



Middle East
Centre

THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS IN LEBANON

STATE FRAGILITY AND SOCIAL RESILIENCE

FILIPPO DIONIGI



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THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS IN LEBANON:
STATE FRAGILITY AND SOCIAL RESILIENCE
Filippo Dionigi

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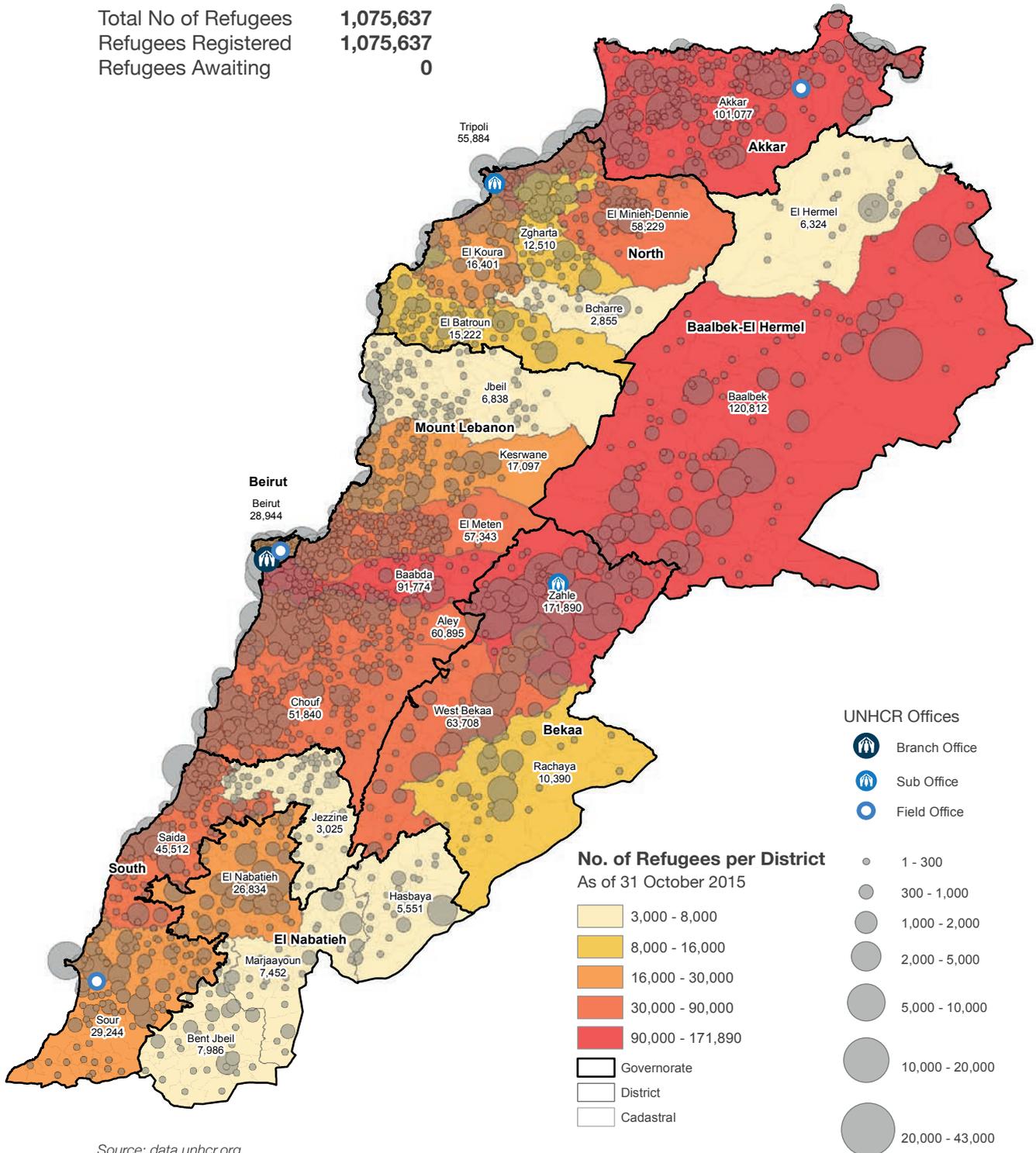
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Syrian Refugees Registered in Lebanon

UNHCR Lebanon Country Office, 30 October 2015

Total No of Refugees **1,075,637**
 Refugees Registered **1,075,637**
 Refugees Awaiting **0**



Source: data.unhcr.org

Executive Summary¹

At least 250,000 civilians have been killed in the Syrian conflict since 2011.² The war has devastated infrastructure and economy³ and has transformed entire regions of the state into semi-anarchical or warlord-ruled areas. Millions of Syrians have fled their homes to seek refuge either in different areas of the country or abroad. The scale of this forced migration has no precedent in the modern history of the Middle East; according to official sources there are 6.6 million internally displaced persons and 4.7 million refugees.⁴ About half of the Syrian population is forcibly displaced.

Owing to its geographic proximity, the overlap in language and historical relations with its neighbour, Lebanon is one of the most obvious destinations for Syrians trying to escape the civil war, and around 1.2 million have registered there with the UNHCR. Yet, this small country (only slightly bigger than Cyprus) with a population of about 4 million and a history of troubled relations with Damascus, is hardly an ideal refuge.⁵ Many of Lebanon's political factions and paramilitary groups are closely related to or directly involved in events in Syria, and Lebanese state institutions are known for their scarce capacity for the provision of essential services and security even to Lebanese nationals.

Nevertheless, although five years ago it was plausible that the conflict would spill into Lebanon, grave security incidents that have occurred have remained localised and episodic. While the refugee crisis has caused concerns and been perceived as yet another destabilising factor in the social, political, and economic context of the country, considering the magnitude of the phenomenon its impact has not yet caused as much disruption as could have been expected. Syrians in Lebanon are vulnerable and those in the category of 'displaced' (*nazih*) are increasingly segregated. The local host communities are strained by limited infrastructural capacity and increased competition for services and resources. Still, episodes of friction with the refugee population have been relatively limited.

This report provides an account of the situation in five sections. Firstly, it offers an account of the unfolding of the crisis from the perspective of Lebanese political institutions. Secondly, it maps political reactions to the crisis, focussing on the main actors involved.

¹ I am grateful for the constructive comments of the reviewers of this report, whose comments I tried to incorporate as much as possible. I am especially grateful to those interviewed as part of my research. This research was partly funded by the Leverhulme Trust, grant ECF-2014-675. The responsibility for the content of this report remains exclusively that of the author.

² 'Ahead of Geneva Talks, UN Envoy Addresses All Syrians in Video Message', *UN News Centre*. Available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=53118#.VrnypmLSHt> (accessed 8 February 2016).

³ David Butter, *Syria's Economy: Picking up the Pieces* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2015).

⁴ UN OCHA, 'Syrian Arab Republic', *United Nations*. Available at <http://www.unocha.org/syria> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁵ International Crisis Group, 'Too Close for Comfort: Syrians in Lebanon', *Middle East Report* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2013).

Thirdly, it analyses the status of Syrians displaced in Lebanon – displacement being one of the main sources of vulnerability. Fourthly, it highlights the role played by local administrations and international organisations in managing the crisis. And finally, it illustrates how Syrian-Lebanese migrations have a consolidated history based on mutual economic interests, and social and cultural ties.

Based on these considerations, the report then proposes a set of possible courses of action to be undertaken by various stakeholders. The objective of this report is to strengthen knowledge and understanding of the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon and, on this basis, it proposes policy guidelines that can facilitate greater protection for refugees as well as support the stability and development of the host country.

Suggested Guidelines for Action

To Lebanese Institutions

- Lebanese public institutions should develop a clear legal framework which provides refugees with a well-defined status that protects their rights.
- Lebanese institutions should allow Syrians in Lebanon to access essential services and enjoy fundamental rights, including the right to work.
- Lebanese political groups should address the Syrian presence as a purely humanitarian issue, trying to avoid the politicisation of refugee identity by associating their presence with various political or sectarian factions.
- The rich academic and civil society community of Lebanon should be supported in developing research and communications strategies to avoid the spread of xenophobic rhetoric and to show the real implications of the crisis from a problem-solving perspective.
- Lebanese institutions should consider the development and establishment of a regional cooperation process for refugee protection.

To States and Supranational Institutions

- States, as well as supranational institutions such as the European Union (EU) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) should increase and sustain financial support for transparent and effective humanitarian action and developmental projects for both refugees and host communities.
- States and supranational institutions should fulfil their aid and funding pledges as announced in international conferences.
- All states and supranational institutions should immediately engage in resettlement operations, and/or in the revision of visa and migration regulations so that they are proportionate to the magnitude of the crisis.

- States should abide by the legal obligations to which they are bound on the basis of international customary law and the treaties they are party to (including the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, its additional protocols and other regional treaties).
- States should consider that ‘burden-sharing’ instead of ‘buck-passing’ is the key strategy to cope with the crisis successfully and in a long-term perspective.

To International Organisations

- Ensure that relations between host communities and refugees remain constructive, thus making sure aid does not cause a sense of relative deprivation and have polarising effects.
- Emphasise and enable the development of crisis management for local communities and the national government.
- Consider that foreign aid, although vital in sustaining current operations, can only be a short- to medium-term strategy, and long-term economic sustainability of the Syrian presence should be facilitated.
- Capitalise on the historical record of Syrian migrations to Lebanon, which has been an important economic resource for decades and also relies on cultural as well as family connections. Informal networks are also important instruments through which refugees can enhance their living conditions when displaced.

To Civil Society Organisations

- Maintain a separation from political and sectarian dynamics.
- Ensure that relations between host communities and refugees remain positive, making sure that aid does not cause a sense of relative deprivation and have polarising effects.

To the General Public

- Donate to well-reputed and transparent aid organisations that clearly and publicly account for their activity.
- Stay informed, using reliable and documented sources. Do not become swayed by superficial stereotyping and unjustified perceptions of insecurity associated with migration processes.
- Be aware that states and their governments (whatever their political orientation) have a universal legal obligation to help and protect refugees, grounded in international customary law and further reinforced by several international treaties regularly ratified by a majority of states.

The Unfolding of the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon

It was on 28 April 2011 that the refugee crisis caused by conflict between the Syrian opposition and government forces first directly affected Lebanon. About two thousand Syrians from the area of Talkalakh crossed the border into Lebanon and temporarily settled in the northern area of Wadi Khaled, where some of them had family connections or trade relations.¹

It was the beginning of a phenomenon that would grow to an unprecedented magnitude in the following four years. By January 2015, nearly 1.2 million Syrians were registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Lebanon, amounting to a quarter of its autochthonous population. In May 2015 the Lebanese government asked the UNHCR to suspend the official registration of refugees, and since then no other reliable figures have been made public. In all likelihood the refugee population has continued to grow, albeit at a slower pace.

Since the beginning of the crisis in 2011, the Lebanese Government (then headed by pro-Saudi Prime Minister Saad Hariri) and the UNHCR, have been active in addressing the situation. The UNHCR established a presence in the northern border area and the government tasked the High Relief Committee² as well as the Ministry of Social Affairs³ (MoSA) to ensure that that refugees coming from Syria received the necessary humanitarian attention. The phenomenon, at the time, was perceived as short-term and contained. Many were expecting the imminent fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime,⁴ and the presence of refugees in Lebanon was an opportunity for the regime's critics to highlight the ferociousness of its repression and the repercussions of this for Lebanon.

In June 2011, Najib Mikati, more closely connected with the Syrian establishment, replaced Hariri as Prime Minister. Mikati's government did not significantly change the general approach to the crisis, in the sense that most of the activity related to crisis management remained under the control of the MoSA, the High Relief Committee (whose responsibility was mainly financial) and the UNHCR which was the main coordinator. For a year or so, the refugee presence in Lebanon kept growing but remained relatively limited. By July 2012, there were about one hundred thousand Syrians registered with UNHCR.⁵

¹ 'UNHCR Works with Lebanon to Help Thousands Fleeing Syria Violence', *UNHCR*. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/4dd66d3e6.html> (accessed 8 February 2016).

² 'High Relief Commission (HRC Lebanon)', *UNHCR*. Available at <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/partner.php?OrgId=13> (accessed 8 February 2016).

³ 'Website of the Ministry of Social Affairs of Lebanon', *Ministry of Social Affairs*. Available at <http://www.socialaffairs.gov.lb/MSADefault.aspx> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁴ Jeffrey Goldberg, 'Hillary Clinton: Bashar's Days Are 'Numbered'', *The Atlantic*. Available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/07/hillary-clinton-bashars-days-are-numbered/259547/> (accessed 8 February 2016); 'Lebanon's Hariri Says Syria's Assad Fall 'Inevitable'', *Reuters*. Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-hariri-idUSBRE91D1ER20130214> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁵ 'Syria Regional Refugee Response: Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal (Lebanon)', *UNHCR*. Available at <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122#> (accessed 8 February 2016).

As events evolved, Mikati's government became less keen to engage directly in crisis management. The Syrian conflict was beginning to look more long-term with inevitable, although uncertain, repercussions for Lebanon. The Syrian presence consequently became a source of political contention within the divided political arena of the host country.

In March 2012, the UN enacted the first Regional Response Plan (RRP), a humanitarian project which, with its subsequent addenda, was unprecedentedly large. The RRP was launched with an overall budget demand of 100 million US Dollars, which subsequently became 1 billion US Dollars in 2013 and 1.7 billion in 2014.⁶ A new programme was launched in 2015 with a forecasted budget of 2.14 billion US Dollars, while the continuation of this programme in 2016 requires funding of up to 2.48 billion US Dollars in order to be fully implemented.

In June 2012, all political parties adopted the Ba'adba Declaration,⁷ which formally stated Lebanon's dissociation policy from regional and international conflict as part of its National Dialogue framework. Interestingly, the declaration did not refer to the refugee situation, but mentioned the importance of the 'right to humanitarian solidarity' as 'guaranteed under the constitution and the law.'⁸

Owing to internal quarrels,⁹ Mikati removed the High Relief Council from the crisis management task, and the MoSA became the main entity in charge of collaborating with the UNHCR on the matter. Almost all officers interviewed observed that the ministry's capacities were limited in terms of infrastructure and know-how. The UNHCR and its partner agencies were given a great deal of autonomy over a situation in which the Lebanese government was fundamentally unwilling to act, fearing that taking a stance would have destabilising effects.

In late spring and summer of 2012, new reports emerged in the Lebanese media indicating that the General Security Office (GSO), the security agency also responsible for border enforcement,¹⁰ had begun a process of repatriation of Syrians, including refugees.¹¹

⁶ UNHCR Annual Reports, in 2012 90% of the funding was provided, 72% in 2013 and 46% in 2014. At the end of 2014, a new expanded plan was launched – the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) – with a more comprehensive approach also targeting aspects of the crisis affecting host countries. The part of this plan dedicated to the case of Lebanon, has a requested budget of 2.14 billion US Dollars which is equivalent to about 5% of Lebanon's GDP in 2013.

⁷ Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the UN, *Baabda Declaration Issued by the National Dialogue Committee on 11 June 2012* (New York: UN Security Council, 2012).

⁸ 'National Dialogue', *Presidency of the Republic of Lebanon*. Available at <http://www.presidency.gov.lb/English/News/Pages/NationalDialogue.aspx> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁹ Mohamed Nazzal, 'Lebanon's Former Aid Chief: Millions Spent to Fund Tripoli Fighting', *Al-Akhbar*. Available at <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/18991> (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹⁰ 'Directorate of the General Security', *General Security Office (GSO)*. Available at <http://www.general-security.gov.lb/Default.aspx?lang=ar-lb> (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹¹ Ghida Frangieh, 'Forced Departure: How Lebanon Evades the International Principle of Non-Refoulement', *The Legal Agenda*. Available at <http://english.legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=675&lang=en> (accessed 8 February 2016).

This was in obvious breach of the non-refoulement principle,¹² and subsequently Mikati's government adopted a non-refoulement policy that was observed by the GSO, although reports of cases of forced repatriation have occasionally emerged.¹³

In October 2012, the Mikati government began to fall apart. After the assassination of Wissam al-Hassan, a major figure in the Lebanese security apparatus, Mikati's resignation was called for by the opposition.¹⁴ Nevertheless, he remained in power until March 2013, when Tammam Salam, a political figure close to the Saudi sphere of influence, was designated as new Prime Minister. However, as often is the case in Lebanon, it took months before Salam could put a government together. His office only became operative in February 2014, with a cabinet composed by 24 members.¹⁵

While the Lebanese executive was stuck in a long transitional phase, the Syrian presence in Lebanon began to grow faster.¹⁶ The 'Open Door' policy allowed for the free flow of Syrians across the border without control or restraint, and without identifying the specific nature of displacement – knowledge which could have enabled better provision for their needs. Since the beginning of the crisis, the UNHCR had been registering on average 47,000 refugees per month. In July 2013, the number of Syrians registered with the UNHCR reached half a million.¹⁷ Until then, Syrians were able to cross the border with Lebanon simply by presenting a form of ID. This was possible through an agreement¹⁸ related to the Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination¹⁹ between Syria and Lebanon. In July 2013, the GSO began to implement stricter document checks at the border,²⁰ although this measure did not have great effect. Of the three main refugee host countries (Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan), Lebanon has had the fastest growing Syrian population.

¹² Non-refoulement is a principle of international law that reflects the commitment of the international community to ensure that refugees are not returned to persecution or danger.

¹³ 'Lebanon: Stop Forcible Returns to Syria', *Human Rights Watch*. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/01/11/lebanon-stop-forcible-returns-syria> (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹⁴ 'March 14 Calls on PM Mikati to Resign after Hasan Killing', *The Daily Star*. Available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2012/Oct-19/192077-march-14-calls-on-pm-mikati-to-resign-after-hasan-killing.ashx> (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹⁵ 'رئيس الجمهورية وقع مرسوم تشكيل الحكومة رقم 73 برئاسة الرئيس تمام سلام' (The President of the Republic signed a decree forming the 73rd government headed by Tammam Salam), *Presidency of the Council of Ministers*. Available at <http://www.pcm.gov.lb/arabic/subpg.aspx?pageid=4909> (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹⁶ 'Syria Regional Refugee Response: Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal (Lebanon)', *UNHCR*.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ 'Agreement on the Regulation of Transport of Persons and Goods between the Lebanese Republic and the Syrian Arab Republic', *Syrian Lebanese Higher Council*. Available at http://www.syrleb.org/docs/agreements/05PERSONS_GOODSeng.pdf (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹⁹ 'Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Lebanese Republic', *United Nations Treaty Series*. Available at http://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/LB-SY_910522_TreatyBrotherhoodCooperationCoordination.pdf (accessed 8 February 2016).

²⁰ Naharnet Newsdesk, 'Lebanese Authorities Discuss with U.N. Official New Border Controls with Syria', *an-Nahar*. Available at <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/92038-lebanese-authorities-discuss-with-u-n-official-new-border-controls-with-syria> (accessed 8 February 2016).

Geographic proximity, familiarity with the local environment and loose border control were among the main factors influencing this. Along with the north, the Bekaa Valley became one of the main areas hosting refugees, and as time went on all Lebanon became punctuated with settlements, with refugees also living in urban areas. Despite their prevalence, camps have never been officially approved by the Lebanese government as a viable hosting infrastructure.

Long transitional phases from one government to another and the absence of political will to manage the crisis left a vacuum, within which international agencies, their local partners and social networks have been operating constantly and relatively freely, managing the refugees' presence.

In mid-2013, the country's security situation was threatened by a series of attacks against civilians which made many fear an incipient expansion of the Syrian conflict into Lebanon.²¹ Furthermore, Hezbollah had become openly involved in the Syrian conflict.²² In the spring and summer of 2013, the Battle of al-Qusayr, between Hezbollah and the Syrian Arab Army on the one hand and factions of the Syrian oppositions on the other became a turning point – the Syrian war was turning into a protracted conflict.²³ It was only the beginning of a long-term commitment by Hezbollah, which is still active in Syria at the time of writing.

Within the context of political uncertainty and exacerbated conflict, the question of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has never been at the top of the political agenda, which has preserved Syrians from the politicisation of their presence in Lebanon.

In March 2014, Salam delivered his governmental policy statement to the Lebanese parliament,²⁴ which entrusted him with a confidence vote.²⁵ In this, he declared his intention of directly tackling the question of Syrian refugees. In his own words:

The government will work on taking the necessary measures to address the issue of Syrian refugees whose numbers exceed the country's capacity to deal with, in order to contain the security, political, social and economic repercussion of their temporary presence in Lebanon. The government will call upon the international

²¹ 'Suicide Attack Targets Shiite Town in Lebanon', *Al-Monitor*. Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/02/lebanon-fifth-suicide-attack.html> (accessed 8 February 2016).

²² Until then Hezbollah's operations in Syria were known but denied, but in May 2013 Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah openly admitted Hezbollah's role in Syria. See Nicholas Blanford, 'Why Hezbollah Has Openly Joined the Syrian Fight', *Christian Science Monitor*. Available at <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2013/0623/Why-Hezbollah-has-openly-joined-the-Syrian-fight> (accessed 8 February 2016).

²³ Not only Hezbollah has stakes in the Syrian battlefield; Lebanese Salafist networks also have connections with their Syrian counterparts.

²⁴ 'البيان الوزاري لحكومة المصلحة الوطنية' (Ministerial Statement of the Government of National Interest), *Presidency of the Council of Ministers*, Republic of Lebanon. Available at <http://www.pcm.gov.lb/arabic/subpg.aspx?pageid=4896> (accessed 8 February 2016).

²⁵ Hasan Lakkis and Hussein Dakroubl, 'Salam: 'Don't Expect Miracles' as Cabinet Wins Confidence Vote', *The Daily Star*. Available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Mar-21/250915-salam-dont-expect-miracles-as-cabinet-wins-confidence-vote.ashx> (accessed 8 February 2016).

community and the Arab world to assume their responsibilities in helping Lebanon fulfil its ethical and humanitarian obligation and at the same time facilitate their return to their homes.²⁶

It was the first time that the crisis had gained such a high political profile in Lebanon as part of governmental policy. A ministerial source mentioned that this government had from the beginning intended to adopt a more proactive stance on the situation as part of its policy.²⁷

In May 2014, the number of Syrians registered with the UNHCR reached 1 million, and uneasiness about the situation began to emerge.²⁸ That month the government set up what it called an inter-ministerial Crisis Cell to oversee crisis management, headed by the Prime Minister and comprising the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Migration, the Ministry of Interior, the MoSA and, at a later stage, the GSO. These ministries were tasked with specific roles. The Ministry of Interior and Municipalities is responsible for managing the situations of refugees internally according to international standards. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Migrants was tasked with exploring the possibility of establishing safe zones in Syria in order to relocate refugees. The MoSA is in charge of coordinating relations with international organisations and local administrations.²⁹

In the summer of 2014, the Ministry of Interior began monitoring border crossing activities and recorded about 18,000 Syrians travelling back and forth between Syria and Lebanon.³⁰ Some political groups claimed that these Syrians were not entitled to a refugee status and its benefits, as they did not fear returning to their home country.³¹ As a consequence, the Minister of Interior issued a new regulation that aimed at revoking the status of ‘displaced’³² (*nazih*) of those Syrians travelling back to their country. The effective application of this regulation is however not confirmed.³³

That June, the Syrian regime held its presidential elections with Syrians allowed to vote abroad, including in Lebanon, at local embassy offices. Rumours spread among Syrians that voting was also a way to have their passport stamped by the Syrian authorities,

²⁶ ‘البيان الوزاري لحكومة المصلحة الوطنية’ (Ministerial Statement of the Government of National Interest), *Republic of Lebanon*.

²⁷ Interview with a Senior Advisor in the Ministry of Interiors and Municipalities, Beirut (12 May 2015).

²⁸ ‘Syria Regional Refugee Response: Inter-Agency Information Sharing Portal (Lebanon)’, *UNHCR*.

²⁹ Council of Ministers Decision No. 72 (23 March 2014).

³⁰ Interview with a Senior Advisor in the Ministry of Interiors and Municipalities, Beirut (12 May 2015).

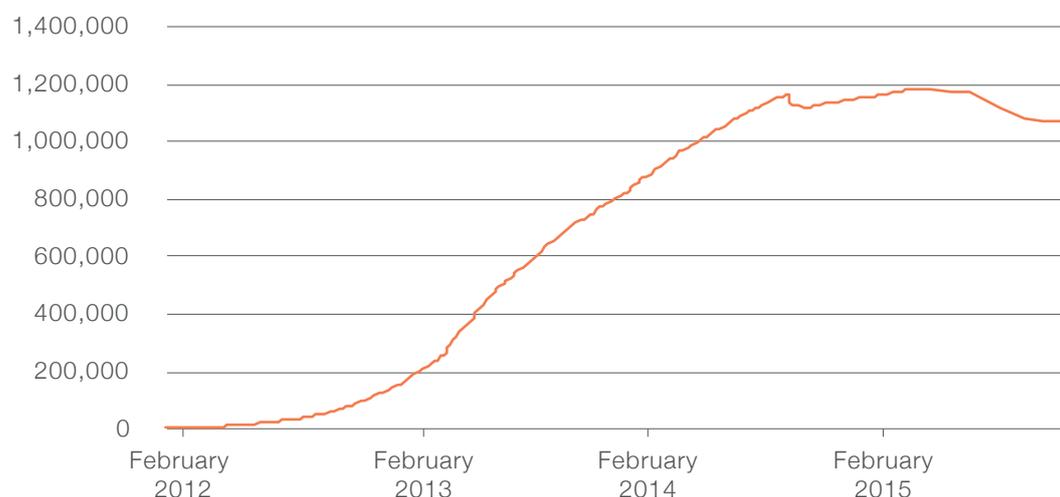
³¹ Maya Gebeily, ‘A Refugee on Paper: Running from War, Bureaucracy Could Be Syrians’ Greatest Obstacle’, *Executive Magazine*. Available at <http://www.executive-magazine.com/economics-policy/refugee-paper> (accessed 8 February 2016).

³² Jean Aziz, ‘Displaced Syrians Target of New Lebanon Law’, *Al-Monitor*. Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/06/lebanon-interior-ministry-decision-status-displaced-syrians.html> (accessed 8 February 2016).

³³ Samya Kullab, ‘Lebanon Revises Open-Door Refugee Policy’, *Al-Jazeera*. Available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/06/lebanon-revises-open-door-refugee-policy-201466744881995.html> (accessed 8 February 2016).

Graph 1: Number of Syrian Refugees Registered with the UNHCR in Lebanon

Source: UNHCR, data range between 27/01/2012 and 31/12/2015



implicitly symbolising loyalty to Bashar al-Assad, thus facilitating their return to Syria in the future or the renewal of their passport.³⁴

At the time, tens of thousands of Syrians marched down the streets of Beirut, many chanting in support of al-Assad. This momentous disruption in Beirut³⁵ made the Syrian presence more apparent than ever. Furthermore, it showed that the Syrians in Lebanon were more subject to politicisation than was generally expected. At that point, the refrain among many in Lebanon became that Syrians ‘cannot stay’. Another consideration that emerged was that, in contrast perhaps to the cases of Turkey and Jordan, Syrians in Lebanon were probably far from being a homogenous anti-regime group and had potential to be mobilised by the Syrian regime. The reaction of Lebanese critics of al-Assad was harsh, with some even calling for the repatriation of refugees that supported the regime.³⁶

³⁴ Reports on this matter are conflicting but show nevertheless a complex and contradictive electoral dynamic in favour of al-Assad’s candidacy. See Cecily Hilleary, ‘Losing Election Not an Option for Syrian President’, *Voice of America*. Available at <http://www.voanews.com/content/losing-election-not-an-option-for-syrian-president/1926458.html> (accessed 8 February 2016); ‘Amid Fear and Pressure Syrians Vote in ‘Blood Elections’’, *Ya Libnan*. Available at <http://yalibnan.com/2014/06/03/amid-fear-pressure-syrians-vote-blood-elections/> (accessed 8 February 2016); In Jordan the situation was similar, see: Elisa Oddone, ‘Syrians in Jordan Vote in Presidential Election’, *Al-Ghad*. Available at <http://www.alghad.com/articles/804854-Syrians-in-Jordan-vote-in-presidential-election?s=118438a8fe-5bad208f932f03660c0659> (accessed 8 February 2016).

³⁵ Jim Muir, ‘Syria Election: Refugees Vote in Lebanon and Jordan’, *BBC News*. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-27599868> (accessed 8 February 2016).

³⁶ ‘March 14 Officials Request Deportation of Pro-Assad Syrians’, *Now Lebanon*. Available at <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/549157-march-14-officials-request-deportation-of-pro-assad-syrians> (accessed 8 February 2016).

In a conversation with the author, a public official from the Ministry of Interior raised concerns that there may be ‘sleeping cells’ among Syrian refugees.³⁷ Officials in the Lebanese international humanitarian community have described the situation following the reaching of the 1 million refugee threshold and the presidential elections as a ‘wake-up call’, which changed the perception of the Syrian presence in Lebanon.³⁸

In August 2014, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) undertook a military operation against Salafist groups operating in the border area of Aarsal (North-East of Lebanon), which were expanding their influence from their territory in Syria. The objective of the LAF was to regain control of an area that was increasingly under the influence of groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State, which were spilling over from Syria.

During this operation at least 30 members of the LAF and the Internal Security Forces (ISF) were abducted by Salafist groups. Some of them were killed, while others remained in the hands of their captors until 1 December 2015, when Qatar facilitated a controversial prisoner swap between Lebanon and the kidnappers.³⁹ At the time of writing some of the abducted soldiers and security forces are still detained by Syrian Islamist groups.

Consequently, the perception grew among some Lebanese political actors that there was a risk of Syrian settlements becoming breeding grounds for Salafism in Lebanon. There is no historical precedent that would justify this concern regarding Syrians in particular, but nevertheless Aarsal and surrounding areas – where the reality of Syrian displacement overlaps with the peripheral repercussions of the Syrian conflict – have since mid-2014 become of special security concern.⁴⁰

As a result of these events, the perception of refugees from Syria changed in economic, political, and security terms, and the Lebanese government began to adopt restrictive policies. The turning point was in October 2014, when the government unanimously approved a Policy Paper in which it laid down new measures for 2015.⁴¹

The Policy Paper came at the same time as a conference organised in Berlin to address the question of Syrian displacement. The Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gebran Bassil, was particularly critical of the initiative because the final document proposed at the conference, according to him, emphasised the host states’ responsibilities instead of widening international support. Bassil even compared the situation to the Cairo Agreement

³⁷ Interview with a Senior Advisor in the Ministry of Interiors and Municipalities, Beirut (12 May 2015).

³⁸ Interview with a UN OCHA Officer, Beirut (8 May 2015); Interview with a Senior Advisor in the Ministry of Interiors and Municipalities, Beirut (12 May 2015).

³⁹ Bilal Y. Saab, ‘Lebanon’s Deal with the Devil: The Prisoner Swap with Jabhat Al Nusra’, *Foreign Affairs*. Available at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/lebanon/2015-12-06/lebanons-deal-devil> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁴⁰ ‘Aarsal Conflict’, *Civil Society Knowledge Centre*. Available at <http://cskc.daleel-madani.org/security-timeline/aarsal-conflict-starting-august-2-2014> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁴¹ ‘جلسة 23 تشرين الأول 2014’ (Session of 23 October 2014), *Presidency of the Council of Ministers* (Republic of Lebanon). Available at <http://www.pcm.gov.lb/arabic/subpg.aspx?pageid=6118> (accessed 8 February 2016).

of 1969⁴² when the Lebanese authorities acknowledged the status of Palestinian groups operating in Lebanon and granted them the power to control the Palestinian refugee camps in the country.⁴³ The Cairo Agreement is often considered a key factor in precipitating Lebanon's Civil War (1975) and also the Israeli invasion of 1982.

Lebanon's revised policy towards the Syrian refugees was based on three aspects of the Policy Paper. First, that Lebanon had done more than what was reasonably to be expected with regards to the refugee situation. Second, that Lebanon would enforce legislation to limit – and in fact end – the flow of refugees in the country; and third, that measures would be adopted to reduce the numbers of UNHCR registered Syrians in Lebanon.⁴⁴

In December 2014, measures were adopted by the government and the GSO to enact the Policy Paper. From 5 January 2015, new criteria were introduced which effectively limited the ability of Syrians to enter Lebanon. These measures slowed the flow of refugees into Lebanon – at least it appears so from official records; and they certainly made staying in the country even more challenging. Whether this course of action positively affected Lebanon's security and stability is another matter. In reality, it created an even more ambivalent status for refugees and increased segregation.

According to operators working in refugee settlements, as well as from visits made to the settlements by the author, it seems that Syrians often cannot afford to renew documents and now refrain from leaving settlements because of fear of being arrested. This makes them more prone to negative coping strategies⁴⁵ and more hostile to their host population.

From early 2015 until the London pledging conference of February 2016, the Lebanese political debate and policy towards Syrian refugees has remained fundamentally unchanged. Among the issues that emerged during that time, is the question of the registration of new-born babies from Syrian parents in Lebanon.

Due to the complex legal process of registration⁴⁶ and the fact that many Syrians do not have the legal documents required or are afraid of prosecution if they approach Lebanese officials, many new-born babies remain unregistered – and therefore stateless.

⁴² Wafiq Qanso, 'مؤتمر برلين: معركة لتوطين النازحين' (Berlin Conference: The Battle for the Resettlement of Displaced People), *Al-Akhbar*. Available at <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/218660> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁴³ Fawwaz Trabulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, (London; Ann Arbor, MI: Pluto, 2007), p. 154.

⁴⁴ The paper included the commitment to maintain a high security alert on the situation and encouraged Syrian repatriation or resettlement in third countries by all available means.

⁴⁵ 'Negative coping' mechanisms or strategies are defined by most humanitarian organisations as those survival stratagems to which vulnerable people may resort, even though they may be illegal, morally reprehensible and in the long-run damaging. These include prostitution, illegal employment, child labour, or theft. For an example of the use of this terminology see: <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/crisis/>

⁴⁶ Dalia Aranki, 'Birth Registration Update: The Challenges of Birth Registration in Lebanon for Refugees from Syria', *Norwegian Refugee Council*. Available at http://www.nrc.no/arch/_img/9192872.pdf (accessed 8 February 2016).

Lebanese political factions have quarrelled on the matter, with some political groups seeing registration as an attempt to ‘naturalise’ Syrians and give them the status of Lebanese citizens.⁴⁷

Also part of the Lebanese debate on refugees is a proposal by authorities to set up camps in Syria to which refugees would be relocated,⁴⁸ a plan which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Migrants was in charge of assessing the feasibility of. Notwithstanding much advocacy for this measure, especially from the Lebanese Minister for Foreign Affairs Bassil,⁴⁹ the proposal was rejected by international organisations as a non-effective solution and one that would expose refugees to greater insecurity.⁵⁰

The security situation in the North-East remains volatile, but at the time of writing the LAF, supported by Hezbollah, has managed to prevail over attempts by Islamist factions to gain control of territory in this area. In November 2015 two suicide attacks were carried out against civilians in Beirut, sharpening sectarian resentment and putting Hezbollah’s intervention in Syria under further scrutiny.

Five years from the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis, the Lebanese situation remains volatile and uncertain. Lebanon has shifted from an ‘open door’ policy towards limiting access or even closing borders for Syrian refugees, while the permanence of refugees in the country has been made increasingly difficult by new legal measures and insufficient funding.

The Lebanese approach to the crisis has been characterised by unwillingness from the political elites to engage directly with the issue, for fear of increasing polarisation in an already complex political landscape, and while the political process is at a stalemate. The critical level of the crisis reached in mid-2014 subsequently prompted a revision of this policy, precipitating the adoption of restrictive measures. At the occasion of the 2016 London pledging conference for the Syrian crisis, Lebanon began to discuss the possibility of softening measures towards refugees in exchange for more foreign aid. But it is too early to assess whether these new measures will effectively materialise.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Jean Aziz, ‘Lebanese, UN Fall out over Refugee Registration’, *Al-Monitor*. Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/07/lebanon-syria-refugees-unhcr-gebran-bassil-rejection.html> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁴⁸ ‘جلسة 23 تشرين الأول 2014’, *Presidency of the Council of Ministers* (Republic of Lebanon). See also: ‘Lebanon Foreign Minister Calls for Refugee Camps inside Syria’, *The Daily Star*. Available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Jun-19/302888-lebanon-foreign-minister-calls-for-refugee-camps-inside-syria.ashx> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁴⁹ ‘Bassil Calls for Safe Zone inside Syria to House Refugees’, *The Daily Star*. Available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Oct-01/317196-bassil-calls-for-safe-zone-inside-syria-to-house-refugees.ashx> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁵⁰ Interview with a UNHCR Senior Protection Officer, Beirut (14 May 2015). See also: Julian Borger, ‘Syria Safe Zones Will Not End Need for Asylum in West, Un Refugee Head Warns’, *The Guardian*. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/30/syria-safe-zones-refugees-need-for-asylum-in-west-un> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁵¹ ‘London Conference – Lebanon Statement of Intent’, *Support for Syrians Conference*.

Mapping the Political Dynamics of the Refugee Crisis: Risks of Politicising the Refugee Presence

The Lebanese political system relies on a consensual model of power-sharing whereby major decisions have to be agreed on by all members of government. In the vast majority of cases, governments in Lebanon are national unity governments, proportionally representing all political parties, confessions and sects. According to this system, when a third of the cabinet resigns or when at least one of the main confessional groups or sects is not represented, the government is considered ‘unconstitutional’.⁵²

Although this system may have some advantages in preserving stability, it is an insurmountable obstacle when decisions need to be made. As a governmental source stated, the Lebanese system is highly dysfunctional in crisis management, its complications and equilibria are too cumbersome to react to fast-moving crises. The Syrian war, and the refugee crisis with it, are no exception, especially considering that it has taken place over the course of three governmental transitions and the current long-term vacuum in the presidential office, with parliamentary elections postponed twice.⁵³

Since 2011, the developments in Syria had been a source of concern in Lebanon, where the political elite is split between pro and anti-Assad groups. The political groups that manifestly support the al-Assad regime include Hezbollah and Amal (based in the Shi‘a constituency), which are both part of the March 8 Coalition. The Free Patriotic Movement, a Christian party with the highest number of seats in the Parliament, has a more complex stance, whereby it is allied with Hezbollah in Lebanese politics, but is historically opposed to the Syrian regime.

The March 14 coalition, on the other hand, is more or less overtly anti-Assad, and includes the Future Party and another minority component of Christians. In between these groups, the Druze Progressive Socialist Party led by Walid Jumblat is against the Syrian regime, but oscillates between the two political poles of March 8 and March 14.

The political dynamics of the Syrian refugee crisis can be divided into two main phases. The early stage was characterised by the perception among Lebanese critics of the Syrian regime that the crisis in Syria would be short (as it appeared to be in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen), while the second phase is characterised by the knowledge that this would not be the case.

⁵² This is generally known as the ‘blocking third’ mechanism, based on an interpretation of the constitution. See Articles 65(5), 69(1.b) to be read in conjunction with the provisional measures, especially Article 95(b).

⁵³ ‘Lebanon to Postpone Parliamentary Poll to 2017: Minister’, *Reuters*. Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-election-idUSKCN0I21BX20141013> (accessed 8 February 2016).

During the first phase, representatives of the Future movement – which relies on a Sunni constituency and leads the March 14 coalition – advocated a hospitable approach,⁵⁴ calling for solidarity as a moral duty. Speculatively, the refugee crisis was also an opportunity to highlight the consequences of al-Assad's repressions in the Lebanese context. Especially in this early stage, when numbers were still limited, the Sunni political component did not have strong incentives in opposing the presence of Syrians in Lebanon. Possibly the presence of a new, mainly Sunni and allegedly anti-Assad population was even perceived as a future political asset.

The main political groups voicing concerns over the Syrian presence in Lebanon from the start were those representing the Christian constituency. Although this could have not been explicitly stated, the overwhelmingly Muslim identity of Syrians raised concerns about a new sectarian structure emerging in Lebanon as result of the crisis. This became most obvious for example when the Lebanese president at the time Michel Suleiman (by convention a Christian) addressed the UN General assembly in 2013 and defined the Syrian refugee presence in Lebanon as an 'existential crisis'.⁵⁵

Groups such as Hezbollah⁵⁶ and Amal, but also the Progressive Socialist Party⁵⁷ had to find a balance on an issue that challenged the alignment of transnational solidarity concerns, sectarian identity concerns, and political interests. Hezbollah acknowledged the obligation to support refugees in Lebanon,⁵⁸ but also understood the problems that a long-term presence might raise.

Concerns were reinforced by historical reference to the 2006 Lebanon-Israel War, when many Lebanese, above all from Shi'a areas, found refuge in Syria.⁵⁹ The memory of Syrian hospitality is still vivid and underpins a sense of duty and transnational Muslim solidarity that goes beyond sectarian affiliations. In almost all conversations the author had during the course of this research with NGOs, international organisations and civil society representatives, the example of the 2006 war was brought up as a matter of reciprocation and solidarity between communities. Sources in the Lebanese international community have repeatedly highlighted how Hezbollah has stressed the humanitarian character of the crisis, therefore trying to isolate it from sectarianism and politicisation.

⁵⁴ 'Future Movement Calls on Govt to House Syrian Refugees', *The Daily Star*. Available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Feb-06/162335-future-movement-asks-govt-to-house-syrian-refugees.ashx> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁵⁵ Timothy Witcher, 'Lebanon Faces Social Explosion over Syria Refugees: UN', *UNHCR*. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refdaily?pass=52fc6fbd5&id=5243d07c5> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁵⁶ Nasser Chararah, 'Hezbollah Plans Aid for Syrian Refugees', *Al-Monitor*. Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2012/al-monitor/lebanon-hezbollah-syrian-refugee.html> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁵⁷ 'Future Movement Calls on Govt to House Syrian Refugees', *The Daily Star*.

⁵⁸ 'Hezbollah Sends First Aid Delegation to Refugees', *The Daily Star*. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refdaily?pass=52fc6fbd5&id=504ecad15> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁵⁹ 'Lebanon's Syria Refugee Move Prompts Media Concern', *BBC News*. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-30682185> (accessed 8 February 2016).

The second phase began months later, when it became obvious that the Syrian crisis would be long-term. The fact that Hezbollah and al-Assad's regime prevailed in the Qusayr battle of mid-2013 has been considered a watershed by many, after which the Lebanese political elites critical of al-Assad moderated their expectations of the outcome of the conflict. In addition to this, the magnitude of the crisis was reaching entirely unexpected proportions. Consequently, the question of sustainability and confessional balances became relevant.

During this second phase the Future Movement seemed to develop a different perception of the crisis, the Christian groups took harsher stances, and Hezbollah raised its alert on the security implications of the Syrian presence in Lebanon, especially regarding border areas such as Aarsal.

In March 2014, for example, President Michel Suleiman shifted from defining the situation as an 'existential crisis' to 'existential threat'.⁶⁰ Lebanese media reported an increasing number of declarations by Christian political leaders and members of government evoking a 'conspiracy' against them.⁶¹ In these declarations, the Syrian presence is associated with unemployment, increased consumption of electricity, a rise in cost of living,⁶² crime,⁶³ and insecurity. The Lebanese foreign minister Gebran Bassil, a leading voice in the Free Patriotic Movement, has been among the main opponents to the Syrian presence in Lebanon.⁶⁴

The main policy shift within the Future Movement became evident when the Minister of Interior Nohad Machnouk began to adopt a more critical stance towards the status of refugees in Lebanon in mid-2014.⁶⁵ At a later stage, the Ministry of Interior promoted measures to withdraw the status of refugees from those Syrians that were still regularly travelling between Lebanon and Syria.⁶⁶ Furthermore, in meetings with municipal administrators

⁶⁰ 'Address by His Excellency the President of the Republic of Lebanon, General Michel Sleiman at the 25th Arab Summit', *Presidency of the Republic*. Available at <http://www.presidency.gov.lb/English/Pages/SpeechesDetails.aspx?nid=22892> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁶¹ Pia Francis and Hanan Khaledl, 'Aoun Warns of 'Conspiracy' to Settle Syrian Refugees in Lebanon', *The Daily Star*. Available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Sep-15/315335-aoun-warns-of-conspiracy-to-settle-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon.ashx> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁶² 'Syria Crisis Has Cost Lebanon \$20 Bn: Minister', *Agence France Presse*. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refdaily?pass=52fc6fbd5&id=54990d558> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁶³ 'Syrian Refugees Causing Crime Rate to Increase in Lebanon', *MTV Lebanon*. Available at http://mtv.com.lb/news/english_highlights/414272/syrian_refugees_causing_crime_rate_to_increase_in_lebanon (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁶⁴ 'Bassil Warns of 'Strife' over Syria Refugee Crisis', *Now Lebanon*. Available at <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/archive/554427-bassil-warns-against-permanent-syrian-refugee-presence> (accessed 8 February 2016); Naharnet Newsdesk, 'Bassil Warns of Catastrophic Effects of Refugee Crisis', *an-Nahar*. Available at <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/190552> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁶⁵ 'March 14 Officials Request Deportation of Pro-Assad Syrians', *Now Lebanon*. Available at <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/549157-march-14-officials-request-deportation-of-pro-assad-syrians> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁶⁶ Elise Knutsen, 'Security Fears Prompted Review of Syrian Refugees: Machnouk', *The Daily Star*. Available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Jun-02/258507-security-fears-prompted-review-of-syrian-refugees-machnouk.ashx> (accessed 8 February 2016).

and humanitarian officials, it has been reported to the author that the autochthonous Sunni communities began to complain to their political patrons that the Syrian presence was incurring unsustainable costs in social, economic and cultural terms. Most of the refugee population tends to settle in the poorest areas, where small, unequipped, and often poor municipalities have had to deal with a vastly increased – sometimes doubled – population, while demands for waste and sewage management and the provision of electricity and water consumption become unmanageable.

Neither has coexistence always been smooth at the social level. Although there are no official numbers, various sources have reported an increase in divorces or polygamy, pointing to the presence of a young and mostly female population in the country as a cause.⁶⁷ In most of the cases, official authorities do not record these new marriages nor the children born out of them, who risk remaining unregistered and becoming stateless. Marriage has become an example of negative coping mechanisms for some Syrian refugee families, who reduce their costs by ‘marrying off’ family members to the local, more affluent population. Reportedly this practice has also involved under-age girls.⁶⁸

The emergence of such concerns, within the Sunni constituency as well, have put under pressure even those political groups and patrons who initially were not worried about sectarian imbalance. They most likely began to recognise the high political cost attached to the open-border policy of before mid-2014 and, consequently, aligned themselves with the tougher measures enacted in January 2015.

Despite Hezbollah maintaining an overall humanitarian approach to the crisis and being the dominant political and military power in many areas hosting Syrian refugees, they have also grown more alert to security implications. Arsal is the key example of this. Here, the Salafist movements active in Syria against both the regime and Hezbollah have established a presence, opening an internal front. On several occasions, Hezbollah has called for the relocation of Syrian civilians so that they could intervene militarily in the area,⁶⁹ but there has been political division on what kind of intervention could occur. The Ministry of Interior, for example, has criticised Hezbollah on several occasions.⁷⁰

The divisiveness of the refugee presence in Lebanese political dynamics is also exemplified by the question of the establishment of camps. Refugee camps are a last resort measure in refugee crisis management but have been adopted as a long-term policy for housing part

⁶⁷ Interview with a UN OCHA Officer, Beirut (6 May 2015).

⁶⁸ Olivia Alabaster, ‘The Challenges Facing Young Women Refugees’, *Wafmag.org*. Available at <http://wafmag.org/2015/11/challenges-facing-young-women-refugees/> (accessed 8 February 2016). ‘News Brief’, Université Saint-Joseph. Available at <http://www.sciences-po.usj.edu.lb/pdf/News%20Brief%20Too%20Young%20To%20Wed.pdf> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁶⁹ Jean Aziz, ‘Nasrallah Warns of Impending Arsal Battle’, *Al-Monitor*. Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/lebanon-hezbollah-nasrallah-battle-qalamoun-arsal-isis.html> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁷⁰ Naharnet Newsdesk, ‘Mashnouq Responding to Qassem: He Wants to Destroy Arsal, Not Liberate It’, *an-Nahar*. Available at <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/179877-mashnouq-responding-qassem-he-wants-to-destroy-arsal-not-liberate-i> (accessed 8 February 2016).

of the refugee population in both Jordan and Turkey.⁷¹ Since the very beginning of the crisis, the political debate in Lebanon gauged the opportunity to build refugee camps. The Future movement hinted about this possibility at the beginning of the crisis,⁷² believing it to be an efficient way of dealing with the situation. Governmental sources close to the Future Movement noted that housing Syrians in camps would be ‘less bad’ than them living on the streets, in parking lots and other areas. Small and manageable camps have been considered an option worth exploring for crisis management.⁷³

Nevertheless, refugee camps in Lebanon have a long and tragic history, awakening memories of the Lebanese Civil War and the present reality of Palestinian camps. These have become a symbol of segregation for Palestinians and are also the symptom of a fragile state, being perceived as almost extra-territorial entities, sources of insecurity, radicalisation and armed groups.⁷⁴ With this in mind, both Christian groups and Hezbollah have clearly stated their aversion to the establishment of camps for Syrians.⁷⁵

Those who oppose a policy of camps do so mainly because they want to prevent history from repeating itself in Lebanon. But those who see camps as an option consider the analogy between the Syrian and Palestinian cases historically flawed. This is the most benevolent interpretation – less official views claim that the interest in building camps is related to the idea that they may turn into long-term settlements and be sources of political support for those who protected them.

From a phase in which no political consensus was possible and therefore the crisis was left unmanaged, mid-2014 saw parties align towards a restrictive policy towards the Syrian presence, although Amal and Hezbollah did express criticism towards these measures.⁷⁶ Still, a minimal consensus allowed for the new Policy Paper of October 2014 to be implemented in January 2015. Developments in Syria and political tensions in Lebanon will shape the next stages of the refugee crisis. Syrians, as a result of the 2015 restrictive measures, are increasingly vulnerable, while Lebanese political reactions reflect social and political tensions exacerbated by the uncertainty of the Syrian civil war.

⁷¹ Lewis Turner, ‘Explaining the (Non-)Encampment of Syrian Refugees: Security, Class and the Labour Market in Lebanon and Jordan’, *Mediterranean Politics* (2015).

⁷² ‘Future Movement to Build Syrian Refugee Camp’, *Now Lebanon*. Available at https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/nownews/future_movement_to_build_syrian_refugee_camp (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁷³ Interview with a Senior Advisor in the Ministry of Interiors and Municipalities, Beirut (12 May 2015).

⁷⁴ Bernard Rougier, *Everyday Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam among Palestinians in Lebanon*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

⁷⁵ ‘Hezbollah Rejects Syrian Refugee Camps in Lebanon’, *The Daily Star*. Available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2012/Mar-10/166204-hezbollah-rejects-syrian-refugee-camps-in-lebanon.ashx> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁷⁶ ‘نحو إعادة النظر في تأشيرة السوريين’ (Reconsiderations of Syrian Visas), *Al-Akbar*. Available at <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/223781> (accessed 8 February 2016).

Who is a Refugee in Lebanon? Aliens, 'Displaced' and Refugees

Lebanon is not party to the 1951 convention on refugees⁷⁷ and does not employ a legal definition of refugee nor a legal framework that regulates their presence and status.⁷⁸ There is, on paper, an inter-institutional committee in charge of adjudicating political asylum requests,⁷⁹ and political asylum is regulated by title VIII of the 'Law Regulating the Entry to, Stay in and Exit from Lebanon' of 10 July 1962.⁸⁰ However its application is limited to requests for *political* asylum only, and its effectiveness is not confirmed.

In 2003 the Lebanese government signed a memorandum of understanding to address the status of refugees in Lebanon, which in theory is still valid. Nevertheless, the document has remained largely unapplied and its consequences have not been felt by Syrians in Lebanon.⁸¹

As with previous refugee populations such as the Palestinians and the Iraqis,⁸² the legal status of Syrians in Lebanon currently lies in a grey area between 'alien',⁸³ 'displaced' (*nazih*) and 'de facto refugee'. The government has constantly steered away from the internationally acknowledged notion of 'refugee', fearing to undertake obligations such a status can demand.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ 'The 1951 Refugee Convention', *UNHCR*. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁷⁸ Although in some parts of the legislation the term 'refugee' is used (see for example Law 10 of July 1962, Article 19). See 'قانون تنظيم الدخول الى لبنان والاقامة فيه والخروج منصا دره فيه 10 تموز 1962' (Law to regulate access to Lebanon, Residency and Exit, 10 July 1962), *Ministry of Justice* (Republic of Lebanon). Available at <http://ahdath.justice.gov.lb/law-nearby-Foreigners.htm> (accessed 8 February 2016). In this context the definition of refugee is limited to political refugee. The same piece of legislation also refers to asylum procedures (Articles 26-31)

⁷⁹ The committee is composed by the Minister of Interior, the Directors of Justice, Foreign Affairs and General Security.

⁸⁰ 'Law of July 1962: Concerning the Entry and Stay in Lebanon as Well as the Exit', *Ministry of Justice* (Republic of Lebanon). Available at <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/SERIAL/39234/97115/F1369890137/LBN-39234.pdf> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁸¹ Suzan Akram, 'Protecting Syrian Refugees: Laws, Policies and Global Responsibility Sharing', St Joseph University, Oxford University, *UNHCR*. Available at <http://www.bu.edu/law/files/2015/07/FINALFullReport.pdf> (accessed 8 February 2016). According to some interpretations the Memorandum does not apply to cases of mass displacement and that is why it is not applied to the Syrian situation.

⁸² Souheil al-Natour, 'The Legal Status of Palestinians in Lebanon', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 10 (1997). The question of whether Palestinians in Lebanon are considered in accord with international legal standards is disputed, they are more commonly defined as 'special foreigners'.

⁸³ Much of the legal conditions for aliens to entry and exit Lebanon is regulated by Law 10 of July 1962, its implementing decrees and various amendments.

⁸⁴ This does not mean that the Lebanese state has been necessarily averse to refugee rights in general, by looking at the current crisis and the Iraqi crisis it can be seen that at least some of the fundamental obligations related to refugee status, such as non-refoulement, have been respected overall.

Until January 2015, no specific legislation had been issued to regulate the status of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, thus they were subject to the ordinary legislation regulating the entrance and stay of aliens. Their additional agreement via the bilateral Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination that, until 2015, regulated the movement of the two peoples, made it even easier for Syrians to cross the border.

In addition to the ordinary legal provisions, other denominations have begun to emerge in the political debate. ‘Displaced’ (*nazih*) and ‘*de facto* refugee’ are the main terms that have emerged. They constitute *ad hoc* categories that have been defined only vaguely.

As a governmental source explained, the term ‘displaced’ has been intended in this context exclusively in its literal meaning: someone being forced out of his or her usual place of residence, with no reference to international legal standards.⁸⁵ Another governmental source spoke of how the whole definitional issue was symptomatic of the government and international organisations being unable to agree on the correct status of Syrians in Lebanon. ‘*De facto* refugee’ was a temporary solution to this confusion – a definition which can now be found in documents such as the 2015 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, referring to those Syrian refugees registered with the UNHCR.⁸⁶

This rather complex situation has created two main groups of Syrians in Lebanon. The first includes those who enjoy the sponsorship of a Lebanese employer. Those generally do not have major problems entering and staying in the country, so long as they provide an ID at the border and have the necessary documentation concerning their employment status. As long as they can afford the renewal of their permits, and as long as they remain employed, their stay in Lebanon is lawful.⁸⁷ The same applies to Syrians with sufficient and certified funds such as businesspersons, owners of real estate in Lebanon, or those in possession of a regular rent agreement.

The second group includes those Syrians who came to Lebanon to escape the conflict (the displaced or *nazihin*) but do not enjoy sponsorship via employment and do not fall in any of the aforementioned categories. Until 2015, they were subject to the ordinary visa scheme that applies to all aliens, which grants a six-month period of stay, renewable thereafter for a yearly fee.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Interview with a Senior Advisor to the Ministry of Social Affairs, Beirut (12 May 2015).

⁸⁶ ‘Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2015-2016’, *UNOCHA*. Available at <http://www.unocha.org/cap/appeals/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2015-2016> (accessed 8 February 2016). On the legal status of *de facto* refugees see: William Thomas Worster, ‘The Evolving Definition of the Refugee in Contemporary International Law’, *Berkeley Journal of International Law* 30, no. 1 (2012).

⁸⁷ In the past months there has been shortage of agricultural workers and exceptionally the GSO has guaranteed temporary access with no need for documentation to those Syrians that crossed the borders declaring their intent to work in Lebanese agriculture on a seasonal basis. Conversation with ILO Lebanon Officer. See Mohammed Zaatari, ‘Lebanon Farms Reel from Shortage of Syrian Laborers’, *The Daily star*.

⁸⁸ Mary Ann Perkins and Tuesday Reitano, ‘Exploring the Status of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon’, *Columbia SIPA*. Available at http://jia.sipa.columbia.edu/online-articles/exploring-status-syrian-refugees-lebanon/#_ftnref3 (accessed 8 February 2016).

All Syrians could register with the UNHCR through a *prima facie*⁸⁹ registration process that included a short interview along with other formalities, and be given access to the aid provided by the UNHCR according to their specific needs.

With the implementation of the new regulations,⁹⁰ those entering Lebanon from Syria were divided into seven categories each containing several sub-categories. The first category includes those travelling for tourism, work, trade, and ownership or rent of real estate. In each of these cases and upon provision of several documents, Syrians are given temporary residence permits. Category 2 allows entrance for study, and Category 3 allows transit to the airport or maritime ports upon provision of documentation showing the purpose of travel. In these cases short-term temporary permits are granted.

Category 4 explicitly says that Syrians with the ‘status of displaced’ (*nazih*) are not to be admitted in Lebanon, with two exceptions: those previously registered as ‘displaced’ and those that meet certain conditions set by the MoSA. Qualifying for these exceptions is difficult. The conditions for humanitarian admittance set by the MoSA are strict, only applying to minors, disabled people who have already been resettled in other countries, and those who are in need of life-saving health treatment.⁹¹ Furthermore, the actual implementation of these conditions is dependent on the presence of MoSA staff at the border, which has not been confirmed to the author. In fact, according to a ministerial source, between January 2015 and May 2015 only ten people have been guaranteed a ‘displaced’ status on a humanitarian basis.⁹²

Categories 5 and 6 allow entrance into Lebanon for medical reasons as well as access to embassies. Category 7 allows Syrians to enter Lebanon on the basis of ‘prior liability commitment’ to a Lebanese employer. This category also includes subcategories. It allows Syrians short visits upon invitation by a Lebanese national, visits to obtain permissions to work, and visits to family relations in Lebanon who are in possession of a regular working permit.

What is most important is that, as part of the new 2015 policy, other criteria have been added making it harder and more expensive to renew permissions to stay in Lebanon.⁹³ The new criteria demand of all Syrians to provide official documents confirming their place of residence.

⁸⁹ For a discussion of *Prima Facie* recognition refugee status see: *Guidelines on International Protection No. 11: Prima Facie Recognition of Refugee Status* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2015).

⁹⁰ ‘إعلان عن تنظيم دخول السوريين إلى لبنان والإقامة فيه’ (Announcement to Regulate Syrians’ Entry to and Residence in Lebanon), *General Security Office* (GSO). Available at http://general-security.gov.lb/news_det.aspx?d=194 (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁹¹ According to a UNHCR Document: ‘Four categories of persons are presently being considered by the MoSA for inclusion in the humanitarian exceptions. These are: 1. Unaccompanied/separated children (under 16 years old) whose parents/legal guardians are confirmed to be displaced in Lebanon; 2. Persons with disabilities dependent on family/relatives confirmed to be displaced in Lebanon; 3. Persons needing life-saving medical treatment not usually available in Syria, or not available in a timely manner; and, 4. Individuals pursuing resettlement or transitioning through Lebanon to a third country, with proof of onward travel outside Lebanon.’ *UNHCR Lebanon Humanitarian Admission* (30 June 2015).

⁹² Interview with a Senior Advisor to the Ministry of Social Affairs, Beirut (12 May 2015).

⁹³ ‘إعلان عن تنظيم دخول السوريين إلى لبنان والإقامة فيه’ (Announcement to Regulate Syrians’ Entry to and Residence in Lebanon), *General Security Office* (GSO). Particularly the final section of the document: ‘notes’.

Those Syrians who are working also have to present certificates of employment for visa renewal. Those who do not work and are registered with the UNHCR are also required to present a legalised pledge document in which they declare that they will not take any job positions. These documents are expensive; the UNHCR has calculated that an average family of five has to spend 1,375 US Dollars for a one-year stay.⁹⁴

Only recently have there been talks within the Lebanese political sphere about the possibility of giving all Syrians the right to work in labour intensive sectors and to renew their visa for free, depending on the availability of international aid.⁹⁵

In contrast to the complex domestic situation, from an international standpoint, Syrians enjoy full refugee status. The UNCHR has granted *prima facie* recognition of refugee status to Syrians and this has allowed them to benefit from the services and protection that the UNHCR can provide with the collaboration of its subsidiary agencies. Those Syrians that reach the UNHCR registration premises and go through the due formalities, including a short interview, are given identification documents that confirm their status. These documents need to be renewed or checked after a period of time, but the status of refugee is not subject to time limits unless if the situation changes in the country of origin, or it is cancelled or revoked according to UNHCR regulations.⁹⁶ Additionally, even after the suspension of registration in May 2015, Syrians could still have been logged in the UNHCR's internal database.⁹⁷

In conclusion, the status of Syrians in Lebanon is particularly complex. The state has shifted from the applying ordinary legislation on aliens' entry to the implementation of special regulation in early 2015, which has rendered access to and stay in Lebanon increasingly difficult for Syrians. As a result, since late 2014, the number of Syrians crossing into Lebanon has significantly decreased – at least according to UNHCR registration numbers – while their status has become increasingly ambivalent and vulnerable due to the restrictive nature of the new provisions.

⁹⁴ 'February Monthly Dashboard', *UNHCR* (2015). Similar analyses are also to be found in: 'Lebanon: Pushed to the Edge: Syrian Refugees Face Increased Restrictions in Lebanon', *Amnesty International*. Available at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/1785/2015/en/> (accessed 8 February 2016); 'I Just Wanted to Be Treated Like a Person', *Human Rights Watch*. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/01/12/i-just-wanted-be-treated-person/how-lebanons-residency-rules-facilitate-abuse> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁹⁵ Conversation with Senior Advisor to the Ministry of Interior (3 February 2016). See also 'London Conference – Lebanon Statement of Intent', *Support for Syrians Conference*.

⁹⁶ 'Note on the Cancellation of Refugee Status', *UNHCR*. Available at <http://www.refworld.org/docid/41a5dfd94.html> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁹⁷ Interview with UNHCR Officials and Field Visit to UNHCR Registration Centre, Tripoli (27 May 2015).

The Role of International Organisations and Municipalities: Filling the State Vacuum

With the refugee crisis growing so fast and within political vacuums, how is it possible that its repercussions have been relatively limited thus far? When reflecting on the relative stability of Lebanon in a regional context of unprecedented turmoil, part of the explanation is that the reception of refugees in Lebanon did not take place in a complete institutional vacuum. Over and above Lebanese state institutions, international organisations (IOs) have played a significant role in coordinating humanitarian intervention. As previously observed, the unwillingness of the Lebanese government to act has allowed international organisations to operate with a relative degree of autonomy.

Since the beginning, the UN has implemented a humanitarian programme – one which turned into one of the biggest humanitarian operations ever realised by the UN.⁹⁸ The leading agency in the operation is the UNHCR, along with its partner organisations. Since 2012, the UNHCR has implemented six programmes under the banner of the Syrian Regional Response Plan (RRP),⁹⁹ which addressed the humanitarian needs of the Syrian population, displaced outside the borders of Syria within neighbouring countries.

In 2015 the programme expanded and became the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), which also included developmental objectives for the autochthonous communities hosting refugees. The 3RP programme for Lebanon goes under the title of the ‘Lebanon Crisis Response Plan’, and to date there have been two main projects for 2015 and 2016.¹⁰⁰ The overall objective has been to increase the resilience of host communities as well as that of refugees considering longer-term perspectives on the crisis.

Below the level of state institutions, local administrations and civil society groups have played a fundamental role in tempering the impact of refugee presence on the everyday life of host communities. In particular, the municipalities, local branches of justice administration offices, as well as local education and healthcare institutions, have become the real reception structures for hundreds of thousands of refugees. The pressure of the Syrian presence has affected these local realities, whose capacities were already limited.

All statistics confirm that Syrian refugees tend to live in the poorest areas of Lebanon, with 25% of Lebanon’s population already living under the local poverty line of four US Dollars a day.¹⁰¹ This has exacerbated social imbalance and competition for resources among the poorest sectors of Lebanese society and Syrian refugees.

⁹⁸ ‘UN Launches Biggest Humanitarian Appeal, Fearing Deepening of Syrian Crisis’, *UNHCR*. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/52aece8e9.html> (accessed 8 February 2016).

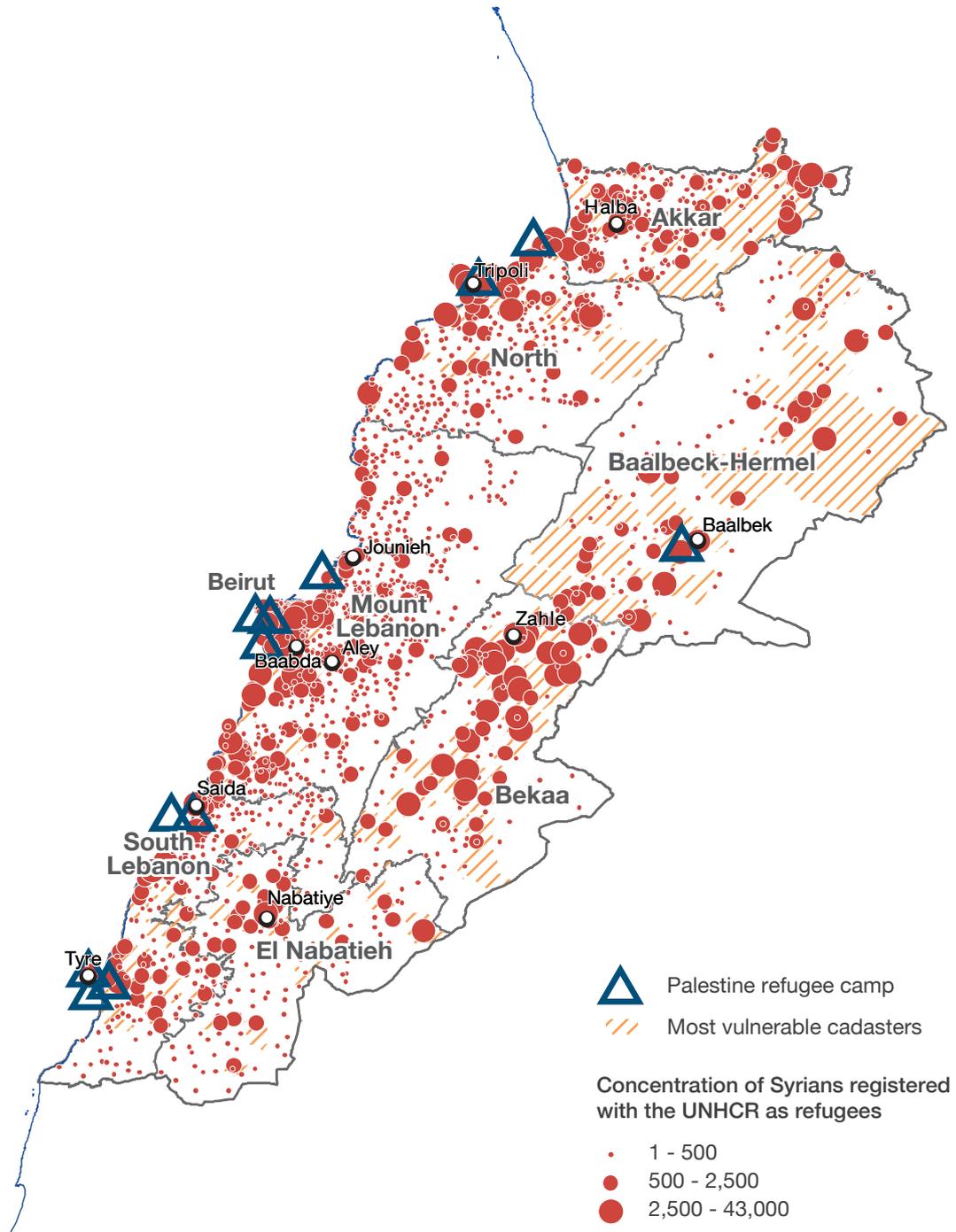
⁹⁹ ‘2014 Syria Regional Response Plan’, *UNHCR*. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/syriarrp6/> (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹⁰⁰ ‘3rp 2016-2017’, *UNHCR*. Available at <http://www.3rpsyriacrisis.org/the-3rp/lebanon/> (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹⁰¹ ‘World Development Indicators’, *World Bank*. Available at <http://data.worldbank.org/country/lebanondata.worldbank.org/country/lebanon> (accessed 8 February 2016).

Figure 1: Map of Most Vulnerable Cadasters of Lebanon and Syrian Refugee Presence

Source 3RP Dashboard December 2015 (Projections)



The humanitarian response plan, launched by the UN and its partners, entitled Syrians to receive services and economic support, which at least some poorer Lebanese have not been receiving from their own government. One example is secondary healthcare, which was provided to Syrians, but which Lebanese can access only in their own private capacity, not as a public service.

This has put under pressure those political groups who dealt with the recriminations of poor Lebanese witnessing that the humanitarian emergency plan was supplying Syrian refugees' needs more effectively than the Lebanese government addressed those of its own citizens.

As a consequence of this increased sense of relative deprivation, the UN has expanded the focus of its action. Until 2014, the main focus of its operations was humanitarian and primarily managed by the UNHCR. From 2015, with the establishment of the Lebanon Resilience and Response Plan,¹⁰² international cooperation in the country has expanded its focus to local development as a key factor of crisis management.

It is still too early to assess the consequences, but assuming that sufficient funding is made available, this broader scope of action may address the most urgent issues that local municipalities face when coping with their own infrastructural deficiency.

Matching development objectives with humanitarian relief may have the positive effect of turning crisis management into a development opportunity for Lebanon. Nevertheless, it should also be acknowledged that systemic development projects in Lebanon, such as the reconstruction of Beirut in the aftermath of the civil war, have failed to bring about significant social, political and infrastructural development for the state.¹⁰³ Thus caution is advised in undertaking grand developmental initiatives in the absence of a capable, transparent, and accountable governance.

The role of municipalities and local administrations has not constantly been constructive.¹⁰⁴ In various cases, at times when tensions have peaked, municipalities have become the means to implement restrictive measures targeting Syrian refugees, spurred by perceptions of insecurity and general social fatigue. For example, some municipalities implemented local curfews for Syrians or adopted other security measures to reduce both the mobility and sense of security of Syrians in Lebanon.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² '3rp 2016-2017', *UNHCR*.

¹⁰³ This has been widely documented and discussed for example in the works of Pierre Gaspard, *A Political Economy of Lebanon, 1948-2002: The Limits of Laissez-Faire Social, Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East* (Netherlands: Brill, 2004); Reinoud Leenders, *Spoils of Truce: Corruption and State-Building in Postwar Lebanon* (Ithaca: Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Tom Najem, *Lebanon: The Politics of a Penetrated Society* (London, New York: Routledge, 2012).

¹⁰⁴ Nayla Geagea, 'Asylum Crisis or Migrant Labor Crisis?', *LCPS*. Available at <http://www.lcps-lebanon.org/featuredArticle.php?id=42> (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹⁰⁵ Maya el-Helou, 'Refugees under Curfew: The War of Lebanese Municipalities against the Poor', *The Legal Agenda*. Available at <http://english.legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=674&folder=articles&lang=en> (accessed 8 February 2016); 'Lebanon: At Least 45 Local Curfews Imposed on Syrian Refugees', *Human Rights Watch*. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/10/03/lebanon-least-45-local-curfews-imposed-syrian-refugees> (accessed 8 February 2016).

The autonomy given to municipalities has also allowed for fragmented management of the crisis, leading to Syrians being treated differently in different municipalities of Lebanon.

International organisations, local administrations, and civil society groups have constituted the main source of Lebanon's resilience to this unprecedented crisis. Their capacity to cope with the situation, nevertheless, is entirely dependent on the support that they receive from donors as well as cooperation with the central government. It is therefore vital that international organisations, as well as local groups and administrations, keep receiving all the support they need to supply services to both refugees and host communities, since this is a key stabiliser for a disruptive phenomenon.

The Broader Context of Syria-Lebanon Migrations: Uncertain Borders, Contested Statehoods and Economic Imbalances

The fast developing phenomenon of mass displacement from Syria to Lebanon is not only explained by the conflict's ferocity, its destructive consequences, and the geographic proximity of Lebanon to Syria. It has other broader causes.

Lebanon and Syria have a historical relationship, which has determined the porousness of the border. The birth and development of Lebanon itself is the result of a process whereby the country's territory was carved out a unified 'Greater Syria'. Since then, Pan-Arabism has posed both external and internal challenges for Lebanese sovereignty. The 1958 civil unrest, the 1975-1989 Lebanese Civil War, Syria's military presence in Lebanon from 1976 to 2005 and the phase of the so-called Pax Syriana licensed by the Taif Agreement of 1989¹⁰⁶ are only some of the most obvious instances where the uncertain nature of the border has been manifested. These are further confirmed by the fact that Syria opened its first diplomatic mission in Lebanon only in 2008¹⁰⁷ following the withdrawal of its forces in 2005 – a result of internal and international pressure epitomised by the UNSC resolution 1554. Furthermore the border between Syria and Lebanon is, in legal terms, still being demarcated.¹⁰⁸

But history and international law are only one angle of the phenomenon. There are political, social, and economic relations that have made the border between Syria and Lebanon exceptionally porous. As a direct consequence of a fundamental lack of recognition from the Syrian regime of Lebanon's sovereignty, the former has often exercised much influence in Lebanese politics, often relying on sympathising Lebanese elites and parties. The main refrain among Syrian and Lebanese supporters of the idea of 'Greater

¹⁰⁶ 'Taif Agreement', *The Lebanese Parliament*. Available at https://www.un.int/lebanon/sites/www.un.int/files/Lebanon/the_tauf_agreement_english_version_.pdf (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹⁰⁷ Ian Black, 'Syria to Open Embassy in Beirut after Historic Decree', *The Guardian*. Available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/oct/15/syria-lebanon> (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹⁰⁸ Nizar Abdel-Kader and Alexander Ramsbotham, 'Boundaries and Demarcation', *Accord* 24 (2012).

Syria' is 'one people two countries'¹⁰⁹ which has been recently paraphrased by the Lebanese Foreign Minister Bassil as 'two peoples in one state',¹¹⁰ with reference to the Syrian refugee presence in Lebanon.

Lebanon's signing of the bilateral Treaty of Brotherhood and Cooperation with Syria¹¹¹ effectively brought the two countries even closer, allowing Syrians and Lebanese to cross without the need for a visa or even a passport. Although the wording of the agreements is vague and the implementation of the measures is only partial, they clearly point to a special treatment of Syrian migrants in Lebanon, where their migration is greatly facilitated and their status protected in comparison to others.¹¹²

Syrians have also presented a reserve of labour for the Lebanese economy for decades. The fluid border and the informality of employment makes it difficult to find statistics on this phenomenon, but it is widely believed that in past decades hundreds of thousands of seasonal and construction workers from Syria have come to Lebanon as economic migrants. Figures oscillate, some sources estimate that there are between half a million and one million Syrians working in Lebanon,¹¹³ while the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates a figure between 200,000 and 600,000.¹¹⁴ The Syrian labour force constitutes an important economic resource, and it is no surprise that the recent restrictions at border crossings have caused complaints in the agricultural sector.¹¹⁵

Economic imbalances between Lebanon and Syria are a possible explanation for this phenomenon. In Lebanon the currency is pegged to the US Dollar and has a stronger purchasing power than the Syrian Pound. Lebanon's economy is also generally service-based and capital intensive.¹¹⁶ The difference between the economies is even starker at the time of writing, when the Syrian economy is going through unprecedented challenges.¹¹⁷

Thus, those Lebanese who have access to a more competitive educational infrastructure have more often joined the highly skilled and capital intensive service sectors such as trade, banking, business, tourism, education, medicine or engineering. Legislation is in

¹⁰⁹ 'Lebanese, Syrians One People in Two Countries: Syrian Ambassador', *The Daily Star*. Available at <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Jan-09/283518-lebanese-syrians-one-people-in-two-countries-syrian-ambassador.ashx> (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹¹⁰ 'Bassil: Refugees Threaten Lebanon's Existence', *The Daily Star*. Available at <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refdaily?pass=52fc6fbd5&id=524917555> (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹¹¹ 'Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Lebanese Republic', *United Nations Treaty Series*.

¹¹² For a more detailed chronicle of economic migration from Syria to Lebanon see John T. Chalcraft, *The Invisible Cage: Syrian Migrant Workers in Lebanon*, (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009).

¹¹³ 'Labour in the Levant', *The New Left Review* 45 (May 2007).

¹¹⁴ Interview with an ILO Officer in Beirut; Chalcraft, *The Invisible Cage: Syrian Migrant Workers in Lebanon*, pp. 54-55.

¹¹⁵ 'Lebanon Farms Reel from Shortage of Syrian Laborers', *The Daily Star*.

¹¹⁶ In Lebanon the services sector accounts for about 70% of the GDP, agriculture accounts for about 5% of the GDP and industry 25% of the GDP. See World Bank Data. Available at <http://data.worldbank.org/country/lebanon> (accessed 13 February 2016).

¹¹⁷ Butter, *Syria's Economy*.

place to reserve these kinds of jobs for Lebanese citizens. Syrians, however, are keener to fill gaps in the job market in labour intensive sectors such as construction (which has been booming since the end of the civil war) and agriculture. Pay for Syrians is usually very low and work conditions are poor,¹¹⁸ but the fact that the Lebanese Pound has a stronger purchasing power than the Syrian Pound has given an edge of profit for Syrians workers who send their remittances back home.

Table 1: Difference in Levels of Education between Lebanon and Syria

Source: World Bank Data, 2007

| | Lebanon | Syria |
|-------------------------------------|---------|-------|
| Working force with Primary degree | 46% | 55% |
| Working force with Secondary Degree | 18% | 20% |
| Working Force with Tertiary Degree | 24% | 8% |

In addition to the economic factors, social and family connections are also strong across the border. The area in which the refugee crisis began, Wadi Khaled, is populated by thousands of people whose nationality was regularised only in 1994 by a controversial decree issued by Rafiq Hariri's government.¹¹⁹ Originally, the border with Lebanon in those areas was not clearly demarcated; in fact, many inhabitants are also Syrians or hold a provisional citizenship status there.¹²⁰ Family ties, and national identity are blurry realities in this area and in other border regions cutting across the already porous Lebanese-Syrian border. Furthermore, trade and transhumance have also contributed to a fluid border situation.¹²¹

Although it was the country that would have had the least to offer in terms of security, stability, and isolation from the conflict, Lebanon is also the country with the most established migratory record historically in regards to Syrians,¹²² and this is likely to be a crucial factor in explaining why it has become the state with the fastest and most concentrated population transfer from Syria.

¹¹⁸ Chalcraft, *The Invisible Cage: Syrian Migrant Workers in Lebanon*, pp. 81-84.

¹¹⁹ Guita Hourani, *The 1994 Naturalisation Decree*. Available at <http://eudo-citizenship.eu/docs/LEB-1994NaturalizationDecree-GuitaHouraniNov2011.pdf> (accessed 8 February 2016).

¹²⁰ Guita Hourani and Eugene Sensenig-Dabbous, 'Naturalized Citizens: Political Participation, Voting Behavior, and Impact on Elections in Lebanon (1996-2007)', *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 13/2 (2012).

¹²¹ Dawn Chatty, Nisrine Mansour, and Nasser Yassin, 'Statelessness and Tribal Identity on Lebanon's Eastern Borders', *Mediterranean Politics* 18/3 (2013). See also Dawn Chatty, *Displacement and Dispossession in the Modern Middle East*, *The Contemporary Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹²² It is worth noting that Syrian workers already present in the country before the beginning of the crisis may have registered as refugees with the UNHCR once the crisis in Syria erupted. This may have contributed to the number of UNHCR registrations, although these refugees were not effectively part of the migration that has taken place since the beginning of the crisis in Syria.

Conclusions

Based on conversations with policymakers, officers from international organisations, and civil society activists, this report has provided an analysis of the social and political dynamics of the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon.

Despite the resilience shown by both Lebanese society and the refugee population, the complex nature of the crisis poses an unprecedented challenge for state and society, and deserves attention from Lebanon's international partners as well as from domestic political authorities. The situation can only be managed if the fragility of Lebanese social and political institutions, as well as the vulnerability of the refugees themselves, are taken into account.

As the humanitarian crisis shows no signs of subsiding and the conflict continues unabated, long-term strategies that go beyond immediate humanitarian aid must be developed. Crucially, Lebanese institutions must be strengthened, especially in their capacity to provide welfare to both refugees and Lebanese nationals.

Failing to appreciate the urgency of this issue will inevitably expose Lebanese governance to further strains and increase the precariousness of Syrian presence in Lebanon. This will have the effect of protracting the current crisis and potentially lead to even more regional instability.

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إلى منظمات المجتمع المدني

- أن تحافظ على الاستقلالية عن الديناميات السياسية والطائفية.
- أن تكفل العلاقات بين المجتمعات المضيفة واللاجئين، بالتأكد من أن المساعدات لا تسبب شعوراً بالحرمان النسبي ولا يكون لها آثاراً استقطابية.

إلى الجمهور

- أن يتبرعوا لمنظمات الإغاثة الشفافة ذات السمعة الطيبة التي تعلن عن حساباتها بشكل واضح.
- أن يبقوا مطلعين من مصادر موثوقة ضد التنميط السطحي وتصورات انعدام الأمن غير المبررة المرتبطة بعمليات الهجرة.
- أن يدركوا أن الدول وحكومتهم (أياً كان توجههم السياسي) لديها التزام قانوني دولي بمساعدة وحماية اللاجئين مبني على القانون الدولي العرفي ومعزز بالعديد من المعاهدات الدولية التي تصادق عليها بانتظام غالبية الدول.

توجيهات مقترحة للعمل

إلى المؤسسات اللبنانية

- ينبغي على المؤسسات الرسمية في لبنان أن تضع إطاراً قانونياً واضحاً يوفر للاجئين وضعاً واضح المعالم يحمي حقوقهم.
- ينبغي على المؤسسات اللبنانية السماح للسوريين بالحصول على الخدمات الضرورية والتمتع بالحقوق الأساسية كالحق بالعمل.
- ينبغي على المجموعات السياسية اللبنانية أن تبذل جهداً في التعاطي باستمرار مع الوجود السوري كقضية إنسانية على وجه الحصر، في محاولة لتجنب تسييس هوية اللاجئ من خلال ربط وجودهم بفصيل سياسي أو طائفي ما أو آخر.
- ينبغي مساندة المجتمع الأكاديمي والمدني الوفير في لبنان في وضع استراتيجيات البحث والاتصال لتجنب انتشار الخطاب المعادي للأجانب ولإظهار الآثار الحقيقية للأزمة من منظور حل المشكلة.
- ينبغي على المؤسسات اللبنانية التعاون من أجل تنمية وإنشاء سياق للتعاون الإقليمي لحماية اللاجئين.

إلى الدول والمؤسسات فوق الوطنية (Supranational)

- ينبغي على جميع الدول والمؤسسات فوق الوطنية مثل الاتحاد الأوروبي ومجلس التعاون الخليجي زيادة الدعم المالي والمحافظة على استمراريته من أجل عمل إنساني شفاف وفعال ومشاريع تنموية متعلقة باللاجئين والمجتمعات المضيفة معاً.
- ينبغي على جميع الدول والمؤسسات فوق الوطنية الوفاء بتعهداتها لتوفير المساعدات والتمويل التي اعلنت عليها خلال المؤتمرات الدولية.
- ينبغي على جميع الدول والمؤسسات فوق الوطنية أن تبادر حالا بعمليات إعادة التوطين، و/أو في تنقيح لوائح التأشيرات والهجرة بحيث تكون متناسبة مع حجم الأزمة.
- ينبغي على الدول والكيانات فوق الوطنية تسهيل إنشاء معاهدة إقليمية لحماية اللاجئين في الشرق الأوسط.
- ينبغي على الدول أن تلتزم المعايير القانونية التي تخضع لها بمقتضى القانون العربي الدولي والمعاهدات (بما في ذلك اتفاقية عام 1951 الخاصة بوضع اللاجئين والوثائق الملحقة بها) والتي تلعب بالتزامات محددة تجاه حماية اللاجئين.
- ينبغي أن تفكر الدول جدياً بأن "تقاسم الأعباء" بدلاً من "تقديم المال" هو استراتيجية أساسية للتعامل مع الأزمة بنجاح وبمنظور بعيد المدى.

إلى المنظمات الدولية

- أن تكفل استمرار العلاقات البناءة بين المجتمعات المضيفة واللاجئين، بالتأكد من أن المساعدات لا تسبب شعوراً بالحرمان النسبي ولا يكون لها آثاراً استقطابية.
- أن تبرز وتقوي الطاقة التنموية لإدارة الأزمات للمجتمعات المحلية والحكومة الوطنية.
- أن تفكر جدياً في أن المساعدات الخارجية على الرغم من مدى أهميتها في الحفاظ على العمليات الجارية لا يمكنها أن تكون سوى استراتيجية قصيرة إلى متوسطة المدى وأنه ينبغي تسهيل الاستدامة الاقتصادية طويلة الأجل للوجود السوري.
- أن تستفيد من السجل التاريخي للهجرات السورية إلى لبنان، والتي كانت مورداً اقتصادياً مهماً على مدى عقود والتي تعتمد أيضاً على الروابط الثقافية بالإضافة إلى الروابط العائلية. الشبكات غير الرسمية تشكل أيضاً أدوات هامة تساعد اللاجئين السوريين على تعزيز أوضاعهم خلال النزوح.

الملخص التنفيذي

بدأ الصراع السوري في عام 2011 وتسبب بما لا يقل عن 250,000 من الضحايا المدنيين حتى الآن؛¹ فقد دمر البنية التحتية والأنشطة² الاقتصادية وحول مناطق بأكملها من الدولة إلى مناطق شبه فوضوية، أو مناطق يحكمها أمراء الحرب. هذه هي فقط العوامل الأكثر بديهية التي أجبرت ملايين السوريين على الفرار من منازلهم للعثور على ملاذ في مناطق أخرى من سوريا أو في الخارج. إن أرقام هذه الهجرة القسرية لا سابقة لها. فوفقاً لمصادر رسمية هناك 6.6 ملايين مهجرين داخلياً و 4.7 مليون لاجئ؛³ أي ما يقرب من نصف سكان سوريا.

لقد تسجل نحو 1.2 مليون سوري مع المفوضية السامية للأمم المتحدة لشؤون اللاجئين في لبنان. على الأرجح، الرقم الفعلي لعدد السوريين في لبنان في وقت كتابة هذا التقرير هو أعلى بكثير.

إن لبنان، من حيث القرب الجغرافي واللغة وعلى أساس علاقات تاريخية طويلة الأمد هو من بين الوجهات الأكثر بديهية للسوريين الذين يحاولون الهروب من الحرب الأهلية. ومع ذلك، فإن هذا البلد الصغير (أكبر قليلاً من قبرص) الذي يبلغ عدد سكانه حوالي 4 ملايين نسمة ولديه تاريخ مضطرب من العلاقات مع دمشق ليس بالمكان المثالي لتوفير الحماية للاجئين السوريين.⁴ فالعديد من الفصائل السياسية في لبنان والجماعات شبه العسكرية ترتبط ارتباطاً وثيقاً أو تشارك مباشرة في الأحداث في سوريا، و مؤسسات الدولة اللبنانية معروفة بإمكانيتها الضئيلة على توفير الخدمات والأمن الأساسيين للبنانيين أنفسهم.

الصراع السوري في عامه الخامس، وعلى الرغم من أنه من المنطقي أن تكون تداعياته قد امتدت إلى لبنان، فقد ظلت الحوادث الأمنية الخطيرة التي جرت محلية وعرضية حتى الآن. لقد أثارت أزمة اللاجئين المخاوف، ونظر إليها على أنها عامل عدم استقرار إضافي في السياق الاجتماعي والسياسي والاقتصادي للبلد. لكن بالنظر إلى حجم الظاهرة، فإن أثرها لم يتسبب حتى الآن بالاختلال الذي كان من المعقول توقعه. السوريون في لبنان ضعفاء ومن هم في فئة "النازحين" يعزلون على نحو متزايد، في حين تنهك المجتمعات المحلية المضيفة بسبب الطاقة المحدودة للبنية التحتية وزيادة التنافس على الخدمات والموارد. ومع ذلك فإن حالات الاحتكاك مع اللاجئين لا تزال محدودة نسبياً حتى الآن.

يقدم هذا التقرير عرضاً للوضع من خمسة أقسام. أولاً، يقدم سرداً للأزمة التي تتوضح تدريجياً من وجهة نظر المؤسسات السياسية في لبنان. بعد ذلك يرسم خريطة تفاعلات الأزمة السياسية، مع التركيز على الجهات الفاعلة الرئيسية المعنية. فيما بعد، يقدم تحليلاً لوضع النازحين السوريين في لبنان، الذي يشكل أحد المصادر الرئيسية لضعفهم. ثم يخصص قسمًا لتسليط الضوء على الدور الذي تقوم به الإدارات المحلية والمنظمات الدولية في إدارة الأزمة. يوضح القسم الأخير كيف أن للهجرات السورية اللبنانية تاريخاً موحداً على أساس المصالح الاقتصادية والاجتماعية المتبادلة والروابط الثقافية.

وبناء على هذه الاعتبارات، يختتم التقرير بمجموعة من مسارات العمل الممكنة التي ينبغي أن تضطلع بها مختلف الجهات المعنية. الهدف من هذا التقرير هو تعزيز معرفة أزمة اللاجئين السوريين في لبنان وفهمها، وعلى هذا الأساس، اقتراح مبادئ توجيهية للسياسة التي يمكن أن تسهل حماية اللاجئين وكذلك دعم الاستقرار والتنمية في البلد المضيف.

¹ 'Ahead of Geneva Talks, Un Envoy Addresses All Syrians in Video Message', *UN News Centre*. Available at <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=53118#.VrnnygPmLSHt> (accessed 8 February 2016).

² David Butter, *Syria's Economy: Picking up the Pieces*, (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2015).

³ UN OCHA, 'Syrian Arab Republic', *United Nations*. Available at <http://www.unocha.org/syria> (accessed 8 February 2016).

⁴ International Crisis Group, 'Too Close for Comfort: Syrians in Lebanon', *Middle East Report* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2013).



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فيليبو ديونيجي

مركز الشرق الأوسط

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