

Donor response to refugee tensions in Lebanon

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Question

What available evidence is there of what has worked and what has not worked in the donor response to prevent and reduce tensions between Lebanese and refugees in refugee-hosting communities across Lebanon?

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1. Overview

30% of Lebanon's population are refugees and the country has taken in the most refugees per capita in the world with over 1.5 million in total. Given that Lebanon itself is recovering from civil war and has prominent political divisions, bad public services and strained infrastructure, the large number of refugees has exacerbated these pre-existing issues and pushed a large number of Lebanese citizens into poverty. As the longevity of the conflict in Syria was not predicted from the outset, and due to the large number of refugees arriving, early humanitarian interventions focused on providing for Syrians' basic needs, rather than on building resilience and ensuring good community relations. However, since 2014 there has been more focus from donors and the humanitarian community on building social cohesion. Nonetheless, many issues had already emerged between the communities and had become entrenched before donors and agencies sought to address them.

This rapid review synthesises data from academic, policy and NGO sources on donor response to prevent and reduce tensions between Lebanese and refugees in refugee-hosting communities across Lebanon. The focus is on post 2011 and Syrian refugees as the complexity of social, cultural, and historical dynamics produce tensions that are unique to Syrians and Lebanese. The history of occupation and exploitation of Lebanon by Syria has created animosity in large sections of the population, whilst close trade, religious and family connections have created strong ties with other sections of the Lebanese population, leading to a complex situation of intra and intercommunity tension. There is limited evaluation of the success and failure of individual programmes to alleviate community tensions in the literature, with organisations involved publishing little critical reflection and scholars focusing on the issue more broadly.

Key findings are as follows:

- In order to counteract the negative perception of refugees in the media the UN and the Lebanese Information Ministry launched a joint media campaign in August 2017 aimed at improving relations and signed up a number of media outlets to provide more neutral reporting on refugees.
- The UN has invested heavily since 2014 in improving infrastructure and services that
 have been negatively impacted by refugees; although this has benefitted the Lebanese
 population, it has not managed to address the scale of the issue.
- The EU has also invested heavily in trying to counter the impact that refugees are having on services and infrastructure, but this also began post-2014 and considering the poor state of these prior to the arrival of refugees, the impact is again minimal.
- The contentious political situation in Lebanon also negatively impacts on donors' policies, for example, when the World Bank established a trust fund to help communities affected by the influx of Syrian refugees no political consensus was reached in Lebanon to disburse the funds.
- A number of large donors helped establish the Reaching all Children with Education (RACE) programme, which aimed to improve government schools, get more Lebanese into non-private education, and school the large number of Syrian children. Although

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/lebanon_syrian_crisis_en.pdf

- great progress was made, again the scale of the issue (particularly with the large amount of Syrian children) made it difficult to fully address.
- Food and fuel vouchers proved less successful than cash cards. Initiatives that provided cash cards for both vulnerable Syrians and Lebanese were able to mitigate tensions produced over the competition for resources and employment.
- The Lebanon Host Communities Support Programme (LHSP) was launched in mid-2013 by UNDP jointly with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) to ensure direct support was provided to the most vulnerable Lebanese communities. LHSP has increased livelihood and economic opportunities, strengthened local capacity to deliver services, improved local conflict resolution and security and more than 1 million Lebanese and 500,000 Syrians have benefitted through the programme.²
- Part of the success of LHSP is that it allows local municipalities and communities to be involved in highlighting local issues and developing solutions. However, job creation has been limited and employment is a core area of animosity between Lebanese and Syrians.
- Since 2013 USAID has expanded its programmes in order to help host communities deal
 with the increasing strain of the large numbers of refugees. They train municipal leaders
 to work jointly with populations to carry out projects that improve services and create
 economic opportunities for all vulnerable communities, use micro agriculture schemes to
 supplement rural households' income, and lend money to small businesses facing
 challenges related to Syrian refugees.
- DFID funds have been important in areas like the Bekaa valley, where there is a high level of poverty and a large number of refugees. Initiatives include work schemes for both refugee and Lebanese populations, vaccinations and food for Lebanese livestock, repairs and upgrading of schools, water and sewage infrastructures.
- At local level, Basmeh and Zeitooneh (BZ) a Syrian-led group mainly operating in the Shatila refugee camp in Beirut – has promoted social cohesion through projects such as home renovation in the local community and cleaning campaigns with Lebanese and Syrian participants.

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² http://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/projects/SupportLebaneseHostCommunities.html

2. Community Tensions

Lebanon has taken in the most refugees per capita in the world with over 1.5 million refugees in total – the majority from Syria – accounting for 30% of the country's population.³ Lebanon itself is still recovering from conflict and before the Syrian conflict it was already beset by political divisions, insecure borders, severely strained infrastructure, and over-stretched public services – all which have been exacerbated by the large number of refugees (Kelly, 2017). The World Bank estimated that the effects of the Syrian refugees would push 170,000 Lebanese into poverty while doubling the unemployment rate (Integrity Consultancy, 2014: 12).

Lebanon and Syria also have a long history, with Syria having strong political influence and a military presence in Lebanon between 1976 and 2005. As a result there is a division in Lebanon between those who support the Syrian regime and those that support opposition groups. These divisions, entrenched by the confessional system,⁴ transfer to decisions made on refugee policies (Kelly, 2017). On the one hand there is a history of occupation and exploitation of Lebanon by Syria, which has created animosity. Whilst on the other hand close trade, religious and family connections have created strong ties (Mercy Corps, 2013). Additionally, with Hezbollah's support of the Assad regime and entry into the conflict, Lebanon was dragged into the war with cross-border conflict and assassination attempts of key security personnel (Betts et al., 2017).

Incidents, such as that in Aarsal in August 2014 – where Syrian opposition fighters engaged in an armed stand-off with the Lebanese Army that resulted in the death of 19 Lebanese soldiers and 42 civilians, the wounding of hundreds of soldiers and civilians, and the capture of 29 policemen and soldiers – have led to some level of a political consensus of the perceived danger of refugees to the already fragile stability in Lebanon (Kelly, 2017).

The above-mentioned factors have led to the securitisation of refugees in Lebanon with security, infrastructure, services and the economy all being seen as being under threat. This is particularly visible in some of the more impoverished areas where there are often more refugees than local residents. As a result political parties have supported the tightening of borders, restriction of refugee movement, the eviction of refugees from sensitive areas, and have attempted to discourage refugees from prolonged stay (Kelly, 2017).

In October 2014 the Lebanese government passed a new policy, known as the 'October Policy', which imposed restrictions on the free movement and residency of Syrians. The absence of a unified central government has led to local municipalities making many of the decisions with regard to policies, as well as what they will implement, which in turn has led to varied treatment of refugees across the country. The local policies implemented are often tied to identity politics and the local political economy. However, even in predominantly Sunni areas such as Tikrit, curfews have been implemented, whereas in Zahle the Christian mayor has not imposed curfews due to his professed liberal values (Betts et al., 2017).

³ https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/lebanon_syrian_crisis_en.pdf

⁴ A system of government where political and institutional power is distributed proportionally among the confessional communities.

Social Relations

In the impoverished areas of Lebanon, Syrian refugees have also unintentionally increased the vulnerability of the host communities through the increased competition for low paid work and by leading to rent increases. When paired with the increased strain on healthcare, services, and education, many of the vulnerable host community view themselves as much as victims of the crisis as the Syrian refugees. Additionally, humanitarian responses such as the targeted medical assistance — which provides medical aid to vulnerable Syrians — have created conflict, as a significant proportion of the Lebanese population cannot afford adequate health insurance and Syrians are seen to get preferential treatment. The visibility of UNHCR-funded initiatives only helps to highlight the perception that Syrians are prioritised (Integrity Consultancy, 2014).

In a survey carried out in 2016 by UNHCR, 63% of the refugee population felt they were not welcome in Lebanon. Whereas, 27% of Lebanese surveyed considered their relationship with refugees to be good or very good. 40% of Lebanese respondents also reported hearing a number of negatives stories about refugees, mainly from the media and their neighbours. 50% of Syrian refugees surveyed also reported incidents with authorities or civilians, including harassment, insults, beating, eviction, and extortion (Alsharabati, 2017: 15-16).

Although direct clashes between the two groups have remained minimal, there has been an increase in demonstrations and open protests. Road blockages in areas highly populated by Syrians took place for various reasons (Mercy Corps, 2013). Lebanese communities have identified worsening economic conditions due to the fall in tourism and cross-border trade as a result of the conflict in Syria, with refugees also being blamed. Syrians are also seen to offer cheaper labour than locals, whilst at the same time being seen to be responsible for the increase in rents. Participants noted reduced job opportunities, high unemployment, and an increase in poverty, crime, and arms proliferation (Saferworld, 2016).

3. Alleviating Tension

Media

Perceptions of Syrian refuges have gradually worsened, and the media has played a significant role in this deterioration. Following the success of their earlier campaign in which many media outlets signed up to provide more neutral reporting on refugees, in August 2017 the UN and the Lebanese Information Ministry launched a joint media campaign under the slogan "I will Return to My Country and Invite You to Visit Me" with the aim of countering the negative impact the Lebanese media is having on relations between refugees and host communities.⁵

Services

Many of the areas refugees moved into were already impoverished, lacked infrastructure, and did not have enough water to provide for the increased population. As a result water was trucked in to refugees in informal settlements. However, due to donor investments this temporary solution

⁵ http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Aug-04/414962-media-campaign-seeks-to-defuse-tensions-between-syrian-refugees-and-lebanese.ashx

was eventually replaced with more sustainable options, such as investing in wells and reservoirs that also benefited the local host communities.

UN Agencies

UNHCR increased its budget for service provisions from \$170,000 in 2012 to over \$24 million by the end of 2014. However, much of this was focused on planning that had been conceived prior to the Syrian conflict, and was compounded by the incorrect forecasting on the duration of the conflict. Additionally, as Lebanon is a middle-income country, direct support to its institutions beyond technical and policy advice was often not accounted for in programme designs. For this reason programming with a resilience agenda was only introduced by UNHCR in 2014. Since 2014, UNHCR has implemented a range of community support projects in areas where poverty levels and refugee numbers are high, with projects including new wells; water, sanitation and waste management facilities; community centres; improved medical facilities; youth education and sport activities and rehabilitation works. However, these projects are still unable to address the sheer scale of the impact of Syrian refugees on Lebanon. Particularly as the issue goes beyond providing for refugees, as it has had a significant economic impact too with trade, tourism, consumer confidence, and investment all falling and losing the government billions of dollars (Kelly, 2017).

Since 2014 UN agencies have extended water networks; equipped municipalities with waste collection trucks; rehabilitated schools and health centres; and built local markets in order to mitigate the pressure placed on local communities as a result of the increase in Syrian refugees. UN investments and partnerships with local institutions to improve the effectiveness and reliability of water and sanitation provision led to 525,000 Lebanese benefitting in 2014 alone (UNHCR, 2015). Projects involved improvements in water production, water treatment, communal water storage, and water distribution. The UN and local partners built a number of reservoirs across the country, installed chlorinators and pipelines in order to provide Lebanese villages with safe drinking water, alongside assistance in sanitation and waste removal (UNHCR, 2015).

European Union

The EU has also financed a range of projects at municipal level, including efforts to improve waste collection, water distribution, community services, and the delivery of public health, which to a certain extent have helped to ease tensions between the host and refugee communities. However, like many of the other efforts by donors and NGOs, these initiatives came late (post-2014) when a number of issues between refugees and the host community had already emerged and become entrenched (Kelly, 2017).

Lebanese Relief Council

The Lebanese Relief Council (LRC) launched an initiative in Akkar to provide water and sanitation services in order to prevent tensions between refugees and the host community. Akkar is one of the poorest governorates in Lebanon and experienced poor socio-economic infrastructure prior to the large number of Syrian refugees that arrived. With the competition for limited resources by Syrians and Lebanese communities tensions and insecurity rose in Akkar. LRC worked with and through the municipality to gain approval for their projects and to get the municipality to identify needs, which would then be independently assessed by LRC. Through addressing waste removal and water needs, they help both Syrians and Lebanese. LRC also

addressed earlier short term planning and replaced wooden toilet seats installed by INGOs in the informal tented settlements with metal ones in order to improve hygiene and waste management. Additionally, LRC provided water to communities in the villages of Akroum and Kfartoun by organising the refill of water tanks. LRC has been particularly successful in managing relationships in the area; as they have become a key point of contact for the different communities and officials in Akkar, they are able to manage and address tensions relating to services when they arise. LRC has received funding from UN OCHA (Saferworld and Conciliation Resources, 2015).

It is important to note that although there have been positive impacts on local communities from these investments, they come nowhere close to adequately reversing the impact that refugees have had on areas such as water, waste management, electricity and health, and other services. Particularly as there were significant service gaps prior to the arrival of Syrian refugees. Additionally, the political situation in Lebanon is also very relevant to donors' operations, as when the World Bank established a trust fund to help the Lebanese government finance projects that would have helped Lebanese communities affected by the influx of Syrian refugees, the lack of political consensus to establish mechanisms to disburse the funds negatively impacted on the success (Kelly, 2017).

Education

The EU's large-scale funding was particularly successful in education. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) with the support of several donor states, UNICEF, the World Bank, UNHCR, and other agencies strengthened the capacity of the public school system, which was severely lacking – 75% of Lebanese children attended private schools (Kelly, 2017). A three-year programme, Reaching all Children with Education (RACE) was launched in 2014. The RACE initiative included the physical rehabilitation of schools, teacher training, accelerated learning programmes, and technical support to the Ministry. RACE improved the standard of education in government schools and also increased the number of refugee students in the schools, thus benefiting both host and refugee communities. It is argued by Kelly (2017) that it is an exemplar of the linking of humanitarian and development planning. However, the large number of Syrian children made it difficult to get all children into the limited amount of existing schools.

In 2014 RACE achieved the following (UNHCR, 2015):

- 2,675 staff and teachers of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education received training in active learning, classroom management, language and positive discipline.
- 93 schools were rehabilitated and supplied with computers and stationery.
- 270 public schools above 400m of altitude received funding for heating increasing to 600 schools in 2015.
- A two shift teaching system was introduced and finances were provided for the salaries for the additional shift.
- Vulnerable Lebanese children had their fees paid and received school supplies.

Cash and Vouchers

The food voucher programme spearheaded by the World Food Program, and implemented by NGOs like World Vision has encountered many challenges. However, it is also said to have

helped many local shops in tough economic times, as well as local producers. It helps to provide a livelihood for communities sharing limited resources with the refugees. UNICEF and three implementing partners (InterSOS, Terre de Hommes, Mercy Corps) distributed 120,000 clothing vouchers in winter-affected areas for vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian children (Mercy Corps, 2015).

Cash-based programming through multi-purpose cash cards has been successfully implemented in Jordan, but its introduction in Lebanon was initially resisted by the government, as they thought that poor Lebanese would resent refugees being given cash. However, the Lebanese government's objection was addressed when cash-based programming was linked to improvements to Lebanon's National Poverty Targeting Program (NPTP) when an emergency project was launched to expand and improve the social assistance package of the NPTP. The earlier food and fuel vouchers were not as successful, as they were often sold for less than face value (often through intimidation). Moreover, cash cards brought money into the local economy (Kelly, 2017). In November 2014 an e-card food assistance programme was launched through NPTP and targeted 27,200 vulnerable Lebanese. Similar to the programme offered to Syrian refugees, it allows families to buy food in designated shops. Not only does this programme detract from the animosity that some vulnerable Lebanese may have to Syrians receiving this assistance whilst they did not, it also helps vulnerable households and communities cope with the impact of the large amount of Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2015).

Following a successful pilot project the International Rescue Committee (IRC), funded by DFID, implemented an unconditional cross-sector cash programme in Akkar, North Lebanon, between February and October 2013. The programme provided monthly cash assistance via an ATM card to 700 Syrian refugee and 425 vulnerable Lebanese households. Prior to the Syrian war Akkar had the highest rate of poverty in Lebanon and since 2012 it has received a significant number of Syrian refugees, increasing the population by roughly 40%. Refugees compete for day labour, which is a significant source of income for impoverished Lebanese, and thus threaten income in an already fragile local economy. Moreover, vulnerable Lebanese are also in competition with Syrians for aid from religious groups and the local community. IRC's aim was to mitigate tensions by assisting vulnerable households in both communities (Campbell, 2014).

Social Cohesion

Lebanon Host Communities Support Programme

The Lebanon Host Communities Support Programme (LHSP) was launched in mid-2013 by UNDP jointly with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) to ensure direct support was provided to the most vulnerable Lebanese communities. It targets municipalities that were impoverished prior to the Syrian conflict and that have received a high number of refugees (Mercy Corps, 2015).

The aim of LHSP is to increase social stability, build the abilities of host communities, address tensions, prevent conflict, and ensure peaceful co-existence through improving livelihoods and

⁶ https://www.devex.com/news/on-the-ground-in-lebanon-the-food-voucher-dilemma-81360

service provision. Targeting the poorest communities, LHSP identifies interventions that alleviate the stress caused by the increased population in these areas.⁷

LHSP is divided into three themes:

- 1. improving the delivery of basic services within the municipality or union of municipalities;
- 2. support for livelihoods and employment generation;
- 3. conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

Efforts focusing on supporting host communities and municipalities to cope with the impact of the Syrian conflict have involved collaborative projects with the municipalities and communities in order to help them to identify core needs and to allow for quick action and potentially avoid tension. The Ministry of Social Affairs leads the implementation of 'maps of risks and resources', which is a participatory exercise that enables host communities and municipalities to jointly draft multi-sector action plans to address key challenges and risks to the community (UNHCR, 2015). LHSP has increased livelihood and economic opportunities, strengthened local capacity to deliver services, improved local conflict resolution and security. Over 1 million Lebanese and 500,000 Syrians have benefitted through LHSP. However, job creation for Lebanese citizens has been extremely limited and is one of the core reasons for animosity towards Syrians (UNHCR, 2015).

4M Project

With support from the European Decentralized Cooperation, UNDP is implementing the project "Support to Integrated Service Provision at the Local Level" (known as 4M). This uses a resilience-based approach to tackle problems in the health, social and education sectors. It supports the development of integrated health territorial plans and services to increase access to high-quality primary health care services for vulnerable communities (Mercy Corps, 2015).

USAID

From 2013 USAID restructured its programmes relating to expanding public services, improving livelihoods, and increasing business opportunities in order to help host communities deal with the increasing strain of the large numbers of refugees on the wider system. Through this programme USAID trains municipal leaders in heavily impacted communities to work jointly with populations to carry out projects that improve services and create economic opportunities. They are also working to promote economic opportunities for all vulnerable communities, use micro agriculture schemes to supplement rural households' income, and lend money to small businesses facing challenges related to Syrian refugees (USAID, 2015).

Lebanon Compact

The Lebanon Compact, which was agreed in London in February 2016, focused on fostering job and educational opportunities for all of Lebanon's vulnerable groups and not just refugees. In exchange for a commitment of around Euros 400M, Lebanon committed to allow the temporary stay of Syrian refugees. However, Lebanon imposed further restrictions on residency for Syrians

⁷ http://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/projects/SupportLebaneseHostCommunities.html

⁸ http://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/projects/SupportLebaneseHostCommunities.html

and with expensive renewals of residency permit many were pushed into precarious situations (Betts et al., 2017).

DFID

DFID funds through humanitarian organisations have been used to support host Lebanese communities to cope with the growing number of refugees. In the Bekaa valley, where there is a high level of poverty and a large number of refugees, these programmes have been extremely important. Initiatives include work schemes for both refugees and Lebanese, vaccinations and food for Lebanese livestock, repairs and upgrading of schools, water and sewage infrastructures. These types of programmes are particularly important, as the war in Syria has exacerbated preexisting fault lines in Lebanese society between those who support and those who don't support the Assad regime. These tensions extend to refugees with them being blamed for a range of issues.⁹

Local initiatives

Basmeh and Zeitooneh (BZ) is a Syrian-led group mainly operating in the Shatila refugee camp in Beirut. As well as providing for the needs within the camp, BZ also focuses on promoting social cohesion between the refugees and host community. One of their projects is to renovate houses in the area, which benefits both the host community and the refugees. BZ also brings the communities together in a positive manner. It organised a three-month cleaning campaign in Beirut, which brought together children from the refugee school and their Lebanese and Palestinian friends in Beirut (Saferworld and Conciliation Resources, 2015).

4. Criticisms

Although there has been an increase in aid towards vulnerable Lebanese households, they are still largely overlooked by the aid community and the growing animosity of Lebanese toward Syrians is partly due to the uneven response to the needs of both populations. The emergency aid given is needed by both Syrians and Lebanese who are negatively impacted by the strain of the increased population. However, according to Mercy Corps (2013) aid needs to move beyond emergency and toward medium-term support to enable both vulnerable Lebanese and Syrians become more financially secure. Job creation and economic development have been limited with a far stronger focus on providing direct aid and services. Mercy Corps (2013) argues that:

- Training needs to be provided to make people more financially aware and to enable them
 to manage their resources, as well as asset management skills and behaviours to
 strengthen household production of goods and services of value.
- Training can be used to create social cohesion by bringing Syrians and Lebanese together around a common cause, as the greater the interaction the lesser the animosity between the two communities. As it is now clear that Syrians are not going home anytime soon, more effort should be made at repairing the damaged relationships between the two communities, rather than purely focusing on measures to prevent animosity from growing further.

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⁹ https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/perspective/refugees-fregonese.aspx

In an assessment carried out for International Alert respondents highlighted that in healthcare most INGOs focused on individual approaches to address tensions between host and refugee communities, rather than an institutional approach of building it into programmes. Sustaining medical care with limited resources and potential funding cuts remained their main priority (Integrity Consultancy, 2014).

Carpi (2017a) argues that funds that were being used to address vulnerable communities in Lebanon and the impact of the July 2006 war were redirected towards aid for Syrian refugees and this reallocation of funds interrupted several ongoing projects and this in turn reinforces new welfare systems. Taking these resources away from projects that aimed to reinforce the non-emergency system only acts to weaken it and in Lebanon this has been a continuous cycle with progress constantly reverted. This process forces local NGOs and municipal actors to also address short-term needs in order to comply with international actors' requirements and gain funds. This in turn leads to them no longer working towards improving the conditions of vulnerable communities who are not part of the new emergencies. Aid also acts to reinforce local actors who are needed to carry out programmes and who implement them based on their own idea of the social order; thus humanitarian agencies become mere donors and their projects are rescaled to fit the narrative of local actors.

Capri (2017b) is also critical of the humanitarian livelihood programmes in Lebanon arguing that they have little impact on the local economy. She argues that the presence of humanitarian agencies has more impact. However, only local educated youth get employment within the humanitarian agencies, strengthening local middle classes whilst vulnerable and impoverished Lebanese do not tend to benefit. Rather they face the additional strain of having to compete over the same resources and jobs with refugees who due to aid can work for less. Moreover, livelihood programmes are not targeted and those who do join them are not necessarily the right candidates - rather the ones who managed to hear about them (Capri, 2017b)

Finally, a number of social tensions stem from the memory of the civil war in Lebanon, which is aggravated by the Syrian refugees – connected to Syria's history of occupation. The history of violence and tension in Lebanon should not be ignored by humanitarian actors; some tensions are historical and cannot be alleviated through humanitarian actions (Carpi et al., 2016).

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Key websites

- UNHCR Lebanon http://www.unhcr.org/lb/
- Mercy Corps Lebanon https://www.mercycorps.org/countries/lebanon
- Civil Society Knowledge Centre http://civilsociety-centre.org
- UNDP Lebanon http://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home.html

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