay there. I tell them to go to formal school so they can go to school later in Syria, but they say that in Syria they will have an entrance exam and will be accepted accordingly. They are used to the program and it is comfortable. We hear that in public schools there is discrimination. We hear that we will be told ‘you are Syrians’”

Syrian mother of a child enrolled in a MEHE-uncertified NFE program, Beirut suburbs

Syrian parents in FGDs whose children participated in MEHE-uncertified NFE programs, generally perceived them of better quality than the second shift public education. Respondents’ descriptions of these programs include them being safe and non-discriminatory learning environments. Some of the parents in FGDs perceived these programs as a stepping board for their children to eventually transition to formal education, including MEHE-certified NFE programs such as ALP or BLN. A sticking point for several Syrian parents was the lack of certification of some NFE programs.

Although Lebanese are also eligible to apply to these programs, FGDs with Lebanese parents of children enrolled in public schools and Lebanese youth who have dropped out of school confirmed that they had not in fact heard about such possibilities. Lebanese youth mentioned how these programs would fail to attract Lebanese students who are not in school without linking education to job opportunities in a better way.

5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF EDUCATION FOR SYRIAN REFUGEES AND LEBANESE HOST COMMUNITIES IN THE MEDIUM-TERM

- **Continuing to support and expand enrollment and retention of Syrian students in national public schools.** In the medium-term, **international donors and operational response actors** should continue allocating efforts to support the public education system and MEHE in order to meet education needs for all children in Lebanon and to continue building the capacities of the public education system to cater to more children. As donor governments should continue to commit funding toward this goal, the **GoL and MEHE** should ensure accountability mechanisms are in place within the public education institutions. These mechanisms are primarily essential for the second shift, as it would contribute to improving the learning environment.
- **Supporting access to and quality of education services by unifying existing frameworks for data management, strengthening data collection protocols and monitoring systems, and ensuring transparent reporting of monitoring outcomes.** This research suggests that improved timely and accurate data collection and analysis would support access to and quality of education services, for example in optimizing school capacity or tracking learning 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, which should integrate enrollment in formal education, public and private schools, as well as NFE in order to monitor access to education. This would allow coordination and the declaration of enrollment numbers and capacities across schools, which is a starting point to optimize the improvement of access to formal education. Monitoring students’ access to education should be based on enrollment numbers as well as learning outcomes in order to assess the quality of education.
- **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. Teaching techniques should be more interactive, with an emphasis on understanding rather than memorizing, and achievements should be monitored based on learning outcomes. The improvement of public education’s overall quality has the potential of promoting public schools as the preferred choice of education, a vision shared by government actors.⁶⁸

68 Interview with a government actor on 8 July, 2019, in Beirut.

- **Exploring the option of developing targeted, flexible, and quality NFE programs as stand-alone education pathways with MEHE certification.** It is crucial to present alternative education pathways given the caseload of Syrian refugee children who are out of school, the longer-term timeframe it takes to expand the infrastructure of schools, and the current cost-benefit equation to accommodate more children into the public education system. **MEHE, international donors, and operational response actors** should explore the option of developing quality, accredited NFE programs presenting stand-alone education pathways. **Operational response actors** should develop and promote innovative education programs that can meet the needs of vulnerable out-of-school children and youth.
- **Complementing existing NFE programs better with vocational skills that can equip youth for livelihoods opportunities.** **MEHE in coordination with 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. For instance, vocational training should be incorporated into the Youth BLN program which should also be adapted to focus on competence rather than attendance and be more sensitive to vulnerable youth's lived realities. This includes displacement-related vulnerabilities by, for instance, taking working hours into consideration.
- **Exploring the structured role private education institutions could play in the humanitarian response.** While funding and capacity building efforts should primarily be targeted at the public education system, **MEHE, international donors, and operational response actors** should explore the structured role of private schools in absorbing some of out-of-school children. Such an intervention could be piloted in areas with a high number of out-of-school children and fewer public schools. Exploring this option should be done in a context- and conflict-sensitive manner to avoid increasing social tensions, as Syrian children might be perceived as taking opportunities some Lebanese do not have.
- **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, the development of one comprehensive national education policy targeting all school-aged children in Lebanon is advisable. Rather than making education opportunities available by nationality, **MEHE** with the support of experts among **operational response actors and international donors** should develop a sector-wide strategy that would enable the harmonization of programs, the unification of existing data frameworks, expansion of school infrastructure, and inclusive and equitable quality education programs for all school-aged children in Lebanon. Ensuring that refugee-specific needs and vulnerabilities are not overlooked will be critical.

6. LIVELIHOODS

This section tackles the livelihoods sector response and relevant policies. This section's first subsection provides an overview of the changing regulatory frameworks organizing Syrians labor in Lebanon, the second elaborates on Syrian refugees' and Lebanese employers' work-related experiences and perceptions, and the third proposes policy and programming considerations for improving economic opportunities in the medium-term.

6.1. THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS ORGANIZING SYRIANS LABOR IN LEBANON AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS WITHIN A WEAK ECONOMY

Categorized as an upper middle-income country, Lebanon's dire economic state faces low growth with a 0.2% GDP growth rate in 2018 and one of the highest public debt-to-GDP ratios in the world at 151% in 2018.⁶⁹ Lebanon has a high-income inequality with 25% of national income distributed among 1% of the population between 2005 and 2014.⁷⁰ The Lebanese economy is not a productive, export-driven one: It is highly dependent on remittances, as well as the real estate, banking, and tourism sectors. The poor performance of the country's industrial sector is largely due to high production costs, minimal support from the government, the absence of a manufacturing strategy, and the region's instability.⁷¹

To address the economic situation, the GoL is dependent on the 2018 CEDRE Conference reforms and projects listed in the Vision for Stabilization⁷² and Capital Investment Program⁷³ as well as the Lebanon Economic Vision McKinsey report,⁷⁴ which is pending the approval of the GoL. Many economic experts believe that the government's current plans are inadequate to address the country's economic and fiscal ills and are insufficient for sustainable economic growth and job creation.⁷⁵

In order to address the country's financial challenges, several elements could be improved, such as the industry, infrastructure, exports, and job creation, which would all fit within the scope of a national economic development strategy. Moreover, Local Economic Development (LED) strategies and Integrated Territorial Investments (ITI)—with their emphasis on sustainable growth, poverty reduction, and social inclusion—can play an essential role in helping grow the local economy from within and in providing infrastructure and public services. Particularly in areas that currently host large numbers of refugees, LED and ITI approaches, if tied to feasible and carefully selected projects, can be vital to attract private capital, stimulate public-private partnerships, and create new job opportunities.

The arrival of Syrian refugees to Lebanon has generated certain positive economic impacts, e.g. aid money for Lebanon's host communities and Syrian cash insertion in local economy. However, burdens for Lebanon also increased as a result. Population growth impacted the already unstable labor market and exposed many of the country's existing socio-economic, infrastructural, and basic service provision problems.⁷⁶ Competition between Syrians and Lebanese over low-skilled jobs has intensified, mainly at the expense of young Lebanese jobseekers, knowing that Syrian workers traditionally accepted smaller salaries and compromised decent work conditions with little protection in sectors unattractive to many Lebanese.⁷⁷ The closure of traditional overland export routes through Syria has seemingly also contributed to reducing Lebanon's ability to create jobs.⁷⁸

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- 69 World Bank. 2019. 'GDP Growth (Annual %).' <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=LB&view=chart>; and 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>
- 70 Salti, N. 2019. 'No Country for Poor Men: How Lebanon's Debt Has Exacerbated Inequality.' Carnegie Middle East Center. <https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/09/17/no-country-for-poor-men-how-lebanon-s-debt-has-exacerbated-inequality-pub-79852>
- 71 Atallah, S., N. Ezzeddine and J. Mourad. 2019. 'Lebanon Must Develop an Export Strategy to Create Jobs.' The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies. https://www.lcps-lebanon.org/publications/1563883265-policy_brief_43.pdf
- 72 Government of Lebanon. 2018. 'Vision for Stabilization, Growth and Employment.' <http://www.cdr.gov.lb/study/cedre/CedreGoLVisionMarch15.pdf>
- 73 Government of Lebanon. 2018. 'Capital Investment Program.' <http://www.pcm.gov.lb/Admin/DynamicFile.aspx?PHName=Document&PageID=11231&published=1>
- 74 McKinsey. 2019. 'Lebanon Economic Vision.' <https://www.economy.gov.lb/media/11893/20181022-1228full-report-en.pdf>
- 75 Atallah, S. and N. Ezzeddine. 2019. 'In Need of a New Economic Approach: The Case for the Manufacturing Sector.' The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies. <http://lcps-lebanon.org/featuredArticle.php?id=247>
- 76 Harb, M, A. Kassem, and W. Najdi. 2018. 'Entrepreneurial Refugees and the City: Brief Encounters in Beirut.' Journal of Refugee Studies. Oxford University Press. <https://academic.oup.com/jrs/article-abstract/32/1/23/4833579?redirectedFrom=fulltext>
- 77 Lebanon Support. 2016. 'A Shoulder to Lean On.'
- 78 UNDP, ILO and WFP. 2017. 'Jobs Make the Difference: Expanding Job Opportunities for Syrian Refugees and Host Communities (Egypt – Iraq – Jordan – Lebanon – Jordan – Turkey).' https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/compressed_12312313123UNDP_JOR_FINAL_Low%2520Res.pdf



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

The MoL, in an attempt to reduce job competition resulting from the refugees' presence, issued resolution No. 1/197 in December 2014, which constrained unregistered Syrians' access to work to three sectors that have traditionally been unattractive to the Lebanese labor force, namely agriculture, construction, and cleaning (or environmental services as later renamed). Furthermore, Lebanon suspended its 1993 bilateral labor agreement for Economic and Social Cooperation with Syria in January 2015. Since then, the GSO has been requesting Syrians who wish to work in Lebanon within the allowed three sectors to obtain a "pledge of responsibility" signed by a Lebanese sponsor who is held liable for their actions. As a result, it has become very difficult for Syrians to get access to formal work or to acquire and maintain legal stay in Lebanon without a sponsor. In January 2017, the MoL's decisions (No. 1/41 and No. 1/49) introduced stricter rules regarding the professions foreigners are formally permitted to work in, the allowable ratios of foreigner versus Lebanese workers, and the procedures of issuance and renewal of foreigners' work permits.⁷⁹

MoL's plan (Decision No. 8, on 21/5/2019) on informal foreign labor (on the basis of Decree No. 17561 of 1964) has imposed disciplinary measures on businesses that do not comply with the legal requirements regarding foreigners' employment in Lebanon. While this plan maintains restrictions on Syrians' employment to the three approved sectors, it theoretically allows Lebanese employers to acquire temporary work permits for non-Lebanese workers in sectors for which they could not find qualified Lebanese, subject to MoL approval in coordination with the National Employment Organization (NEO).⁸⁰ However, the capacity of NEO to carry out its responsibilities of conducting market research, improving employability, finding job opportunities for job seekers, and building capacities to increase employability is questionable in light of its limited outreach and in the absence of well-established labor market information.⁸¹ Critically, some sectoral experts interviewed for this research cautioned that an implementation of such a plan would have serious implications on Syrians' access to work, and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), especially those that rely on Syrians' expertise in the immediate term. This is mainly due to unlikelihood of employers' ability or willingness to bear formalization costs.⁸² Many Lebanese business owners are themselves operating informally and MoL is not willing to issue work permits to their employees before they legalize their own businesses.⁸³

79 It specified 'one Foreigner versus ten Lebanese workers, except for the institutions that conduct cleaning work which could exceed this ratio up to one Lebanese versus 10 foreign workers, and the institutions that conduct construction work and equivalent, whereby the ratio will be one Lebanese versus one foreigner'. Interagency. 2017. 'Questions & Answers for LCRP Partners: Recent Demonstrations and Municipal Restrictions against Syrian Refugees Labour Competition and Businesses.' <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/questions-answers-lcrp-partners-recent-demonstrations-and-municipal-restrictions>. The ratio of migrant workers to Lebanese is now 1:3, as reported by a government actor during an interview held on 10 June, 2019.

80 Interview with a government actor, on 10 July, 2019, in Beirut.

81 International Labor Organization. 2016. 'Towards Coordinated Efforts for Effective Labour Market Information and Employment Services in Lebanon.' <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/60256>

82 Interview with an operational response actor, on 21 June, 2019, in Beirut.

83 Interview with an operational response actor, on 25 July, 2019, in Beirut.

The restrictive policy dynamics has limited 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,⁸⁴ and remains one of the most underfunded sectors of the LCRP.⁸⁵ Out of a \$214 million appeal for the sector, \$53 million were carried over from 2018 and received by the end of September 2019.⁸⁶

6.2. SYRIAN REFUGEES' LIMITED ACCESS TO SELF-RELIANCE AND LIVELIHOODS IN LEBANON

Box 4: Syrian respondents' main barriers to livelihoods

Based on FGDs with Syrian refugees in Bar Elias, the main reported barriers to livelihoods are:

- Lack of residency permits impacting freedom of movement: Unregistered Syrian refugees who cannot secure a work contract are unable to renew their legal residency. This has imposed serious restrictions on their movement due to their fear of arrests, losing their job, and/or being asked to pay a fine.
- Lack of available jobs within the Lebanese economy: In addition to the restricted mobility of those without legal residency permits there is a scarcity of jobs in the country.
- Obstacles of accessing formal employment: The legal restrictions on their employment and the sponsorship system have rendered the process of accessing the job market expensive and administratively complex for most Syrians. Consequently, the majority of them work informally, including those working in the three approved sectors.
- Lack of decent work conditions: Across FGDs, respondents mentioned lack of decent work conditions, including issues such as irregular payment of wages, exploitation, and lack of minimum safety standards. The precarious legal situation of Syrian refugees has certainly facilitated their exploitation by employers.
- Weaker social networks: Many Syrians mentioned not having easy access to information regarding available jobs as well as training opportunities. Instead, they resort to knocking on doors to find jobs and word of mouth.

As expressed by FGD respondents, the restrictive regulatory environment has forced many into an irregular residency status and informal employment under poor labor conditions. Many respondents stressed that the only way for many Syrians to meet their basic needs was to accept the difficult working conditions and resort to negative coping strategies, including child labor. Both Lebanese and Syrian FGD respondents highlighted their wish for sustainable job opportunities. Specifically Syrian respondents in FGDs strongly stressed their wish to be self-reliant and expressed their frustration at the inability to be financially independent without a legal residency card. The legal precariousness is limiting Syrians' freedom of movement in search of available job opportunities, affecting their psychological wellbeing, increasing their exploitation by their sponsors and/or employers, and making them more dependent on humanitarian assistance.

"Without residency cards, I feel trapped, it forces me to reject work that is located far from where I live. I can't go to Beirut for instance to look for work as one can't predict where the police checkpoints are located."

Syrian woman working in an unapproved sector, Bar Elias.

84 Based on the outcomes of the research validation workshop held on 17 September, 2019, in Beirut.

85 Government of Lebanon and the United Nations. 2019. 'Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 2019 Update.'

86 Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon. 2019. 'LCRP 2019 Quarter 3 Funding Update.' <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/72348>

Moreover, FGD respondents highlighted the lack of decent work conditions that have amplified the vulnerabilities of Syrians and Lebanese alike. Work conditions are broadly characterized by long working hours, low salaries and occasionally wage theft, poor health and safety conditions, and no insurance. Several of the FGD respondents in Bar Elias reported working more than 12 hours per day, some in unsafe work environments, without proper daily breaks, and with only short occasional holidays. As expressed in the legal protection chapter, female respondents indicated the risk of harassment and sexual exploitation by employers, as they were strongly reliant on the income.

“We mainly face harsh working conditions, the supervisors tell us to work faster... We are not subjected to sexual harassment... [but] I saw a supervisor asking a young Syrian worker for a kiss to grant her some time to rest.”

A female agriculture worker, Bar Elias

Furthermore, female FGD respondents who traditionally did not work in Syria found themselves without a choice but to work in Lebanon. This is the case of some female-headed households and some families where men are absent or unable to move around for fear of arrests. As a Syrian female agricultural worker in Bar Elias stressed: **“Women have to work in Lebanon because the men are not working. If they [the men] worked, the women wouldn’t worry, but would stay home.”**

Syrian men and women who have taken part in livelihoods programs delivered by international and national organizations, including Cash for Work (CfW) and vocational trainings, pointed out several positive outcomes, including monetary compensations, gaining new skills that have broadened job options, and building social capital and networks with host communities. However, most respondents stated that they were unable to find employment opportunities after participating in these programs. Despite the programs’ limited impact in finding jobs, many respondents wished they were implemented more frequently and in varied locations, due to restrictions on movement and transportation costs. Female respondents also wished that livelihood programs were designed in a more gender-sensitive way with more work opportunities for women.



Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese work at a project funded by the Danish Refugee Council in Akkar, Lebanon.
Photo by: Sam Tarling

“Cash for Work programs were very helpful, we wish they would do recruitments more often... Once per year for a longer period, for example two months, like every summer.”

Syrian woman, Bar Elias.

To better respond to their needs, FGD respondents proposed that CfW programs should (1) increase their duration and geographic coverage; and (2) be designed in a more gender-sensitive manner to take into account women’s preferences and socio-cultural dimensions. They also proposed

that vocational trainings should (1) improve the quality of training courses; (2) adapt their content to changing markets and economic needs; (3) better link vocational training to employment and learning on the job programs; and (4) ensure that all participants of such programs, regardless of their nationality, get officially recognized certificates.

Syrian women who had taken part in vocational training opportunities particularly expressed a clearer desire to engage in income-generating activities.

"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. We have heard of such experiences in other areas."

Syrian woman, Bar Elias.

The majority of Lebanese employers and SME owners interviewed in Bar Elias acknowledged hiring Syrians because Lebanese workers' requirements **"were harder to match"**, as they request higher salaries and registration with NSSF. Lebanese employers admitted to taking advantage of Syrians as they accepted lower wages but simultaneously referred to the tough economic climate and their increased inability to increase wages.

"We are taking advantage of the fact that they [Syrians] accept lower salaries, but it is because we can't even pay more. It is not feasible, business-wise."

Lebanese SME owner, Bar Elias.

FGDs emphasized the negative consequences of MoL's plan to formalize foreign labor, including employers being forced to dismiss Syrian employees without being able to replace them with Lebanese workers, reportedly due to higher costs and lack of specific skills (e.g. traditional sweets making and artisanal work). Moreover, some Syrian FGD respondents recounted that when MoL inspectors fined their employers for hiring them informally, employers insisted that the fine was extracted from their salaries, further increasing their vulnerability.

6.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADDRESSING SELF-RELIANCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE MEDIUM-TERM

- **Increasing multi-year funding to ensure livelihoods programs can more effectively align with existing economic development plans.** Existing 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. It is therefore important that **international donors** provide increased multi-year funding for the sector to ensure that livelihoods programs are as effectively aligned with existing national or local level economic development plans as possible. Moreover, the **GoL** should maintain the space for livelihoods programs addressing refugees and host communities in order to ensure that everyone can benefit equally from the LCRP outcomes.
- **Ensuring that work permit acquisition does not affect refugees' international protection status.** The **GoL** should decrease associated costs for both workers and their employers, waive the sponsorship and work permit requirements for seasonal workers, and ensure that refugees seeking to regularize their work will not be penalized for approaching the authorities. By facilitating legal access to job opportunities, Syrian refugees will have easier access to temporary formal employment in jobs that Lebanese nationals are usually not willing to do.
- **Improving decent work standards.** **Operational response actors** should prioritize programs incentivizing potential employers of Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese to implement Lebanon's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) legislations. This would ensure security in the workplace, basic social protection to workers, and better prospects for personal development (e.g. through on the job training courses). **International donors and the MoL** are encouraged to push for improving work standards for all.

- **Harnessing the untapped potential in Lebanon's construction, agricultural, and environmental sectors (i.e. the three sectors currently open to Syrians).** Interviews with economic development experts and analysis conducted within the scope of this research highlight the need for **MoL and operational response actors** to strategically link these sectors to the available labor force in the country, including refugees. Socio-economic development experts particularly believe that green construction, eco-agriculture, and circular economy innovations could simultaneously create a substantial boom in jobs and advance Lebanon's commitment to SDGs. The **GoL** is strongly encouraged to address administrative and political bottlenecks blocking such untapped potential.
- **Supporting LED and ITIs 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. **International donors** are advised to support them too. These approaches have the potential of creating economic growth and providing Lebanese and refugee populations with much-needed infrastructure and public services. They are also vital to attract private capital, stimulate public-private partnerships, create new sustainable job opportunities, reduce poverty, and enhance social inclusion. Moreover, **international development organizations, operational response actors, and GoL** should empower local government institutions by building their capacity and supporting them in addressing the physical, socio-economic, and environmental impacts of rapid population growth. This entails putting Lebanon's decentralization draft law into effect and guaranteeing the fiscal independence of municipalities and municipal unions.
- **Strengthening the NEO and its role in determining job opportunities for Lebanese and non-Lebanese.** The **MoL** with the support of **international donors and operational response actors** should strengthen NEO's technical and administrative capacity. This includes improving its Electronic Labor Exchange system in order to better link jobseekers to employers, provide reliable and credible information on the labor market, and allow for a stronger collaboration between NEO and private recruitment agencies and NGOs that provide targeted services.
- **Investing in infrastructure development projects that can stimulate the national economy and create jobs.** The **GoL** should prioritize the implementation of crucial institutional and fiscal reforms in order to regain the trust of the international community and unlock potential external financial commitments. For instance, the CEDRE Capital Investment Program presumably presents an opportunity "to (i) meet the needs of Lebanon's expanded population and economy; (ii) generate meaningful employment opportunities for a large and growing youth population and for displaced persons; and (iii) stimulate long-term and sustainable economic growth."⁸⁷
- **Developing and implementing a comprehensive national economic development strategy aimed at retaining existing jobs and enabling job-creation in the longer-term.** The **GoL** should prioritize a strategic economic development approach that could center on (1) supporting sectors with growth, comparative advantage, and export potential; (2) encouraging economic diversification and value chains of industrial and agro-industrial products; (3) improving competitiveness of local products by meeting regional and global market standards and demands; (4) better linking job seekers with available employment opportunities; and (5) supporting a realistically phased transition from the informal to the formal economy. Efforts to enable the business environment and facilitate business creation should also be integrated into this strategy and **international donors and operational response actors** can support its implementation. A key determinant for this strategy should be a comprehensive market research and reliable labor market data.

87 Government of Lebanon. 2018. 'Capital Investment Program.'

7. SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

This section examines the provision of social safety net programs, namely the National Poverty Targeting Program (NPTP) addressing vulnerable Lebanese host communities, and the multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) targeting Syrian refugees and cash assistance received by Lebanese beneficiaries. The first subsection provides an overview of social assistance-related interventions addressing both communities, the second examines the implications of such programs on the lives of vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugees based on FGDs, and the third identifies considerations to improve the provision of social assistance to both communities.

7.1. PARALLEL SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROVISION SYSTEMS FOR VULNERABLE LEBANESE HOST COMMUNITIES AND SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

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.”⁸⁸ They are within the wider scope of social protection, which is defined as “the set of policies and programs designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability across the life cycle.”⁸⁹ In Lebanon, there are a range of social protection programs supporting vulnerable Lebanese and Syrians. Such programs include social assistance, social security, labor market programs, financial assistance to accessing health and education services, as well as food security programs.

The first goal of the SDGs, namely eradicating poverty, includes the target of “implement[ing] nationally appropriate social protection systems”.⁹⁰ Social protection stands at the center of the humanitarian-development nexus, as a condition for individual welfare as well as for intra and inter-communal stability and long-term human development.⁹¹ The current social protection schemes in Lebanon remain relatively scattered, with low levels of funding, as well as insufficient coverage and levels of support.⁹² While the GoL is currently developing a National Social Protection Policy with the support of UNICEF following Lebanon’s first national dialogue on social protection in January 2019, it remains unclear how social protection programs will be funded through state contributions.

The GoL’s 2007 National Social Action Plan outlines a detailed roadmap for social policy reform and key interventions, including the implementation of a targeting mechanism to identify Lebanese low-income households. The most prominent social assistance program recently implemented in the country is the NPTP, which was designed to mitigate poverty that is believed to have exacerbated with the spillovers of the Syrian crisis among vulnerable Lebanese.⁹³ In addition to NPTP, social assistance is provided to Lebanese people with disabilities, including healthcare assistance, through a card that beneficiaries may voluntarily apply for.

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

89 ILO. 2017. ‘World Social Protection Report.’ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_604882.pdf

90 UNDP. ‘Sustainable Development Goals.’ <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals.html>

91 European Commission. 2019. ‘Tools and Methods Series Reference Document No 26 – Social Protection across the Humanitarian-Development Nexus.’ <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/sp-nexus/documents/european-commission-2019-tools-and-methods-series-reference-document-no-26-social>

92 Interview with an operational response actor, on 24 June 2019, in Beirut.

93 Interview with a government actor, on 5 August, 2019, in Beirut.

Box 5: National Poverty Targeting Program

The NPTP supports interventions such as (i) food vouchers for households living in extreme poverty (10,000 out of the 44,000 NPTP beneficiary families); (ii) subsidized education in public schools; and (iii) healthcare in governmental hospitals, where the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) covers 15% of the bill. The NPTP also covers bills in private hospitals in exceptional cases.⁹⁴

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.⁹⁵ 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 in education and health for poorer and vulnerable groups due to financial costs incurred.⁹⁶

As for Syrian refugees, in addition to the various sectoral assistance programs extended via the LCRP that include basic assistance, education, livelihoods, health, social stability, shelter, and protection interventions, UNHCR and WFP cash transfers constitute the largest share of cash assistance programming. The needs currently surpass the amount of available aid that can be provided.

Box 6: Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance

Between January and March 2019, a total of 66,732 (35%) of 187,269 vulnerable Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian households received MPCA. However, 817,003 (89%) of 913,406 vulnerable Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian households received food assistance through various modalities.⁹⁷ Cash assistance is provided via Lebanon's One Unified Inter-Organizational System for E-cards (LOUISE), which is a unified system channeling cash-based assistance by WFP, UNICEF, and UNHCR since 2016.

The success in using e-cards for Syrian refugees has been replicated by the NPTP for the vulnerable Lebanese to transfer food vouchers. While LOUISE, Lebanon's One Unified Inter-Organizational System for E-cards, is held up as a strong example of collaboration and of agencies harmonizing social assistance approaches, it has been criticized for being slow and unclear on what it includes.⁹⁸

The identification of eligibility and assessment of vulnerability also poses a challenge. The assessment of vulnerability for UNHCR and WFP assistance is defined based on a formula that takes into account the household's size and nature (whether they are male or female-headed), cases of disability and/or chronic illnesses, and the presence of under-aged children, among other criteria. Each criterion is given a coefficient, which is then calculated based on a formula that is not made public to potential beneficiaries. This is applicable for both Syrian and Lebanese vulnerable households.

The NPTP's questionnaire uses proxy indicators while the scoring and final results are issued by the central administration of the Council of Ministers' secretariat. The questionnaire has 30 questions using international indicators. It is mainly based on outcome (consumption) rather than income (earnings) because of difficulties to get accurate data on earnings.⁹⁹ The questions include information about the constitution of the household, availability of social security or any healthcare

94 Ibid.

95 Lebanon Support. 2016. 'A Shoulder to Lean On.'

96 Ibid.

97 Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon. 2019. '2019 March Statistical Dashboard.' Lebanon Crisis Response Plan. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/69391>

98 Bailey, S. and P. Harvey. 2017. 'The DFID/ECHO Approach to Cash Assistance for Refugees in Lebanon. Documenting the Process.' Working Paper. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11899.pdf>

99 Interview with a government actor, on 5 August, 2019, in Beirut.

coverage, properties, basic water supply, sanitation and hygiene data, equipment available in the household, number of persons with disabilities or chronic illnesses, and economic activity, among other things.



A girl in an ITS in Zahle, Lebanon. January 2017. Photo by: Mais Salman/ DRC

These formulas are meant to be recalculated on a regular basis. Relevant stakeholders interviewed expect to see an increase in vulnerability over the next three to five years, because of limited funding mainly and deteriorating living conditions in Lebanon in general. More clearly, there is evidence demonstrating that cash transfers represent an appropriate and effective humanitarian response¹⁰⁰ and cash-based interventions are found to be the preferred means of assistance among beneficiaries in Lebanon.¹⁰¹ However, as the amount of cash provided is small compared to beneficiaries' needs, cash-based interventions are not enough to lead to greater self-reliance.¹⁰²

Interviews with social assistance and social protection experts have highlighted continued evidence gaps on the best practices of cash assistance and the need for more learning. Some key informants questioned certain operational and methodological considerations with respect to how to best allocate the available funding, like the monthly amount of cash assistance, as well as the duration and scale of the intervention. It should be also noted that within the context of cash-based assistance, there is an assumption that beneficiaries would be able to eventually generate income, which may not be realistic for all.¹⁰³

In terms of strengthening service provision through national systems, consolidating the capacities of MoSA's Social Development Centers (SDCs) is repeatedly mentioned in the LCRP, as SDCs are frontline institutions providing social and medical services to local communities.¹⁰⁴ Interviews with sectoral stakeholders revealed that SDCs require strengthened capacities in order to cater to vulnerable communities, and better referral systems between SDCs and various local level institutions such as NGOs providing services across a range of sectors and geographical areas.¹⁰⁵

100 Bailey, S. and P. Harvey. 2015. 'State of Evidence on Humanitarian Cash Transfers.' ODI. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/projects-documents/283.pdf>

101 International Rescue Committee. 2014. 'Emergency Economies: The Impact of Cash Assistance in Lebanon.' <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/631/emergencyeconomiesevaluationreport-lebanon2014.pdf>

102 Interview with an INGO representative, on 15 July, 2019, in Beirut.

103 Ibid.

104 Government of Lebanon and the United Nations. 2019. 'Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 2019 Update.'

105 Based on the outcomes of the research validation workshop held on 17 September, 2019, in Beirut.

7.2. SYRIAN REFUGEES AND VULNERABLE LEBANESE HOST COMMUNITIES' PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

The FGDs with Syrian and Lebanese respondents who had recently benefited from social assistance or were currently receiving assistance at the time of the FGD, raised a number of crosscutting concerns. Firstly, both Lebanese and Syrian respondents expressed confusion and frustration regarding access to and eligibility for social assistance systems. Many stated not being sure why certain people received assistance while others did not. While they had a basic idea of broader eligibility criteria, such as female-headed households, big household size, and chronic diseases or disabilities, they expressed a perceived lack of transparency regarding why assistance was granted to some and not others.

Confusion about eligibility criteria for social assistance was discussed persistently across all groups, especially Syrians. Many respondents felt that social assistance was distributed based on luck or connections alone. Participants often described patchy information-sharing regarding access to assistance in general. Lebanese participants specifically reported word of mouth as the most common way of accessing information, which exacerbates their perception of unfairness and bias in the targeting process.

" [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.

"Many Lebanese citizens make us feel guilty about receiving food support from NGOs. They believe we are living in better conditions."

Syrian male participant, former beneficiary of MPCA, Tripoli.

Syrian and Lebanese FGD participants expressed very similar vulnerabilities, for instance having a family member with severe or chronic health condition, lack of education and employment, old age, and lack of a breadwinner in the household. Critically however, there are distinct challenges that pertain to Syrians due to their precarious legal status and displacement. Syrian FGD respondents raised their limited mobility due to lacking legal residency as a hurdle, which also affects their access to justice and exposes them further to potential exploitation and abuse (Refer to section 4 on legal protection). Another subtle, but important, difference between Lebanese and Syrians' vulnerability is housing. While a Lebanese FGD respondent raised the poor conditions of his apartment that presents a health hazard, a Syrian FGD respondent explained that she was evicted multiple times due to her inability to pay rent.

Both Syrian and Lebanese FGD participants expressed having to employ negative coping mechanisms. The most common one is accumulation of debt, to cover medical expenses (mainly pharmaceutical drugs), rent, and groceries. FGD respondents stated having debt varying between LBP 500,000 (around \$333) and LBP 1,500,000 (\$1,000).

"I am indebted to a pharmacy. I get medications for my sick daughter. I settle the payments monthly using cash assistance"

Lebanese beneficiary of cash assistance, Tripoli.

"There are no job opportunities, how can we settle our rent? How can we settle our expenses? How can we settle the medical bills?"

Syrian beneficiary of cash assistance, Tripoli.

Other cited negative coping mechanisms were begging and child labor. FGD respondents who had received cash assistance expressed resorting to it mainly to settle parts of their accumulated debts, such as paying back several months' worth of rent, and settling bills with grocery stores and pharmacies. Critically, cash assistance was perceived as a short-term relief, and once it came to an end, all respondents indicated returning to negative coping mechanisms.

“In short, when they cut us off from social assistance we stopped breathing”

Syrian former beneficiary of cash assistance, Tripoli.

“The pharmacy and the minimarkets sympathize with us, they allow us to delay payments”

Lebanese beneficiary of cash assistance, Tripoli.

FGD participants across groups reported that they did not have an alternative plan for when the cash assistance stops. As the majority of FGD participants reported cases of chronic vulnerability, the receipt of cash assistance was considered a short-term relief, after which they would be back to their previous situation.

7.3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROVIDING SOCIAL ASSISTANCE TO VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES IN THE MEDIUM-TERM

- **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. While designing interventions, it is crucial to integrate the perspective of vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian communities.
- **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. Moreover, social protection actors, including **MoSA, operational response actors, and international donors**, should capitalize on the National Social Protection Policy as an opportunity to discuss more sustainable resource mobilization mechanisms and adequate financing from **GoL** toward a comprehensive national social protection system.
- **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. As poverty is multi-dimensional, this research highlights the need to better connect assistance across sectors such as protection, basic needs, education, and livelihoods.
- **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. Due to the big caseload of beneficiaries, innovative capacity-building methods such as accompaniment and mentorship should be explored.
- **Mapping a package of services that provide basic social insurance for any person residing in Lebanon in the longer-term.** The **GoL** with guidance from **operational response actors** should develop a package of minimum services that any person residing in Lebanon should have access to, which would form a social safety net. Such a package would allow a clearer overview of required services and could form a baseline for advocacy regarding existing and future interventions of local and international actors.

8. CONCLUSION

This report has explored the main challenges and priorities, as well as ways forward for responding to Syrian refugees' protracted displacement in Lebanon over the medium-term (3-5 years). The findings of this research show that many Syrian refugees are far from being self-reliant and share a number of broader vulnerabilities with Lebanese host communities. Those include for instance lack of access to decent work and sustainable livelihoods, restricted social assistance provisions perceived as confusing and inequitable, and limited access to quality education and access to justice, among others.

While Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese communities share many vulnerabilities, Syrians face distinct challenges relating to their precarious legal situation. Arguably, this research highlights that Syrians' challenges in obtaining legal residency strongly affect their self-reliance, by limiting their freedom of movement, access to livelihoods, and justice. Existing data and current trends point toward the unlikelihood of Syrian refugees to return home anytime soon.¹⁰⁶ This reality certainly requires bringing the humanitarian response and national economic development agendas closer together.

With Syrians' displacement entering its ninth year, medium-term response planning should be prioritized going forward. Many interviewed experts expect that Syrian and vulnerable host communities will face increasingly difficult conditions due to the dire economic situation. The latter may risk leading to increased tensions. It is therefore critical to coordinate efforts and take bolder steps to ensure that everyone in Lebanon, including Syrian refugees, is able to live a dignified life, even when in displacement.

106 For more on this issue refer to: 11.11.11. 2018. 'Long Road to Return.' and Mhaissen and Hodges. 2019. 'Unpacking Returns.'

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ANNEX 1: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research employed primary and secondary qualitative data collection methods, namely a desk review, key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs). The desk review was finalized in June 2019 and molded the research questions by reviewing and outlining evidence from existing literature, identifying knowledge gaps, as well as providing a strong background to the research focus. Between June and October 2019, 29 KIIs were held to gauge diversified perspectives on the thematic areas with key stakeholders. The breakdown of the KIIs is presented in table 3 below.

Table 3: Breakdown of KIIs by type of actor

	GoL	UN Agencies	INGOs	Local Public Institutions	Local NGOs	Private Sector	Sectoral Experts
Legal Protection	3		1		2		1
Education	2	1	2	1		2	1
Livelihoods	1		1	1			2
Social Protection	2	2	2		2		

In August 2019, 16 FGDs were held with vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugees in order to gain their perspectives and better understand how macro-level policies and programs affected their daily lives. Eleven FGDs were conducted with Syrian refugees, reaching 102 individuals, and five FGDs were conducted with Lebanese host communities, reaching 44 individuals. The FGDs were divided by thematic area: Six FGDs on education, six on livelihoods, and four on social protection. Legal protection questions were examined across all FGDs conducted with Syrian participants. Based on the consultations, inception workshop, and evidence gaps identified through the literature review, FGDs were targeted to certain population categories to ensure relevant perspectives were included.

The geographic locations selected to conduct the FGDs were based on the desk review as well as consultations with RRG members. The education FGDs were held in Ard Jalloul, geographically located in Greater Beirut near Shatila Camp. Counted within Chiyah's cadastral boundaries, the area hosts 37,653 UNHCR-registered Syrian refugees and is the area most densely populated with Syrian refugees in Beirut and Mount Lebanon.¹⁰⁷ The area is also densely populated with Palestinian refugees from Lebanon and Syria, as well as Lebanese communities. Moreover, Mount Lebanon has the highest enrollment rate in public schools, reaching 26%.¹⁰⁸

The livelihoods FGDs were held in Bar Elias, in the district of Zahle, which hosts Lebanon's highest number of UNHCR-registered Syrian refugees. Out of the 154,328 UNHCR-registered Syrians in Zahle district,¹⁰⁹ Bar Elias hosts 30,550,¹¹⁰ the highest number in the district, while having a local population between 60,000 and 70,000.¹¹¹ After Zahle, Bar Elias is the second-largest town in the Bekaa and is considered to be more developed than other neighboring villages given its urban character.

107 UNHCR. 2019. 'Lebanon Beirut and Mount Lebanon Governorates – Distribution of the Registered Syrian Refugees at the Cadastral Level.' <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/69592>

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

109 UNHCR. 2019. 'Lebanon Syrian Refugees Registered.' <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/71254>

110 UNHCR. 2019. 'Lebanon Bekaa and Baalbek-El Hermel Governorate – Distribution of the Registered Syrian Refugees at the Cadastral Level.' <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/69594>

111 UNDP. 2018. 'Below the Surface: Results of a WhatsApp Survey of Syrian Refugees and Host Communities in Lebanon.' <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/67579>

Social assistance FGDs were held in Tripoli, Lebanon's second largest city, with a high poverty rate. Indeed, 57% of the local population is considered poor and deprived.¹¹² Moreover, North Lebanon has the second highest concentration of Syrian refugees after the Bekaa. In light of Tripoli's urbanized context, Syrian refugees alongside Lebanese citizens experience urbanized poverty, and Tripoli has one of the highest concentrations of National Poverty Targeting Program (NPTP) beneficiaries presented in the latest published map of household beneficiaries.¹¹³

Table 4: Breakdown of FGDs

	Number of Participants	Gender	Nationality	Profile
Education	8	Female	Syrian	Mothers of Syrian children enrolled in the second shift
	8	Female	Syrian	Mothers of Syrian children enrolled in the accelerated learning program (ALP)
	6	Male	Syrian	Fathers of Syrian children enrolled in non-formal education programs that are not approved by MEHE and are implemented by INGOs
	8	Mixed	Syrian	Syrian dropouts
	8	Female	Lebanese	Mothers of Lebanese children enrolled in public schools' first shift with Syrians in class
	8	Mixed	Lebanese	Lebanese dropouts
Livelihoods	9	Male	Syrian	Working in construction
	11	Female	Syrian	Working in agriculture
	6	Male	Syrian	Working in unapproved sectors
	12	Mixed	Syrian	Former beneficiaries of Cash for Work
	10	Mixed	Syrian	Former beneficiaries of Vocational Trainings
	5	Male	Lebanese	SME owners employing Syrians
Social Assistance	12	Female	Syrian	Beneficiaries of Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance
	12	Mixed	Syrian	Former beneficiaries of Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance
	12	Mixed	Lebanese	Beneficiaries of Cash Assistance
	10	Mixed	Lebanese	Former beneficiaries of Cash Assistance

112 UN ESCWA. 2015. 'Poverty in Tripoli.' <https://www.unescwa.org/news/poverty-tripoli>

113 Lebanese Republic Presidency of the Council of Ministers. 2019. 'National Poverty Targeting Program -Distribution of Beneficiary Households by Caza.' http://nptp.pcm.gov.lb/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Caza_Combined.pdf

