

# Assessing the Development- Displacement Nexus in Lebanon

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## Working Paper

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# Acronyms

<b>CAS</b>	Central Administration of Statistics (Lebanon)
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>GoL</b>	Government of Lebanon
<b>ICMPD</b>	International Centre for Migration Policy Development
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>LBP</b>	Lebanese pound
<b>LCRP</b>	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan
<b>MOSDA</b>	Ministry for the Affairs of the Displaced (Lebanon)
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>OFID</b>	OPEC Fund for International Development
<b>OPEC</b>	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations Refugee Agency
<b>UNRWA</b>	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>VASYR</b>	Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon



# 1 Introduction

This paper focuses on Lebanon, a country which covers some 10,450 km<sup>2</sup> and has received the largest influx of refugees from Syria in proportion to its own nationals. In 2015, Syrian refugees represented about a quarter of the Lebanese population, according to data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) considers Lebanon to be an upper-middle income country and estimated its average per capita income to be US \$15,077 in 2014. However, high income inequality and poverty rates are also widely acknowledged (UNDP, 2008; Hamdan and Bou Khater, 2015). No recent poverty assessments are available for Lebanon. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2008) found that 28.5% of the Lebanese population was poor, measured as living on less than \$4 a day. Data released by the Central Administration for Statistics (CAS) based on a 2011-2012 household budget survey are similar, indicating that 27% of the Lebanese population were poor. Regional disparities are stark. Poverty is particularly pervasive in Bekaa and the North governorates, and these are also the main areas of arrival of Syrian refugees (Table 1 and 2 in Annex).

Refugees fleeing from the fighting in Homs began to arrive in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli in 2011. In March 2012, the Bekaa Valley, an agricultural region, became the main destination. Throughout, the Lebanese authorities' have maintained a reluctance to set up new refugee camps. This has forced many Syrians to seek asylum in places where they have relatives, often big cities like Beirut or Tripoli. Or they settle in border regions, like Wadi Khaled in the north and in the eastern Bekaa Valley. Most rent apartments in small towns, are hosted by relatives or find shelter in informal settlements.

The number of Syrians crossing the border into Lebanon increased significantly when the conflict in Syria escalated in 2013 (Kabbanji and Drapeau, 2017). Today refugees are found in more than 1,700 localities throughout the country, often in communities that themselves are already among the country's poorest.

Politically, the Syrian regime's repression of peaceful protests in 2011 aggravated an already explosive polarisation in Lebanon between two multi-sectarian coalitions: the 8 March coalition, which is pro-Syrian regime (including Hezbollah), and the 14 March coalition, which is anti-Syrian regime. That polarisation has smouldered since the assassination of former prime minister Rafic Hariri in 2005. Indeed, the political stage in Lebanon has been tumultuous for many years. Since 2011, the country has had three transitional governments. It lacked a president between May 2014 and October 2016, at which time Michel Aoun was elected. Parliamentary elections were delayed for nine years, though they were finally held in May 2018. During this period, social protests spread, reaching a climax in 2015 in the wake of a huge crisis over garbage collection. This exposed, yet again, corruption within the various political groups that have shared power since the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990 (Dot-Pouillard, 2015).

Security threats in Lebanon have increased as a spillover effect of the war in Syria. These materialised, for example, in the August 2013 car bomb attack on two mosques in Tripoli and in the Battle of Aarsal, in which insurgents took control of a north-eastern border region after attacking Lebanese army checkpoints.

To help Lebanon respond to the crisis, the international community created the International Support Group for Lebanon on 25 September 2013. This group includes the five permanent members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, the European Union (EU), the Arab League, UNHCR, the World Bank and UNDP.



In addition, the EU, in collaboration with the UN, launched the UN-EU Conference on Syria, dedicated to raising funds to assist Syrian refugees and the countries hosting them. Two conferences have been held within this framework: Brussels I in 2017 and Brussels II in 2018. In 2002, the EU signed an association agreement with Lebanon, which entered into force in 2006 (EU Decision 2006/356/EC). Thereafter, talks towards a “mobility partnership” between the EU and Lebanon began in December 2014. These led to the signing of an EU-Lebanon partnership compact in 2016, aimed at improving the living conditions of both Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities. Section four in the current report goes into these initiatives and agreements in more detail.

This report assesses the development-displacement nexus in Lebanon as a possible locus for managing forced displacement from Syria. We argue that management of the refugee crisis and its dynamics in Lebanon has to be approached with consideration of this country’s instable socio-economic and political situation. This report proposes a number of dimensions which we consider key to understand the Lebanese perspective on the Syrian refugee crisis. Appreciation of these will provide a better grasp of the policy options available for promoting regional protection and development in Lebanon.

This report is organised in five sections. Following this introduction, section two introduces the dynamics of Syrian forced migration to Lebanon and the characteristics of the Syrian refugee population. It looks back at the country’s previous experiences with refugee inflows, to place the current Lebanese political approach in context. Section three presents the effects of refugee arrivals on the Lebanese economy and other relevant sectors, particularly education, healthcare, the property market and the environment. It also analyses how these impacts have played out in terms of perceptions of refugees among the host country communities, in national politics and in international engagements. Section four discusses Lebanese government policies concerning refugee protection and development, and how these policies have evolved over time. The conclusion, section five, summarises the main findings. Particularly, it reviews the main factors in the evolution of the Lebanese response to Syrian refugees and the difficult – if not impossible – route towards implementation of the EU-Lebanon partnership compact.

## 2 Refugee populations in Lebanon

To understand the current context, it is important to keep in mind Lebanon's previous experiences with refugee inflows. Indeed, this is not the first time the country has received refugees. Armenians and Kurds arrived here in the 1920s, and Palestinians, expelled from their lands following the creation of the State of Israel, began to arrive in Lebanon in the 1940s. Refugee naturalisation became a sensitive issue over the years, as religious sectarianism has long governed political power sharing in Lebanon. Each community has a share of political weight proportional to its demographic size. The arrival of Palestinian refugees up to the early 1970s, and their long-term settlement, mostly in camps, is a major reason for the Lebanese authorities' refusal to set up new refugee camps for the Syrian arrivals, as such camps are 'widely perceived as problematic and potentially a threat to national security' (Boustani et al., 2016: 21).

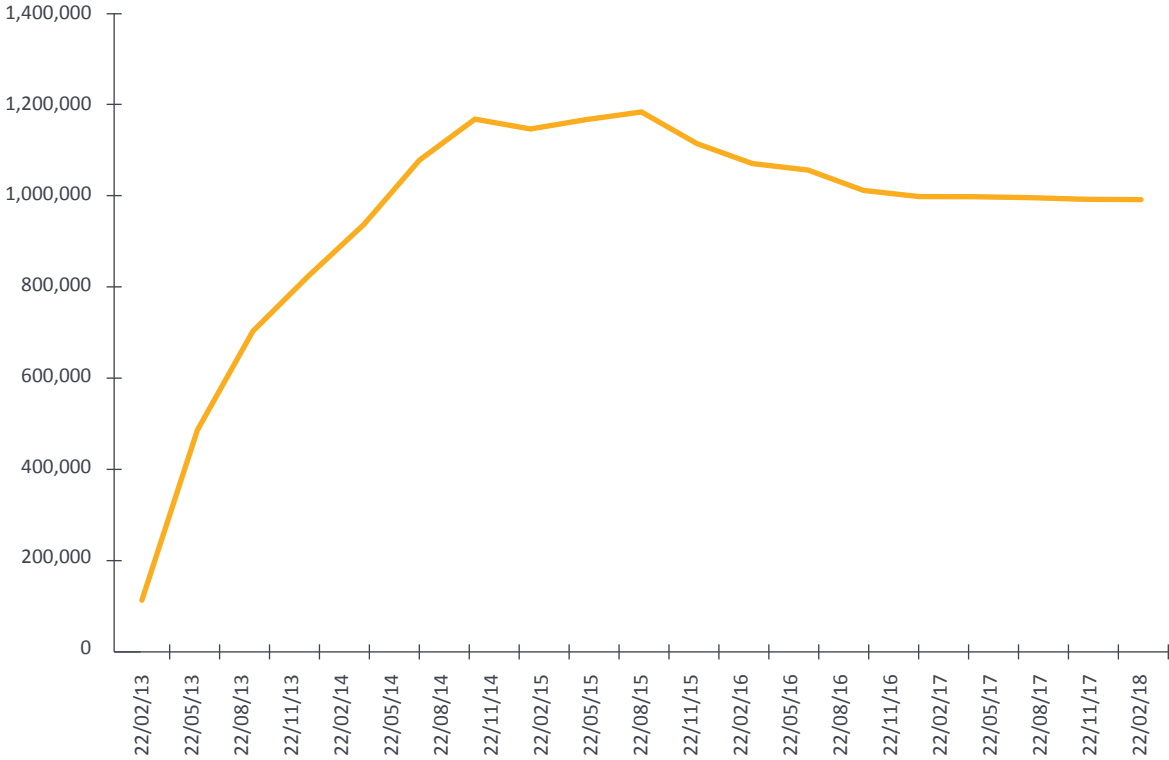
Lebanon is not a signatory to either the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees or the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. This means it does not recognise refugee status. In official parlance, the term "displaced population" is used rather than "refugees". Saghieh and Frangieh (2014) attribute this terminology preference to the Lebanese government's desire to express clearly its refusal of any possible naturalisation of the Syrian refugees within its territory.

### 2.1 Evolution and dynamics of Syrian forced migration to Lebanon

According to UNCHR, which is the main agency producing statistics on Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the country has received the largest influx of displaced Syrians in proportion to its own nationals. In early 2014, Syrian refugee numbers reached a million – a quarter of Lebanon's national population of some 4 million (UNHCR, 2018). The first refugee arrivals were reported on 28 April 2011: around 2,000 persons from Syria's Talkalakh District crossed the border into Lebanon, settling temporarily in the northern village of Wadi Khaled (Dionigi, 2016). The number of registered refugees grew throughout 2013 and 2014, during which time UNHCR registered 47,000 refugees per month on average (figure 1). UNHCR-registered Syrians in Lebanon have steadily fallen since early 2015, in part due to restrictions on new registrations imposed by the Lebanese government. As of 31 January 2018, the population of registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon was just below the one million mark (995,512).

Nonetheless, the actual number of refugees currently residing in Lebanon is difficult to estimate for several reasons. First, the UNHCR data offer an overly static view. Also, the Lebanese government restricts the number of refugees that UNHCR may register since May 2015. Moreover, methodologically, it is not easy to collect reliable data on such a highly changing phenomenon, particularly since many refugees in Lebanon travel independently and find their own accommodations. Some authors have also raised questions on the accuracy and quality of the UNHCR data, due to the agency's high reliance on donations, which could possibly influence its presentation of statistics (Bakewell, 1999). In a December 2017 working paper, Kabbaj and Drapeau (2017) argued that the combination of border statistics, UNHCR stock data and satellite imagery yields a better picture of the dynamics of forced displacement from Syria. These authors' analysed monthly Lebanese border statistics from 2011 through 2017, finding significant variation in inflows and outflows over the seven years as well as a discrepancy since 2015 between UNHCR stock data and border flows. Moreover, movements between Syria and Lebanon were not one-way only. This suggests we should interpret the UNHCR data with caution.

**Figure 1. Number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon as registered by the UNHCR, (2013-2018)**



Source: UNHCR (<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>)

Palestinian refugees from Syria are not counted among the Syrian refugees registered by UNHCR. In 2015, some 53,070 Palestinians from Syria were registered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) – this is the UN agency in charge of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (for details on the situation of Palestinian refugees from Syria, see [www.unrwa.org/syria-crisis](http://www.unrwa.org/syria-crisis)). Most of them came after the December 2012 bombing of the Yarmouk refugee camp in Syria.

## 2.2 Characteristics of the Syrian refugee population

Syrian migration to Lebanon has a long history, though forced displacements have reconfigured the size and socio-demographic characteristics of these flows. Indeed, Lebanon has had a large Syrian workforce since the 1950s, mainly in construction, public works and agriculture (Chalcraft, 2009). After the end of the Lebanese Civil War, Syrian workers were also hired in other branches, such as catering and transport. The number of Syrians working and residing in Lebanon before 2011 is difficult to estimate, as few had a work permit and most were employed in the informal sector. Moreover, because a 1993 bilateral agreement granted Syrians freedom of movement and access to work and residence in Lebanon (and vice versa), they were not as carefully recorded as other migrant groups. Some authors have estimated that between 300,000 and 400,000 Syrian workers were in Lebanon in 2011 (Longuenesse, 2015). Many of these workers were men who left their family behind in Syria and made seasonal migrations between the two countries.

While most of the Syrians who migrated to Lebanon for employment were men of working age, women and children are now overrepresented among the Syrian population in Lebanon. UNHCR's May 2018 data indicate that almost 60% of the Syrian refugees it had registered were under 18 years of age, and 53% were women (UNHCR, 2018).

Located in eastern Lebanon, Bekaa Governorate has the country's largest official border crossing with Syria, at Masnaa. According to UNHCR, this region has received the largest number of refugees, with 357,395 registered Syrians as of 31 January 2018 (figure 2). Beirut and the Mount Lebanon governorates were home to 266,058 registered Syrian refugees. There were 253,173 registered Syrian refugees in the North Governorate, and 118,886 in the South Governorate. Most Syrians live in urban areas, in rented apartments in residential buildings (figure 1 in annex). Some, however, reside in non-residential accommodations, such as garages, workshops and construction sites (UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP, 2017: 22). In June 2017, UNHCR's Inter-Agency Coordination Group recorded 246,126 persons living in informal settlements across Lebanon (UNHCR, 2017). The Bekaa hosts more than 75% of these informal settlements. Most of the other informal settlements are located in the North Governorate, particularly in Akkar and Miniyeh-Danniyeh districts (figure 2 in annex). Regarding Palestinians arriving from Syria, half live in one of the 12 Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. They are a relatively young population, with a mean age of 25 years (on this population see also Abdulrahim and Harb, 2015).

Figure 2. Number of registered refugees by district as of 30 September 2018

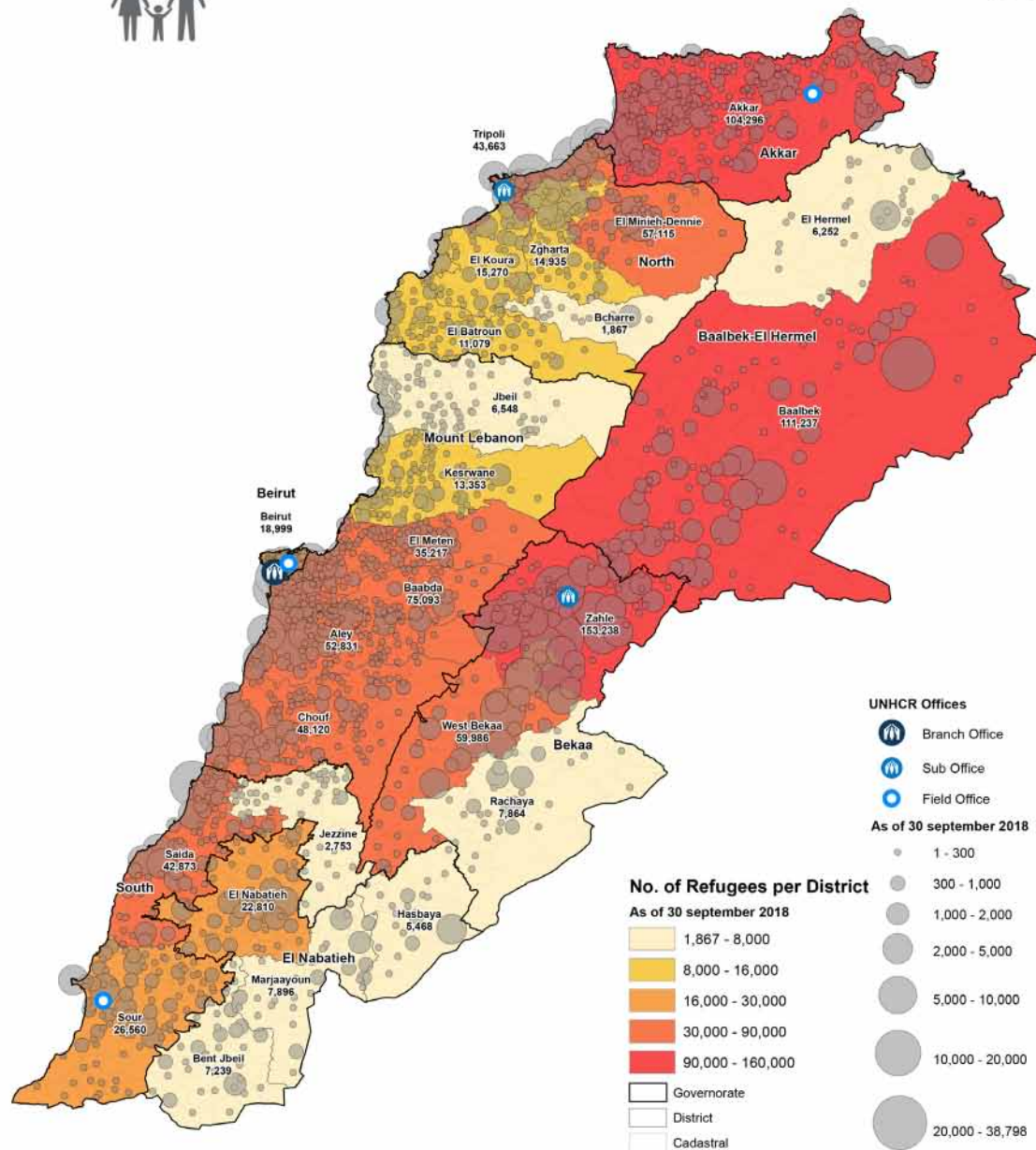


**SYRIA REFUGEE RESPONSE**  
**LEBANON Syrian Refugees Registered**  
 30 September 2018

UNHCR Lebanon - Beirut Country Office



Total No. of Refugees **952,562**



This map has been produced by the Inter-Agency Information Management Unit of UNHCR based on maps and material provided by the Government of Lebanon for operational purposes. It does not constitute an official United Nations map. The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

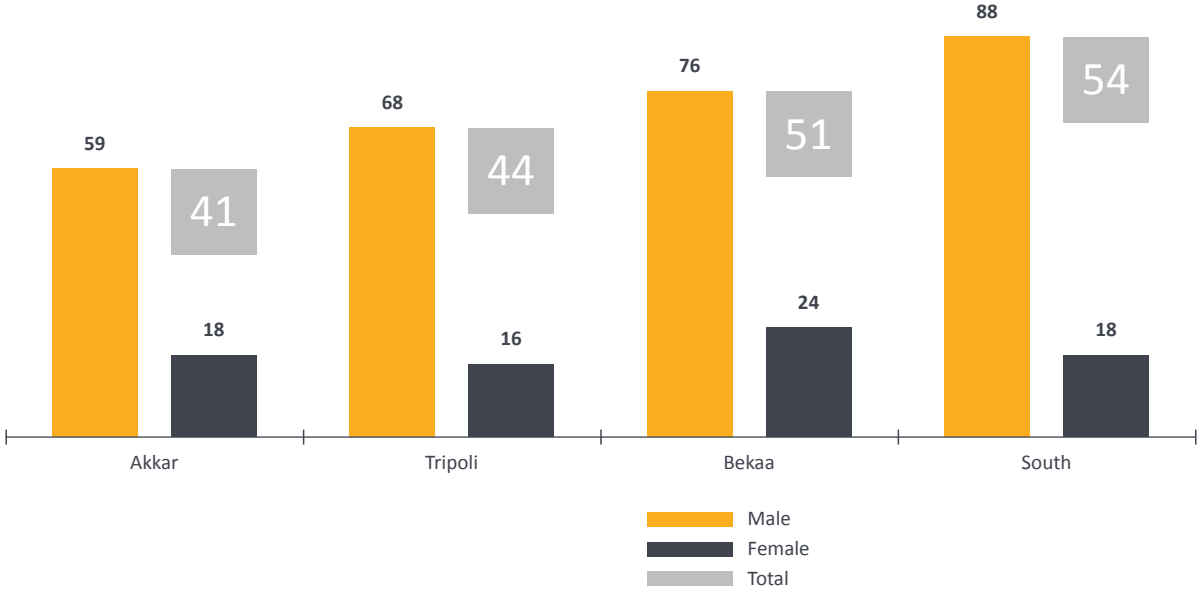
Data Sources:  
 - Refugee population and location data by UNHCR as of 30 September 2018. For more information on refugee data, contact Diana El Habr at elhabr@unhcr.org

GIS and Mapping by UNHCR Lebanon. For further information on map, contact Jad Ghosn at ghosn@unhcr.org or Maroun Sader at sader@unhcr.org

Source: UNHCR (<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/66530>)

Syrian refugees are a very diverse group. Their socio-demographic profile also greatly varies according to their place of residence in Lebanon. Those in Akkar District, in the North Governorate, and in Bekaa tend to have the least-educated household heads, with only a primary-level education or lower. About 20% of heads of household are women. Most refugees living outside the big cities work in precarious jobs, usually seasonal agricultural labour. Stable work is more common in the capital, Beirut. The International Labour Organization (ILO) reports that the highest economic activity rate for Syrian refugees is that found among those living in the South Governorate (figure 3). According to the 2017 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASYR), 76% of Syrian refugees lived below the poverty line, estimated at US \$3.84 a day in Lebanon (UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP, 2017: 60).

**Figure 3. Economic activity of Syrian refugees age 15 and older, by region and sex (%)**



Source: ILO (2014: 23).

Until 2013, most Syrian nationals who applied to UNHCR for financial aid were found eligible. Starting in 2014, however, the agency set up a needs assessment study to select eligible persons. The percentage of refugees receiving assistance then fell from 75% in 2013 to 5% in 2014, with UNHCR attributing the drop to a decrease in its own funding (UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF, 2015). The VASYR study found that close to 30% of Syrian refugees needed assistance to meet their basic needs, and 70% could not fulfil their minimum daily food requirements (UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP, 2017). Since the start of the crisis, humanitarian aid has been limited to provision of material goods and small amounts of cash. No support has been provided to set up income-generating projects for refugees. This is attributed mainly to the Lebanese government’s fear of encouraging refugees to settle in Lebanon (Thorleifsson, 2014).

## 2.3 Legal status issues

From the start of the protests in Syria up until 2014, Syrians were allowed to enter Lebanon freely and granted temporary residence for six months, in accordance with the bilateral agreements the two countries signed in 1993 and 1994 (Lebanon Support, 2016). Though formally a work permit was required, very few workers applied for and obtained one. For instance, just 1,102 work permits were granted to Syrians in 2015, according to data from the Lebanon Ministry of Labor published on the website of the CAS. At the end of 2014, Lebanon progressively implemented a restrictive legal framework, making it more difficult for Syrians to cross the border and reside legally in the country. Measures included an annual US \$200 fee to apply for or renew a residence permit. Also, sponsorship by a Lebanese citizen in Lebanon was required for those not registered with UNHCR (section 4.2 provides more details on this legislation).

As a result, whereas in the early years of the armed conflict in Syria, combined with the open-border policy in Lebanon, volumes of both entries and exits increased, these movements were stifled as the conflict dragged on and entry and residence policies became more restrictive (Kabbanji and Drapeau, 2017). Indeed monthly border statistics show a drop in both entries and exits after 2014. The new regulations also cast refugees from Syria into a legal limbo, which further deteriorated their living conditions in Lebanon. UNHCR reported an 80% drop in new registrations between January and March 2015. The proportion of Syrian households without a valid residence permit had increased from 9% in January 2015 to 61% at the end of July 2015 (Janmyr, 2016). The 2017 VASYR study found that 74% of Syrian refugees age 15 and older had no valid residence status (UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP, 2017). However, no systematic arrests or deportations were reported.

It is important to note here that not all refugees from Syria are treated the same. Palestinians from Syria are subject to another national and international legal framework (Kabbanji, 2016). Lebanon set up specific legislation concerning Palestinian refugees in the 1990s, to block their naturalisation. Thus, Palestinians from Syria must, upon their arrival in Lebanon, obtain an entry visa and then a residence permit, the renewal of which is subject to approval by the Directorate General for General Security. In addition, Palestinians from Syria are excluded from UNHCR's mandate and activities. They are instead subject, under international law, to the dedicated relief and works agency UNRWA.



# 3 Impact of refugee arrivals

## 3.1 A tumultuous past

To fully understand the relationship between Syrian refugees and local populations in Lebanon it is imperative to sketch a brief history of the tumultuous relationship between Lebanon and Syria. Interstate relations have been ambiguous since the independence of the two countries in the 1940s. Until the mid-1970s, relations between them were marked by ideological differences. Lebanon was liberal and more oriented towards the West, while Syria was protectionist and closer to the socialist bloc. Syria's military intervention early in the Lebanese Civil War, in 1976, radically changed the nature of their relations. Thereafter, and for nearly 30 years, Damascus governed Lebanon for all intents and purposes. For instance, all important state decisions were taken in Syria, and no Lebanese government could be formed without approval of the Syrian authorities (Salloukh, 2005). The hasty departure of the Syrians in 2005 following the assassination of then prime minister Rafic Hariri rebalanced relations between the two countries. This was also the starting point of a period of heightened tensions. From then on, armed micro-conflicts became widespread, focused against Lebanon's two politico-military and multi-sectarian blocs, the first being the pro-Syrian regime, 8 March coalition, and the second being the anti-Syrian regime, 14 March coalition. It was within this context that the civil war in Syria broke out in 2011.

The period of Syrian domination produced a deep resentment towards Syria across a large share of Lebanese society. This sentiment has fed and exacerbated racism towards the population of the neighbouring state. Syrians are paradoxically perceived as both dominant and dominated. They are thought of as dominant because of Syria's hegemonic presence in Lebanon for many decades. They are thought of as being dominated because Syrians in Lebanon typically work in menial, low-skilled jobs and are thought of as inferior and under-developed.

In this context, what impact has the inflow of Syrian refugees had on the Lebanese economy and labour market, as well as on other key sectors such as education, healthcare, the property market, housing and the environment? What impact have these arrivals had on the political climate in Lebanon, and on perceptions of Syrians in the country?

## 3.2 Impact of refugees on the Lebanese economy and labour market

The Lebanese economy faced structural problems long before the arrival of the Syrian refugees. These structural problems emanate from the nature of the Lebanese economy, as it is highly reliant on foreign investment and remittances from Lebanese workers abroad. Both these sources, moreover, are tightly linked to petrodollars. Thus, the spectacular increase in Lebanon's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the late 2000s was due in part to increased oil prices, which brought greater financial inflows (Bou Habib, 2012: 154). Since 2015, falling crude oil prices have ushered in a drop in both foreign investment from the Gulf countries and in remittances from Lebanese expatriate workers employed in the petroleum industry. Thus, Lebanon's strong dependence on petroleum earnings is a foremost cause of the escalating economic crisis it has experienced in recent years. The situation was analysed by economists

Jad Chaaban and Jana Harb in their policy paper *Macroeconomic Implications of Windfall Oil and Gas Revenues in Lebanon* (Chaaban and Harb, 2015).

Once we realise that the economic crisis in Lebanon is closely linked to the fall in oil prices, we might ask to what degree refugees have contributed to worsen the situation. Prime Minister Saad Al Hariri stated in May 2017 at the Doha Forum that the presence of 1.5 million Syrian refugees in his country constituted a major barrier to economic recovery. Lebanon's major political parties have echoed this claim. Is it true, or is it just a populist lament?

Two major obstacles arise in measuring the impacts of Syrian refugees on the Lebanese economy. First, it is hard to adequately separate the macro-economic impacts of the war in Syria on the Lebanese economy from the micro-level impacts of refugee inflows. However, both tend to be mixed by organisations like the IMF (IMF, 2017: 8). Second, it is difficult to measure the contributions of Syrian refugees to the Lebanese economy, as they usually work in the informal sector for which we lack reliable data (Charafeddine, 2016: 6). The report *The Impact of the Syrian Displacement Crisis on the Lebanese Economy*, by Raed H. Charafeddine, First Vice-Governor at Banque du Liban, cites estimates suggesting that the Syrian refugees may have helped boost the country's GDP by 1.3% in 2014 (Charafeddine, 2016: 6).

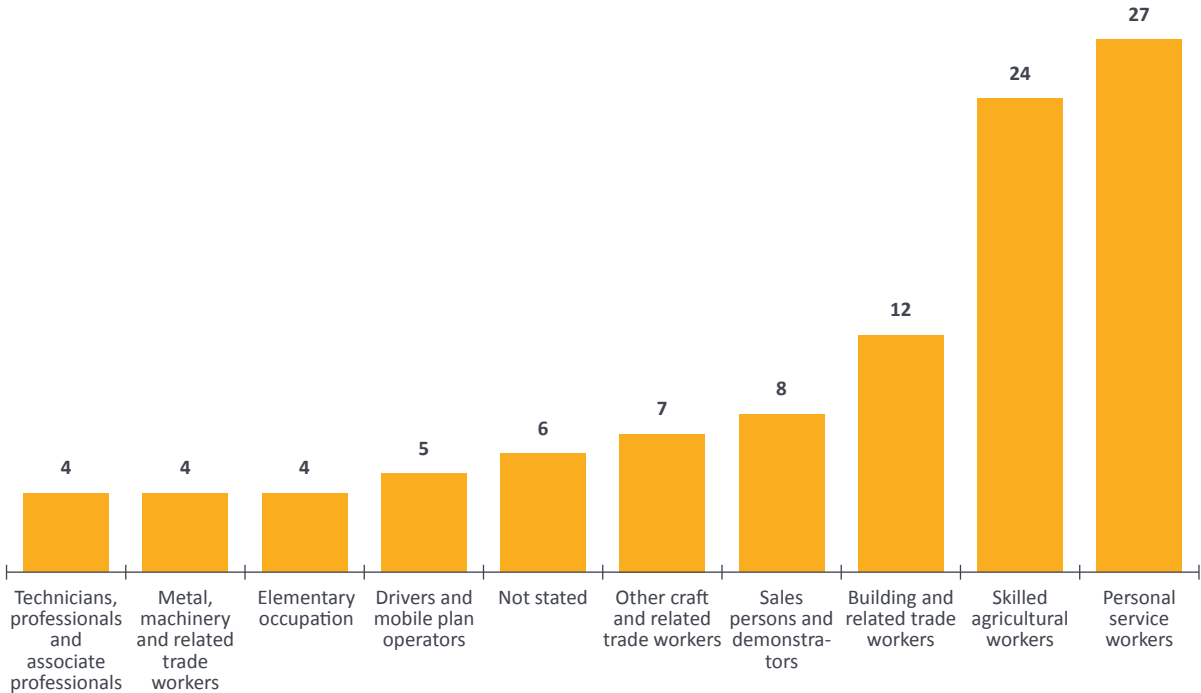
The contribution refugees have made to the Lebanese economy as consumers is also impossible to estimate with any accuracy. Yet, these figures are key, since consumer spending contributes directly to government financing through consumption taxes (e.g., value added and electricity taxes). According to Chabaan (2017), refugees spent an average of US \$106 per month in 2016. Therefore, the total expenditure of refugees for that year would be \$1.5 billion. The World Bank (2013: 53) went so far as to state that consumption by Syrian refugees had partially offset losses in the tourism industry due to the war in Syria. That same report noted that refugee bookings had done much to fill hotel rooms empty due to the drop in tourism.

Charafeddine (2016: 7) identified other areas too in which the presence of refugees had benefited the economy:

Such Syrian labour has benefited Lebanese employers and businesses which were able to pay cheap wages and save disbursing benefits and compensations by avoiding to register the Syrian workers at the social security administration, thus driving down the costs of production for Lebanese business establishments.

However, ILO (2014) acknowledges that the massive arrival of Syrian refugees on the Lebanese labour market has negatively impacted the poorest Lebanese. The World Bank Group (2015: 25) has also found a rise in unemployment among Lebanese workers in the main sectors hiring Syrian refugees. These are agriculture, construction and services (figure 4).

**Figure 4. Distribution of Syrian refugees by occupation (%)**



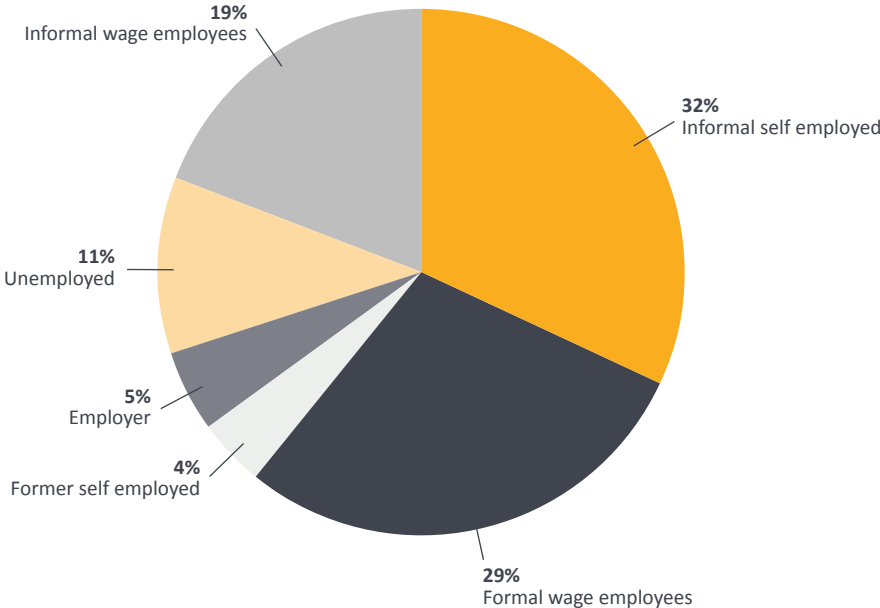
Source: ILO (2014: 25).

Salary competition is another aspect mentioned by ILO, as Syrian refugees earn half the wages of their Lebanese counterparts. ILO (2014: 28) reported an average monthly income of 418,000 Lebanese pounds (LBP) among refugees, with a median earnings of LBP 450,000 (ILO, 2014: 9). In an overview of the status of its country partnership framework with Lebanon, the World Bank (2018) summarised its view on the question as follows:

The crisis is expected to worsen poverty incidence among Lebanese as well as widen income inequality. In particular, it is estimated that as a result of the Syrian crisis, some 200,000 additional Lebanese have been pushed into poverty, adding to the erstwhile 1 million poor. An additional 250,000 to 300,000 Lebanese citizens are estimated to have become unemployed, most of them unskilled youth.

According to 2010 data, more than half of the Lebanese labour force was working in the informal sector prior to the crisis (figure 5). Job creation in the informal sector has risen since then. According to the Banque du Liban report, ‘Intense competition for jobs by new entrants raised unemployment and informal business activities by 10 percentage points, with 220,000-324,000 Lebanese nationals joining the ranks of the unemployed by 2014’ (Charafeddine, 2016: 5). In addition, Syrian refugees have set up numerous small businesses, which now compete with Lebanese enterprises. In Bekaa, for example, Longuenesse (2015: 37) mentions 380 establishments run by Syrian refugees, including 260 restaurants and 120 bakeries, shops and various types of workshops. These were a source of tension with the local native population.

**Figure 5. Lebanese labour force by status, 2010**



Source: World Bank Group (2015: 24).

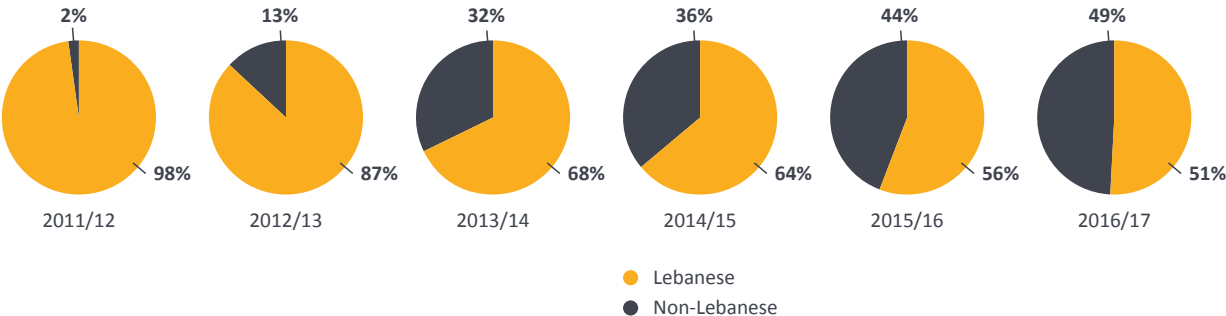
Based on these various sources, we can conclude that the presence of refugees did likely benefit the Lebanese economy from a macro perspective. Yet, the massive influx of hundreds of thousands of workers has had negative effects, such as increasing unemployment among the Lebanese, especially the poorest.

### 3.3 Sectoral impact

#### Education

The presence of Syrian refugees has greatly disrupted the educational system in Lebanon. Indeed the Government of Lebanon and UN (2018: 50) estimated that in 2018, nearly 600,000 Syrian children would be in need of educational assistance. Ferris and Kirisci (2016: 42) found that in 2015 the number of Syrian children in Lebanese public schools exceeded the number of Lebanese children. The Lebanese government’s estimate for the 2016-2017 school year was slightly lower: Syrian children were said to represent nearly half of the students in public schools that year (figure 6). Of all the Syrian children in the country, both registered refugees and not registered, 70% were attending school in 2017 (UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP, 2017: 32). But Syrian refugees and Lebanese children rarely share the same classrooms. Indeed, language is a major obstacle to mixed classes. Lebanese students are educated in French and English, while Syrian students are taught in Arabic.

**Figure 6. Share of Lebanese and non-Lebanese students in Lebanon’s public schools, 2011-2017**



Source: GoL and UN (2018: 52).

This influx of refugee students represents a major challenge for the national education system. To cope, the Lebanese government has set up second shifts at existing schools and opened new schools throughout the country. Several hundred Lebanese teachers have also been hired. Hence, the presence of Syrian refugees has boosted the Lebanese education system in a number of ways. First, international aid has allowed the government to develop educational infrastructure. Second, it has provided temporary jobs for many unemployed Lebanese teachers. Lastly, as Lebanon’s Ministry of Education and Higher Education observed, these efforts have raised enrolment rates of Lebanese as well as Syrian children in public school, while increasing the number of refugee children receiving educational certificates, despite documentation barriers (Ministry of Education and Higher Education Lebanon, 2016).

**Healthcare**

The Lebanese health system is highly privatised. The imbalance between public and private healthcare offerings in the country was commented upon by an inter-agency evaluation of health services for Syrian refugees: ‘The public sector, which is comprised mostly of primary healthcare centres and dispensaries, has limited capacity when compared to the private sector in terms of tertiary care infrastructure and financial resources’ (Johns Hopkins and Médecins du Monde, 2015: 7).

Like in education, however, arrival of the more than one million Syrian refugees has initiated growth in Lebanon’s public health system. This has given thousands of vulnerable Lebanese, as well as Syrians, access to a range of public healthcare services, from psychiatric help to neonatal and paediatric care, according to Sleiman and Atallah (2016). Training of healthcare professionals is in the lift as well, thanks to international subsidies, which also benefits Lebanese patients. Sleiman and Atallah (2016) note that ‘[f]rom the outset, primary healthcare centre staff have received training in effective vaccine management, and other key services such as the diagnosis and treatment of malnutrition and the clinical management of rape, having a positive impact on Syrians and Lebanese alike.’

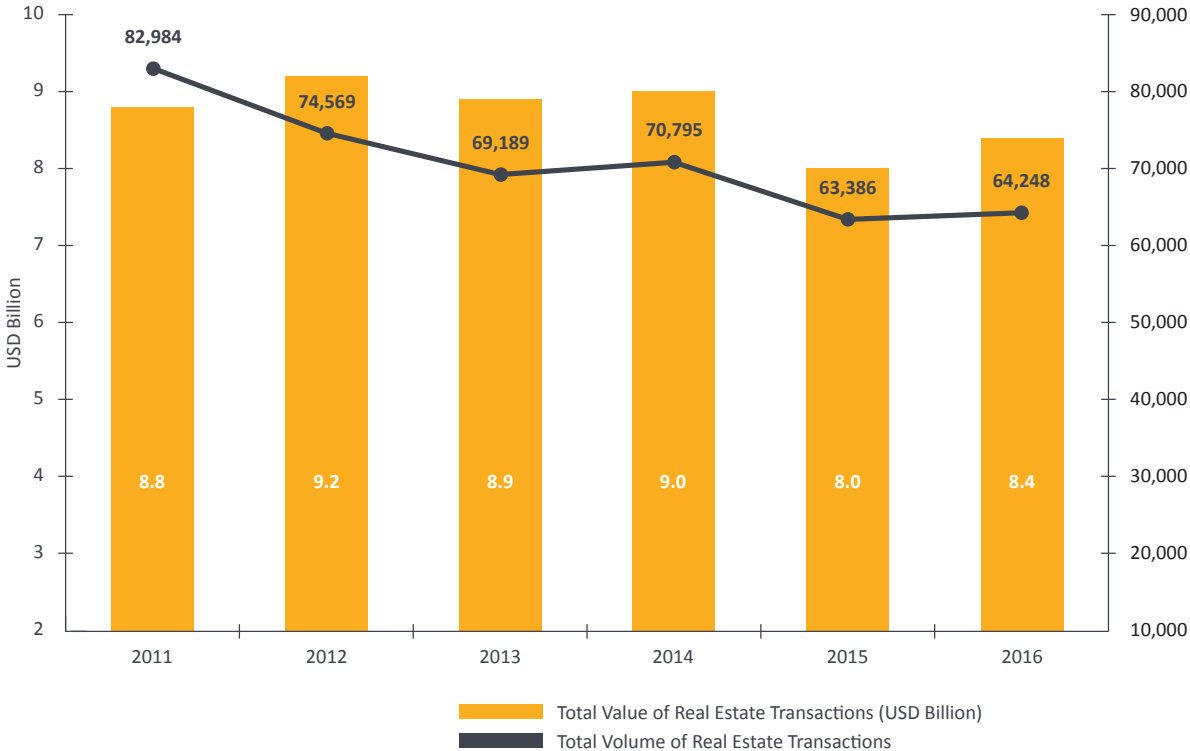
However, the Lebanese government has maintained that the massive arrival of Syrian refugees has undermined the healthcare system (APIS Health Consulting Group, 2016). Lebanese authorities speak of a healthcare system crisis for which, they assert, UNHCR is partly to blame: ‘As of 2014, UNHCR started covering 75% instead of 85% of the hospitalization cost, leaving the patient with the remaining share of 25% to be paid out of pocket or by a third party’ (ibid.). This measure has affected not only Syrian ref-

ugees, but also the most vulnerable Lebanese, according to the government. It concluded that public hospitals have been hampered in fulfilling their mission and become incapable of providing adequate services to either Syrian refugees or to Lebanese citizens.

**The property market and housing**

Most reports note a sharp drop in property values since the crisis in Syria began (figure 7). Indeed, chronic instability has made investors disinclined to invest in property in Lebanon, not least because of the civil war just across the border in Syria. However, the presence of Syrian refugees in itself cannot be considered the cause of this. Their presence is also the result of the conflict, which itself has had a lasting effect on the property market.

**Figure 7. Value and volume of property transactions in Lebanon, 2011-2016**



Source: Bankmed (2017: 3).

The presence of Syrian refugees has strongly affected the rental sector. A 2016 survey by the Mixed Migration Platform found that 83% of refugees lived in rented accommodations. The remaining 17% lived in informal camps (Mixed Migration Platform, 2017a: 5). Given the quick rise in demand for rental properties, rents have increased steeply as well. Between 2012 and 2013, rents rose by 44% (Zetter et al., 2014: 19). This has put a strain on both Syrian refugees and Lebanese citizens, particularly the poorest among them, as refugees tend to live in working class neighbourhoods. The example of Naba’a, a densely populated suburb of Beirut, is illustrative in this regard. A UN-Habitat study found that this neighbourhood was particularly affected by rising rents, which residents attributed to the presence of Syrian refugees (Yassin et al., 2015: 62). That same study observed that Syrian refugees rented agricultural lands to set up tents on, thus limiting agricultural production while benefitting Lebanese landowners.

## Environment and waste

Waste, electricity and water management were structural problems in Lebanon long before the arrival of the Syrian refugees. Lebanon has never had a national policy on waste management. Beirut and Mount Lebanon have relied on emergency waste management measures since 1998. There are 670 open dumps across the country (Human Rights Watch, 2016). The presence of one million Syrian refugees has certainly made this already precarious situation worse.

A 2014 environmental assessment estimated the quantity of municipal solid waste due to the presence of refugees at 324,568 tons per year (MOE, EU and UNDP, 2014: 2). Water demand has increased too. An additional 43-70 million cubic metres of water had been used by the end of 2014 due to the presence of Syrian refugees (ibid.: 4). Electricity use had increased by 251 megawatts (ibid.: 8).

The Lebanese government has responded to this critical situation with its Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP). The stated objective of the plan is to '[r]educe the impact of the crisis on Lebanon's environment with a particular focus on integrated solid waste management, water and wastewater management, use of renewable energy sources and energy-efficient products, protection of the air quality, conservation of land use and ecosystems by strengthening the good management of natural resources and sustainable investments abiding by environmental regulations' (GoL and UN, 2018: 18). However, as of this writing, little evidence of better practices could be observed. Human Rights Watch launched a campaign in January 2018 asking the government to stop the burning of waste ([www.hrw.org/stopthe-burning](http://www.hrw.org/stopthe-burning)). This followed its release of a report a month earlier criticising Lebanese officials' management of the waste crisis:

[The] authorities' lack of action to end open burning of waste across Lebanon is posing serious health risks for nearby residents, violating their right to health under international law. Children and older people are at particular risk. Open burning of waste is a dangerous and avoidable consequence of the government's decades-long failure to manage solid waste in a way that respects environmental and health laws designed to protect people (Human Rights Watch, 2017: 1).

### 3.4 Perceptions, politics and diplomacy

Refugees live in more than 1,700 localities throughout Lebanon. Many have found shelter in communities that were already among the poorest in the country. In some places, refugees now outnumber their host community. This raises three questions: What kinds of relationships do these refugees have with their host communities? How do host communities perceive the refugee population? And what are the political and diplomatic impacts of the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon?

#### Perceptions

From the outset, the Lebanese authorities rejected the idea of creating refugee camps. This decision was motivated by fear of seeing this population with its very large Sunni majority settle permanently, profoundly changing Lebanon's confessional balance. Another factor is Lebanon's complex history with Palestinian refugees. However, the lack of camps has led many refugees to settle in Lebanese towns and villages, often in the most deprived and thus least costly areas. Undoubtedly, this has resulted in greater immersion of Syrian refugees in Lebanese society.

Multiple reports, academic articles and newspaper stories have considered host communities' perceptions of Syrian refugees (e.g., Hägerdal, 2018; Christophersen et al., 2013; Harb, 2016; Mixed Migration Platform, 2017b; Betts, Ali and Memisoglu, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2013; Francis, 2017). Most of these analyse the Syrian crisis, and particularly the refugee crisis, using a simplistic sectarian grid; that is, the Lebanese Sunnis of the 14 March coalition are supportive of the rebellion and therefore more welcoming of refugees, while the Shiites of the 8 March coalition support the Syrian government and thus are less refugee-friendly. For example, a report published by Oxford University's Refugee Studies Centre concludes, 'the Sunni municipalities we spoke with have been the most welcoming. Elsewhere, Hezbollah-run Shia areas have become the least welcoming' (Betts, Ali and Memisoglu, 2016: 2). The conclusion of a report by the prestigious International Crisis Group (2013: 1) is similar: 'Hostility and suspicion are far more discernible among Shiites and Christians.' These two publications present a viewpoint that is essentially based on a cultural, if not confessional analysis.

In 2013, the Norwegian social science research foundation, Fafo, published results offering a somewhat different perspective (Christophersen, Thorleifsson and Tiltnes, 2013; Christophersen et al., 2013). It conducted 900 interviews to discern Lebanese attitudes towards Syrian refugees and the Syrian crisis. One of the questions asked was, 'Are Syrians taking Lebanese jobs?' Interviewees in northern Lebanon (a mainly Sunni area) largely responded yes to this question (91%), while 71% agreed in southern Lebanon (a mainly Shia area). Moreover, if we consider the religious background of those interviewed, a greater proportion of the Sunnis (87%) saw the Syrians as direct competitors, compared to the Shiites (74%). The gap between the two regions and two religious communities was even wider in answers to the question, 'Are the Syrian refugees supported financially to an unfair degree?' Some 74% of respondents in the north said yes to this question, while only 14% of those in the south did (overall, 49% of the Sunni respondents said yes, compared to 16% of the Shiites). Regarding impact on wages, 91% of the northerners considered the presence of Syrian refugees to have negatively influenced wages, while 71% of southerners considered this to be true (83% of the Sunni respondents thought this was true, compared to 66% of the Shiites). Perceptions of the overall impact of the Syrian refugees on the country's worsening socio-economic situation seemed to be shared equally across the whole Lebanese population. Finally, 58% of those in the north said that Syrians could not be trusted, while only 18% of those in the south agreed. More generally, 34% of the Sunnis said that Syrians could not be trusted, compared to 22% of the Shiites.

From this we can conclude that host community perceptions are tightly intertwined with the daily difficulties encountered. The more negative perceptions of Syrian refugees in the north, compared to the south, probably reflect greater competition in the northern districts for salaries, work opportunities and housing, to name just a few examples. While Syrian refugees undoubtedly have greater political and confessional affinity with the inhabitants of northern Lebanon, these factors did not seem to be predominant in determining Lebanese perceptions of the refugees in their midst.

### Political impact

The risk of political destabilisation in Lebanon has increased since 2011. At that time, the Damascus regime's repression of peaceful protests in Syria served to accentuate the political polarisation already smouldering in Lebanon. Indeed, since 2011, Lebanon has undergone a turbulent period, with three transitional governments, no president for two years and parliamentary elections repeatedly delayed until 2018. It is within this context that the Lebanese government adopted the policy of distancing itself from the various factions involved in the conflict in Syria. A main objective of this decision was to limit insofar as possible the impact of the conflict and refugees on the local political scene.



Dionigi (2016) distinguishes two political phases. The first one, from 2011 to 2014, was characterised by optimism within the anti-Syrian political coalition regarding a rapid fall of the Assad regime. This optimism, shared particularly by the Future Movement (Hariri), one of the founding members of the 14 March coalition, was reflected in enthusiastic reception of – the mainly Sunni – refugees. The latter were seen as potential allies of the 14 March coalition in its internal struggle with the 8 March coalition. The second phase began in 2014, when the Lebanese political elites realised that the Syrian crisis would not be quickly resolved. The 14 March coalition then adopted a more pragmatic stance towards the Syrian regime. The coalition’s attitude towards refugees shifted as well: refugees were no longer perceived as a political ally against the 8 March coalition, but as a threat to Lebanon’s own political stability.

Starting in 2014, the Government of National Unity – including the 8 and 14 March coalitions – instituted several measures to limit the impact of Syrian refugees on Lebanon’s security. These included restrictions on the entry and stay of Syrian refugees. Though the purpose of these measures was purportedly to preserve security, an underlying objective pursued by the policy was completely different: to make the refugee population a scapegoat for the country’s ills, thereby exonerating the local political elites that despite manifest incompetence had been able to remain in power for decades. With the local population increasingly hostile to the presence of Syrian refugees, it was relatively easy for politicians to begin scapegoating Syrian refugees. In the words of Joey Ayoub (2018), ‘So the same government that is loathed by most Lebanese is telling the Lebanese to look at Syrian refugees as the source of their problems.’

Marcela Guerrero Turbay’s (2015) master’s thesis, *The Politics of Representation: Syrian Refugees in the Official Discourse in Lebanon (2011-2015)*, addresses this issue. Like Dionigi (2016), Turbay notes a change in the official discourse on Syrian refugees starting in 2014. Since then, politicians have associated refugees with insecurity. Moreover, a racist element has emerged in official speech, particularly in the language of Gebran Bassil, Minister of Foreign Affairs. Racism was also prevalent within some of the contending factions in the parliamentary elections of 6 May 2018. This is demonstrated by a Christian Phalangist party banner hung over Sassine Square, Beirut, reading: ‘A day will come when we will tell the Syrian: Gather your stuff and everything you stole and leave’ (figure 8).

In sum, Syrian refugees do not appear to have participated or currently be participating significantly in strengthening any of the Lebanese political coalitions. On the contrary, the increasing complexity of the war in Syria, the difficult living conditions in Lebanon and hostility within host communities have generated what Dot-Pouillard and Pesquet (2015) term “a discourse of neutrality” among the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon.

**Figure 8. Christian Phalangist party banner over Sassine Square, Beirut, reading: ‘A day will come when we will tell the Syrian: Gather your stuff and everything you stole and leave’**



Source: Photograph taken by the authors on 29 April 2018.



# 4 Protection and development policies

## 4.1 Overall national approach: Evolution of the political and legal framework

The political approach taken by the Lebanese government towards the Syrian refugee crisis has evolved over time. From 2011 to 2014, its stance has been described as a “no” policy approach (Saghieh and Frangieh, 2014); that is, it said “no” to establishment of refugee camps, “no” to the official closure of borders and “no” to expulsions to Syria. This stance reflects the government’s desire to “neutralise” the Syrian crisis by emphasising its humanitarian dimension and the principle of dissociation. The other objective of the Lebanese government is to underline the transitory nature of forced migration from Syria: Lebanon is not a country of asylum; it is at most a transit country. Indeed, until 2014, it had no specific political framework regulating the entry and stay of refugees from Syria.

The government approach did change, however, in 2014, upon adoption of the Policy on Syrian Displacement on 23 October. This policy established much more restrictive rules on entry and stay. The Directorate General for General Security implemented new measures aimed at putting ‘an end to displacement across the borders, except for exceptional humanitarian cases, and registering those who enter [Lebanese] borders based on reasons of entry in order to verify the implementation of these measures’ (Frangieh, 2015). For the government, these measures were reflective of three priority concerns: ‘(i) reducing the numbers of Syrian refugees, (ii) addressing the rising security concerns which resulted from the crisis, and (iii) alleviating the burden placed on the people and the economy’ (Achilli, Yassin and Erdoğan, 2017: 31).

The roots of the second phase extend back to September 2013, when the Lebanese government commissioned the World Bank to conduct an exhaustive study on the impact of Syrian refugees on the country’s economic and social structures (World Bank, 2013)<sup>1</sup>. To provide a solid basis to define its needs and frame its priorities in terms of the specific assistance it seeks from the international community as well as to inform its own domestic policy response, the Government of Lebanon (GoL). But it was not until the Government of National Unity was formed in February 2014 that practical measures were formulated. From the outset the new government established an inter-ministerial crisis cell to find solutions to the refugee crisis. The government saw management of the Syrian refugee crisis as a key challenge, as confirmed by an official statement describing its priorities: ‘Further to the measures that have already been authorised, the government will put in place clear mechanisms to deal with the issue of displaced Syrians. Their number has exceeded Lebanon’s capacity to cope, in terms of the repercussions on the security, political, social and economic situation’ (Executive, 2014).

Based on the 2013 World Bank report, the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) was formulated. The LCRP focuses on the impact of Syrian refugees on Lebanon’s economic and social structures. The document sets out precisely which sectors of the economy are most affected by the refugee crisis and was designed for the government’s use at subsequent conferences with donors, which multiplied starting in 2014.

Regionally, the 3RP Refugee and Resilience Plan was launched 18 December 2014. This is a joint initiative between the Minister of Social Affairs and the UN, with the latter represented by its Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator. The LCRP was included as a chapter in the 3RP.

The current LCRP, published in 2018, sets four main priorities (GoL and UN, 2018: 16):

- Protection of vulnerable populations
- Immediate assistance to vulnerable populations
- Support service provision through national systems
- Reinforcement of Lebanon’s economic, social and environmental stability

The LCRP states its aim as the following: ‘ensure the protection of displaced Syrians, vulnerable Lebanese and Palestine Refugees; provide immediate assistance to vulnerable populations; strengthen the capacity of national and local service delivery systems to expand access to and quality of basic public services; and reinforce Lebanon’s economic, social and environmental stability.’ (GoL and UN, 2018: 8). More than 50 partners are involved in implementation of the LCRP. UNHCR and UNDP are specifically in charge of the refugee and resilience or stabilisation aspects of the collective response. Municipalities have refugee management tasks as well, in some cases allowing them to introduce regulations not previously within their mandate. For example, some have established curfews to limit the circulation of Syrians at night. The LCRP coordination structure is presented in figure 3 in the annex.

The Lebanese authorities report several achievements within the LCRP framework:

[S]upport to Lebanese roads, water and waste infrastructure; a wide range of initiatives helping local municipalities implement priority projects for their communities; extensive cash assistance that has brought life-saving support to the poorest groups while boosting the local economy; support to health centres and hospitals around the country; and substantial advances in helping the Government of Lebanon enrol greater numbers of children in schools every year (GoL and UN, 2018: 8).

## 4.2 Refugee protection-focused policies

From 2011 to 2014, open-border Lebanese policies allowed refugees from Syria to enter the country unhindered. Refugees were treated according to the 1993 and 1994 bilateral economic and social cooperation agreements between Lebanon and Syria. Among other things, these agreements ‘set out principles of free movement of goods and people, and granted freedom of work, residence and economic activity for nationals of both countries’ (Janmyr, 2016: 11). Under the agreements, Syrian refugees could cross the border with an identity card and did not need to pay any fee for a residence permit.

These liberal entry and stay conditions were ended in October 2014, when the Lebanese cabinet approved a new policy on Syrian “displaced persons”. A main objective at this point became to restrict refugees’ access to Lebanese territory and encourage returns to Syria (Janmyr, 2016). Several border policy regulations were implemented limiting the entry of Syrian refugees. Entry was denied to people ‘who do not come from areas along the Lebanese border with Syria, reassessing the status of Syrian refugees who occasionally return to Syria and are economically benefitting from living in Lebanon, and calling for the establishment of camps either in Syria or along the no-man’s land between Lebanon and

Syria' (Atallah and Mahdi, 2017: 22). From then on, Syrians were admitted only for “exceptional reasons”, with no legal definition of exceptionality provided. Also, registration of newcomers by UNHCR became conditional on approval by the Ministry of Social Affairs.

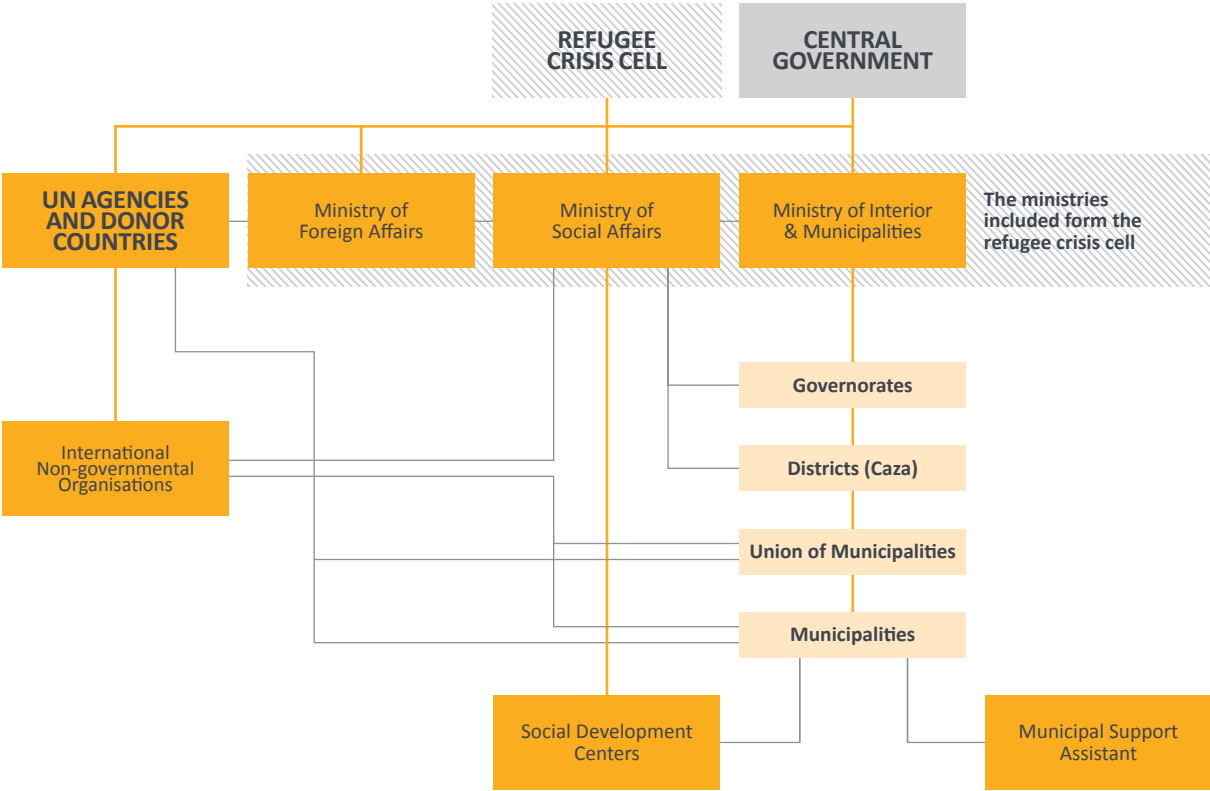
On 13 January 2015, the Directorate General for General Security issued a directive detailing the new entry requirements. Hereafter, Syrian nationals had to comply with the following:

- Have a Lebanese sponsor, own property in Lebanon or the purpose of travel must fall under one of the following categories: tourism, business, study, transit, medical treatment or visa application at a foreign embassy
- Hold a residential rental agreement
- Hold a Lebanese residence permit, be a spouse of a Lebanese national or child of a Lebanese mother, a wife of a Palestinian refugee registered in Lebanon or hold a residence permit in another Arab or foreign country and diplomats

Syrian nationals who fulfilled these criteria were granted short-term, temporary residence. According to an officer working at the Masnaa border for the Ministry of Social Affairs, after 2015 only some 100 Syrians per year were allowed entry for “humanitarian” reasons (interview by author, May 2018). Also, the government imposed the aforementioned annual US \$200 fee to apply for or renew a residence permit, alongside other provisions, such as the requirement of a valid passport or identification card and a document indicating sponsorship by a Lebanese citizen if the person in question was not UNHCR registered. Earlier, in December 2014, the Ministry of Labour issued a circular limiting access of Syrian workers to jobs in multiple sectors, including construction, agriculture and janitorial services. However, even after 2014, refugees still retained their access to public education and healthcare.

In 2012, the Lebanese Council of Ministers had designated the Ministry of Social Affairs as the leading ministry in charge of the response to the Syrian refugee crisis (Boustani et al., 2016). This ministry thus became coordinator of the inter-ministerial committee managing refugee affairs. In particular, the ministry led responses in basic assistance to refugees, livelihoods, protection, shelter, social stability and information management (figure 9).

**Figure 9. Governance structure for responding to the Syrian refugees**



Source: Boustani et al. (2016: 15).

As of this writing, the mandate of the Ministry of Social Affairs encompassed approval of refugee applications and coordination of the more than 200 social development centres established throughout the country to provide social services to local communities and refugees. The ministry’s attitude, however, is well expressed by Pierre Bou Assi, Minister of Social Affairs, in his recent statement: ‘The real way to solve the Syrian refugees issue is their return to Syria’ (Ministry of Social Affairs, 2018).

In 2016, the Ministry for the Affairs of the Displaced (MOSDA) was established. This ministry, led by Moein Merabi, member of the Future Movement, was tasked to formulate a national policy on displaced Syrians. However, according to Mouawad (2018: 11), the ministry ‘has acted as a key agent in promoting a narrative of insecurity and tension between host communities and Syrian refugees. This has enabled the government to request additional aid to foster the resilience of host communities and to provide services to the Syrians.’

UNHCR is in charge of coordinating humanitarian operations in the territory and managing the practical aspects of refugee reception and stay. This has allowed the Lebanese State to withdraw from the economic responsibility of caring for refugees. A whole set of UN agencies (e.g., UNICEF, UNDP and UNRWA), international organisations (e.g., the World Food Programme, Caritas, Red Crescent, Islamic Relief), foreign non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (e.g., the Danish and the Norwegian refugee councils) and local NGOs (e.g., the Amel Association) are involved in these operations.

### 4.3 Development-focused policies

From the outset, the Lebanese State ignored reality by refusing to recognise Syrians fleeing the war as refugees. The official term used instead by the Lebanese authorities is “displaced persons”. This language emphasises the temporary nature of the refugees’ presence. Moreover, short-term considerations have conditioned all of the assistance provided to Syrians and determined the Lebanese government’s attitude towards the humanitarian emergency. Development aid seeking to improve refugees’ lives by enabling them to integrate into their host environment is incompatible with the official vision of the State, which refuses to consider the refugee crisis as a medium- or long-term concern. However, as the war in Syria has bogged down and refugee numbers swollen to more than one million, the Lebanon State has been forced to review its policy.

The first LCRP, published in 2015, put forward humanitarian aid as the main response to the refugee crisis. The LCRP ‘outlines protection and assistance to be provided to the most vulnerable Lebanese, displaced Syrians and Palestine refugees – strengthening the link between humanitarian action and Lebanon’s own growth and development’ (GoL and UN, 2015: 19). Two years later, development aid became, at least formally, one of the government’s priorities in the second LCRP: ‘The response plan focuses on humanitarian assistance to vulnerable communities including persons displaced from Syria, vulnerable Lebanese and Palestinians, but also strongly seeks to expand investments, partnerships and delivery models for stabilization as a transition towards longer-term development strategies’ (GoL and UN, 2018: 16).

This change in the official discourse has not proven to be very effective in practice. The UN agencies in the field have observed mixed results:

[T]here have been significant achievements in education, and stabilization of the situation for refugees in terms of health, sanitation and shelter. There has also been a worsening in the situation of the Syrian refugee population in other areas, with poverty rates increasing, and food consumption and dietary diversity deteriorating’ (UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP, 2017: 6).

To alleviate the growing poverty among refugees, a development programme is needed to provide work opportunities to the displaced population. However, on this point, none of the government’s promises have materialised.

The partnership priorities and compact agreed in 2016 between the EU and the Lebanese government stipulate that Lebanon will undertake a controlled easing of Syrian refugees’ access to the job market in sectors where they do not compete directly with Lebanese workers. An EU press communique on the agreement states:

It outlines specific mutual commitments to address the impact of the Syrian crisis... to turn the situation into an opportunity to improve the socio-economic prospects, security, stability and resilience of the whole Lebanon. In turn Lebanon commits to ease the temporary stay of Syrian refugees, in particular regarding their residence status (Council of the EU, 2016).

The priorities agreed by both partners are security and countering terrorism, governance and the rule of law, fostering growth and job opportunities, and migration and mobility. Nonetheless, the Lebanese Ministry of Labour issued only 200 work permits in 2017 (Howden, Patchett and Alfred, 2017). Apart from the fact that the formal labour market in Lebanon is saturated, the persistent internal political divisions work against implementation of such development aid-oriented policy.

In their journalistic exposé *The Compact Experiment*, Howden, Patchett and Alfred (2017: 13) cite Ziad Abdel Samad, Executive Director of the Arab NGO Network for Development, as saying that the Lebanese representatives came to the 2016 compact negotiations bringing only '[a] description of a disaster, without any vision of what to do'. During the negotiations, the government did promise to facilitate refugees' access to certain jobs. However, it had already proposed a series of measures to create more than 300,000 jobs, 60% of which would be for refugees, months earlier, in February 2016 at the Supporting Syria Conference in London (Republic of Lebanon, 2016). Yet official reports show that little has come of this. Indeed, the issue of employment remains a major source of contention between host communities and refugees. This is confirmed by the LCRP, which states: 'Long-standing inequalities are deepening and tensions at local level have been rising during the course of 2017, mostly over perceived competition for jobs and access to resources and services' (GoL and UN, 2018: 8).

A similar tension was evident after the Brussels II conference, Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region, held in April 2018. The joint declaration from that event stated, among other things, that the governments of the countries in the region that receive refugees commit to facilitate their integration into the labour market. This, however, sparked an official response from Lebanese president: 'Lebanon, as it highly values the UN and EU efforts in helping the country in many fields, was taken aback by their statement in terms of providing job opportunities for the displaced' (Al-awsat, 2018). This was despite the fact that three Lebanese ministers had played a part in negotiating the closing declaration.<sup>1</sup>

In a statement made on 26 April 2018, Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil urged the international community 'to quit lecturing Lebanon on humanity and to stop encouraging Syrians to stay in Lebanon' (Housari, 2018). This aptly summarised his country's position on the contradiction between development aid and Lebanon's official policy on refugees. The minister has since made the issue of return of Syrian refugees a centrepiece of policy on the Syrian refugee crisis. He even accused UNHCR of encouraging Syrians to settle in Lebanon (Reuters, 2018). On 8 June 2018, he froze renewals of residence permits for all UNHCR employees (Naharnet, 2018a). A few days later, the Lebanese minister set his conditions for normalisation of the status of employees of the UN agency: 'I'm willing to lift the Foreign Ministry's measures against UNHCR if I see a change in its policy and I'm ready to increase them should there be no change' (Naharnet, 2018b). He then went on to explain: 'Preventing the early return of refugees to their country is a rejected policy and we're not asking the agency to encourage Syrians to return; we're rather asking it not to scare them of returning' (ibid.).

<sup>1</sup> These ministers were Marwan Hamade of the Ministry of Education and Higher Learning, Pierre Bou Assi of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Mouein Merehbi of the Ministry of Refugee Affairs.



# 5 Conclusions

The refugee crisis in Lebanon and more particularly its management by the Lebanese authorities has been strongly influenced by the socio-economic and political situation of the country. Indeed, when the clashes in Syria began, Lebanon was already experiencing a period of high political tension. Moreover, the first months of the Syrian uprising took place against the backdrop of political euphoria in the Arab world. In Tunisia, a popular uprising drove out Ben Ali. In Egypt, Hosni Mubarak was forced to resign, and in Libya rebels took power in Tripoli. As a result, many journalists, political analysts and Syrian opposition supporters believed in 2011 that the Bashar El Assad regime was about to fall.

The political struggles within Lebanon stem from two opposing camps, one pro-Syrian regime and the other anti-Syrian regime. From the outset, events in Syria have further polarised a political situation that was already smouldering. The government of Najib Mikati, in office from June 2011 to February 2014, was dominated by the pro-Syrian 8 March coalition. The 14 March coalition, which politically, if not militarily, supported the rebels in Syria was relegated to the opposition. The clashes that began in June 2011 on the streets of Tripoli, Lebanon, between the Bab-El Tebaneh and the Jabal Mohsen neighbourhoods, the former representing the opposition bloc and the latter the pro-Bashar bloc, were the first major spillover of the Syrian conflict into Lebanon. This contributed to a deterioration of Lebanon's security situation. It was in these very tense circumstances that the first Syrian refugees arrived in the country.

Although refugees were initially well received, especially in Sunni areas under the influence of the 14 March coalition, socio-economic hardship soon generated rising hostilities towards the displaced population. At the same time, the conflict in Syria got bogged down, with no clear end on the horizon. The enthusiasm of many Lebanese nationals gave way to disappointment. This disappointment, particularly noticeable in northern Lebanon, led to increasingly demonstrative rejections of Syrian refugees, whose numbers reached nearly one million by the end of 2013. This change of heart could be explained by this region's pervasive poverty, which has been aggravated by the influx of hundreds of thousands of newcomers.

If in macro-economic terms, Lebanon has somewhat benefitted from the presence of refugees in regard to their contribution to the country's GDP, the impact in other respects has been rather mixed. The official policy of the Lebanese State is to categorically refuse to establish refugee camps on its territory – though without framing any national strategy for managing the arrival and stay of the thousands of refugees. This denial of reality has pushed displaced Syrians to seek what refuge they can find in the underprivileged regions. At least two consequences can be noted. First, the local population has found itself in competition with a displaced labour force, leading to a drop in wages. Second, price inflation has occurred, especially for basic necessities, and rents have skyrocketed due to the huge demand for living spaces.

Pressures on host communities have been aggravated by security threats. Indeed, unprecedented military attacks and clashes affected the country in 2013. The deterioration of the security situation was in part due to the formalisation in May 2013 of Hezbollah's presence in Syria, which put an end to Lebanon's official policy of distancing itself from the Syrian conflict. Thus, the 2013 decision added an additional risk of destabilisation, potentially affecting the entire region.

To counter this risk, the international community created the International Support Group for Lebanon in September 2013. At the same time, faced with internal and external pressures, the Lebanese government decided to take action. It commissioned the World Bank to write a comprehensive report on the impact of Syrian refugees on the country. This was the first sign of the government's willingness to tackle the refugee crisis. Subsequently, in February 2014, one of the first orders of priority of the newly established Government of National Unity was to formalise the state's approach to the refugee situation. The government's policy at this point was defined by a desire to limit insofar as possible any negative impacts of displaced Syrians on the country.

On the basis of the 2013 World Bank study, the Government of National Unity, in collaboration with the UN, drafted the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) in 2015. This plan was used for priority setting and allocation of financial support at the various international conferences on aid to Lebanon, which multiplied starting in 2014. Among the involved donors, the EU has consistently been an important actor. Not only does it finance the various UN organisations that assist refugees in Lebanon, the EU also signed a partnership compact with Lebanon in 2016.

The EU-Lebanon partnership compact is unique in that it seeks to go beyond humanitarian aid and make development aid a priority, thus acknowledging the protracted nature of the Syrian refugee crisis. The EU sees the compact as a win-win arrangement. But given the weakness of the central state and internal political divisions, it is questionable whether the agreement can be successfully implemented.

The model for the compact, the Jordan Compact, was designed for the Zaatari refugee camp, the largest such camp in Jordan. But are the Kingdom of Jordan and the Lebanese Republic politically, economically and socially comparable? Also, can a refugee management approach developed according to Jordan's industrial development needs be transposed to the very different political and economic environment of Lebanon? The negotiations prior to the signing of the compact indicate otherwise. Indeed, while the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) and the World Bank managed to negotiate an agreement that suited them in the talks with Jordan, the situation with Lebanon is different. As a result, the final agreement with Lebanon is less ambitious and states in very vague terms the Lebanese commitments on difficult aspects such as governance and the rule of law. However, the main impediment to implementation of the compact remains the controversial issue of job creation for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

In short, the structural problems of the Lebanese economy, the political divisions and the weakness of the central state represent near insurmountable obstacles for any policy seeking to go beyond humanitarian aid and adopt a more developmental approach. To all this, we must finally add the fear shared by most of the political class of any spectre of resettlement of refugees within Lebanon's borders. The recent statements of the Lebanese Foreign Minister on Syrian refugees and UNHCR confirm this analysis. He has strongly maintained his government's policy of 'preventing naturalization and returning the displaced to their homeland' (Reuters, 2018). Such a statement coming from a leading Lebanese minister seems quite incompatible with the EU humanitarian-developmental approach.

With this in mind, Mouawad (2018: 12) has pragmatically summarised the resulting stalemate of competing interests:

The international community continues to pledge money in an attempt to keep the refugees in Lebanon away from Europe, while the Lebanese ruling elite at different levels of state institutions, either through ministries or municipalities, serve and feed their patronage and

clientelism networks. In this sense, state agencies become key actors among an array of many others working on the ground, and the public state as a result does not rise above the fray of tensions and conflicts.

This view turns any semblance of “win-win” on its head. It casts a dark shadow on hopes of joint implementation of refugee protection and development policies in Lebanon, while raising the question of who actually benefits from such a model.



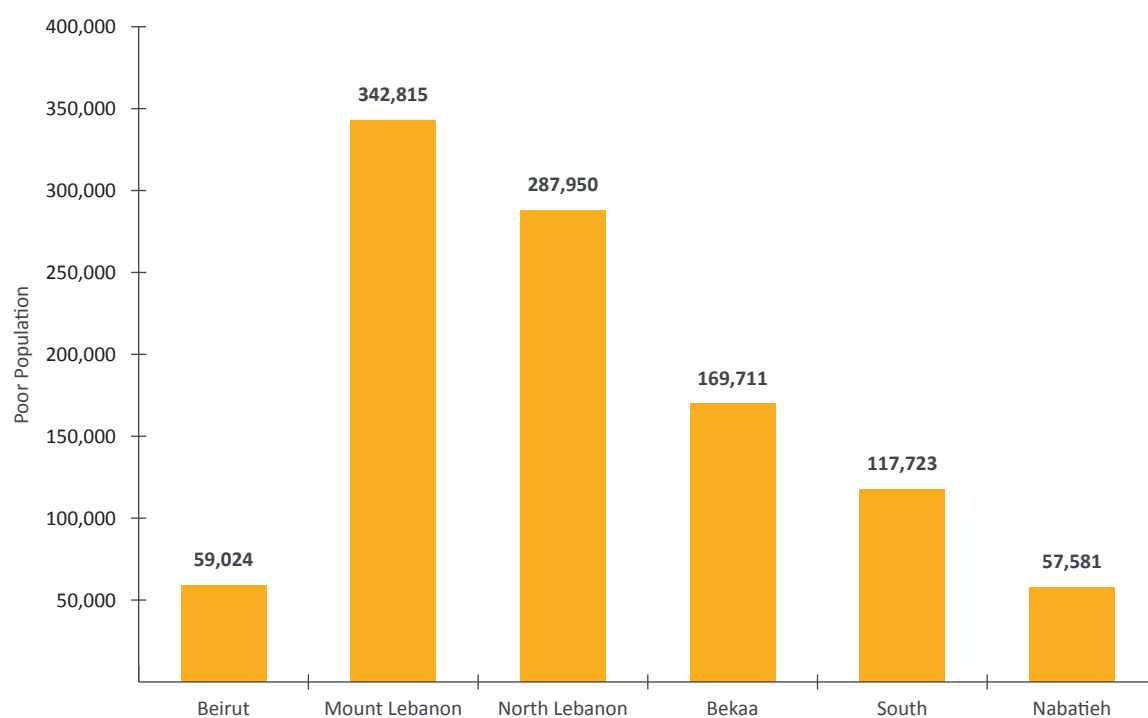
# Annex

**Table 1. Poverty measures by governorate, 2004-2005**

Governorate	Extremely Poor			Entire Poor Population		
	P0	P1	P2	P0	P1	P2
Beirut	0.67	0.07	0.01	5.85	0.95	0.24
Nabatieh	2.18	0.21	0.05	19.19	3.97	1.26
Mount Lebanon	3.79	0.69	0.21	19.56	4.45	1.52
Bekaa	10.81	1.89	0.53	29.36	8.05	3.06
South	11.64	2.00	0.53	42.21	11.35	4.22
North	17.75	3.65	1.08	52.57	18.54	8.63
<b>Total</b>	<b>7.97</b>	<b>1.50</b>	<b>0.43</b>	<b>28.55</b>	<b>8.15</b>	<b>3.32</b>

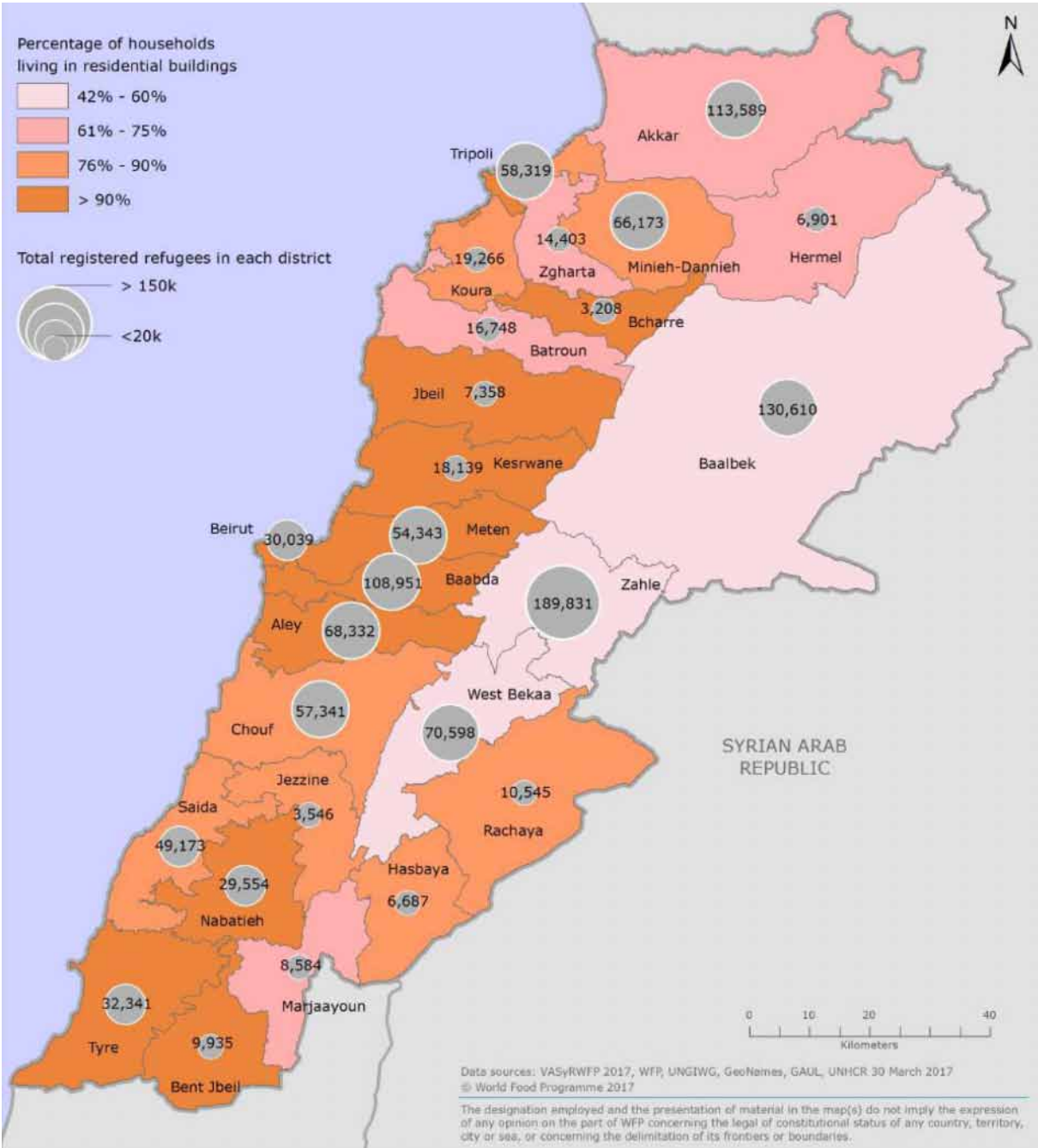
Source: (UNDP 2008, 19)

**Table 2. Number of poor people by governorates (2011-2012)**



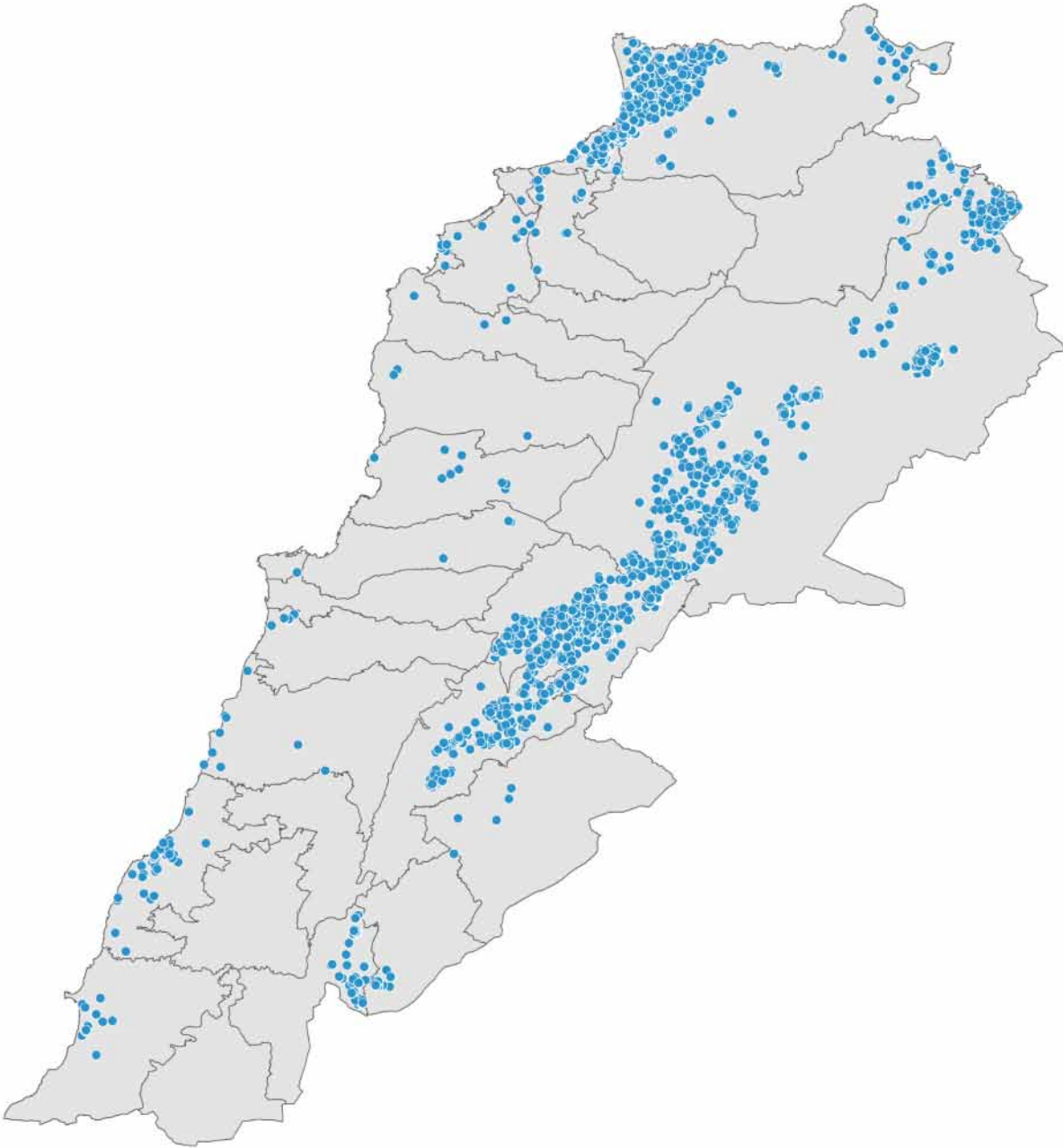
Source: (Central Administration for Statistics et World Bank Group 2016, 2)

Figure 1. Percentage of Syrian refugee households living in residential buildings, 2017



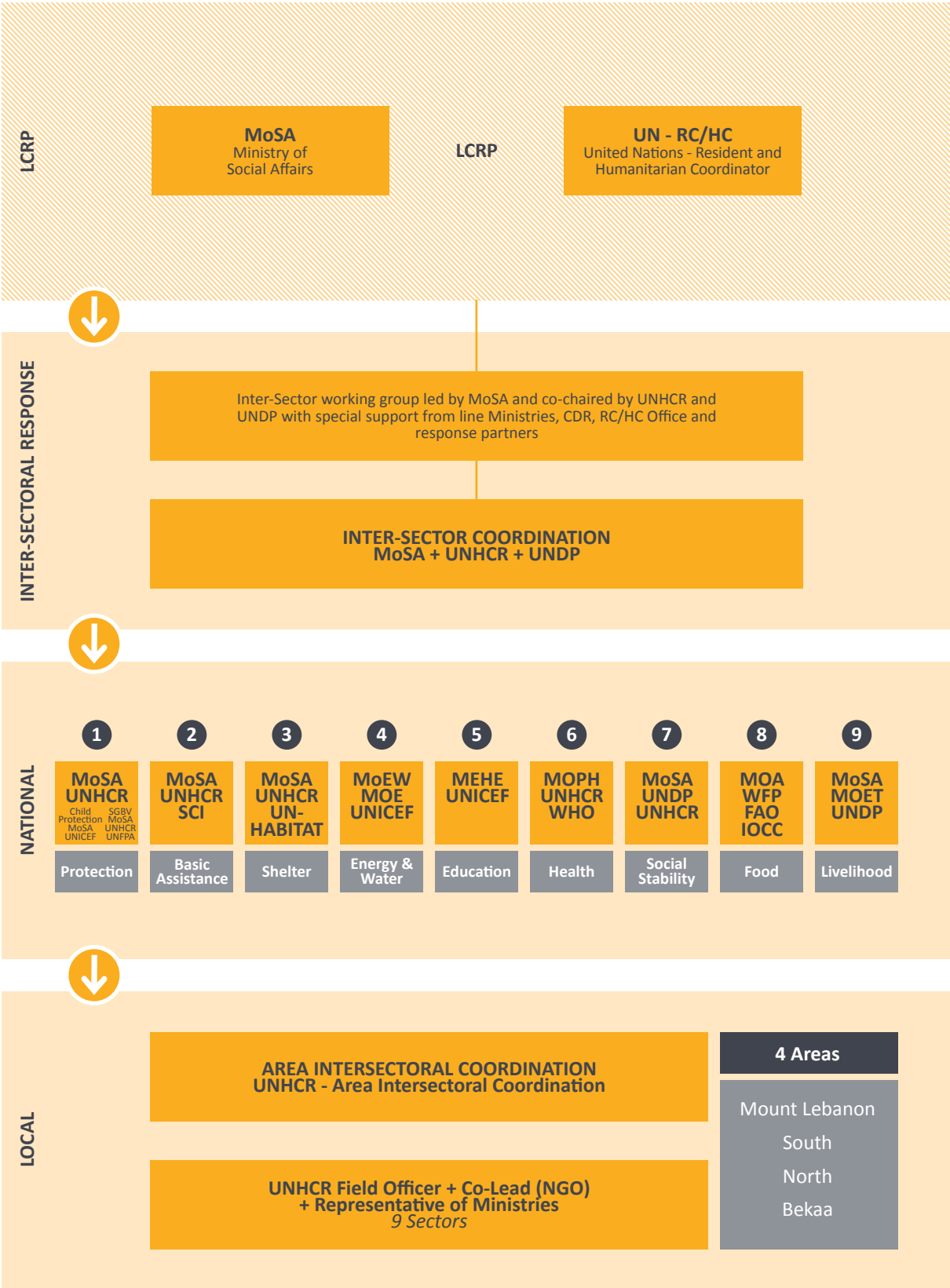
Source: UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP (2017).

**Figure 2. Informal refugee settlements in Lebanon, June 2017 (number of tents by governorate)**



Source: UNHCR (2017).

Figure 3. Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) coordination structure



Source: Boustani et al. (2016: 17).



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