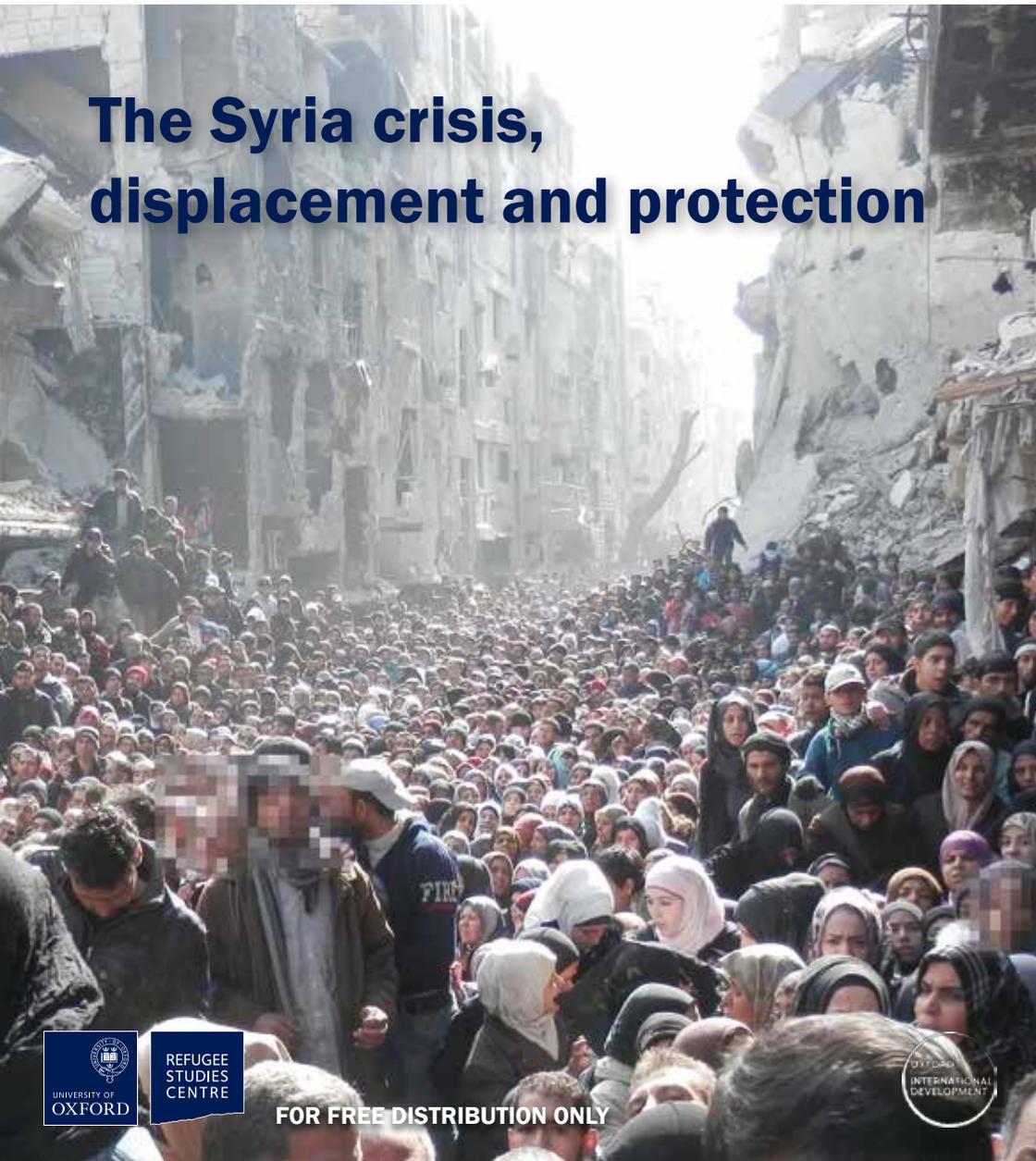


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Issue 47
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The Syria crisis, displacement and protection



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Front cover: Palestine refugees in Yarmouk Camp wait for food aid, January 2014. Behind them can be seen the destruction from bombing in the region. UNRWA

Yarmouk Camp is a 2.1 sq km district of the city of Damascus, populated by Palestine refugees. Once home to over 160,000 Palestinians, Yarmouk was overwhelmed by fighting in December 2012; a siege began in July 2013 and now only about 18,000 Palestine refugees remain, deprived of food and medicine, their clinics and schools closed, their streets and buildings damaged, their access to the outside world largely cut off. Over 50% of Palestine refugees in Syria are estimated to have been displaced within Syria or to neighbouring countries.

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Staff

Marion Couldrey &
Maurice Herson (Editors)
Nina E Weaver (Finance and
Promotion Assistant)
Sharon Ellis (Assistant)

Forced Migration Review

Refugee Studies Centre
Oxford Department of International
Development, University of Oxford,
3 Mansfield Road,
Oxford OX1 3TB, UK

fmr@qeh.ox.ac.uk

Skype: fmreview
Tel: +44 (0)1865 281700

www.fmreview.org

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From the editors

The numbers of displaced people in Syria make this the largest IDP crisis in the world, with possibly also the largest number of people who are 'trapped'. In addition, the number of refugees from Syria continues to increase – Syrian refugees themselves, Iraqi and Palestine refugees, and others.

Nigel Fisher, former UN Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria crisis, says in his introductory article: "Let us ... not forget that displacement is the manifestation of the ugly fact of impunity that rides rampant in Syria. If ever an armed conflict were characterised by the absence of proportionality and distinction, Syria's civil war must be so characterised."

The official status, physical conditions and social reception of the refugees have not been uniform either across geography or across time so far and will no doubt continue to shift. With no obvious sign that the crisis inside Syria will die down in a manner or time that is predictable, the international community has an opportunity to set up, starting from now, an effective response to what will clearly become protracted displacement. While the conditions in neighbouring countries and responses further afield will continue to evolve, a pattern of needs, lacks and problems has already emerged. The authors of articles in this issue offer observations that could be of value in increasing the level of protection for the displaced and in shaping assistance to both the displaced and the countries and communities that are 'hosting' them.

We are very grateful to Kathrine Starup of the Danish Refugee Council and to Dawn Chatty of the Refugee Studies Centre for their assistance and input as special advisors on this issue.

The full issue and all the individual articles are online in html, pdf and audio formats at www.fmreview.org/syria. It will be available in print and online in English, Arabic, French and Spanish. An expanded contents listing for the issue is available at www.fmreview.org/syria/FMR47listing.pdf.

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With our best wishes

Marion Couldrey and Maurice Herson
Editors, Forced Migration Review

Foreword: the inheritance of loss

Nigel Fisher

As the civil war in Syria drags on, the scale of displacement continues to increase. While the crisis may be prolonged, refugees and IDPs need support now for their protection, their recovery, and both their immediate and their long-term prospects.

The civil war in Syria has displaced vast numbers of Syrians from their homes and communities. By August 2014, some 6.45 million were estimated to be displaced within Syria and more than 2.9 million exiled as refugees beyond Syria's borders, the great majority of them hosted by neighbouring countries. In effect, half of Syria's population is uprooted, impoverished, many trapped in 'hard-to-reach' areas – and these numbers are most likely under-estimates. Is there an international outcry? Are there expressions of anger or of solidarity? Well, yes, by human rights organisations, by UNRWA, by UN Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos before the Security Council, and in the media of neighbouring countries. But in general? If anything, Syria is slipping off the front pages – not only dislodged by Gaza and Iraq but pushed aside by indifference.

'Displaced'. Such an innocuous word. But with its now-commonplace usage, accompanied by mind-numbing and ever-increasing numbers, have we become inured to the human drama behind the devastating facts of displacement in Syria today? Tucked away behind that rather bland term are, for millions, repeated stories of family separation; the loss of children, parents, friends, homes, entire neighbourhoods; and the terror of raining barrel bombs, of extremist deprivations, of reprisals against family members imprisoned, tortured, raped, disappeared or killed. Displacement not once, twice or three times but multiple uprootings – to the homes of neighbours or into shells of buildings in their own neighbourhoods, displacement within their own districts and governorates or, ultimately, fleeing across borders to an unknown future. Few responses today are taking into account the trauma that the displaced have

suffered and continue to suffer, through recurring flash-backs, through current rejection or continued family separation. Counselling is required, on a massive scale; but the road to recovery is also one of attempting to restore some kind of normalcy.

What is normalcy? For many who have undergone conflict-induced trauma, it is – beyond the grieving – the chance to help others, to focus on the needs of others, rather than on one's own dark thoughts; it is the opportunity to earn a living and be able to make decisions about the future. Over many decades of working with and for displaced people on several continents, I have found consistency in their hopes. When asked what they want, they do not ask for physical comforts, for shelter, food or medical care (of course, these basics are all essential and should in no way be discounted) – they usually ask for two things: a job, and education for their children.

A job, which brings with it the dignity of earning one's own money and the dignity of being able to choose how to spend that money; an education for their children because an education brings hope for the future. So many parents have said: "Maybe my life is finished but my children should have a future and that means going to school." Plus, for a child, going to school – even in the shell of a bombed-out building or in a refugee camp – means system, routine, friends and, hopefully, a caring teacher or caregiver. That is an important road to normalcy, to recovering from trauma, to managing those nightmares. So do not let anyone tell you that education is not a priority intervention for the internally displaced or for refugees.

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In addition, let us also not forget that displacement is the manifestation of the ugly fact of impunity that rides rampant in Syria. If ever an armed conflict were characterised by the absence of proportionality and distinction, Syria's civil war must be so characterised. All sides are guilty and all wreak havoc with impunity but with the preponderance of force goes the preponderance of responsibility. It is a supreme irony that a regime that so blatantly disregards the obligations of sovereignty and its obligations under international humanitarian law so stridently insists on respect of its sovereign rights.

Across Syria's borders, neighbouring countries struggle to respond to the needs of the countless refugees that they host today; Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey in the main but also Egypt and even Iraq have been generous beyond all reasonable expectations. Yet after three and a half years, they are feeling the strain: increasing social tensions in host communities, the competition between citizens and Syrian refugees for health care, shelter, water, jobs, and places in school. These challenges demand a focus beyond refugees alone, to assess and respond to the strains on communities and on national treasuries.

This year, host governments and the international community have come together to attempt to define a comprehensive regional response strategy that deals with the multi-layered complexities of the Syria crisis, looking at long-term as well as short-term solutions for both refugees and host communities. Host countries are having to review policies instituted during the first few months of the crisis, when few thought that it would last more than a few months. Should Syrian refugees be allowed to work in neighbouring countries, have separate schools, have separate health facilities? Each question represents a



A Syrian refugee family in Erbil, Iraq. The girls' parents paid US\$100 per person to be smuggled safely out of Syria after their neighbourhood came under prolonged heavy attack. "More than anything, what I want for my girls is that they are able to attend school in safety," their mother said.

dilemma for host countries who hope that one day their Syrian guests will return to Syria. But to what Syria? How to prepare Syrians to return to a radically changed landscape? How to help Syrians still living in their own country to protect their communities, maintain water and sewerage systems, keep schools and hospitals going under continuous threat, or contain further displacement? These are all questions that are being raised and for which creative solutions are being sought. In a context of limited resources, hard choices have to be made, innovative solutions found.

The civil war drags on, in the context of growing regional instability. The numbers of internally displaced people will increase, as will the numbers of refugees. The contributors to this issue bring a wide range of thought-provoking perspectives to the Syrian displacement crisis: insights, reflections, questions, solutions – all food for thought and for action. So, read on.

Nigel Fisher is former United Nations Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for the Syria Crisis. With acknowledgements to Kiran Desai's 2006 novel for the title of this Foreword.

Development and protection challenges of the Syrian refugee crisis

Roger Zetter and H elo ise Ruauadel

The Syria Regional Response Plan 6 (RRP6) 2014 provides an increased focus on early recovery, social cohesion interventions and a transition from assistance to development-led interventions, alongside the continuing large-scale humanitarian assistance and protection programme.

In a region already hosting millions of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees, the scale of the Syrian crisis is putting immense additional strains on the resources and capacities of neighbouring countries and the international humanitarian system. The 3,300 refugees on average arriving in neighbouring countries every day in 2014 place a large burden on the protection capacity of the host countries and international actors and further accentuate the already severe negative social, economic and human developmental impacts on the host countries of the region. With no prospects of the civil war abating in Syria and with a peace process that might encourage refugee return even further away, the displacement is becoming protracted.

The Regional Response Plan 6 (RRP6) 2014 targets assistance to a projected year-end total of 2.85 million Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq collectively – the three countries where the three-year Regional Development and Protection Programme (RDPP)¹ is to be implemented – and 2.5 million of the 45 million host populations. This article is based on a mapping and meta-analysis, done for the RDPP, of project evaluations, situation reports and other studies produced by intergovernmental agencies, host governments, donors and humanitarian agencies in 2013.²

Economic impacts on refugees and their livelihoods

For refugee households, income-generating activities are scarce and for most of them the income-expenditure gap is substantial and increasing. Livelihood sustainability, cost of living and rent levels, alongside food

insecurity and increasing indebtedness, are major concerns for the refugees as well as for their hosts.

Syrian refugees find casual, irregular and predominantly unskilled work when they can; across Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq about 30% of the working-age refugee population are in some form of paid, sporadic employment but, with high competition for work, wage levels are declining. That the majority of refugees live in urban areas is a significant factor since they are more able to engage in economic activity than encamped refugees. However, the opportunities are extremely limited and the livelihood vulnerability of the urban refugees is no less severe than of those in camps.

Whilst refugee registration gives access to humanitarian assistance and some public services, the Syrian refugees have no legal entitlement to work in Jordan or Lebanon without a work permit. Thus it is the informal sector which provides the opportunities for income generation but wages are inevitably very low and working conditions are exploitative. By contrast, Syrian refugees with residency rights in the Kurdish Region of Iraq are entitled to work. Evidence indicates that their livelihood conditions are less stark, although more refugees are encamped than in Jordan for example and are thus possibly better able to access humanitarian assistance.

Syrian refugees deploy a variety of highly risky coping strategies. The sale of personal assets is extensive; this not only increases their current impoverishment but depletes the resources that the refugees might have available when and if they return to Syria

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to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. Lack of employment has disproportionately affected women and youth; conversely, the rising incidence of child labour, as refugee households succumb to increasing impoverishment, is of particular concern in terms of their immediate well-being and, in the longer term, the loss of education that will affect their life chances both in exile and when they return to Syria.

The overall picture, then, is one of chronic vulnerability which is both deepening and becoming more entrenched. Whilst, inevitably, the humanitarian focus is on Syrian refugees, the situation of Palestine and Iraqi refugees secondarily displaced from Syria is extremely serious. The costs and impacts of displacement on their livelihoods are severe and their marginalisation from the mainstream response programme is particularly worrying.

Economic impacts on host countries and populations

In terms of **micro-economic** impacts, housing rent levels are rising steeply, pricing the local population out of the market. Substantial spikes in unemployment, depressed wage rates and limited employment opportunities, mainly for low-skilled labour, are widespread. Despite the official restrictions on working, some refugees gain employment and the surge in labour supply has deeply affected labour markets, increasing market prices for basic commodities. While cash transfers/ vouchers to assist refugees have enhanced their purchasing power it causes prices to rise in local markets, accentuating the livelihood vulnerability of an increasingly large number of local households.

As well as the fiscal stress created, the impacts on economic production and output are also severely affecting the host populations, impoverishing a very substantial number of (mainly low-income and already poor) households. Even before the crisis 25% of the Lebanese population lived below the upper poverty line of US\$4 per day and the influx of refugees was projected to push an additional 170,000 Lebanese into poverty

and to double unemployment to above 20% by 2014.³ The fact that 2.5 million people in the host countries are projected to receive assistance under RRP6 in 2014, through a range of Community Support Projects and other interventions, is indicative of this stress. Yet this accounts for little more than 5% of the three countries' combined population (about 20% in the case of Jordan and Lebanon) and is unlikely to significantly reduce either the short- or long-term negative impacts which the host communities are experiencing.

The crisis has also had a very detrimental impact on all the public services – notably the health and education sectors – alongside severe impacts on services such as water supply and power. Pre-existing substantial shortfalls in capacity have increased dramatically, despite the assistance from the Regional Response Programme to support infrastructure development.

Negative **macro-economic** impacts include large losses in terms of economic performance, public revenue and taxes, profits, private consumption and investment, cuts in growth, increasing unemployment and widening of the national deficits. For example, the World Bank estimated that the impact of the crisis reduced Lebanon's economic growth rate (GDP) by 2.9% per annum from a predicted growth rate of 4.4% in 2012-14, whilst foreign direct investment was projected to diminish by more than half compared to previous years. The cumulative impact has depressed government revenue by US\$1.5 billion, while simultaneously increasing government expenditure by US\$1.1 billion with the growth in demand for public services.⁴

There has been severe disruption to regional trading patterns and dynamics affecting import and export performance and commodity prices for consumers. The long-term dislocation of international trade will further exacerbate declining investment, rising unemployment, and commodity shortages in the region. The unstable political and security situation and spill-over effects generated by the conflict reduce

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Omar, 20, works as an assistant in a carpentry shop in Amman, Jordan, to support his mother, sister and three brothers. His monthly salary covers the cost of rent. He lost his father, who taught him carpentry, to a sniper's bullet in Syria in early 2014.

investor and consumer confidence, further diminishing economic activity and placing public finances under increasing pressure.

Conversely, and maybe less commonly recognised, humanitarian crises can spark development opportunities⁵ and positive effects have also been reported in the region: increased availability of cheap labour which favours employers; rising demand and consumption by refugees; and benefits for large-scale agricultural producers, landlords, local traders, businesses and retailers, construction contractors, as well as suppliers of goods and commodities to the humanitarian programme. In some locations, educated refugee professionals such as engineers, doctors and skilled construction and craft workers have augmented local economic capacity. Exports from Lebanon to Syria have increased significantly, and for the first time Lebanon has a positive trade balance with Syria.

The limits to refugee protection

Although Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee

Convention or its 1967 Protocol, they have displayed remarkable solidarity towards the refugee population. But an increasingly ambivalent hospitality amongst the host countries and their populations is growing as pressure increases on their livelihoods and living standards.

Syrians may enter Jordan with a passport and do not require a visa or residency permit. Under certain conditions they are permitted to reside in urban communities. Possession of a UNHCR registration card is needed for access to assistance and local services but refugees can easily lose their status and lose access to assistance if, for example, they move around the country. Many fail to register – because of lack of information but mainly for security reasons and fear of detection by different factions fighting in Syria.

In Lebanon, a residence permit is required, valid for six months with the possibility of renewal for a further six months. However, subsequent extension is unaffordable by most refugees, effectively stripping them of their legal status. In Iraq, there is a vacuum in the

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statutory protection framework, and practice across the governorates is not uniform. These conditions limit freedom of movement and restrict access to work, services and housing. Palestine refugees leaving Syria who have already sought protection in neighbouring countries are particularly vulnerable, falling between highly restrictive residency conditions and the severely stretched resources of UNRWA, the UN agency mandated to assist them. In practical terms, since mid-2014 Turkey is the only one of the surrounding countries that will still allow entry to Palestinian refugees from Syria.

It appears that, despite the heavy emphasis of the humanitarian assistance programme on protection, many of those fleeing Syria are unaware of their rights and obligations. Those refugees with irregular status are increasingly marginalised and vulnerable. Access to cross the borders is the most pressing protection concern for refugees. Lebanon's periodic border closures – in response to cross-border violence and threats – and recent access restrictions put refugees at risk. Jordan and Lebanon regularly deny entry to Iraqi refugees from Syria and other groups without regular identity papers.

Some cases of arbitrary arrest and detention are reported in all three countries (though less evident in Lebanon). Palestinians have been particularly susceptible to arbitrary detention. Evidence suggests that secondary migration, as refugees move around the country of asylum or engage in circular migration to Syria, increases protection risks and intensifies household vulnerability as refugees lose their regular status. Of growing concern is the number of Syrians falling into irregular immigration status due to their inability to pay for renewal of their visas.⁶

Socio-economic factors and the lack of legal status increase refugees' susceptibility to a range of human rights abuses and vulnerabilities whether in camps or urban settings. Forced and early marriages have reportedly risen compared to the pre-crisis period and incidents of domestic violence,

sexual and gender-based violence and violence against children are high. In urban settings, the possibility of eviction carries significant protection risks, especially as local authorities in some areas have started to crack down on refugees working informally. The longevity of the crisis has also accentuated the vulnerability of host communities, and tensions between refugee and host communities exacerbate protection risks.

Responding to the development and protection challenges

The challenge for humanitarian and development actors is to stabilise the precarious economic situation, forge a transition from assistance to development, promote economic development strategies which support host and refugee communities equitably, and reduce the potential for negative economic impacts to exacerbate domestic and regional tensions. At the same time there is the imperative to ensure and enhance a 'protective environment' for the refugees.

To develop a more secure evidence base on which to build better targeted interventions, a number of areas are a priority. At a strategic level more analysis is needed of how to better coordinate and align international humanitarian and development assistance with national development strategies in order to reduce the negative impacts and maximise development opportunities. Likewise, more analysis is needed on the structural impacts of the refugee crisis on regional trade and how these might be mitigated. At the micro-economic level, a more detailed understanding of labour-market dynamics under conditions of severe economic shock and severe over-supply of labour is needed. Deeper analysis of the interplay between livelihood insecurity and protection risks and the scope for community-based protection strategies would also help to enhance the protection objectives of RRP6.

To tackle the costs and impacts and the livelihood needs of the refugees and the host populations, a trial programme of locally

targeted Quick Impact Projects (QIPs), in partnership with local authorities, the private sector and community-based organisations would be one way of delivering labour-intensive projects in refugee-populated areas. This initiative could be supported by micro-enterprise finance mechanisms, cash-for-work programmes, and vocational and skills development training. It would be vital that these actions target vulnerable groups in both refugee and host communities and that the host populations are not financially disadvantaged by these initiatives.

More generally, a shift towards cash and market-based programming for livelihood assistance interventions would help to tackle the growing impoverishment of refugees and their hosts, alongside registration procedures that would allow refugees the right to work and establish businesses. These initiatives should be underpinned by improved household and livelihood vulnerability assessments and selection criteria.

Tackling national-level impacts and the fiscal stress on public services requires technical support to the national government finance and planning ministries to strengthen macro-economic development planning capacity for both short-term stabilisation and longer-term recovery and resilience.

To safeguard and enhance the rights of refugees and embed a rights-based orientation within the governance structures of the countries, programme capacity needs to be scaled up. This will require: ensuring that the practice of protection is made more consistent and effective; training and sensitising members of national security forces, including the police, and government officials on the concepts and practices of refugee protection; supporting the development of comprehensive strategies for refugee reception and protection; supporting local civil society groups working in the field of human rights and refugee protection; and conducting advocacy with relevant stakeholders for the rights of refugees.

Stronger legal benchmarks and better coverage of protection gaps in the national legal frameworks could be achieved by encouraging relevant authorities and agencies to: provide documents to Palestine and Iraqi refugees clarifying their legal status and enabling them to access services; locate and identify unregistered refugees, while being mindful of the sensitivity of this process; and desist from practices of deportation/*refoulement* and arbitrary detention.

Finally there is the need to **promote respect for refugees' rights**, prevent violations and abuses towards refugees and reduce vulnerability, including by implementing community-based protection strategies and advocating for the involvement and inclusion of host communities in services and infrastructure provision for refugees.

Roger Zetter roger.zetter@qeh.ox.ac.uk is Emeritus Professor at the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford. www.rsc.ox.ac.uk
Héloïse Ruauudel heloise.ruauudel@gmail.com is a humanitarian policy and protection analyst.

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1. The RDPP is a three-year regional programme working in Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, supported by a platform of humanitarian and development donors involving the European Union, Denmark, Ireland, UK, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic. It is led by Denmark.
2. *The Syrian displacement crisis and a Regional Development and Protection Programme: Mapping and meta-analysis of existing studies of costs, impacts and protection* was prepared for the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The full report is available at data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=4780
3. www.undp.org.lb/programme/pro-poor/poverty/povertyinlebanon/molc/executive.htm
4. *Lebanon, Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Syrian Conflict*, World Bank Report No. 81098-LB. September 2013 <http://tinyurl.com/WB-EconomicSocialImpact-Leb>
5. See 'Reframing Displacement Crises as Development Opportunities', paper prepared by Roger Zetter for the Displacement Solutions Initiative (DSI) Roundtable, Copenhagen, 2-3 April 2014 www.endingdisplacement.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Concept-note.pdf
6. See also article by Dalia Aranki and Olivia Kalis on p20-21.

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The refugee crisis in Lebanon and Jordan: the need for economic development spending

Omar Dahi

The most effective way to tackle the Syrian refugee crisis is for neighbouring states to assume a leading role in development spending, infrastructure upgrading and job creation, particularly in the most underdeveloped regions of those countries.

The entry of Syrian refugees into Lebanon and Jordan has resulted in unprecedented social and economic challenges to both countries. These are felt on a day-to-day basis by all Lebanese and Jordanian citizens whether through higher rents and declining public service availability, or through health and education infrastructure that is stretched beyond its limits. There is no doubt that both host countries have been incredibly generous to refugees, particularly at the societal level. However, the tensions between host communities and refugees within Lebanese society are obvious and in both countries a lot of government and societal discourse about refugees has become palpably resentful.

Even if a meaningful political settlement and ceasefire inside Syria are achieved, the refugees are likely to remain where they are for many years; the crisis therefore requires long-term planning on the part of host governments in collaboration with local civil society and multinational institutions. Specifically, it requires attention to economic development needs, including infrastructure upgrading and job creation, to improve life for all vulnerable populations, refugees and host communities.

The crisis has put a huge strain on the fiscal capacity of both countries so urging more state spending may seem counter-intuitive. However, development spending is justified for several reasons. First, the economies of Lebanon and Jordan were suffering from economic problems beforehand. Second, economic spending will benefit these countries' citizens as well as the Syrian refugees; not spending for fear that it will provide refugees with an incentive to

remain will hurt the country's citizens just as much as it hurts refugees. Third, the fact that most of the refugees in both countries are not in camps has created particularly challenging problems as reaching the refugees and serving their needs is even more expensive than it would otherwise be. It also means that across-the-board development spending is the most efficient way to address the humanitarian crisis.

In both Jordan and Lebanon economic challenges preceded the refugee crisis. For example, the annual GDP growth rate dropped from 8.5% to 1.4% in Lebanon and from 5.5% to 2.7% in Jordan between 2009 and 2012. In Lebanon the onset of the Arab uprisings resulted in a reduction in foreign direct investment and a sharp decline in tourism. Flows of natural gas from Egypt to Jordan were sharply reduced through most of 2012 due to sabotage of the pipelines linking the two countries, resulting in increased fuel costs.

However, the economic challenges facing both countries run even deeper. A 2010 UNDP report found that in Jordan from 2006 to 2008 the number of poverty pockets, defined as districts or sub-districts with 25% or more of the population below the national poverty line, had increased from 22 to 32. The same report found that the three most densely populated governorates, Amman, Irbid and Zarqa, contain 57% of the people living under the poverty line. As of early March 2014, 58% of Syria's registered refugees were located in those three governorates. Mafraq governorate – where Za'atari camp and just under 30% of registered Syrian refugees are located – contains the highest

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Syrian refugee girls try to study in their tented camp in Turbide, Beka'a Valley.

incidence of poverty and illiteracy rates in Jordan (along with Ma'an governorate).

The situation in Lebanon is marked by sharper economic and regional inequalities, accompanied by deep social cleavages and sectarian fault lines that have been exacerbated by the Syrian conflict. Sixty per cent of the registered Syrian refugees are in the North and Beka'a Valley regions, that are also the poorest regions in Lebanon. The North region has the lowest per capita expenditure in the country, along with the highest levels of inequality. These two regions have been historically marginalised as reconstruction after the end of the civil war in Lebanon in 1990 saw most wealth flow to the greater Beirut region.

However, both Jordan and Lebanon are loath to embark on major development spending. There is fear that substantial investment in refugees will provide incentives for further

inflows – or integration of existing refugees. A Jordanian minister admitted in 2013 that conditions are calibrated to provide minimal aid so that refugees will have no incentive to remain, and this appears to be an unspoken policy in other host countries as well.¹

This line of thinking is erroneous, even from a self-interested perspective. First, neglecting this issue hurts the domestic population as much as the refugee population. Second, the decision or ability to return home for many Syrians will depend on a number of other issues too. Syrians who come from areas where there is no possibility for economic life or where they are too fearful for their lives will prefer to stay, even if it means living in destitution. Third, ignoring the issue will cause more problems than if attempts were made to tackle them head on. The host countries have an incentive to provide refugees with a decent living so as to avoid the social problems that will arise

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from extreme poverty and destitution. And everyone has an interest in keeping children in schools and away from exploitation. Finally, all the neighbouring countries will benefit from a future Syria that is strong socially and economically. Allowing Syrians to pursue their livelihoods and build their capacity today is an investment in the long-term regional economy.

In the case of Lebanon, in addition to fears of integration there is also the real issue of weak state capacity. Lebanese are known for routinely declaring “we have no state” when asked why services are poor, or infrastructure is dilapidated, and the current crisis is an opportunity to strengthen state capacity at all levels. The inflow of foreign aid could give the government the ability to strengthen its capacity without the accompanying fiscal strain.

Shifting to development means investment in upgrading the water, electricity and health infrastructure as well as launching projects (perhaps with mixed public and private sector involvement) that can generate jobs and alleviate poverty. These must target the most vulnerable areas such as the Beka’a Valley and the North in Lebanon and the Mafraq governorate in Jordan. Such spending should target all vulnerable communities particularly in the most under-served areas. This should be accompanied by outreach that both allows local communities to express their grievances and publicises the efforts being made by the state and aid community in addressing their needs along with those of the refugees. Increased local input, transparency and media outreach are key to getting local and national communities on board with these projects and to better informing refugee communities of their rights.

Close cooperation is needed so that the efforts of multinational institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF complement the efforts of host countries, UNHCR and other aid organisations, rather than working at cross purposes.

The continuation of pre-existing policy goals such as fiscal consolidation and lowering debt-to-GDP ratios must be weighed against new needs for development and infrastructural investments. Though UNHCR’s approach has shifted towards development in the Regional Response Plan 6,² this cannot materialise without buy-in and cooperation from all parties. Both the academic and the policy literature on economic policies in conflict and post-conflict situations have shown that traditional economic policy that focuses on austerity or state retrenchment is inadequate or even counterproductive in these circumstances. In such situations, political goals must take precedence over economic ones.³ Though these countries are not in a state of war themselves, they are experiencing the contagion of an extended period of regional upheaval.

Development initiatives administered by the state such as infrastructural investment in services, health care, education and job creation, and targeting host communities as well as refugees, have the benefit of strengthening state capacity and relieving tensions at the same time as addressing refugees’ needs. Though large-scale initiatives carry certain risks, so does inaction, particularly as both refugee and host communities become increasingly restless.

Omar S Dahi *odahi@hampshire.edu* is Associate Professor of Economics at Hampshire College www.hampshire.edu and Visiting Fellow at the Carnegie Middle East Center, Beirut. <http://carnegie-mec.org/>

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1. www.nytimes.com/2013/10/06/world/middleeast/as-syrian-refugees-develop-roots-jordan-grows-wary.html

2. See article by Roger Zetter and Héloïse Ruadel on p5-10.

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Syrians contributing to Kurdish economic growth

Anubha Sood and Louisa Seferis

The circumstances for both successful livelihoods programming for refugees and for contributing to the local economy are present in the Kurdish region of Iraq.

Over 225,000 refugees have taken refuge in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI); this represents 97% of all Syrian refugees in Iraq, as central Iraq has denied entry to Syrian refugees. Over 90% of Syrian refugees in KRI are Syrian Kurds.

A recent economic survey of refugees in the camps in KRI indicates that a significant proportion of refugees have little or no access to income-generating activities, and those who do often cannot manage to fully meet their households' needs.¹ Findings also indicate depleted savings, increasing levels of indebtedness, and negative economic coping strategies. In neighbourhoods with large refugee concentrations, rents have increased steeply (by nearly 20% for residential rent and by 10-15% for commercial property) and prices for basic commodities and food have gone up. While it is unclear whether or not the price increases are due to increased demand because of the presence of refugees, these factors are having a severely damaging impact on household livelihoods, pushing a very substantial number of (mainly low-income and already poor) households into impoverishment.

However, at the same time, KRI has been witnessing an economic boom, drawing back many Kurds who had fled during the former Iraqi regime. As of June 2013 there were 2,300 foreign companies registered in KRI, in addition to 15,000 local companies.² Growth over the last ten years has been on the rise as regional opportunities to transport goods and food through Kurdistan to places like Turkey offset the loss of business from Syria. Factors encouraging expansion into KRI include affordable housing, good security, reliable power, airport infrastructure, growing transport structures, a strong retail sector, the oil market, tourism, and

investment opportunities in the hospitality sector. With a population of just over five million, Iraqi Kurdistan is expected to see an 8% growth in GDP in 2014. With this growth rate there is a demand for unskilled and semi-skilled workers, and also more skilled workers in the service sector.

Syrians contributing to the KRI economic boom

With return to Syria a remote prospect, and resettlement only practical for a small proportion of refugees, many people may prefer to stay in neighbouring countries, where they know the language and are familiar with the culture. Integration in the main host countries requires strengthening the host communities and running programmes that do not widen the divide between the hosts and the refugees but instead strengthen the bonds and benefit both.

In 2013 the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) started an apprenticeship project for Syrian refugees living outside camps in KRI. It was conceived to help the Syrian refugees integrate better, provide for themselves and contribute towards the economic growth of KRI. The project assisted 70% Syrians and 30% host community members. They were placed in private companies in the hospitality sector and in retail businesses for two months to get on-the-job training and exposure to the job market. Most employers contributed towards the apprentices' salaries in cash or by providing free meals and transportation.

The project received a tremendous response, as Syrians were filling positions that locals did not want, working as waiters and cleaners and in other lower-paid jobs or jobs less highly thought of by the locals. The refugees were earning a living with dignity, providing for their families and at the same time being productive in the host country.

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Pshitiwan Ali



Pshitiwan Ali



Pshitiwan Ali

Young Syrians and Kurds on job placements.

Two months after the financial support from the project stopped, approximately 79% of the project beneficiaries were still working in the businesses where they were placed but now as regular company employees. Those who left did so because they found other employment or moved to another location. The jobs with the best retention rates were in the service industry – restaurant work, retail jobs and employment in shopping malls. DRC also observed that most of the young women benefitting from group job placement in big retail stores stayed on after the project ended; in their case, it seemed that group support and the relative prestige

of the position, as well as the steady income, were factors in the girls' decisions to stay on.

The Kurdish government policy of allowing refugees to work was also a huge facilitating factor. Syrians with a resident identification card (valid for 6-12 months) are allowed to work, though it varies in different governorates. The government is currently not renewing resident IDs but Syrians are allowed to work so long as they once had an ID, even if it has expired. The government also has not taken a clear position on whether or not to formally approve Syrian refugees' right to work, so as not to allow a huge influx of labour in the job market, especially now with the influx of IDPs from central Iraq. IDPs from central Iraq do not have the same permission to work as Syrian Kurds, though some have managed to find temporary employment (mainly as unskilled labour and in construction work). It is too early to tell if the assistance extended to Syrians and the lack of assistance to IDPs outside camps will create tensions between the two communities.

The DRC project's success was largely due to two main factors – gaps in the labour market which could be readily filled by Syrians without saturating the labour market or inciting tension with the host communities, and the existing social capital and integration between Syrians Kurds and local Kurdish communities. Given the fact that the vast majority of Syrian refugees in KRI are Kurdish, there were fewer language barriers (different Kurdish dialects as opposed to the severe barrier Syrians face in Turkey) and, more importantly, Syrian refugees in Kurdistan had access to social networks that created an environment conducive to job and business creation.

The possibilities for livelihoods programming in Kurdistan are therefore more developed and flexible than in other countries hosting large numbers of Syrian refugees, especially where there are stricter government policies against refugees' right to work or open businesses. Similar job placement or business creation projects, carried out by DRC and

other NGOs in Lebanon or Jordan have had limited success and scope compared to those undertaken in KRI. Outside the Kurdish communities, Syrian refugees and host communities have fewer social ties that withstand the enormous pressure that the refugees' presence puts on resources and labour markets. Oversaturated labour markets, particularly for unskilled workers, either mean that there are fewer job opportunities or the jobs available put Syrian refugees in competition with the host community labour force; Syrians, being willing to work for less pay than the host community, often crowd out local labour. This is particularly true for sectors such as construction, agricultural work, daily or temporary work and the service industry. For example, restaurants in some parts of southern Turkey often now employ young Syrian boys, starting from around 10 years old, to clear tables, wash dishes and translate for Arabic-speaking customers.

Government policies on Syrian refugees' right to work have also been stricter in other countries, more resembling the Kurdish government's position on IDPs from central Iraq. This in turn has made those governments averse to allowing NGOs to implement livelihood programmes, because they do not want to further encourage Syrians to 'steal' jobs from the hosting communities, who themselves suffer from long-term poverty and lack of access to steady employment. In-kind assistance to refugees is generally an accepted form of humanitarian aid in the region but some authorities see cash and livelihoods for refugees as threats to their communities' well-being. It is a delicate balance to promote refugee self-reliance without undermining hosting communities' livelihoods.

Conclusions on livelihoods programming

A strong argument for refugee livelihoods programming should begin with the host country's socio-economic priorities, and how support to refugees can alleviate hosting burdens and/or strengthen existing host-country systems and markets. NGOs like DRC are therefore working on finding markets where Syrians and host communities

already collaborate rather than compete for labour or business creation. Livelihoods programming opportunities can also build upon Syrians' special knowledge in certain sectors to transfer knowledge to local communities that do not have the same skill sets, or can focus on transitional/temporary markets that are only needed for Syrians and that would alleviate some of the burden on the host country infrastructure.

There are three main challenges for livelihoods programming to support Syrian refugees in the Middle East. Firstly, organisations must aim to integrate these programmes into the local/regional markets, which is what determines their longer-term success; the success of DRC's livelihoods projects in KRI was largely due to the fact that refugees and locals were placed in the same businesses and when the project ended beneficiaries were integrated into the service sector with the requisite experience and contacts. Secondly, it is difficult to implement livelihoods programmes on a scale that truly benefits refugees and vulnerable host communities; most of the proposed projects are in niche markets that are difficult to scale up and can only benefit a limited number of people. Finally, it is much more difficult to influence or support sustainable livelihood solutions for refugees in urban contexts where labour market or supply trends have a greater effect than livelihoods projects on people's ability to earn a reliable income. The challenge also remains of being able to demonstrate the impact of livelihoods programming in such urban market systems, where humanitarian projects are only one part of complex circumstances that determine the livelihood outcomes for Syrian refugees.

Anubha Sood anubha.sood@drciraq.dk is Emergency Livelihoods Program Manager for Iraq. **Louisa Seferis** louisa.seferis@drclebanon.dk is Regional Livelihoods and Cash Advisor, Danish Refugee Council – MENA. www.drc.dk

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Limited legal status for refugees from Syria in Lebanon

Dalia Aranki and Olivia Kalis

Having limited legal status has direct negative consequences for Syrian refugees' access to protection and assistance during their stay in Lebanon. Limited legal status also increases the risks of abuse and exploitation.

According to Lebanese law, without the required entry or stay documentation to be in Lebanon, refugees from Syria are considered to be there 'illegally', giving them only limited legal status in the country. Either they crossed into Lebanon through unofficial border crossings or they have not been able to renew their residency visa. As a result, they feel that they have been forced into the situation of being illegally present in Lebanon and feel compelled to limit their movements for fear of being arrested, detained or even deported back to Syria. Many refugees from Syria in Lebanon feel overwhelming concern about the potential risks they face from being in this situation. For refugees with limited legal status, their ability to access basic services, work and UNHCR registration sites and to register births and marriages is severely limited. For Palestinian refugees from Syria the situation is even more challenging, as the restrictions on entering Lebanon and on renewing their legal stay are much more severe.

Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, hence the limited legal protection for refugees and asylum seekers in Lebanon, although it is bound by the customary law principle of *non-refoulement* and by the obligations of the human rights treaties which it has signed and which are incorporated into its Constitution. International standards under these obligations recommend, at a minimum, the adoption of temporary protection measures to ensure the safe admission of refugees, to protect them against *refoulement* and to respect their basic human rights.

Although UNHCR has been permitted by the Lebanese government to register refugees,

the protection offered by such registration remains limited; being registered with UNHCR in Lebanon can provide some legal protection and is important for access to services but it does not grant refugees the right to seek asylum, have legal stay or refugee status. This leaves refugees in a challenging situation.

Facing the challenges

In order to address the challenges that refugees with limited legal status face, they often adopt coping mechanisms which can lead to exposure to new risks. Some of the main ones are: returning to Syria in order to try to re-enter through an official border crossing and thereby get another entry coupon free of charge; paying high prices for retrieving identity documentation from Syria; buying fake documentation; or using other people's documents. Due to having limited funds and the high cost of visas, many families prioritise the renewal of the residency visa for the main income-earner in the family, usually a male member of the household. This often leaves the other members of the family without legal stay documentation.

The impact for refugees from Syria of being in a situation of limited legal status is pervasive and affects many aspects of their lives. More than 73% of the 1,256 refugees interviewed in a recent Norwegian Refugee Council assessment¹ reported that freedom of movement was the main challenge faced by refugees with limited legal status. They could not move out of the area where they lived; fear of crossing checkpoints was prevalent, especially in locations where there had been an increase in ad hoc official checkpoints.

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NRC/Christian Jepsen

Syrian boy in an informal tented settlement in the Beka'a Valley, eastern Lebanon.

Limitations on their movement also impeded access to services, particularly health care.

As men – who, in certain geographic areas of Lebanon, are more likely to be arrested – decrease their movements, women seem to increase theirs. Some women with limited legal status reported that their husbands prefer to send them to receive assistance because they themselves are afraid of being arrested at checkpoints, particularly in North Lebanon. While this is done so that the family can access assistance, it exposes women to risks of sexual harassment and exploitation, for example on the way to or at the distribution sites for humanitarian assistance. Due to their limited legal status, they rarely report this harassment to the police or other authorities for fear of being arrested.

Adults with limited legal status often send their children to work instead of them, since children are less likely to be arrested. As a consequence, the children cannot attend

school and are more likely to be exposed to abuse and exploitation.

For Palestinian refugees from Syria and Syrian refugees in Lebanon many serious problems emerge as a consequence of having limited legal status, including reducing their ability to seek redress and access justice. As the numbers of refugees from Syria – both Syrians and Palestinians – in Lebanon are likely to continue to increase and those who are already there are likely to stay for longer than was anticipated, the need to resolve the legal status challenges for refugees is urgent.

Dalia Aranki dalia.aranki@nrc.no is Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance Programme Manager and **Olivia Kalis** olivia.kalis@nrc.no is Advocacy and Information Adviser in Lebanon with the Norwegian Refugee Council. www.nrc.no

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The role of host communities in north Lebanon

Helen Mackreath

Research conducted in Akkar, north Lebanon, suggests that the role played by the host community demonstrates good local capacity which should be built on to encourage further civic engagement and empowerment.

Two problems have beset the response to the situation of Lebanese host communities with regard to the Syrian refugee presence. The first is the tension over short-term versus long-term strategies towards the displacement, with the former being emergency responses largely excluding the host community and the latter being 'developmental' approaches which include them as 'vulnerable' populations. The second is differences in perception and approach between actors, particularly governmental and non-governmental actors, as to whether host community actors should be taken seriously as an empowered channel of assistance or should be viewed as vulnerable.

Host communities play a significant role in assisting Syrian refugees as a result of the decision of the Lebanese government not to set up camps. This assistance takes many different forms. For example, Lebanese individuals host people directly in their homes (either family members, prior acquaintances or complete strangers); individuals lend an empty 'home' or outbuilding to be used by a refugee family without charging rent; landlords reduce the rent payment or accept long delays in rent payment; individuals lend small amounts of money to refugees for everyday expenses; and individuals give furniture, clothes, labour and larger amounts of money to Syrian refugee strangers.

The spontaneous assistance provided by host communities, which in many respects replicates that of the Albanian host community during the much shorter Kosovo refugee crisis in 1999, should be incorporated into longer-term development strategies; the host communities should be seen not only as a vulnerable population in need of assistance but also, more usefully,

as empowered actors with the potential to generate cohesive community initiatives. This would also require the perspective of the host community to shift towards a more nuanced view of their own potential capacity, alongside their vulnerability.

How are host communities operating?

The majority of assistance being afforded to Syrian refugees by the Lebanese host community has come about through personal exchanges and one-to-one interactions. With many individuals offering shelter to complete strangers, out of humanitarian sympathy, it is not necessarily the case that Lebanese individuals are only helping Syrian family members or prior acquaintances – but these closer affiliations naturally tend to make up a slightly larger proportion of support. It is not possible to identify any broad trends in who is providing support; Lebanese individuals, men and women, well-off or living just within their means, those with large families or living alone, are all contributing to giving assistance. Of course, it should be noted that there are also individuals who are taking advantage of the situation by exploiting the vulnerability of refugees, through charging high rents or paying low wages.

Alongside this there is a micro-economy forming on highly localised scales, as refugees sell food coupons or medical aid for rent money or cash for other payments. A collection of young mothers living in tents on some land outside Halba town described how they sell the diapers they receive as aid from UNHCR to pay rent for the land. Another woman described how she 'repays' the assistance of neighbours, who helped her build a bathroom and assisted with small amounts of money, by giving excess food she receives from the UNHCR food

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UNHCR/S. Makawi

Syrian women cook together in a mosque converted to accommodate refugees in Arsal, northern Lebanon. 2012.

vouchers. People also run up small amounts of credit with local shopkeepers on a weekly basis. A system of job swapping is also evident amongst skilled manual workers and teachers. These small-scale bargains between refugees and their hosts are useful for both populations to get by and highlight both the importance of dignified 'autonomous' trade for the refugee, and the significance of the role of the host community in providing assistance by accepting the refugees into the informal economic life of the community.

Secondly, Lebanese individuals who are hosting Syrian families do not necessarily expect anything in return for the support they are giving; indeed, many would see this as an affront to their personal humanitarian efforts. However, there is a form of gift economy occurring, with many Lebanese individuals who offer assistance expecting to be repaid by the Syrians at some point in the future – and there is a mutual understanding that this will occur. For many Syrian refugees it is a necessary source of pride that they repay whatever assistance they are receiving. In effect, Syrian individuals are involuntarily creating a burden of debt or obligation which will take many years to repay.

Thirdly, a large number of networks of assistance are being formed between women. Many refugee families have no men present; often the Syrian men who are present are disabled and unable to work and Lebanese women often provide them with assistance.

Although women rarely hold positions of governmental authority within the municipality in north Lebanon, women are often landladies and matriarchs within their household, or are widows or have husbands working abroad in the Gulf; these women are more likely to rent out an outbuilding or basement of their home where they can.

The host community support within Akkar reflects a community with a great deal of humanitarian spirit and moral sensibility for the welfare of refugees, shows the proactive attitude of the Lebanese, and indicates bonds of trust between members of the two national communities (although, it should be noted, not necessarily between different religious communities).

Help to host communities

These Lebanese hosts who open up their homes to refugees are essentially operating outside of much of the assistance being given to refugees by NGOs. From the outset the 'host' Lebanese community has been viewed as a vulnerable group but excluded from the largely emergency-oriented planning meant for refugees. Currently they are seen as vulnerable but an integral part of the longer-term 'development' approach which is viewed as the best way of dealing with the protracted Syrian refugee crisis. Within the 2014 Regional Response Plan 6, local communities and authorities are intended to be supported with activities in areas such as water and sanitation, social cohesion, health and employment, to be delivered by humanitarian and development actors.¹ These intended initiatives demonstrate an awareness of the importance of local actors as social agents in supporting the refugee population, alongside the necessity to refrain from excluding them.

Some schemes, such as the flagship joint UN-Lebanese government Lebanese Host Communities Support Program, continue to frame host communities as 'vulnerable' rather than 'empowered'. Nevertheless, there are examples of schemes which are moving towards sustainable and embedded support for host communities. One Polish NGO

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assisted in the renovation of an outbuilding within a Lebanese host home, to make it liveable for a refugee family, by fitting a bathroom, kitchen, chimney, windows and doors. Significantly, this NGO dealt with the landlady of the building, rather than with the refugees. And local NGOs (such as Akkar Network for Development) are carrying out projects with the municipality and women's empowerment projects, which aim to build on the capacity of the community.

A precedent?

The 1999 Kosovo refugee crisis, which saw nearly half a million Kosovar refugees cross into Albania, helped to transform civil society in Albania and foster longer-term links between the Albanians and Kosovars. It was the actions of the Albanian population towards the refugees in offering housing, food, education and counselling services to 70% of them which generated a level of trust between the two populations and, crucially, civil society and local governments. This gave Albanians a sense of empowerment that continued afterwards.

In the case of the Kosovar refugees, Albanian NGOs played a critical role in identifying host

families and helping link them to UNHCR programmes, and collective shelters were set up by local authorities. These collaborations fostered trust and communication among different segments of society and directly increased social cohesion and local capacity.

The key question to emerge from the role of host communities in Lebanon, then, is whether the current combination of the local, national and international responses to the crisis will inspire long-term capacity building at the local level. While building on the assistance offered by the host community may be problematic owing to its ad hoc nature, the potential it has for future community cohesion and civic engagement could now be further strengthened. The perspective of the host community itself should shift towards a more nuanced view of their potential capacity, alongside their vulnerability, in order to achieve this.

Helen Mackreath hmackreath@gmail.com is a Graduate Assistant at the American University of Beirut. www.aub.edu.lb

1. 2014 *Syria Regional Response Plan: Strategic Overview* <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Syria-rrp6-full-report.pdf>

Refugee activists' involvement in relief effort in Lebanon

Frances Topham Smallwood

A cadre of educated middle-class Syrian refugees dedicated to improving conditions for Syrians at home and in Lebanon are building a civil society in exile but face obstacles to consolidating their presence and becoming more effective.

There is a significant community of highly educated, middle-class and generally left-leaning Syrian refugees living in Lebanon who are strongly committed to assisting needier refugees and to playing a role in rebuilding Syria, yet whose energies could be harnessed to better effect.

"You can do a lot for Syria from outside," says one of the refugee activists I met in Beirut. Some were involved in a range of initiatives to support fellow Syrians at home

and in Lebanon, collecting and distributing food and non-food items through networks of private individual benefactors and volunteers, improving conditions in tented settlements or helping Syrian families to pay their rent. Others focused their energies on cultural and educational activities, such as providing art and music classes for refugee children or filming a documentary on the lives of the Syrian intelligentsia in Lebanon. Several were working on projects that they hoped could

sow the seeds of a flourishing democratic civil society in Syria, holding workshops on active citizenship and negotiation.

Most of these initiatives had been established since arrival in Lebanon. For the most part they were small-scale grassroots affairs, operated through networks of friends and acquaintances with little formal organisational structure, though some also benefit from relationships with longer established international or Lebanese NGOs for funding and mentorship.

Though they are doing important work with very limited resources, the capacity of these Syrian-led initiatives to fulfil their potential is hampered by several factors. Firstly, Syrian refugees report that their organisations are not permitted to register officially as NGOs or to open bank accounts, which hampers their ability to secure funding. Some get around this difficulty by partnering with Lebanese NGOs or by registering under the names of helpful Lebanese activists but this entails relinquishing some financial and managerial control to the Lebanese partner along with a percentage of any income.

Barriers to working with more established and professionalised NGOs include perceived discrimination against Syrians and unreasonably high requirements for language skills, qualifications and experience, and play a part in encouraging refugees to set up initiatives on their own.

Political sensitivities also constrain refugees' activities. One activist living and working in Beirut explained that the Lebanese state, with its official policy of disassociation from events in Syria, "has no problem if you work here but don't get involved with back inside Syria." Even those involved in relief work inside Lebanon repeatedly stressed that they make every effort to separate the humanitarian from the political.

Frustration with mainstream response

Though refugees recognised that some good work was being done, criticism of

UNHCR and large INGOs was nearly universal; the perception of wastefulness and corruption may be more important than the extent to which it is accurate, sowing mistrust and souring potentially fruitful future relations between these organisations and local initiatives.

Several refugees involved in relief work complained that Syrians were not being given the opportunities and support they needed to contribute effectively. "If these NGOs don't get Syrians involved in their projects, it's just not going to work. We're the ones who know what's going on, we're working at the school from 8am until 1pm, then afterwards we're sitting with the children for hours at a time. We're Syrians and we understand their situation," said a volunteer with an informal group providing education to refugee children in the Beka'a valley. Another activist volunteer expressed deep frustration with what he saw as a lack of international support for the fledgling Syrian civil society movement. "These small organisations are the first real democratic experience that Syrian youth has had," he says. "But where's the support for it?"

From the perspective of the INGOs and of UNHCR in its planning and inter-agency coordination role, there are doubtless numerous practical challenges to providing the kind of support these refugees would like. And some of these grassroots initiatives in fact are receiving international support, especially those that have been established longest or have more Lebanese involvement. Nonetheless, it does appear that many of these international organisations could do more to make their formal commitment to incorporating refugees' input into their programmes a reality.

Frances Topham Smallwood was until recently an MSc candidate at the University of Amsterdam; this article is based on research conducted in Lebanon in March-April 2014 for her master's thesis.
ftophamsmallwood@gmail.com

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Coping strategies among self-settled Syrians in Lebanon

Cathrine Thorleifsson

Refugees in Lebanon prefer living outside camps, where they can influence their situation.

Three years into the conflict, displaced Syrians in Lebanon are affected by both governmental and ordinary people's ambivalence towards their presence. From the point of view of the international humanitarian community, the absence of official camps in Lebanon makes it far harder to ensure refugee protection and coordinate aid relief. The refugees themselves, however, say that they prefer living outside camps where they have better opportunities to influence their situation.

Lebanon's experience with Palestine refugees since 1948 affects its practices and policies toward the displaced Syrians. The Lebanese authorities have refused the establishment of camps as they fear that history will repeat itself. The establishment of armed Palestinian groups in camps was one of the reasons for the civil war between 1975 and 1990, and Lebanese authorities fear that the establishment of new camps would increase the likelihood that Syrians will stay and form spaces of resistance for Syrians in exile.

More than 400 informal tented encampments are registered around Lebanon to accommodate Syrian refugees. In Bebnine, a village of around 40,000 residents in the poor northern Akkar region, informal encampments – groupings of simple plastic tents constructed directly on the ground without water, electricity or sanitation – have popped up in several places. The Syrians, both urban and rural poor from the Homs region, typically arrive empty-handed and traumatised and end up moving into makeshift shelters in shops, garages, store-rooms, hallways and even a slaughterhouse.

Back in Syria many of the refugees lived close to their relatives' houses. After the flight to Lebanon, families were scattered, which has contributed to the loss or

weakening of social support. Some Syrians have formed social relationships with non-kin individuals such as host families or other refugees and go on to apply kinship categories like mother, father, sister and brother to them to emphasise their obligations and roles associated with close family.

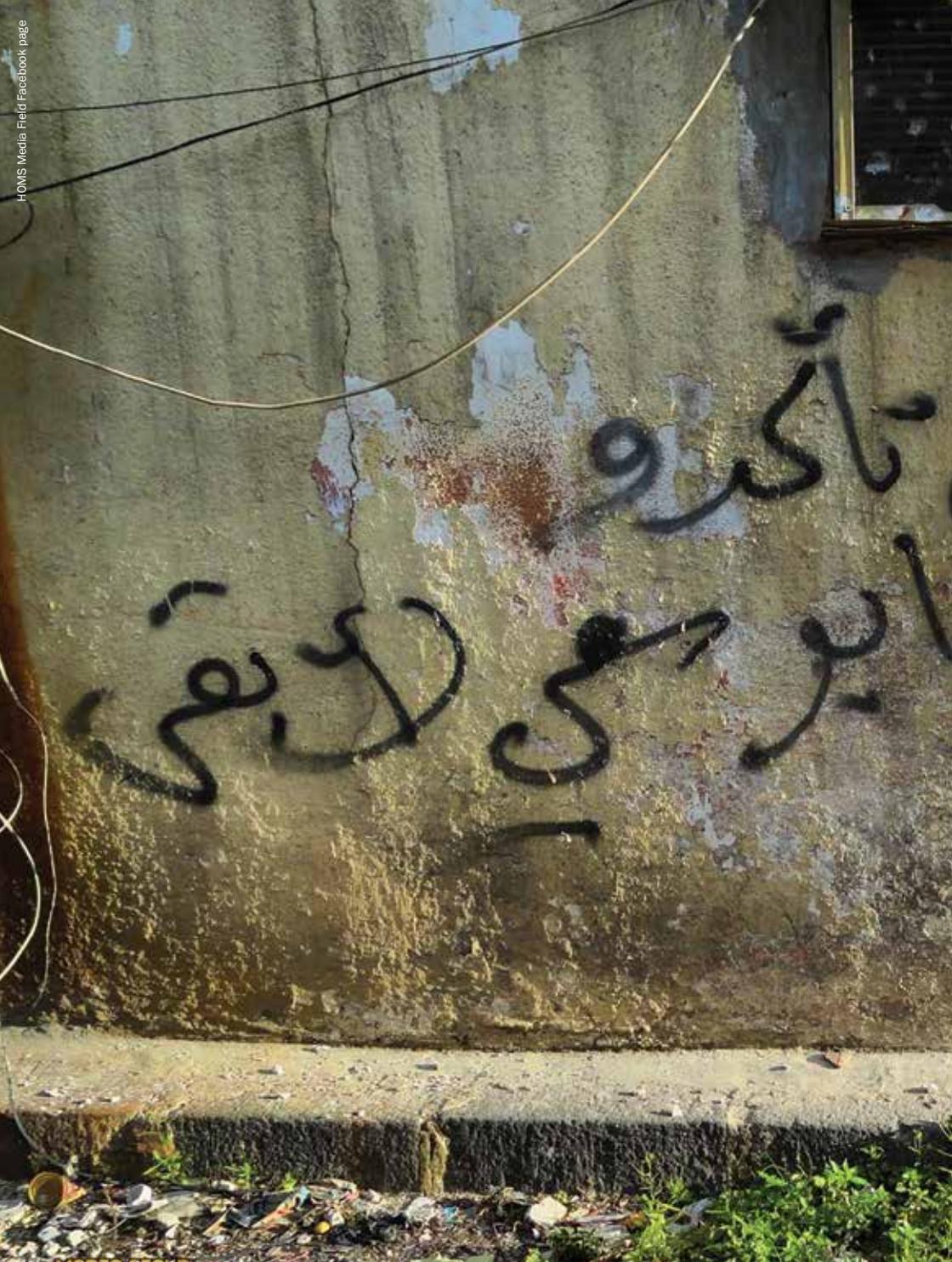
While local practices of hospitality toward the Syrian refugees are widespread, the Syrians have been used as scapegoats for economic as well as political insecurity. The coping strategy used by Syrian refugees that has the most severe impact is employment in the unskilled labour market in agriculture, construction or in small businesses. Prior to the crisis, Syrian migrant workers typically accepted lower wages than the Lebanese due to the comparatively lower cost of living in Syria. Now the refugees compete with Lebanese for even lower wages, since they also receive aid, a livelihood strategy closed to poor Lebanese. An overwhelming majority of Lebanese¹ believe that Syrians are taking jobs from the Lebanese and pushing down wages.²

Refugees report incidents of physical violence. Some Syrians have tried to change their accent or other characteristics so as not to be subjected to harassment. Salma who fled from Idlib with her husband and five children says: "We fled here but I do not feel safe. Hopefully we will go back home soon."

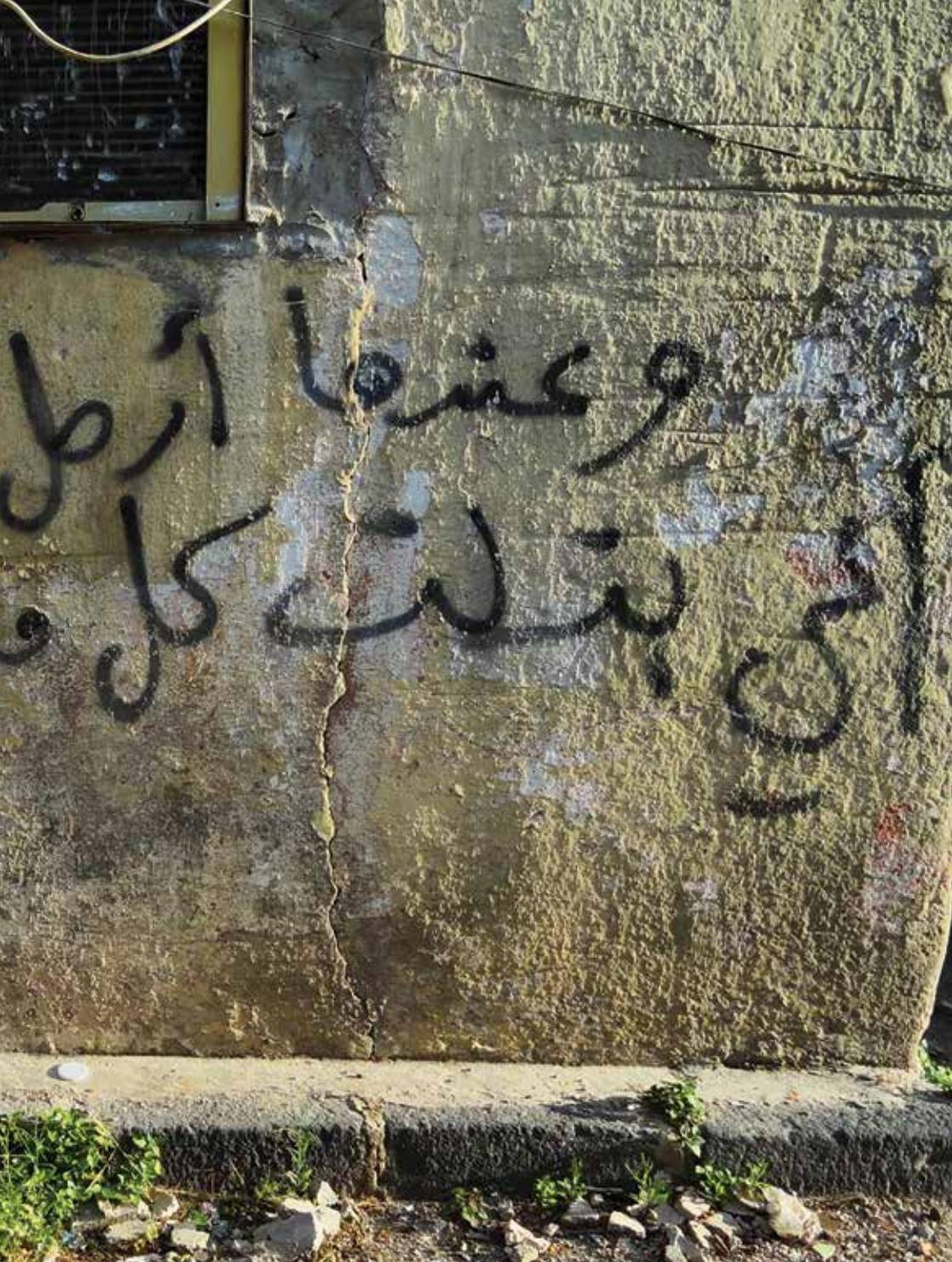
Cathrine Thorleifsson cathrine@thorleifsson.com is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Oslo, Department of Social Anthropology. www.sv.uio.no/sai/english/

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Graffiti on a wall in Homs, Syria, which translates as:



وعدنا اننا لنكون معكم

“When I leave, know that I did all I could to stay.”

Refugee by association

Blanche Tax

Many Syrians, even when they have not been individually singled out, meet the refugee criteria on the grounds of being at risk of persecution because of a perceived association, in the broadest sense, with one of the parties to the conflict.

What may appear to be generalised or indiscriminate violence in Syria is in reality often specifically targeting particular populations on the basis of an imputed political opinion, that is, their perceived support for one of the sides in the conflict. Such violence is really only 'indiscriminate' in that it does not differentiate between military objectives and civilians and civilian objects. Based on these findings, UNHCR considers that Syrians may be at risk of persecution by reason of imputed political opinion because of who controls or controlled the neighbourhood, village or town where they used to live, or because they belong to a religious group that is associated or perceived to be associated with a particular party to the conflict.¹

For example, in a recent decision, Belgium's asylum appeal court reversed a first instance ruling to grant only subsidiary protection status to a Syrian woman from the town of Saqba in Rural Damascus. Instead, she was recognised as a refugee, based on the court's finding that residents of Saqba, an area under the control of armed opposition groups, were collectively considered to be supporting the opposition and as a result had come under repeated and sustained attacks by government forces, including aerial shelling and attacks with chemical weapons.

The understanding of who is considered to be 'opposition' or 'pro-government' in Syria is being interpreted by parties to the conflict in very broad terms. Reports by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry² and independent human rights organisations have extensively documented that those opposing, or perceived to be opposing, the government are subjected to arbitrary arrest, *incommunicado* detention, torture, and summary and extra-judicial execution. Similarly, it has been

documented that civilians supporting, or perceived to be supporting, the government have been subjected to a range of human rights violations by armed opposition groups, albeit not on the same scale. But more than that, and seemingly going beyond the targeting of known opponents, dissenting political opinion can also be attributed by association to a range of people. This includes, for example, family members.

Even more broadly, whole neighbourhoods, villages and towns have been targeted **by association**. Government and pro-government forces subjected areas where armed opposition fighters were believed to be present or where anti-government protests took place to military raids, often accompanied by summary executions of men, women and children, mass arrests, pillaging and destruction of property. Increasingly, as whole areas fell under control of armed opposition groups, the Government of Syria, according to consistent reports, systematically subjected these locations to extensive artillery shelling and aerial bombardment, often using imprecise weaponry such as barrel bombs and cluster ammunition. Opposition-held areas have also been put under suffocating sieges. Snipers positioned at access points reportedly target persons who attempt to leave or enter besieged areas without passing through government-controlled checkpoints. Persons leaving opposition-held areas are reported to find themselves at risk of arrest, detention and abuse solely on the basis of their origin as indicated on their ID cards.

Similarly, reports indicate that armed opposition groups frequently consider locations where the government maintains control as generally pro-government, targeting these areas, and thus their inhabitants,

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indiscriminately with imprecise mortar, rocket and sniper fire, improvised explosive devices and military raids or cutting off electricity, water, food and medical assistance. 'Pro-government' is often interpreted in broad terms, and includes areas with government military installations or personnel but also with populations considered supportive of the government, often on the basis of their religious make-up or a perceived association with the government appearing not to go beyond the civilians' physical presence in neighbourhoods, villages or towns under the control of the Syrian government.

This perception of opposition to or support for the 'other side' is based on little more than the civilians' physical presence or origin in neighbourhoods or villages presently or previously under the control of, or having a presence of, armed opposition groups or, alternatively, the government itself. Civilians in such areas are at risk of persecution by reason of either their perceived opposition to, or support for, the government. The risk of them being harmed is very real and is in no way diminished by the fact that they may not be targeted for or exposed to harm on an individual basis.

A person arrested and tortured by the government, or at risk of such treatment, for participating in an anti-government protest, or a person abducted or at risk of execution by an armed opposition group on the basis of his or her perceived support for the government, would meet the refugee criteria of the 1951

Convention and should be granted refugee status. What is, however, less acknowledged is that an individual can also meet the refugee criteria without having been individually singled out but rather on the grounds of being persecuted on the basis of association in a broad sense. An understanding of the particular dynamics of the conflict in Syria leads to the conclusion that such a person is not just fleeing generalised violence.

For Syrians this matters. In many countries of asylum, the rights attached to subsidiary or complementary forms of protection are not the same as those attached to refugee status. In particular, Syrians granted a subsidiary or complementary form of protection are in some countries not entitled to family reunification. Not only does prolonged family separation prevent families from restarting their lives but it also contributes to decisions for separated family members to embark on dangerous journeys, by land or, particularly risky, by sea. For an individual Syrian, whether he or she is recognised as a refugee or is granted another form of protection can make all the difference.

Blanche Tax tax@unhcr.org works for UNHCR. www.unhcr.org The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

1. UNHCR *International Protection Considerations with regard to people fleeing the Syrian Arab Republic, Update II*, 22 October 2013, p8. www.refworld.org/docid/5265184f4.html
2. www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/IICISyria/Pages/IndependentInternationalCommission.aspx

Protection challenges of mobility

Melissa Phillips and Kathrine Starup

It is easy to say that people fleeing Syria should stay in camps or satellite cities but people move on for a variety of reasons, and programmes and services must adapt to assist them.

The scale of displacement from the Syrian crisis is compounded by its geographic spread and its prolonged nature. Syrians have been forced from their homes to neighbouring Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey, while others have fled to Egypt, Libya

and beyond; Syrian refugees are also moving on through irregular means to Europe. At the start, people's intention was often to find a suitable place where they could wait in safety with their families until return became possible. With the conflict now in

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UNHCR / B Sokol

Adiyaman refugee camp, Turkey, 2013.

its third year, people's intentions and plans are changing and they are being forced to re-consider what the future holds. Some are moving on again, adding greater complexity to the profile of Syrian displacement and to the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Turkey

While Turkey has taken many positive strides in recent years to improve conditions and legislative arrangements for its population of refugees and asylum seekers, that population has now increased considerably. Turkey's position at the frontier of 'Fortress Europe' and adjoining countries in crisis such as Syria has resulted in efforts being made by the government to contain refugee populations that have not been matched with similar attention to discussions about local integration and conditions for urban refugees in particular.

The unofficial number of Syrian refugees in Turkey, including non-registered populations, is estimated to be close to one million, although official figures of registered refugees are around 750,000. Most international organisations are concentrated in southern parts of Turkey, near the border

with Syria. Working in cooperation and with the Turkish government, they have provided protection assistance to people in camps and satellite cities. However, there is a growing trend of people moving on: first, to urban areas of Turkey in search of employment and, second, towards the European Union either by land or sea routes.

Informal estimates by actors on the ground suggest that there could be close to 100,000 Syrians living in Istanbul in insecure housing and working informally. Others may commute to Istanbul daily or weekly to work and then return to the areas they are

registered in. Unknown numbers of Syrians are travelling further north, far from the eye of international organisations and advocates, in an attempt to cross the land border between Turkey and Bulgaria. There has been a 600% increase in detection rates of so-called 'illegal' border crossings in Bulgaria in 2013 compared to a year previously, mainly of Syrians.¹ This sizeable increase could partly be attributed to increased surveillance and deterrence methods on the Greek-Turkish border since Greece launched Operation *Aspida* ('Shield') in 2012. As is known from other places, irregular movements that are obstructed simply shift rather than stop, and there has also been a concomitant rise in people trying to reach Greece by sea.

Yet there has been a significant delay in reacting and responding to the mobility of Syrians. Gaps include a lack of protection actors in northern Turkey, no cross-border monitoring on the Syrian-Turkish border and service providers overwhelmed by the needs of refugees. Yet without a clearer picture and understanding of mobility patterns and trends, including decision-making patterns and intentions, future services cannot hope to respond to the realities on the ground.

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Libya

Libya is itself a country that has been undergoing political transition since its revolution in 2011. Migration in Libya was an extremely sensitive issue under the previous regime, connected to broader concerns about identity and nationality. This was further complicated by the external actions of countries like Italy that resulted in the interception and return of asylum seekers and migrants taking boats across the Mediterranean in the hope of reaching Europe. Libya has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention nor does it have a formal agreement with UNHCR, which leaves little common ground for discussions about refugee protection.

Like Turkey, Libya is both a destination and a transit point for Syrians fleeing the crisis. In early March 2014 there were close to 18,000 Syrians registered in Libya, with more thought to be living in cities but not registered. The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) has been working there with displaced people on the move through its mixed migration programme. Underpinning this work has been a recognition that some, but not all, refugees and asylum seekers will seek to move on to other locations in the absence of local integration possibilities or refugee resettlement. For instance, DRC has encountered Syrians who have flown to Egypt, then travelled by land across the border to Libya with the express purpose of securing a place on a boat for Europe.² Others have lived and worked in Tripoli for years but find that the diminishing security environment and the condition of basic services such as health and education force them to consider other options, including moving on again.

The lens of mixed migration – recognising that different ‘categories’ of people move in mixed flows and that their status may change en route – has proved an important entry point when providing assistance to vulnerable people in Libya.³ This has become even more critical as Libya grows in importance as a transit site to Europe,

with Syrians now the second-biggest group leaving Libya by boat after Eritreans. DRC’s protection programmes in Libya are informed by research with beneficiaries⁴ as it is essential that the support provided is based on contextual knowledge, analysis and research to understand the fast-changing nature of displaced and host-community dynamics and decision making. Based on this research, DRC has developed modes of working such as outreach to people’s houses, a drop-in centre and a network of community mobilisers who offer protection assistance including protection monitoring, reporting on urgent issues and alerting DRC to vulnerable cases in challenging and sensitive locations.

Implications

How and through what modalities can actors then provide protection to highly mobile displaced persons in a fast-changing environment? The answer includes outreach, especially through host communities, and working with refugee community associations and places of worship.

Authorities too have a critical role to play in transit sites, hosting countries and destinations, in that they have the primary role in ensuring the protection of displaced persons’ rights. Partnership between local NGOs, authorities and international organisations around training have proven very successful in Libya. For instance, UN agencies, INGOs and local NGOs responded to a request from the Department for Combatting Illegal Migration – the Ministry of Interior directorate responsible for the day-to-day management of detention centres – for training on refugee law, detention guidelines and best practice in health and hygiene. A series of training sessions has now taken place in and around Tripoli, focusing on centre managers and guards. Additionally, local NGOs have received training in alternatives to detention through the International Detention Coalition. It is hoped this might lead to a system whereby vulnerable groups such as women and children can be released from detention and might improve referral mechanisms until such time as

broader policy and legislative reform can be achieved in the asylum and migration area.

The lack of quantitative border-monitoring programmes in countries like Libya and Turkey is a serious gap that needs to be addressed in order to provide data on people on the move – and can be complemented by research on protection issues en route. Because of a tendency to assume that providing services in urban areas will attract or encourage people to move there, there is a paucity of funded services in urban areas to assist people. Working with civil society groups is vital in this case as they have the potential to provide support over a longer duration and to engage with host governments and communities to ensure public support for refugee communities. Finally, we must all constantly re-examine the assumptions on which our assistance towards Syrians refugees is based and

ensure that the assistance also responds to the needs of highly mobile populations.

Melissa Phillips addis.pm@regionalmms.org is Mixed Migration Project Manager for the Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat www.regionalmms.org and was formerly a Senior Programme Officer with the Danish Refugee Council in Libya. Kathrine Starup kathrine.starup@drc.dk is Global Protection and Policy Advisor at the Danish Refugee Council. www.drc.dk

1. Frontex (2013) *FRAN Quarterly*, Q3, July-September http://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/FRAN_Q3_2013.pdf
2. See Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat (2014) *Going West: contemporary mixed migration trends from the Horn of Africa to Libya & Europe* <http://tinyurl.com/RMMS-Going-West-2014>
3. See also Kumin J (2014) 'The challenge of mixed migration by sea', FMR 45 www.fmreview.org/crisis/kumin
4. See DRC (2014) *"We risk our lives for our daily bread": findings of the Danish Refugee Council study on mixed migration in Libya* <http://tinyurl.com/DRC-Mixed-Migrants-Libya-2014>

A duty and a burden on Jordan

Saleh Al-Kilani

It is important to Jordan both that it protects its national identity and maintains its cultural obligations, and that it faces up to its humanitarian obligations.

More than 40% of Jordan's current population originates from other countries, including two million Palestinians, up to 1.3 million Syrians and 29,000 Iraqis. In order to protect its national identity in these circumstances, and because of the complicated situation in the region generally, the country has not become a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention.

Jordan's law on refugees is defined by a 1998 Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR, amended in April 2014. It includes the Convention's definition of 'refugee' and accepts the principle of *non-refoulement* and third country resettlement for refugees. However, it does not allow for local integration as a solution. Article 21 of the Constitution offers refugee status for political asylum but only in very exceptional situations and it is not an option available for most refugees. A

domestic refugee law is in the process of being drafted, and is currently under discussion in Jordan, though for political and security reasons it may be postponed until after the Syrian crisis.

Everyone crossing a border from Syria is considered to be a refugee unless they are considered a potential security threat or to have crossed illegally. Along the 378-km Syrian-Jordanian border there are 25 recognised crossing points and a further 23 that are open depending on the situation. At the crossing points there are temporary assembly or collection sites where categorisation and prioritisation takes place. Priority is given first to the injured and sick; then to children, particularly unaccompanied or separated minors; next to the elderly; and lastly to the general adult population. 41% of

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the incoming refugees are children, 30% are women and 29% are men. There are currently five camps in Jordan and another being planned; however, the vast majority of Syrian asylum seekers and refugees fleeing the conflict are living outside the camps, thus putting the burden on the local and host communities.

Financial burden

Jordan is faced with the challenge of balancing human rights and national security in the economic, political and social fields. The Jordanian Economic and Social Council has stated that the cost to Jordan per Syrian refugee is over US\$3,500 per year¹ and the direct cost is currently at US\$1.2 billion and is expected to rise to \$4.2 billion by 2016.² Also, facing a severe water crisis and needing to recruit more armed forces, but lacking adequate funds, the country has formulated a National Resilience Plan in an effort to protect Jordanian infrastructure.

Jordan decided not to send anyone back to Syria once they are in the country. But there are Syrians who have returned, some as traders, some to fight, and some say they would rather die in Syria than live in a camp. The high cost of living has been a factor and the snow over the winter was a push for many of them. Others believe the Syrian government when it says that it controls 70% of the country – and make the decision to return. In the case of voluntary returns, the individuals must sign a letter in the presence of UNHCR to say that they are consenting to the return. Returns are arranged both through official and unofficial borders.

Jordan supports resettlement but the government refuses to discuss it in the media as it fears it will encourage Syrians to come to Jordan as a 'gateway' to third countries. The limited numbers



Thousands of new pre-fabricated homes being installed in Za'atari refugee camp in preparation for winter. 2012.

of resettlement slots available make resettlement inadequate as a real solution. Stabilising Syria is the best solution.

The Ministry of Interior also asks the international community not to forget Jordan. Jordan plays a large role in controlling the region and keeping it safe. It is helping to contain the effects of the conflict and, by extension, protecting the economic interests of many Western nations.

Despite Jordan not being a party to the 1951 Convention, the history of refugees and migrants in Jordan and the practice and the experience of the country demonstrate respect for human dignity and humanitarianism as much as or more than many countries who are party to the Convention. The main obstacle to the protection of migrants' and refugees' rights is not the absence of law but the failure of states to respect the conventions, agreements and declarations that they have freely accepted.

Dr Saleh al-Kilani *Saleh.al.kilani@MOI.gov.jo* is Refugee Affairs Coordinator in the Jordanian Ministry of Interior. www.moi.gov.jo

1. <http://tinyurl.com/Jordan-EcoSocCouncil> (Arabic only)
2. www.mop.gov.jo/index.php

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For beneficiary-led protection programming in Jordan

Sinead McGrath

Despite the humanitarian community's clear focus on addressing the protection concerns of displaced Syrians, in Jordan the beneficiaries of many protection programmes have had limited influence on the shape of the protection response to date.

One example of how the protection response has failed to adequately involve beneficiaries is the focus of humanitarian actors on child marriage amongst the displaced Syrian population. Evidence suggests the practice of child marriage has not increased as a result of displacement¹ and yet media articles focusing sensationally on the issue have influenced humanitarian protection actors responding to the crisis, as well as international donors.

While it is widely accepted internationally that the practice of child marriage is damaging to the well-being of the minor(s) involved, many Syrians believe this common practice is an acceptable way to secure a safe future for their female children in particular. While awareness raising on issues such as child marriage

is important, humanitarian agencies need to ensure that the immediate protection response is shaped by the community's own priorities and urgent needs and that the context and culture of the population is understood and respected by humanitarian agencies.

Notably, when consulted, female Syrian refugees said that the protection intervention they desired most was a basic literacy programme. These women felt that having the confidence and ability to read shop signs, rental contracts and identification documents related to their status in Jordan was the protection assistance they perceived as most valuable.

Sinead McGrath sineadmarmcgrath@gmail.com is a Program Manager with the International Catholic Migration Commission in Jordan. www.icmc.net
The views expressed here are those of the author and not necessarily of ICMC.

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If Israel accepted Syrian refugees and IDPs in the Golan Heights

Crystal Plotner

Could re-opening the Golan Heights to Syrians displaced by the conflict be a beneficial option for those fleeing the Syrian conflict and for Israel's relations with its north-eastern neighbour?

As the conflict in Syria enters its fourth year, Israel remains Syria's only neighbour which has still not accepted displaced persons and refugees fleeing the armed conflict. International and Israeli human rights organisations are increasingly calling on Israel to open its eastern border for humanitarian reasons. Although members of the Israeli public and government invoke a moral obligation to help Syrian refugees, the government's preferred approach is through provision of humanitarian aid to refugee camps, in particular to Jordan as Israel has tense to non-existent relations

with the other neighbouring countries who are receiving Syrian refugees. While the aid is welcome, Israel – which has repeatedly cited its neutrality in the Syrian war – has the capacity to help in more direct ways.

In early 2012, the Israeli government stated it was making preparations to accept Syrian refugees in the Golan Heights as it anticipated the impending fall of the Assad regime. However, six months later, the Israeli Defence Minister asserted that any refugees attempting to cross the border into the Golan Heights would be stopped.

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Subsequently, invoking serious security concerns, Israel has undertaken quick and thorough measures to re-fortify the eight-metre-high, 90-kilometre-long fence along the ceasefire line between the occupied Golan and Syria, which is also monitored by a UN peacekeeping force. The Israeli military has also indicated that it would lay new minefields along the border with Syria due to the failure of previous landmines to detonate during demonstrations in 2011.

It is worth further noting that any plans which may have been in existence in 2012 to accept displaced Syrians into the Golan Heights would arguably have been superseded by measures Israel has taken to assert its claim to the Golan in light of the Syrian conflict. In January 2014, comments from an Israeli security cabinet meeting were leaked which detail discussions over a strategy to take advantage of Syria's current poor public image by pressuring the international community to recognise Israel's sovereignty over the occupied Syrian Golan. In the same month, the Israeli government also approved plans for a US\$100 million investment in developing 750 new farms for settlers in the Golan Heights. Israel has thus made it clear that displaced Syrians will not be admitted into the Golan and that, furthermore, Israel fully intends to retain its control over the Golan.

Nevertheless, a small number of Syrians are crossing the border, not as refugees but as medical patients. The Israeli military has been treating wounded Syrians who arrive at the armistice line fence seeking medical aid at a field hospital in the Golan Heights. It is reported that they treat an average of 100 Syrians per month and that those with more serious conditions are transferred to hospitals inside Israel.

Whilst the medical treatment provided by the Israelis is commendable, it should be noted that after treatment the Syrian patients are then repatriated to Syria. In 2011, the UN Human Rights Council declared a blanket status of refugee to

any Syrian fleeing the country due to the conflict, yet Israel continues to violate the principle of *non-refoulement* in this regard. Physicians for Human Rights-Israel have advocated for Syrian patients to be allowed to apply for asylum after medical treatment, rather than being involuntarily returned to a war zone.

The Israeli authorities state that Syrian patients are eager to return home, and that the repatriation is therefore voluntary. However, human rights groups claim that wounded Syrians being treated in Israel are not being informed at all about the possibility of seeking asylum in Israel. Secondly, the Israeli government argues that Syrians would not be prepared to seek refuge in Israel, even if it were possible to do so, as they would then be subject to social stigma as traitors in their home country. However multiple interviews with Syrians receiving medical treatment in Israel indicate that they would certainly accept asylum in Israel if it were granted.

Double refugees and IDPs

Although Israel cites security threats from Hezbollah and Al-Qaeda as justification for refusing to admit those fleeing the conflict in Syria, the refusal also conveniently eliminates the possibility of Palestinian refugees in Syria entering Israel. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who were displaced in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war sought refuge in Syria, and are now facing or experiencing double displacement due to the Syrian war. Additionally, thousands of Palestinians were accepted as refugees in the Syrian Golan in 1948, only to be displaced during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and to now face being displaced a third time from refugee camps in Syria.

This state of affairs re-opens an especially tender wound in the occupied Syrian Golan, which was brought under Israeli control in 1967 and was subsequently annexed as Israeli territory in 1981, despite rejection of this move by the international community as illegal under international law. Of the

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130,000 indigenous Syrians displaced from the Golan, it is estimated their total numbers, including descendants, now range from 300,000 to 400,000. This population is primarily located in those urban areas of Syria most affected by the armed conflict. Like many Palestinians, they are now facing or experiencing double displacement.

The Golan is internationally recognised as Syrian territory and therefore Syrians crossing the armistice line into this region would technically be internally displaced persons and not refugees as they are not crossing an international border. This creates something of a conundrum for Israel. If it asserts its sovereignty over the Golan, Israel would need to afford the rights and protections in accordance with refugee law to Syrians entering the Golan. However, accepting that the Golan is still Syrian territory would let Israel abdicate any responsibility for Syrian IDPs there and could open the door for international aid groups to assist the IDPs in a safe environment, simultaneously relieving some pressure on the current overburdened primary host countries.

In the 1,200 square kilometres of the Golan Heights controlled by Israel, there are roughly 40,000 inhabitants. This population is almost equally split between native Syrian Arabs and Jewish settlers. As the area has a low population density and abundant natural resources, there is an adequate amount of land (controlled by Israel) that could accommodate a substantial number of Syrian IDPs. Indigenous Syrians in the Golan have openly voiced their support for taking in their displaced kin and neighbours from across the armistice line, and should these displaced people decide to return to urban areas of Syria once the conflict subsides, it is possible that seeking refuge as IDPs in the Golan would be less stigmatised than seeking asylum within the borders of Israel. Displaced Syrians entering the Golan would also experience a relatively easy transition culturally, as it would be

a potentially welcoming environment being surrounded by other Syrians.

Moving forward

What incentive would Israel have to accept Syrian IDPs or refugees, especially in light of repeated concerns for Israel's national security? Doing so could be a strategy to better leverage a future peace deal with Syria and potentially contribute to establishing durable stability in the region, given Syria's role in the geopolitics of the Middle East. After a history of involvement in conflicts which resulted in refugees fleeing to its neighbours, Israel now has the opportunity to extend a friendly hand and reciprocate as a host country to those fleeing the brutality of war.

After relative quiet in the Golan for forty years, the area is now playing a strategic role in both the Syrian conflict and in Israel's relations with Syria. Of the three most likely outcomes of the Syrian conflict (Assad remaining in power, the Free Syrian Army/opposition forces gaining rule, or militant Islamic groups taking over), both the Assad regime and militant groups have publicly stated their intention to reclaim the occupied Golan once the Syrian conflict is resolved. In contrast, during an interview in March 2014 a leading member of the opposition, Kamal Al-Labwani, made a controversial statement to the effect that if the opposition forces should successfully take power in Syria they would be willing to negotiate with the Israelis over control of the Golan and broker a peace deal with Israel.

Whichever way the Syrian conflict ends, there will be ramifications for the occupied Syrian Golan. By accepting Syrian refugees and IDPs, Israel has a window of opportunity to set the stage for better relations with its beleaguered yet influential neighbour.

Crystal Plotner cjplotner@gmail.com is Legal Advocacy Researcher at Al-Marsad, Arab Human Rights Centre in the Golan Heights.
<http://golan-marsad.org>

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Gender, conscription and protection, and the war in Syria

Rochelle Davis, Abbie Taylor and Emma Murphy

The struggles endured by men who remain inside Syria and the obstacles faced by others who choose to remove themselves from the fighting by fleeing the country demonstrate a need to redefine classic conceptions of vulnerability and to consider civilian men and their needs as part of a solution rather than a problem.

The humanitarian ceasefire in parts of Homs, Syria, in February 2014 allowed for the evacuation of a long-besieged civilian population that had been increasingly without access to food, medical care and supplies since late 2013. While women, children and older men were allowed to leave the neighbourhood, more than 500 men between the ages of 15 and 55 were detained in the city for questioning and security screening.

What this situation in Homs highlights is a reality true of the conflict in Syria on a larger scale. That is, men of these approximate ages, but especially young men, are seen by virtue of their gender as potential combatants. This demographic characterisation means that even if a man does not have weapons and is not engaged in fighting, he is assumed at the very least to be willing to fight. He is therefore viewed either as an asset or as a threat – to the regime, the opposition movements or the governments of host countries. He is never a neutral civilian in the way women, children and the elderly are seen to be.¹

Conscription and fighting inside Syria

Inside the regime-controlled areas of Syria, men – regardless of their beliefs or politics – face conscription at 18 years of age. A man can be exempted or designated to a certain type of service for a limited number of reasons, including if he is the only son in a family or if he has a serious health issue. Alternatively, a man can pay to be exempted from service; in 2013 the government raised the fee from \$7,500 to \$15,000. Studying at a university may result in a postponement and, if working in a government job or living outside the country, a man can submit an annual request

for postponement for up to five years. Since the conflict began, even men who have completed their military service have been called up to serve again, until the age of 42.

Because the policies keep changing and are often applied arbitrarily, many Syrian men express fear and hesitation about remaining within Syria and about trying to navigate the system legally. Large numbers of military-age men have fled both military conscription and service following the creation of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in late July 2011 and the intensification of the regime's violent crackdown throughout the country. Numerous people said the turning point was when an officer knocked on their door with a conscription notice for their 18-year-old son or brother.

Due to the deaths of family members, some men become heads of households and thus are needed to provide for family members, something they could not do as actual or potential combatants inside Syria. Others interviewed are college students who faced repeated harassment or whose homes were destroyed by the regime, thereby preventing their continued enrolment in college and ending their military exemption. These young men said they fled because they were unwilling to join either the national army or the armed opposition.

Additionally, men previously serving in the Syrian army indicated that they defected because, among other reasons, they were commanded to fire on Syrian civilians protesting non-violently in the streets. The addition of a militarised opposition to the

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non-violent uprising plays a significant role in why men choose to flee Syria, even if some of them are ideologically on the side of the opposition. For all of these men, to stay in Syria means either taking up arms to fight or trying to avoid military service – and being caught trying to avoid military service could mean prolonged detention, torture or death.

Thus, many either choose (or their families force them) to flee to neighbouring countries or the non-regime-controlled areas or to hide within Syria. Some spoke of friends and neighbours whose sons went into hiding or faked abduction or death so as to avoid conscription. It is important that the international community, Syrians and all those concerned with the conflict recognise that these men have chosen not to fight and have removed themselves from the conflict despite threats to their safety and that of their families.

Many Syrians see the non-regime-controlled areas, where the FSA or local councils are in charge, as safe havens for those fleeing conscription and those who deserted the army. But there are also reports that in these areas young men and boys aged 12-16 are being groomed to join the Islamist jihadi groups through indoctrination campaigns, and family members describe fleeing to get their sons and brothers out of this environment. Since March 2014, the extended reach of the regime's random bombing campaign, along with targeted killings of non-violent activists in their towns and villages in the non-regime-controlled areas when the Islamist jihadi groups took over, pushed another group of men (especially those who had seen these areas as relatively safe) to flee again, most often across borders.

Barriers to leaving Syria

The right to leave, or the right to find safety in another country, however, is not always afforded to men attempting to flee Syria. While the Syrian government previously banned men who had not completed their two-year military service from leaving the country, in March 2012 restrictions were extended to ban

all men between the ages of 18 and 42 from travelling outside the country without prior authorisation, regardless of whether or not they had already done their military service.

Of course many men can and do flee without permission, dodging the multitudinous Syrian checkpoints on the roads to Lebanon and Jordan. Others have fled with their families from regime-controlled areas to rebel-held areas close to the borders with Turkey and Iraq. While these men no longer face the danger of conscription into the Syrian army, they face other dangers related to their gender. Depending on their personal political activism or that of their family members, they may be detained, tortured or even threatened with execution by the new militant groups; because of their gender, they are seen to pose a threat, either of instigating violence or resistance.

For those men who are able to cross the Syrian border, their legal entry into the neighbouring countries has been blocked by intermittent entry restrictions. Thus there are two categories of Syrians living in Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq: those who are legal and those who entered the country illegally, without formal entry into the registry of the host-government immigration system. Reports from prior to ISIS's advance in Iraq indicate that the Iraqi central government was blocking entry to young men from Syria, although the Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq had been letting men enter the country when its borders were open and seek work. It is unclear what effect ISIS's current control over various border crossings will have on refugee movement and these policies. Since 2013, Jordan has imposed bans on unaccompanied men



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from entering the country. As a result, some have had to make their female relatives travel with them or to attach themselves to other families when crossing the border checkpoints, while many others have chosen to undertake long and risky journeys through the eastern desert to cross illegally into Jordan.

This discrimination against men travelling alone derives from the premise that single men and boys visibly detached from a family unit pose a threat to security, whereas men who function as fathers, sons, brothers and/or husbands do not. Men in these situations are then doubly vulnerable, because they do not have the care and protection of their families,

and because they are seen as a threat by host countries. Conversely, women and girls who are alone, without husbands, brothers and/or fathers, are perceived as vulnerable. It is worth considering whether humanitarian policies targeting women-headed households unintentionally encourage the separation of family units, thereby exacerbating risks for the women **and** the men.

Limits to protection outside Syria

Since many young men and men of military age have deliberately removed themselves from the conflict, it is important that the international community, including donors, media, host governments and policymakers, see them as, by definition, civilians both eligible for and potentially in need of assistance.

In general, men who are civilians fleeing conflict are offered the same legal protections as others. However, in times of crisis humanitarian actors often designate particular groups as vulnerable, thus directing specific types of aid towards those deemed 'at greater risk'. In the case of Syrian refugees, as with so many others, more aid is targeted towards women, children, the elderly and the disabled. This is not to question these groups' needs or the extent to which they may be vulnerable in conflict situations but rather to point out that this demographic categorisation upon which humanitarian assistance is distributed excludes all males who are not children, elderly or disabled.

How are these military-age men vulnerable? First, they cannot return to Syria. Those who fled the military cannot return to regime-controlled areas of Syria at present or they will face punishment, imprisonment and perhaps death as deserters. Many deserters cannot go to the non-regime-controlled areas because they were at one time in the Syrian military, thus making them suspicious to rebel groups. And those who fled or whose families pulled them out of membership in the Free Syrian Army or the jihadi groups cannot return for much the same reasons.



Wissam Al Jazairy

Second, many young male refugees in particular face immense financial and psychological obstacles in host countries and, with little acknowledgement of the reasons why they fled and the incredible danger they would face if they returned to Syria, can be viewed as threats to social, political and economic stability by host governments.

The current paradigm through which we view vulnerabilities in conflict situations more often than not assigns young men to the category of dangerous – belligerents open to radicalisation or prone to violence. This obfuscates vulnerabilities and has harmful implications for civilian men, and their families too, as host countries fear that single men crossing their borders are fighters, either entering the host country to rest and see their families, or coming to recruit and organise armed opposition, or to bring the fight into the host country. There is evidence that such activities are happening in this case too. Yet there are also those who have sought refuge in these neighbouring countries so as to remove themselves from the fighting and to avoid joining the militaries of any side. This stand is something the international community and the humanitarian aid community in particular should recognise, and support; these are the very people to concern ourselves with as part of the search for solutions to end the suffering endured by millions of Syrians.

The international community needs to give renewed attention to demographic categorisations, and concepts of vulnerability and belligerency upon which they are based. The risks these men face being forced to fight

or trying to escape having to fight should make them more of a priority, alongside other more classically ‘vulnerable’ groups. In addition, host country governments should be encouraged and supported to ease border restrictions and to provide training for security personnel and appropriate reception facilities at border posts to make sure that men who want to escape are able to do so. In return, the international community could develop programmes that include appropriate psychosocial activities, volunteerism and vocational training for men and addressing host countries’ concerns about the dangers that men present. Finally, Syrian men who choose not to fight can be key to ending the conflict and can take part in creating new possibilities for the future of Syria.

Rochelle Davis rad39@georgetown.edu is an Associate Professor at the Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Abbie Taylor act64@georgetown.edu is a Research Associate at the Institute for the Study of International Migration, and Emma Murphy emm234@georgetown.edu is a Mortara Undergraduate Research Fellow, all in the Edmund B Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University.
<http://sfs.georgetown.edu>

This article draws on over 100 interviews with Syrian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey during mid 2013 and early 2014.

1. For more on this subject, see Carpenter RC (2006) *Innocent Women and Children’: Gender, Norms and the Protection of Civilians*. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing; Helton AC (1992) ‘Resistance to Military Conscription or Forced Recruitment by Insurgents as a Basis for Refugee Protection: A Comparative Perspective’, *San Diego Law Review*; and Jones A, ed (2004) *Gendercide and Gender*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

The fourth Geneva Convention (‘Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War’) covers all individuals “who do not belong to the armed forces, take no part in the hostilities and find themselves in the hands of the Enemy or an Occupying Power”. Among other provisions, it requires that:

Protected civilians MUST be:

- Treated humanely at all times and protected against acts or threats of violence, insults and public curiosity.

Protected civilians must NOT be:

- Discriminated against because of race, religion or political opinion.
- Punished for an offence he or she has not personally committed.

Fourth Geneva Convention online at www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b36d2.html

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The impact of displacement on disabled, injured and older Syrian refugees

Marcus Skinner

In contexts of displacement it is critical to recognise that some groups in the population may require specific attention. Awareness of these needs has major consequences for the types of services required, and the way they are delivered.

In 2013, HelpAge International and Handicap International undertook a study in Jordan and Lebanon designed to provide robust evidence and data of the numbers and needs of older, disabled and injured refugees and refugees affected by chronic diseases, and to offer the opportunity to compare their needs with those of the wider refugee population.¹

Impairment

The *World Report on Disability*² estimates that 15.3% of the world's population has a moderate or severe disability and that this proportion is likely to increase to 18-20% in conflict-affected populations.³ In comparison, of the surveyed refugees 22% are affected by an impairment and 6% by a severe impairment, and one in five of all those with an impairment have more than one impairment. Older people are disproportionately represented, with a staggering 70% with at least one impairment. Older people are also almost twice as likely as children to present with intellectual impairments.

The challenges of collecting accurate data on impairment and disability in humanitarian emergencies are starkly illustrated by the unavailability of data in Lebanon. At the time of the survey, just 1.4% of refugees registered by UNHCR in Lebanon were recorded as having a disability, with sensory impairments significantly less likely to be identified than physical impairments.

For those with impairments, adapting to a new environment in the absence of their usual family and community support structures and securing proper access to both basic and specialised services become major challenges.

Survey teams reported that those with intellectual impairments and their families faced the most extreme challenges. Without a clear picture of the numbers of people affected by impairment it is of course difficult for organisations to respond effectively.

The study also analysed difficulties faced in 'activities of daily living' (ADL). ADL is a term used by health professionals to refer to daily self-care activities such as feeding, bathing and dressing oneself. The results show that 45% of refugees with an impairment, injury or chronic disease face difficulties in ADL, and 60% of older people face such challenges. In comparison, just 6% of the general refugee population surveyed reported difficulties. Experience shows that these refugees are less likely to access static services and consequently, mobile outreach programmes and support to family and community coping strategies form a critical part of an effective response to their needs.

Injury

The Syrian conflict has been noted for its levels of conflict-related injuries. The survey found that one in 15 Syrian refugees in Jordan has been injured as a result of the war, and one in 30 refugees in Lebanon. Age and gender analysis shows that working-age men are bearing the brunt of the exposure to risk of injury, in part due to their role in the fighting, but also due to their responsibility for fetching food and water, and – for some young men – returning to Syria to check on property and assets. Many of those affected by injury are not receiving adequate care.

Beyond immediate health care, such injuries require long-term physical rehabilitation,

psychological support and, for those with permanent impairments, life-long care. Of particular concern is the limited availability of physical rehabilitation support to avoid the worsening of existing injury-related health conditions and to mitigate the development of potentially permanent disability. It is critical therefore that national and international health providers work together to address the current needs of this population but also to plan for the longer-term financial and human-resource requirements needed to prepare health systems, families and communities to ensure adequate support.

The care needs of those with injury pose a major challenge for humanitarian partners now, and for the long-term needs of health systems in Jordan, Lebanon and ultimately Syria. The Assad regime has made it clear that injured refugees returning from surrounding countries will be counted as part of the anti-government resistance, and hence those living with injury in neighbouring countries face an uncertain future.

Chronic disease

Traditional health responses in humanitarian crises largely fail to address the needs of those with non-communicable, manageable chronic health conditions. Limited access to care and interruptions in treatment can result in severe complications and increasing levels of both morbidity and mortality.

Yet for many refugees the cost of accessing health services is a major barrier. In Lebanon, health service delivery is privatised and fee-paying. Although refugees can usually access health facilities, they are expected to cover the costs of treatment which may be significantly beyond their means. Some refugees in Lebanon stated that they were unable to afford the cost of transport to health centres, let alone the required contribution to their hospital bills.

In Lebanon and Jordan there is almost no health education for patients, limited capacity among health staff to properly assess patients with chronic diseases,

limited services available to support early screening for chronic diseases, and no proper monitoring of conditions, laboratory tests or follow up. Finally, it is important to recognise the link between untreated chronic diseases and disability; we know that a large percentage of those with non-communicable diseases will develop impairments as the diseases progress.

As with response to the needs of those with injuries, the disease profile of the Syrian refugee population has severe consequences for health system support. HelpAge International and Handicap International are working with local and international partners including Médecins du Monde and Amel Association to improve identification and referral of those with non-communicable disease, as well as to support the national health systems to improve levels of care.

Psychological well-being

Half of the surveyed refugees affected by impairment, injury and non-communicable disease reported at least one frequent sign of psychological distress: changes in emotional state, behaviour, relationships or cognition. Again, the older population is disproportionately affected with more than 65% reporting such signs, a level three times higher than the general refugee population. Whereas younger generations may be occupied with work or the search for work, refugees with impairment and older people are often excluded from work and have more time to dwell on their plight.

Marcus Skinner miskinner@helpage.org is Humanitarian Policy Manager at HelpAge International. www.helpage.org

1. Based on data collected from a sample of over 3,000 refugees. See report (2014) *The hidden victims of the Syrian Crisis: disabled, injured and older refugees*.

www.helpage.org/download/537207495fe87
See also Calvi-Parisetti P 'Older people and displacement', FMR 43 www.fmreview.org/fragilestates/calviparisetti

2. World Health Organization (2011) http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2011/WHO_NMH_VIP_11.01_eng.pdf?ua=1

3. See also FMR 35 on Disability and displacement www.fmreview.org/disability

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The vulnerability of Palestinian refugees from Syria

Leah Morrison

While Syrian nationals may eventually return to their home country, the future for Palestinians from Syria is increasingly uncertain. Meanwhile they are more vulnerable, and treated worse, than most other refugees from the Syrian conflict.

Some 270,000 – over half – of Syria's Palestinian population have been displaced either internally or outside the country. Although the conflict has affected all people from Syria regardless of their religion or ethnicity, the dire consequences of the Syrian conflict have highlighted the inherent vulnerability of Palestinians.

Those who fled to Lebanon or Jordan have found little support and cannot return to Syria since two-thirds of the Palestinian refugee camps have been destroyed or are caught up in the conflict. Syria's capacity to absorb Palestine refugees in the first place stemmed from favourable economic conditions at the time and the relatively small numbers that sought refuge in the country over 60 years ago. However, Syrian economic losses for the year 2012 amounted to 81.7% of the country's 2010 GDP, with unemployment rising from 10.6 to 34.9%. The current economic situation is extremely detrimental to Palestinians and even if they are able to return to Syria they are likely to face limited work opportunities and discrimination.

Being chronically underfunded, UNRWA (the UN agency mandated to assist Palestine refugees) has been unable to provide for their basic needs in Jordan and Lebanon. The proportion of Palestine refugees in Syria requiring assistance from UNRWA has increased dramatically from 6% prior to the conflict to currently over 90%. The once partial independence of the Palestinian community in Syria has now crumbled, leaving them largely dependent on UNRWA and funding from the international community. UNRWA's mandate, being limited to relief and works programmes, does not allow for undertaking protection activities.

The vulnerability of Palestinians within the Syrian conflict is exacerbated by the obstacles they face when attempting to flee the country. Since the beginning of the conflict, over 70,000 Palestinians have fled to neighbouring countries including Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Turkey and Iraq where they are being singled out for increasing restrictions on access to asylum and have become the target of growing hostility within the host countries and communities. Instances of discriminatory treatment, indefinite detention, border closures, detention of minors, violence, xenophobic attitudes and *refoulement* characterise the current treatment of Palestinians from Syria in Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt as these countries continue to violate their obligations under international law.

In Jordan, the border has been closed to Palestinians from Syria while it remains partially open to Syrian refugees. Those Palestinians who do enter, or who entered early on in the conflict, are subject to arbitrary detention and *refoulement*. In Lebanon, Palestinians from Syria are prevented from working in many professions, and have to apply for a work visa through a different and much more expensive procedure than Syrian refugees. The difference between the treatment of Syrian refugees and Palestinians from Syria in Egypt is clear too, with Syrians able to register with UNHCR and thereby benefit from third country resettlement, health care and other assistance. The Government of Egypt has barred UNHCR from registering Palestinians from Syria, who therefore receive little to no help, despite fleeing from the same conflict.

For Syrian refugees, a possibility exists that in the future they will be able to return

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to their country, yet the return of the Palestinian community to Syria is much more complex. The Syrian conflict has caused a rapid deterioration of the material condition of the Palestinian community in Syria which faces additional threats in post-conflict Syria in respect of the possible ability to reintegrate back into society.

Throughout the conflict, schools, health facilities and community centres for Palestinians have been attacked and destroyed both in camp and non-camp settings. The perceived 'heart and soul' of the Palestinian community in Syria, Yarmouk refugee camp, which hosted over 150,000 Palestinians prior to the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, has dwindled to a mere 18,000 people and has been targeted by both regime and

opposition forces. Humanitarian aid had been prevented from entering the camp resulting in 128 deaths from starvation, according to Amnesty International.¹ Despite the reaching of a ceasefire in January 2014, the return of the army to Yarmouk in March once again halted the distribution of aid. As central to the political and commercial life of the Palestinian community in Syria, its demise is representative of the future difficulties of Palestinians in resuming the life they once led in Syria.

Leah Morrison morrison_leah@hotmail.com is a recent graduate from the Master's course in Development and Emergency Practice at Oxford Brookes University. www.brookes.ac.uk

1. www.amnesty.org/en/news/syria-yarmouk-under-siege-horror-story-war-crimes-starvation-and-death-2014-03-10

The mental health of Syrian refugee children and adolescents

Leah James, Annie Sovcik, Ferdinand Garoff and Reem Abbasi

Mental health services can be key to restoring basic psychological functioning and to supporting resilience and positive coping strategies for children, adolescents and adults.

The men, women and children fleeing Syria have commonly been subjected to and/or witnessed torture, kidnappings and massacres. They have been victimised by rape and other forms of sexual violence. Their homes and neighbourhoods have been destroyed. They have been targeted – and seen people killed – by bombs and snipers. They have suffered physical injuries resulting in chronic disability, and had loved ones killed or disappeared.

An assessment of the mental health and psychosocial needs of displaced Syrians in Jordan revealed persistent fear, anger, lack of interest in activities, hopelessness and problems with basic functioning. Of the almost 8,000 individuals who participated in the assessment, 15.1% reported feeling so afraid and 28.4% feeling so angry that nothing could calm them down; 26.3% felt

“so hopeless they did not want to carry on living”; and 18.8% felt “unable to carry out essential activities for daily living because of feelings of fear, anger, fatigue, disinterest, hopelessness or upset”.¹

Many Syrian adults report that the well-being and future potential of their children constitute their greatest source of stress; in light of this, mental health services targeting children are a priority for the community as a whole.

Many adults worry constantly about their children and the impact of the horrors they have experienced. One describes his daughters as “psychologically very affected” by the war – anxious, scared and unable to believe anywhere is safe.² Children asked to draw a ‘safe place’ from their pasts in counselling groups are sometimes

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Syrian refugee children in Adiyaman refugee camp, Turkey.

unable to access any non-violent memories and instead draw the tanks and soldiers that populated their neighbourhoods.

For many Syrian children and adolescents, distress is a product of direct exposure to war-related trauma, challenging family dynamics associated with trauma and displacement, and stressors related to adjusting to life in Jordan. Parents and other family members exposed to traumatic experiences and showing symptoms associated with stress and trauma are more likely to demonstrate poor parenting, including abuse and neglect in some cases.

Syrian children receiving services at the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) commonly express an enormous sense of personal responsibility for supporting and protecting family members, including parents. Some describe “guarding” their families by standing watch by the door, or worrying about how best to comfort their parents when they are distressed. Children may also protect parents by refraining from disclosing their own traumatic experiences and related symptoms. At the same time, many children and adolescents share that they are not made privy to certain family discussions. Children most commonly express frustration and anxiety associated with being left out of discussions

about, for example, safety concerns or the whereabouts and well-being of missing family members, sometimes saying that they are fully aware of circumstances but are made to feel that they should feign innocence in order not to disturb their parents further.

In an effort to facilitate healing and positive coping among Syrian children and their parents, CVT provides mental-health, group and individual counselling and physiotherapy services at its clinics in the urban areas of Amman and Zarqa in Jordan, as well as social work services and parent psychological education regarding common responses to trauma and stress for children.

A primary objective is to facilitate a shift in self-image from passive victim to active survivor who can draw on their experiences to positively affect others. Under CVT’s care, torture and war atrocity survivors recover from psychological and physical symptoms, helping them to successfully regain control of their lives. Clients consistently show improvements in both adaptive functioning and non-symptom indicators, as well as in reduction of symptoms such as those for depression and anxiety. Clinical staff conduct assessments of functionality and symptom measures at intake and after 3,

6, 9 and 12 months of a client completing services. Similar results are true regarding physical pain indicators. When comparing results at discharge to results at intake, an overwhelming majority of clients report a decrease in pain or a decrease in the effect of pain on their activities of daily living.

At the same time, groups focus on building coping skills needed to navigate challenges common to the refugee context and difficult family dynamics. Safety and a caring relationship serve as the foundations for later exploration of traumatic experiences and their

associated emotions (e.g. fear, shame, guilt, loss, sorrow), culminating in an eventual reconnection with self, others and life.

Leah James ljames@cvt.org, Annie Sovcik asovcik@cvt.org and Reem Abbasi rabbasi@cvt.org work for the Center for Victims of Torture. www.cvt.org Ferdinand Garoff ferdinand.garoff@gmail.com is a former Psychotherapist Trainer with CVT in Jordan

1. International Medical Corps, World Health Organization, Jordan Ministry of Health and EMPHNET (July 2013) *Assessment of Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs of Displaced Syrians in Jordan*. <http://tinyurl.com/MHPSS-syrians-in-jordan-2013>

2. Written informed consent for use of his story is on file with the Center for Victims of Torture.

The inside story: internal displacement in Syria

Erin Mooney

With IDPs currently constituting two-thirds of those uprooted by the conflict, the ‘inside story’ of displacement in Syria requires much greater attention.

With nearly 9.5 million people forced to flee because of conflict in Syria, more than two-thirds – a staggering 6.45 million people – are displaced inside the country.¹ Indeed, Syria now is the country with the most IDPs worldwide. Many have been uprooted multiple times. New displacements are ongoing; every minute, one family flees, on average 9,500 people a day.² At least half of the displaced are children.

The UN Human Rights Council’s International Commission of Inquiry has detailed “widespread attacks on civilians” including: murder, summary executions, massacres, detention of civilians including children, systematic torture, rape and other sexual violence, recruitment and use of children in hostilities, enforced disappearance, hostage taking, sniper attacks, chemical weapons attacks against civilians, and targeted attacks on hospitals, medical personnel and journalists – committed with impunity by government forces as well as by non-state armed groups.³ Unsurprisingly, many civilians flee in fear for their lives.

In addition, the Commission speaks of “extensive arbitrary displacement” directly

caused by “indiscriminate and disproportionate aerial bombardment and shelling” of civilian-inhabited areas, coupled with warring parties having failed to fulfil obligations under international humanitarian law to take all possible measures to protect and provide assistance to displaced civilians and to ensure family members are not separated. The Commission also documents cases of the war crime of deliberate displacement by some non-state armed groups, such as issuing public ultimatums to particular ethnic groups in the civilian population to leave or face immediate attack; in several such cases, many civilians who subsequently fled were then abducted at checkpoints, while the property of those who fled was looted and burned.

Fleeing itself thus can be risky, with abuses and attacks continuing en route. Safe access to food, water, shelter, medical care and other essentials is a daily struggle. For example, fewer than 3% of IDPs find shelter in official collective centres set up by the government. The rest live with host families, or in private accommodation for as long as their resources will permit, or in makeshift camps and scattered informal settlements where security risks are rampant.

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Meanwhile, siege warfare – a tactic used by warring parties on all sides of the conflict – means that many civilians (241,000 currently) are literally trapped in their communities, largely cut off from assistance and unable to flee. Indeed, IDPs are a large part of a larger group of 10.8 million people in urgent need of humanitarian assistance inside the country.

An estimated 4.6 million people in need of assistance inside Syria are in what the UN terms “hard-to-reach” areas for humanitarian actors. More than 50 aid workers have been killed since the start of the conflict, including 36 from the Syrian Arab Red Crescent. In addition to the security risks, humanitarian deliveries must pass onerous bureaucratic and administrative hurdles for approval, resulting in critical delays. Once en route, convoys can encounter outright obstruction by warring parties. The UN Emergency Relief Coordinator reported, for example, that it was only after almost two years and more than 20 requests by the UN that food and medical care could be delivered in July 2014 to the 24,000 people living in the besieged town of Madamyiet El-Sham in Rural Damascus; they had not received assistance since October 2012. The World Food Programme (WFP) reached a community of 10,000 people in dire need in Dara’á in July 2014 who had received no external assistance at all since the conflict began in March 2011. Until mid-July 2014, cross-border humanitarian convoys – allowing more direct lines of delivery to persons in need – were not authorised. Meanwhile, requests from the Commission of Inquiry and several other UN human rights experts for access to the country remain pending.

Despite the constraints, aid is getting through when and where it can. For example, WFP aims to deliver food to 3.7 million people monthly, both in government- and opposition-controlled areas. In July 2014 medicines, vaccines and urgently needed medical supplies for more than half a million people were distributed by the World Health Organization, while UNICEF helped 16.5 million people have access to safe water.

Funding remains a challenge; of the US\$2.28 billion appealed for to implement the Syria

Humanitarian Response Plan for 2014, only 30% of required funds had been received by the end of August. Some critical sectors, including protection, shelter and education, are funded at less than 15%.

Until there is an end to the conflict, the already immense number of people (currently 9.5 million people, almost half of the pre-war population of Syria) forced to flee, whether inside or outside Syria, inevitably will continue to rise. The internal dimension of the displacement crisis is particularly significant and it risks becoming even greater also because it is increasingly difficult, especially for Palestine refugees in Syria, to cross into and stay in some neighbouring countries: for example, more than 100 have been deported from Jordan back to war-torn Syria since January 2013.⁴ Moreover, most of the nearly 3 million refugees who have sought asylum in other countries were first displaced internally, en route to crossing a border. For the people forced to flee, the internal and external displacement crises are often intersecting parts of the same story. While much of the attention – of the international community, media, and also researchers – has focused on the very tragic and much more visible external dimension, i.e. the refugee crisis (now the largest in the world), more than twice as many people are displaced **inside** Syria, where they and other civilians remain in extreme peril. Responding effectively to ‘the Syria displacement crisis’ requires a comprehensive approach of ensuring protection for people on both sides of the border.

Erin Mooney erin.d.mooney@gmail.com is Senior Protection Adviser, ProCap, and was deployed to the UN operation in Syria in 2013. She is one of FMR’s International Advisors.

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all figures cited are from the UN and current as of end of August 2014. For regularly updated figures and analysis on the humanitarian situation inside Syria, see www.unocha.org/syria

2. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 14 May 2014. <http://tinyurl.com/IDMC-Syria-every-60-seconds>

3. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry for the Syrian Arab Republic was established by the UN Human Rights Council in August 2011. See their 7th report, 12 February 2014, and 8th report, 27 August 2014, at <http://tinyurl.com/OHCHR-SyriaCommission>

4. Human Rights Watch <http://tinyurl.com/HRW070814-turned-away>

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How the crisis is altering women's roles in Syria

Zerene Haddad

The significance of women as both distributors and recipients has been pivotal to the implementation of humanitarian assistance but also points to the burgeoning of a new social dynamic that has come about as a result of the upheaval caused by the war.

A longstanding concern in Syria is the scarcity of international NGOs physically present inside the country. In part because of this, a significant amount of the humanitarian response to the Syrian conflict has been spearheaded by local organisations and networks of civilians. Out of sheer necessity, Syrian women have become actively involved, transforming themselves into agents of change.

“Our lives were predictable [before]. We all knew the beginning, middle and end of our stories. Then this conflict occurred, and it has turned everything on its head. I can never go back to doing what I did before; I can never be so meek and ordinary,” says a 40-year-old translator and English lecturer who is now responsible for emergency assistance distribution for up to 10,000 families per month in Aleppo. “Now I know Aleppo and Aleppans like never before. This forced interaction with people I would otherwise never have met has changed my whole outlook.”

In besieged areas women also take risks regularly to help smuggle medicine or food past checkpoints as they are able to pass through unchecked by authorities on occasion, although if caught their punishment is severe. Women have become a vital supply-line in these instances, crucial to the survival of other civilians.

The vast majority of the nine million Syrians in need are displaced persons, and the women of these internally displaced families have undergone a complete turnaround of traditional roles within their family and community structures. Women from poorer communities, who were more or less confined to roles within the home, are now often the

only able adults in the home, left to support themselves, their children and elderly persons in their family. For women from rural areas who lived on subsistence farming, their displacement into urban areas has left them not only without their means to daily survival but in an entirely new context where their skills are not sufficient to ensure survival. Women are now involved in activities where they were never seen before, and livelihoods projects have been in high demand in an attempt to provide an alternative income to women using skills they already have.

Within Syria, many children have been out of school for two to three years. Using a mother-to-child centred model, training is being provided to equip mothers with techniques to encourage their children to learn even if they are mostly at home. Many women from rural or lower-income communities are illiterate or only attended primary school and are taking advantage of educational support offered to women as a response to the crisis. Through mothers being enabled to enhance their literacy skills and to be active in their children's education, the development of children who would otherwise lack any learning support structure continues.

Ignorance amongst these women spans more than illiteracy in terms of reading and writing. They are unaware of basic health and hygiene precautions to be taken in poor living conditions that are crucial to ensuring the health of their children and themselves. Prior to the escalation of the conflict, these women were able to rely on a health system that was widely accessible and freely available. However, the near collapse of the health sector in Syria means that a vital link in their lives is now missing. Local organisations are stepping in to fill this gap by providing direct

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services in clinics or medical facilities, as well as by ensuring women are informed about basic hygiene, potential risks to themselves or their families, and the availability of professional health-care assistance.

Although the development of events has led to a shift in gender roles in society, it has not been a total overhaul. In areas where conservative forces have gained control, women's independence has been curtailed.

With a few exceptions, women by and large have not taken up arms in the conflict, yet they have borne much of the brunt of the war

physically, psychologically and materially. The significance of women in resisting the logic of war that at present threatens to engulf Syria is undeniable. Women who have been engaged in humanitarian efforts in one way or another should be active participants in any possible re-initiation of a peace process. Their commitment to surviving the war in a non-violent manner sets them apart as advocates for an inclusive society.

Zerene Haddad zerene.haddad@jrs.net
Regional Advocacy and Communications Officer
for the Jesuit Refugee Service, Middle East and
North Africa. www.jrsmena.org

Protection in Europe for Refugees from Syria – RSC Policy Briefing, September 2014

This report considers the response of European countries to the refugee crisis in the Syrian region. The authors, Cynthia Orchard and Andy Miller, provide an overview of the European reaction in general, brief summaries of the responses of selected countries (Germany, Sweden, Norway, Bulgaria, Greece and Italy), and a more in-depth case study of the UK.

While the authors applaud both the humanitarian efforts to assist refugees and the resettlement that is ongoing, they believe that the primary aim of the

European response – to contain the crisis in the countries neighbouring Syria and to reinforce Europe's borders – is unsustainable. The report recommends that European countries implement a Comprehensive Plan of Action for refugees in the countries neighbouring Syria, comprising three main components: activation of a regional temporary protection regime, expanded resettlement, and the development of other legal routes of entry into European countries.

Online at <http://tinyurl.com/RSC-Syria-PolicyBriefing-2014>

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Nina M Birkeland

Norwegian Refugee
Council

Dawn Chatty

Refugee Studies Centre

Jeff Crisp

Refugees International

Mark Cutts

OCHA

Eva Espinar

University of Alicante

Elena Fiddian-Qasmieh

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Rachel Hastie

Oxfam GB

Lucy Kiama

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of Kenya

Khalid Koser

Geneva Centre for
Security Policy

Erin Mooney

ProCap

Kathrine Starup

Danish Refugee Council

Richard Williams

Independent consultant

Mobility as a solution

Lucas Oesch



www.fmreview.org/syria

International organisations, NGOs and even researchers tend to characterise all Syrians as now found in the neighbouring countries as 'refugees'. While this may reflect the administrative category of those registered with UNHCR, it is not a good reflection of the diverse range of their realities. Not all those who have gone to Syria's neighbours are registered, nor do all these people regard themselves as refugees.

Moreover, some of these 'crisis migrants' in fact move back and forth between Syria and the neighbouring countries. This allows them to keep a potential distance between themselves and the violence in their country and at the same time to pursue other economic, cultural or educational objectives.

The conventional 'durable solutions' on offer for forced migrants scarcely fit the mobility strategies that some individuals use which require them to be able to continue circulating between several locations, including their country of origin. The Syrian urban middle-class illustrates this point well. A number of them move backwards and forwards between Damascus and Beirut, where one can meet a large Syrian population.

Alongside migrant workers and an elite group who have long been in the Lebanese capital, there are now members of the Syrian urban middle class; few would have been there before the crisis, and if it were not for the crisis they would not be there now.

While avoiding the fighting is one of their motives, they also see this as a way of pursuing activities that are no longer sustainable in Syria alone.

Some have followed their professional environment – teachers their students, actors the casting opportunities, and artists their audiences, and so on. Others have set up small businesses or off-shoots of businesses they have in Damascus. They have not 'left' Damascus for Beirut but 'circulate', maintaining some of their activities in Syria, whether or not that includes their family home. For some of these migrants, the effect is not a new phenomenon but rather an extension of their movements before the crisis, which might have been from one area of Syria to another.

Even if the numbers of such people among the Syrians currently in Beirut are not great, they represent a significant and often unrecognised phenomenon. A 'mobile and multi-located life' should be seen as a possibility when considering the options for Syrian forced migrants. So far Lebanon has adopted a relatively open-door policy that allows this possibility, while other countries have set up barriers to such movements.

Lucas Oesch lucas.oesch@graduateinstitute.ch is a postdoctorate fellow of the Swiss national science foundation (SNSF) based at the Groupe de recherches et d'études sur la Méditerranée et le Moyen Orient (GREMMO) of Lyon. www.gremmo.mom.fr



Wissam Al Jazairy

A Night In Damascus, by Syrian artist Wissam Al Jazairy. www.wissamaljazairy.daportfolio.com