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Views of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon on Displacement, Conditions of Return, and Coexistence



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RESEARCH REPORT

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Executive Summary

Armed conflict in Syria has displaced millions of people inside and outside of the country. When a political settlement to the conflict is eventually reached, the process of refugees returning to Syria and rebuilding their lives, relationships, and communities will be long and complex. However, discussions with displaced persons about return and coexistence can begin now, even in the face of ongoing violence and displacement.

This research report is based on interviews with refugees living in Lebanon and representatives of local and international organizations in both Lebanon and Turkey working on issues related to Syrian displacement. The report provides an important window into the experiences of refugees in Lebanon as well as their concerns, expectations, and priorities regarding conditions of return and coexistence.

The research findings highlight the harms experienced by Syrian refugees at both the individual and collective levels, including the loss of loved ones, houses, property, and businesses in Syria and difficult economic situations and discrimination in Lebanon. Displacement has had devastating impacts on families and led to broad social fragmentation, including sectarian and political divisions and rifts between those who left Syria and those who remained. The effects of conflict and displacement will be generational, as refugee children have been traumatized by their exposure to violence and largely deprived of education.

The findings also capture common priorities among Syrian refugees in Lebanon for return. Most do want to return, not just to Syria but to the regions and communities where they previously lived. Common preconditions for return include safety and security; shelter, livelihoods, and the physical reconstruction of homes and infrastructure; compensation or restitution for the loss of property and housing; the provision of education for children and youth; psychosocial support; and family reunification.

One positive development among refugees in Lebanon is that many youth engaged with local and international civil society organizations have acquired new skills and an openness to people with different religious and political beliefs that one day may contribute to rebuilding relationships in Syria.

Views about the potential for coexistence and justice vary widely. Some refugees believe that Syrians will be ready to rebuild ties once the conflict ends, while others are less optimistic. Some believe that justice is necessary for return, while others think it unlikely to occur. The research makes it clear that the restoration of dignity will play an important role in establishing the necessary conditions for refugee return and coexistence.

While return will ultimately depend on a political resolution to the Syrian conflict, several steps can be taken now that are likely to have implications for return and coexistence in the future. These include:

- 1) Integrate the views of refugees into discussions and policies about conditions of return, as participatory processes are more likely to lead to context-specific interventions.
- 2) Support community-level interventions, like the provision of psychosocial support, that can be implemented now and may facilitate return and coexistence in the future.
- 3) Address sexual and gender-based violence, women's exploitation, and child marriage by empowering women, educating young girls, and raising awareness of such abuses among families.
- 4) Provide educational support to minimize the risk of the next generation being characterized by missed schooling, trauma, and violence.
- 5) Integrate property and land restitution into discussions of displacement settlement processes in the interest of future social cohesion.
- 6) Promote interaction between different groups and communities to reduce and prevent further sectarian and political divisions.
- 7) Support further research on Syrian refugee experiences and views on return and coexistence in countries such as Turkey and Jordan as well as in Europe.

I. Introduction

Since 2011, armed conflict in Syria has led to the death of hundreds of thousands of people and brought physical and psychological harm to many more. Violations of international humanitarian and human rights law have been systematic and widespread. Violence and destruction have uprooted millions, both within and outside the country, leaving almost half of the country's population of 24 million displaced, internally or externally.

The conflict in Syria, in many ways an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, has devastated communities and fractured the entire society. If and when a political settlement to the conflict is reached, it will present an enormous task of peacebuilding and reconstruction. For refugees and internally displaced persons returning potentially back to their own communities, the process of rebuilding lives and relationships—among individuals and groups, and between citizens and state institutions—will be long and complex.

Because the conflict, atrocities, and massive displacement are ongoing, Syria presents an extremely challenging context when thinking about reestablishing social, political, and economic ties. When this process eventually begins, however, it will be imperative that the experiences and views of victims be strongly taken into account. The context makes it clear that the return of displaced populations will be an integral element of achieving both coexistence and justice. The different harms and losses that forced people to leave their homes and then impacted their lives while away from home, as well as the resulting justice claims, will likely have an important bearing on victims' ability to build or rebuild relationships in ways that may help to prevent the recurrence of conflict.¹

When a political settlement to the conflict is eventually reached, the process of returning to Syria and rebuilding lives, relationships, and communities will be long and complex. Discussions with displaced persons about return and coexistence can begin now, however, even in the face of ongoing violence and displacement.

The participation of displaced persons and other victims in discussions about what return will look like in Syria is a process that can begin now, even in the face of the challenges presented by ongoing violence and displacement. This research project is part of that process. It is based on interviews with 37 refugees living in Lebanon and representatives of 23 local and international organizations working on issues related to displacement and conflict in Lebanon and Syria.

As this research relied on a relatively small sample size and was limited to refugees, not the internally displaced, its conclusions should not be generalized to the experiences of all displaced Syrians. Nevertheless, it provides an important window into the experiences of Syrian refugees in Lebanon as well as their concerns, expectations, and priorities regarding future return, which suggest policies and interventions that could support such processes.

It is hoped that further research of this kind could be expanded to cover Syrian refugees living in Jordan and Turkey, where even greater numbers have fled.

Reconciliation (moussâlaha) is a sensitive term among Syrians, as it is commonly associated with the interests of the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. It is not a prominent part of public discourse. While the notion of reconciliation provides part of the conceptual framework for this research project, the term itself was not used by the researchers during interviews unless the respondents brought it up themselves. A number of different Arabic terms have meanings related to the “building or rebuilding of relationships,” and the term *coexistence (ta’ayush)* was among those most commonly used by respondents.

The findings of this research project highlight the harms experienced by Syrian refugees at both the individual and collective levels, including loss of family members, properties, and businesses in Syria as well as experiences of economic hardship and discrimination in Lebanon. Displacement has had devastating impacts on families, with relatives dispersed throughout the region and Europe. It has also resulted in broad social fragmentation, as significant sectarian and political divisions and the potential for demographic redistribution have emerged. There are also, importantly, potential divisions between those who have left Syria and those who remained, as

feelings of resentment and betrayal are expected. In addition, the effects of the conflict and displacement will be generational, as refugee children are being traumatized by their exposure to violence and deprived of education due to the obstacles (including costs and discrimination) of trying to attend school in Lebanon.



Syrian Refugee in Lebanon, 2014. (plus8gmt/flickr)

The findings also capture common priorities among refugees for any future return to Syria. Notably, almost all refugees interviewed would like to return to their country and, more specifically, to the regions and communities where they had lived. Indeed, many have chosen to stay in Lebanon because of the anticipated advantages of being close to Syria for returning one day. Common priorities

for return include safety and security, which would depend on a political settlement that brings demilitarization and stability; shelter, livelihoods, and the physical reconstruction of homes and infrastructure; compensation for the destruction of property and housing; the provision of education, given missed schooling; psychosocial support; and family reunification, given the widespread fragmentation of families.

Views about the potential for rebuilding social ties, or the notion of coexistence itself, varied widely among interviewees. Some believed that Syrians would be ready to rebuild ties once the conflict ends, while others were less optimistic about the viability of coexisting, particularly in cities. Refugees also have disparate views on the need for accountability for the violations that led to their displacement. Some see prosecutions as unrealistic or potentially destabilizing, while others see them as a key condition for return and the rebuilding of relationships.

A lack of confidence in both the Syrian judicial system and the international community, however, would lead many to look to local tribal courts or other local mediators to promote coexistence. Many refugees referred to religion when they spoke about the potential for justice, forgiveness, and coexistence.

One positive development among refugees in Lebanon is that many youth have engaged with local and international civil society organizations through employment and volunteer opportunities, thereby acquiring skills related to activism, assistance, mediation, conflict resolution, and psychological support, which could eventually contribute to coexistence when they return to Syria one day. Many youth also felt that their interaction with Lebanese society, which exposed them to new ideas and lifestyles, had made them more politically open and aware. They were learning not just new skills but developing greater acceptance of those with different religious or political views.

A common theme in the interviews conducted for this research project was refugees' sense of loss and need to restore their *dignity* (*karama*), an important concept in Arabic and Islamic culture. The loss of family members and homes, the difficult journeys they have made, and the humiliation and discrimination they face as refugees—such experiences left people feeling like they had lost their dignity. The restoration of dignity will play an important role in any future return process in Syria after the conflict and displacement ends. It should be an important element of rebuilding relationships in post-war Syria, between people, between groups, and between citizens and state institutions. Refugees know that this will be a long-term process and that it will mean creating a different society than the one that existed before the conflict.

II. Definition of Terms

The term *reconciliation* refers to processes of building or rebuilding relationships, often after conflict, repression, and the violation of human rights. Reconciliation can occur at the individual and interpersonal levels, between groups and between citizens and institutions. *Horizontal reconciliation* usually refers to building or rebuilding relations between individuals or groups, while *vertical reconciliation* refers to building or rebuilding relations between citizens and the state. Reconciliation can range from “thin” or less demanding forms (in which relations are based on coexistence but with little or no trust, respect, or shared values) to “thick” or more demanding forms (in which relations are based on trust, respect, and shared values, and may contribute to the restoration of dignity of those whose rights have been violated).

For this research, interviewers did not introduce the term reconciliation (*moussâlaha*) in questions with Syrian interviewees, instead using the more neutral concept of *coexistence* (*ta’ayosh*), which invokes ideas of conciliation and appeasement in light of the divisions and tensions that have arisen from the conflict. The term reconciliation hence only appears in the study when it was used directly and unprompted by the respondents themselves. The words *moujâlassa* (“the act of sitting together”) and *moujâyara* (“the act of living side by side”) were also used throughout the interviews by respondents. Other controversial or misleading concepts avoided by the interviewers unless used first by respondents included *moussâmaha* (forgiveness), *moussafât* (resolution), *moussâlama* (concord), *tardiya* (pleasing), *taswiya* (settlement), and *tatbi’* (normalization).

The term *transitional justice* refers to justice-focused processes that societies undertake in the aftermath of large-scale human rights violations, normally in the relatively recent past. It is both the scale of the violations and the fragility of the context that distinguishes these efforts from justice and human rights promotion more generally. Transitional justice processes aim to confront impunity, provide redress to victims, recognize the dignity of victims as citizens and rights bearers, restore trust in state institutions, and prevent the recurrence of violations. They may also contribute to broader objectives, such as restoration of the rule of law, good governance, democratization, peacebuilding and conflict prevention, and reconciliation.

In Arabic, the term transitional justice is referred to as *adâla intiqâliya*, the exact translation of the English; it was not used directly by the researchers but left for the respondents to mention if they chose to. In Arabic, the term accountability is translated as *muhâsaba*, which does not capture the full scope of the English term, restricting it to its punitive aspect. In order to expand its meaning, *muhâsaba* can be joined with *musâ’ala*, which refers to the

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act of questioning authority. During the research, only the term *muhāsaba* was directly used by the researchers, but the word *musā'ala* was mentioned by many respondents.

Displacement occurs when a person or group has been forced or compelled to flee or leave their home or place of habitual residence. The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a *refugee* as someone who flees across a border to avoid persecution, but a broader definition has emerged since then, as reflected in the 1969 Organization of African Unity Refugee Convention and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, as someone trying to avoid the effects of armed conflicts, situations of generalized violence, or human rights violations. *Durable solutions* to displacement include voluntary return, local integration, and resettlement in a third location or country.²

III. Methodology

This study is based on three sets of qualitative interviews with 37 Syrian refugees in Lebanon, 28 representatives of 8 international and 5 local organizations working closely with refugees in Lebanon and/or Turkey, and 12 representatives of 10 Syrian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) located outside of Syria. All three sets of interviews were conducted in or from Lebanon between January 17 and February 14, 2017, by two research consultants, with support from staff in ICTJ's Beirut and New York offices. A specific list of open-ended questions was used for each set of interviews, allowing for cross-referencing different views on similar topics.³

Refugee Population

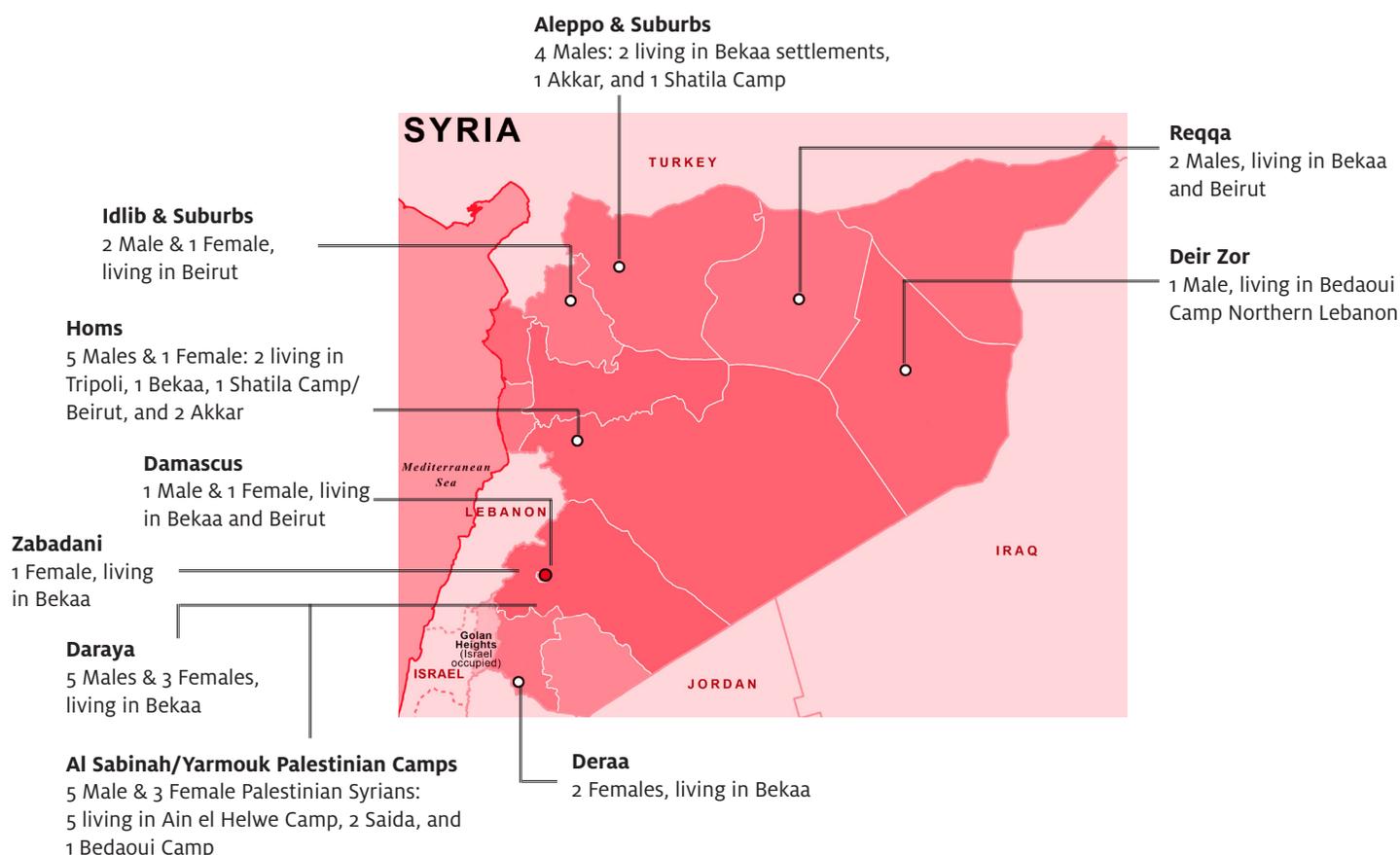
In total, 37 in-depth individual interviews were conducted with Syrian refugees in various regions of Lebanon, both urban and rural settings, and both inside and outside of refugee camps/settlements in Akkar, Beirut, Bekaa, and northern and southern Lebanon.⁴ The sample included a wide range of profiles in terms of background, gender, religion, age, place of origin in Syria, family relations, and socioeconomic status. While this sample is not fully representative of Syrian displaced communities in Lebanon or throughout the world, its diversity and rigorous methodology allowed the identification of common views, priorities, and concerns related to return and coexistence.

In total, 37 in-depth individual interviews were conducted with Syrian refugees in various regions of Lebanon, both urban and rural settings, and both inside and outside of refugee camps/settlements in Akkar, Beirut, Bekaa, and northern and southern Lebanon.

To reach the Syrian community living in Lebanon, the researchers relied on the experience of ICTJ consultants and staff who, having worked in Lebanon since the beginning of the conflict, had developed an extensive network that included those working on the refugee crisis. Persons willing to be interviewed were identified and accessed, and a sample based on a set of criteria was constructed. The objectives and context of the study were explained to those who were contacted, and contacts were given clear confirmation that their answers would remain anonymous. Before starting the interview, as needed, researchers reexplained the purpose of the study.

For most respondents, this was the first time they had participated in such an interview (35 out of 37 respondents). A large number of interviewees thanked the researchers for the conversation, stating how much better they felt after sharing their stories and thoughts on important matters related to their future and the future of their country.

Map 1: Places of Origin of Refugee Interviewees



Of respondents, 12 were female and 25 male (see Graph 1 in Appendix). Regarding religion, 34 were Sunni Muslim, 2 were Christian, and 1 was Kurdish Sunni (see Graph 2). Ages ranged from 21 to 55: 9 were between 21 and 25 years old; 16 between 26 and 35 years old; 8 between 36 and 45; and 4 were 45 years of age or older (see Graph 3). A majority were single (19 respondents), some were divorced, and some were married; most married respondents had 6 to 8 children (see Graph 4).

Respondents' places of origin within Syria varied (see Map 1 above). While most interviewees said they had no particular affiliation with the different sides in the ongoing conflict, some sided with the opposition while others showed pro-regime orientations. Respondents' socioeconomic status ranged from lower-income to higher-income (see Graph 5). The study included 7 Syrian Palestinians from various camps in the suburbs of Damascus (Al Sabinah Camps and Yarmouk).

The list of questions contained different sections that addressed the complexities of refugee experiences, circumstances, and views on the future. The researchers established a climate of trust and engaged with each person in a systematic conversation covering seven main areas:

- Events/experiences/circumstances that caused the respondent (and those with him/her, including family, if applicable) to leave their community as well as the losses they have suffered

- Conditions that would create an opportunity to return to Syria
- Types of assistance needed in order to return
- Types of changes/divisions that have occurred to Syrian society/social fabric/communities
- Meaning of coexistence
- Meaning of justice
- The role of external actors in supporting coexistence and justice processes in Syria

The interviews took an open approach to questions about coexistence and justice, rather than asking what role transitional justice or specific measures (such as prosecutions, truth seeking, reparations, or reform) might play in return and rebuilding processes. This was done to avoid leading with pre-determined ideas, measures, or proposals and to elicit the respondents' own ideas.

Interviews generally lasted one hour, but some lasted up to two hours if the respondent wished to elaborate on their views in more depth. Interview locations differed. Some were conducted in private homes, others in settlement tents. Some respondents felt comfortable enough to be interviewed in a more public place, like a university or café. Offices of local NGOs also served as meeting points as a matter of discretion and practicality.

The study encountered some methodological challenges. Overall, the limited time and resources available did not allow for a larger sample to be interviewed, especially given the time needed to contact and brief interviewees and arrange interviews. In addition, some areas of Lebanon were not covered in the sample, like Mount Lebanon, where Lebanese host communities are known to be more hostile to Syrian refugees (although stories of abuse and discrimination were certainly gathered from other areas). Additionally, the religious faiths of the respondents gave most weight to Sunni views, introducing a limitation to the study regarding the perspectives of Alawi or Shi'a or other minorities, such as Christian and Druze populations. Finally, while strictly using an established set of questions ensures rigor and consistency, it also means relying on the respondent's willingness to answer those questions in some detail; a few respondents gave only their initial impressions and thoughts.

Local and International Organizations

Interviews were conducted with representatives of eight international and five local organizations assisting Syrian refugees in various ways (see Table 2). Questions for this set of interviews focused on five main areas:

- Refugee experiences of displacement and the type of protection and assistance provided by local and international actors
- Main concerns/expectations/priorities of Syrian displaced communities regarding return processes
- Types of support needed to help refugees to return and (re)build their communities
- Mechanisms in place to integrate the concerns and priorities of refugees into ongoing and future processes of conflict resolution, return, justice, and (re)establishing relationships

- Best ways to support processes of (re)establishing relationships and justice within communities returning to Syria

Syrian Civil Society Organizations

The third component of the study comprised interviews with representatives of Syrian NGOs located outside of Syria. In total, 10 interviews were conducted in person in Lebanon or via Skype with organizations in Turkey. Questions for this group addressed 5 main areas:

- The extent of the damage done by the conflict and displacement to the social fabric of Syrian society
- The extent of the support needed to (re)establish social ties on the potential return of Syrian displaced communities
- Community-based efforts to address or minimize the damage caused by the conflict
- Notions of coexistence and justice
- Potential ways for external actors to support communities and groups engaged in return processes

IV. Background on the Syrian Refugee Situation

The armed conflict in Syria since 2011 has caused the deaths of more than 400,000 persons, according to an estimate by UN Special Envoy Staffan de Mistura,⁵ and wounded hundreds of thousands more. Civilians have paid a high toll in the war, particularly women,⁶ children,⁷ and minority groups like the Yazidis.⁸ Repeated, systematic violations of international humanitarian law have been perpetrated on a massive scale. Indiscriminate attacks have been carried out against civilians, with extensive use of air strikes, including the use of barrel bombs by the Syrian army.⁹ Air strikes have also been conducted by military protagonists such as France, Russia, Turkey, and the United States. Mortar shells, mostly used by rebel and Islamist radical groups, have also targeted civilians, while medical and rescue services have been targeted by all parties to the conflict.

In August 2013, chemical weapons were used for the first time in the conflict, against the Al Ghouta locality, causing the deaths of hundreds—some claim thousands—of civilians.¹⁰ By March 2016, reports indicated that nearly 1,500 persons had been killed in chemical attacks throughout Syria,¹¹ while additional victims will be added to this figure with the Khan Sheikhun chemical attack of early April 2017.¹² The use of torture and inhuman treatment has also been widely documented by diverse organizations. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has reported that “massive and systematised violence, including the killing of detainees in official and makeshift detention centres, has taken place out of sight, far from the raging battlefield”¹³ by regime authorities and non-state armed groups in different parts of the country. Recently, Amnesty International reported that “between 2011 and 2015 . . . as many as 13,000 people, most of them civilians believed to be opposed to the government, were hanged in secret at Saydnaya [Prison].”¹⁴

The magnitude of atrocities has resulted in the displacement of up to 7 million people internally and another 4.3 million people to neighboring countries, mainly Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan. Over 1 million refugees have reached other asylum countries in Western and Northern Europe.

The magnitude of these atrocities has resulted in the massive displacement of up to 7 million people internally and another 4.3 million people to neighboring countries, mainly Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan.¹⁵ Over 1 million refugees have reached other asylum countries in Western and Northern Europe (principally Germany and Sweden), endangering their lives crossing the Mediterranean Sea and enduring horrific conditions on the road through the Balkans.¹⁶ Many asylum seekers have reached European countries but remain in camps or without official refugee or asylum status, while many others have been returned to Turkey.

The enormous population movement within and out of Syria has devastated local communities in Syria, shifted demographic balances, and destroyed a great portion of the economy. As such, the humanitarian needs have

reached unprecedented levels, with local first responders and humanitarian organizations, including UN agencies, facing immense challenges in addressing the crisis.

At nearly 2.9 million,¹⁷ Turkey now hosts the largest community of displaced Syrians in the world, mainly in the Southeastern parts of the country, where 25 official refugee camps have been established.¹⁸ There is also a large presence in Istanbul and Ankara. Until 2013, Turkey applied a “generous open-door policy,”¹⁹ but then gradually restricted entry. In January 2016, it introduced a strict visa regime for Syrian nationals arriving by air or sea.²⁰ In March 2016, the Turkish government and the European Union adopted a controversial agreement for Turkey to take back Syrians who had reached Greece illegally in return for the resettlement in Europe of an equal number of Syrian refugees from Turkey as well as billions of Euros in aid and other EU commitments to Turkey.²¹

Since the beginning of the conflict, Jordan has also allowed displaced Syrians to enter its territory. More than 656,000 Syrians are registered as refugees there, according to UNHCR.²² While the majority live in urban areas, mostly in the central and northern governorates, close to 80,000 live in the Zaatari Camp and almost 54,000 in the Azraq Camp.²³ The large influx of people, however, led to growing strains on local services and infrastructure.²⁴ In 2013, Jordanian authorities closed their borders,²⁵ and passed an “encampment policy” on Syrian refugees who leave their camps without following the proper “bailout” process,²⁶ thus creating considerable protection concerns for Syrian refugees and stranding several thousands at the border with Syria. In tandem, the socioeconomic conditions of Syrians living in Jordan have deteriorated rapidly, with 70 percent of registered Syrian refugees today living under the poverty line.²⁷



Refugees arriving in Lebanon may be forced to live in cellars, stables, garages, and even vacant lots. (Sam Tarling/Caritas Internationalis)

Lebanon hosts the highest number of Syrian refugees per capita globally. They account for almost a quarter of the total population of Lebanon, with a little over a million UNHCR-registered Syrians (roughly 235,000 households), with the following geographical distribution: Bekaa 35.7 percent, Greater Beirut area 27.7 percent, northern Lebanon 25 percent, and southern Lebanon 11.6 percent.²⁸ Overwhelmed by the rapidly growing influx of Syrian refugees into its territory, the Lebanese government shifted from a passive stance in 2011–2012 to a complex, expensive, and overly bureaucratic mechanism for Syrians to formalize their legal stay in Lebanon in 2015.²⁹ This new policy, although technically in compliance with the international legal principle of non-refoulement (or no expelling or returning of a refugee to the “frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened”), actually increased the vulnerability of refugees, as most have not been able to comply with the new legal framework and became exposed to arrest, abuse, exploitation, and extortion.³⁰ They have continued to endure harsh living conditions.³¹

V. Experiences and Concerns of Refugees

The situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon speaks to a set of specific experiences, concerns, and visions about the future. It has to be underlined that, given the different circumstances in the three host countries mentioned above (Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey), refugees' concerns and experiences reflect these different contexts and realities. In addition, the diverse profiles of the respondents who participated in the study means there are variations in their stories depending on factors such as place of origin in Syria, experience of persecution, and place of settlement.³² The findings also differ according to the respondent's level of integration in Lebanese society as well as their social class, gender, and age. The most vulnerable among the refugees were the Palestinian refugees from Syria whose situation is particularly precarious in Lebanon.

Harms, Losses, and Vulnerability

The refugees interviewed for this research reported experiencing a wide range of harms and losses as a result of conflict and displacement, including the loss of loved ones, the loss of property and businesses, religious persecution, and discrimination. Most respondents suffered the loss of loved ones and had to decide how to deal with it in a context of serious instability and insecurity.

The refugees interviewed in Beirut, who live in better economic conditions than those living outside the capital in camps or small houses relying on the United Nations and international nongovernmental groups for aid, have experienced mainly material damages related to loss of property and businesses. With few exceptions, most respondents in Beirut were relatively well integrated into Lebanese society, many of them students, activists, and artists. Only one respondent in Beirut stated that he had had friends killed, and others kidnapped and still missing.³³ Another reported that his mother had died after suffering from depression and finding out that the Nusra Front fighters had occupied their houses and lands.³⁴

Many refugees both in and outside of Beirut are fearful of religious persecution. One Syrian activist with a Sunni father and an Alawi mother had to flee Idlib because of “social pressure and harassment due to religious practice.”³⁵ Nusra Front members had seized their home and properties “considering [them] infidels [*kuffar*].”³⁶ Another interviewee from the suburbs of Idlib stressed the ongoing threat from the same faction if he or his brothers were to return to the area, as their “blood can be legitimately shed.”³⁷ A Syrian Christian respondent also spoke of “threats to his family based on religion and social marginalization.”³⁸

Those from Homs had seen their homes destroyed in bombings, while those from Raqqa and Idlib had seen their belongings and houses seized by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Nusra Front fighters. Refugees from Daraya escaped massacres and harsh repression, given that it was a “revolutionary town” that the regime suppressed strongly.³⁹ “Being from Daraya makes you a target,” said one. “We were hunted like rabbits.”⁴⁰ Another

refugee reported that after he had fled Daraya he was arbitrarily arrested in Damascus and tortured for three months just because he was from that area.⁴¹

Most of those living outside Beirut had suffered the loss of loved ones, in addition to losing their homes and sometimes land properties.⁴² All those interviewed in the Bekaa had lost relatives, sometimes more than one, due to bombings, snipers, or other military actions by the Syrian Army, the Free Syrian Army, or other armed groups. One interviewee lost an uncle who was detained in regime jails and another who was killed by the Free Syrian Army. As a result of this trauma, she tried to take her own her life.⁴³ Other loved ones had been killed by stray bullets. One interviewee recounted how he had escaped death after being arrested at a checkpoint and tortured for days. He was shot in the cheek but luckily the bullet did not hit his brain or spine: “I managed to survive this, but I can still feel the pain from the torture to this day.”⁴⁴

Sometimes security risks followed the refugee communities into their new environments, especially Palestinian camps, as security situations can deteriorate depending on local factors. Recent examples include armed clashes in Ain El Helwe,⁴⁵ Baddaoui,⁴⁶ and Burj Al Barajneh,⁴⁷ where Palestinian casualties were reported. Such dangers come on top of the difficult and dangerous journeys and losses most respondents have experienced. Respondents reported that they had had to walk long distances to reach Lebanon, with no assistance, while enduring harassment and exploitation. Many had to pay sums of money to cross from one military checkpoint to another. Many refugees are now living in informal settlements scattered across Lebanon,⁴⁸ in very poor conditions.⁴⁹ Many in the camps said that they had registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees but that not everyone actually had access to aid.

A common experience of all interviewees, whether integrated into Lebanese society or vulnerable, was facing discrimination from Lebanese.⁵⁰ Many Lebanese accuse refugees of endangering their livelihoods and the national economy, although studies have shown that the level of poverty in regions hosting informal Syrian settlements in the Lebanese countryside has actually decreased.⁵¹

It is difficult for Syrian refugees to find employment within Lebanon, as national legislation imposes very strict conditions for engaging in professional activity. Most labor unions are closed to non-Lebanese, and those that allow foreign members, like the Artists’ Union, have very expensive membership fees. Unlike Lebanese, foreign students must pay very high registration costs to enter public universities, barring the way to higher education for many young Syrians interviewed. Some found less expensive institutes or private universities in their area of residence to acquire some formal higher education. Most Syrians end up working in the “grey economy,” as the obstacles to working in the formal sector are so great.



Syrian refugees in Lebanon, February 22, 2012. (Pieter Stockmans)

Young refugees are allowed to study but not to work after they earn a degree. Unable to enter numerous professions, many young Syrians interviewed work for local civil society groups and international organizations.

All respondents described the loss of dignity as one of the most tragic outcomes of their displacement. One respondent, a tribal sheikh, explained how “dignity is more important than money,”⁵² yet it “was greatly undermined in Lebanon.”⁵³ He reported that he was charged a double fare for a ride in a commuter van. When he asked why he was charged extra, the driver answered, “Because you’re Syrian.” This respondent summarized the Syrian refugee situation in this way: “When a camel has fallen, it attracts many knives [*al jamalou, hîn yaqa’ ketrou sakâkîno*].”⁵⁴

Struggling to make ends meet, Syrians in Lebanon, in particular those of the middle class, have endured a drastic drop in the social ladder, putting considerable stress on family and social ties, both among Syrians and within Lebanese communities.

“Kindness,” “love,” and “affection” were among the things respondents said they had lost in the war. “We lost so much: kindness, love, morality,” stressed a man living in a settlement in the Bekaa.⁵⁵ “We lost our kindness, our neighbors, our lives, our lifestyle,” stated a woman living in the Bekaa.⁵⁶ “We have lost the Syrian family,” asserted a young man living in the same area.⁵⁷ “We have been deprived of our society, our extended family . . . One would drown his neighbor to save himself,” said another man,⁵⁸ suggesting a shift in priorities to basic needs, such as shelter, food, and water, over the once important safeguarding of the social fabric. Another respondent compared the abuses being committed against Syrians to “what happened to the Palestinians before us.”⁵⁹

All respondents described the loss of dignity as one of the most tragic outcomes of their displacement. One respondent, a tribal sheikh, explained how “dignity is more important than money,” yet it “was greatly undermined in Lebanon.”

Experiences Affected by Gender and Age

Gender and age were factors shaping the concerns and experiences of interviewees. Most young male interviewees, even those who were married with children, reported that they left Syria to avoid military conscription, as two years of military service is required of men aged 18 to 45; married men are not exempt. As the conflict worsened and the losses endured by the Syrian Army grew, the Syrian authorities increased their efforts to fight desertion and draft dodging.⁶⁰

In some cases, the fact that conscription was forced was not appreciated by the Free Syrian Army, ISIS, or the Nusra Front, which would take revenge against the families of those conscripted, compelling them to flee for their lives. In other cases, ISIS and the Nusra Front would offer people sums of money to enroll in their groups and support them in battle, sometimes leading to situations in which two brothers from the same family were fighting against each other, creating enmity and rifts within the family. To avoid this, many young men left the country. But they also reported that sometimes entire villages would be targeted for conscription by rebel groups. Emptying villages of men has been one of the devastating consequences of the war.

Some families fled out of concern for the safety of their young daughters, as they feared they would be victims of sexual violence, assault, rape, kidnapping, or forced marriage. One respondent reported that her sister had been kidnapped by Nusra Front fighters and forced to marry one of them.⁶¹ In order to see her, she had had to meet her in a place where young women of different nationalities were detained to serve as “wives” for combatants.

Some young women who were divorced or widowed were compelled to flee the country without their children, especially when the family-in-law or the ex-husband, who retain legal custody of children in such cases, refused to grant them visitation or custody rights. This is an issue pertaining to traditions (especially in rural areas) that force

women to marry at a very young age with minimal family rights. From the young women who were interviewed, it was clear that early marriage is common in Syria. Nevertheless, the situation is worse for refugees, with poverty forcing some parents to marry their daughters as early as age 12 so that they do not have to provide them with food, schooling, and other necessities. “It’s one less mouth to feed,” some would say. However, “one mouth” would often come back as “two mouths,” as many of the girls return to their parents divorced and pregnant, as related by interviewees.

Some parents explained that they planned to send their daughters (but not sons) to Damascus to pass official exams, because the Syrian curriculum is different from the Lebanese one and does not allow refugees to pass the baccalaureate or other Lebanese exams in order to enter university. A Syrian Palestinian explained that his children “go to school through a Council of Middle Eastern Churches that helps Palestinians. When the time comes for the baccalaureate, they are driven to Damascus to pass their official exams and brought back to Saida.”⁶² As for young men, they cannot risk crossing the border for fear of being arrested by authorities or kidnapped by Islamist extremists; many stated that they are “wanted” by ISIS or the Nusra Front.

Experiences of Syrian Palestinian Refugees

Palestinians represented the most vulnerable category of respondents. Already having been refugees and settled with their families for decades in Syria, all of them asserted that they had lived in “dignity” and considered Syria their home country, even though they had lived in camps (Yarmouk or Al Sabinah) and did not hold Syrian citizenship. They had enjoyed free education for their children and access to free health-care services, and they had been allowed to work. The double refugee status for Palestinians (*vis-à-vis* both Syria and Lebanon), however, made their experiences and daily lives even harsher. They were compelled to leave Syria because of the precarious political positions of their various leaders in the ongoing conflict, which provoked local retaliation and persecution. They fled their camps in Syria, while relatives, friends, and loved ones who stayed behind had to endure siege, hunger, and bomb strikes.⁶³

All interviewees of Palestinian descent, with no exception, had lived through the tragic loss of relatives to bomb strikes, torture, or gun battles. Their houses, shops, and businesses had been reduced to rubble.⁶⁴ One man had lost all of his cousins in Sabinah in bombings.⁶⁵ A woman reported that her brother had been missing since 2013, but her family “doesn’t dare to ask about his whereabouts.”⁶⁶ One man was shot as he was riding a bus that came under direct fire: “Seven people were killed in the minibus, and I was shot three times in the leg.”⁶⁷

All interviewees of Palestinian descent, with no exception, had lived through the tragic suffering of losing relatives to bomb strikes, torture, or gun battles. Their houses, shops, and businesses had been reduced to rubble.

Many of the 50,000 Syrian Palestinians who have fled to Lebanon have found refuge in Palestinian camps, but they are generally treated as an inferior category than Syrian refugees, thus suffering worse discrimination, “stripping them of the little dignity [they] had left.” The only services they benefit from is the monthly aid (pension/allocation) provided by the UN Relief and Works Agency to pay the rent and feed their families. Like Syrian refugees, Palestinians struggle to find jobs. But if they are lucky enough to work, they also face abuse and exploitation, as most of the Palestinians who worked reported never being paid fully for their labor and being regularly denied any pay at all.

Traditionally, the Syrian labor force included only a small proportion of women; however, given harsh living conditions in Lebanon, Palestinian women have also entered the workforce, to help provide basic necessities for

their families.⁶⁸ They feared that their husbands, brothers, or sons would be arrested by Lebanese authorities while crossing checkpoints.⁶⁹ Furthermore, Syrian Palestinian refugees in particular complained about very expensive health-care services and inhumane treatment by hospitals administrators, who refused to surrender dead bodies to relatives for burial if fees were not paid. One interviewee reported that his wife's life was put at risk because he could not afford to pay for an operation for her following a miscarriage.⁷⁰ The Palestinian community tries to cope with these issues through community assistance and private donations.

Facing a high level of discrimination, Palestinian communities reported that they could not count on any assistance from their official diplomatic representation in Lebanon or local Palestinian factions in the camps, making it even harder for them to envisage what kind of future awaits them.

VI. Social Impacts of Displacement and Conflict

Armed conflict and displacement have had a significant impact on the Syrian social fabric, impacting families, local traditions, demography, and relations between communities. While some youth have engaged with civil society, developing skills and views that may be useful for future coexistence in Syria, refugee children are still being deprived of education and exposed to violence in Lebanon.

Family Separation

Syrian society is very conservative and emphasizes group solidarity/cohesion and the concept of *'asabiya*, which is derived from the Arabic word *'asab*, meaning “to bind people in groups.”⁷¹ This involves a strong sense of respect for the family, parents, and the elderly as well as strong ties among kin relations. Generally, young men and women live with their parents until they get married.

While displaced in other countries, however, Syrians have had to adapt to new environments with different rules and perspectives. Families have often been reduced to smaller units composed of parents and their children, and occasionally grandparents. Often, uncles, aunts, cousins, and other members of the larger family have remained in Syria or settled in another country.

Sometimes separation affects the nuclear family. Some young interviewees reported that they had first come to Lebanon alone or with their brothers and sisters, leaving parents in Syria. One woman explained:

My sister was already married to a Lebanese and living here. When the war started, all the family joined her here. Then my brothers left clandestinely to Turkey, the Netherlands, and Jordan. My other sister got married and joined her husband in the Netherlands. I am myself planning to join my brother in Europe. My parents remained in Syria and went to live in the countryside. They sent me here because they fear for my security and are concerned, because I am girl. The family completely broke up.⁷²

But the journey often does not stop in Lebanon. Many interviewees reported that their siblings had reached Europe or Turkey, where they believe conditions are better. Many wish to join them, and some had initiated procedures related to family reunification. Most of those interviewed want to be resettled in Europe, Canada, or Australia, or even to be smuggled out, while expressing at the same time their desire to return to Syria once conditions allow (see Section VII of this report). Respondents were very keen to seek education abroad for themselves or their children. “If we could emigrate, we wouldn’t hesitate, so as to save our children’s future,” said a father of three living in the Beddaoui camp in northern Lebanon.⁷³ It is thought that when the time comes for return, they would be ready to play a role in the reconstruction of their country. According to another father of three, “Our generation is lost. We have to prepare the children, by ensuring they go to school and get a proper education.”⁷⁴

Others were more inclined to stay closer to home, preferring to live in a familiar and Arabic-speaking environment, like Lebanon. “Going to Europe means there is no coming back. I will stay here [in Qob Elias], which means

staying close to home,” said one woman.⁷⁵ Another interviewee made it clear he did not “want to go to Europe. It’s just eating and sleeping there [‘getting by’]. I know many people who went and came back. My cousin made it to Germany and came back.”⁷⁶ Similarly, another said: “Those who fled to Europe, are they productive? Eating and drinking [‘getting by’] is not enough. They will come back to help rebuild their country.”⁷⁷ Others were unwilling to resettle due to family responsibilities, like taking care of a parent,⁷⁸ or concerns about risking their children’s lives in an uncertain journey. A mother of two explained that “we can’t escape from here. To leave, we need to pay smugglers and it would be too dangerous for my children.”⁷⁹

In other cases, a parent had been killed or a couple had divorced, with consequences for the children. Many stories revealed the difficulties endured by widows or divorced women. One man had remarried a widow whose husband—his cousin—had been killed in his sleep, leaving her with four small children,⁸⁰ but her mother-in-law had since taken the children to Germany without sending any news for four years. A 22-year-old woman left Syria with her parents, brothers, and sisters, leaving her six-year-old daughter behind, after her ex-husband, who, although a judge had granted her custody, refused to let her see the child.⁸¹

Male Syrian refugees in Lebanon have ceased to be the sole breadwinners. Women are now playing a new role, becoming economically empowered. With men facing concerns about security forces, checkpoints, and possible deportation, it is the wives, mothers, and sisters who have taken on the role of running errands. Many have learned new skills and aspire to create and establish their own businesses. Some men feel that they have lost their dignity, however, experiencing a kind of “emasculatation,” according to a representative of an international organization. In the Shatila camp in Beirut, the wife of one respondent was earning the household income (the husband is owed money but the contractors have refused to pay him).⁸² Other women in the camp were knitting bags and clothes to sell in the market, with the support of a local NGO.

Social Fragmentation and the Rise of Sectarianism

Conflict and displacement have also led to broad social fragmentation and growing divisions between groups. To start with, the diverse religious landscape in Syria cannot be ignored. At roughly 76 percent of the population, the

Sunni community formed the largest group in pre-war Syria, but scholars agree that it never constituted a homogeneous group. The Alawi are the second-largest group, representing approximately 12 percent of the population, living mainly in the coastal areas (80 percent of these areas’ population used to be Alawi).⁸³ Christians (from Orthodox, Catholic, Maronite, Protestant, and Nestorian churches—as well as Armenians) represent a little more than 8 percent of the population. There are also Kurdish communities (8 percent), Druzes (2 percent), and Ismaeli, Turkmenes, Shi’a, Circassians, Yazidi, and Jews.

The Syrian regime under Assad had imposed a secular state that prevented the expression of religious differences,⁸⁴



Syrian refugees in Aarsal, Lebanon, days before over 1,000 families escaped increasing fighting on the Syrian side of the border, November 2013. (M. Hofer/UNHCR)

but acts of sectarian violence have occurred in recent history.⁸⁵ The regime, controlled by the Alawi community, engaged in widespread repression to protect the articulation of its *'asabiya and mulk* (power).⁸⁶ Since the conflict began, sectarian interests and tensions have surfaced, imperiling the model that had inspired the regime under the motto of Renaissance figure Boutros Al Boustani: “Religion is for God and the Nation is for All (*al din lilah wal watan liljam'*).”

Many interviewees talked about how their traditions had been gravely affected by the level of violence and destruction during the conflict. As one respondent put it, it had caused the “dissolution of our customs and traditions and the loss of our moral compass . . . We have lost our humanity.”⁸⁷ Another refugee saw a “negative impact on our customs. Divisions have opened up within families, the environment has changed, sectarianism is now a given,”⁸⁸ with the grave symptom of “sectarian killings at checkpoints.”⁸⁹ Similarly, another respondent described the “loss of our moral compass. Before, conflicts would be solved by an elder figure [*woujaha*], now the authority figure is the one holding a gun.”⁹⁰ He pointed to the “rise in extremism. It turns out we are a sectarian society, it was hidden for years.”⁹¹

The issue of sectarianism evoked a range of views among respondents. Some considered it to be a direct consequence of the conflict and geopolitical dynamics in the region—“sectarianism and a million catastrophes suddenly fell on our heads,” said a refugee living in the Shatila camp in Beirut⁹²—while others viewed it as a phenomenon that had always existed. As one respondent put it, “there is no sectarian fragmentation within the Syrian society. People are living with each other,”⁹³ blaming the divide on political⁹⁴ or economic⁹⁵ factors, rather than religious ones. According to another interviewee, “despite the war and despite their differences, people have continued to interact, either by bartering or other economic tools, to survive.”⁹⁶ He explained that the hatred was brought on by foreign fighters and extremist groups, such as ISIS and the Nusra Front. According to a tribal sheikh, “sectarianism is something we were unaware of. Foreign factions came in and brought it with them.”⁹⁷ A man from the Aleppo suburbs denounced the fact that “now everyone searches deep down in their family history to find out their initial religious affiliation. We didn't used to have this mentality.”⁹⁸

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Others compared sectarianism to “embers hidden in ashes,”⁹⁹ and one respondent lamented the fact that “our schools used to be smaller representations of Syria. Now sectarianism has risen and divided the society.”¹⁰⁰ Another interviewee stressed that “sectarianism within the state had always existed. It was an underlying phenomenon all along.”¹⁰¹ A man from Homs used the same wording: “sectarianism has risen. It is now out in the open. There used to be confessionalism in Syria but it was hidden, unlike in Lebanon. In Homs there used to be no problems between Sunni and Alawi, but now it's a deep fracture.”¹⁰² Another Sunni mentioned how sectarian discrimination used to be practiced in the Army to an extent: “An Alawi soldier would boss around a minister.”¹⁰³

The sectarian resentment felt by some Sunni respondents was palpable. One interviewee stated that “sectarian divisions have increased as the Sunni community is being marginalized. There is going to be resentment and retaliation against anyone who contributed to this injustice.”¹⁰⁴ Another respondent reported “discrimination against Sunni in Syria: Alawi would be given the best jobs, and Sunni would go work in the Gulf to both make a living and escape military service.”¹⁰⁵ A former school teacher described how “there was sectarianism before the war. In my school, for instance, the director was always an Alawi. Also, in the military and in strategic government

positions.”¹⁰⁶ A Sunni inhabitant from Daraya also stressed how unsafe Sunnis felt in their region because of their religious affiliation, using a saying: “Jewish, you can pass. Darayani [inhabitant of Daraya], you stay here’ is what happens at checkpoints nowadays.”¹⁰⁷

A pressing concern was the conflict’s demographic consequences. Because “many Sunnis left, if they do not come back the demographic ratio will persist, with lasting changes.”¹⁰⁸ An interviewee had the same concern for her region of origin, Reef Idlib, saying that “a large portion of the population will be replaced, unless there is an international decision to protect their right to return, but I doubt this will happen.”¹⁰⁹ Pessimistic, she added that “presently there are no forces capable of reversing the fragmentation process in Syria.”¹¹⁰

Besides religion, respondents voiced a range of views of the political nature of the divisions in Syrian society. Many deplored how political divisions had fragmented the country and even families, as brothers would fight on different sides because of their differing political opinions. A 35-year-old man from Homs stated: “I would give anything to go back and live together again. But my cousin is now a Salafi, coexisting with him will be hard. He now has power. Those like him have changed. We can’t live next door to them anymore.”¹¹¹

In some cases, political fragmentation has marginalized entire families without members necessarily affiliating with any of the parties to the conflict. For instance, if a family member was forcibly recruited or lawfully fulfilled his

military service when his family did not support the regime, they would still be under the threat of persecution. One man reported that his entire family had been vilified and compelled to flee Reef Idlib “because one of [his] brothers happened to be in the military draft when the revolution started. [They] were hereby considered to be pro-regime.”¹¹² The same fear was expressed by another respondent whose family was wrongly associated with the rebels: “We need guarantees against any persecution.”¹¹³

In contrast, many argued that “Syrians do not have much experience in politics”¹¹⁴ and that politics would not affect social cohesion because “regular Syrians are not politicized and just want the fighting to end so they can return home.”¹¹⁵ For Syrian Palestinians, the more pressing issue was having the chance to reintegrate back into Syrian society after the war. As one

respondent put it, “Things are going to change in Syria for us. Rights will be taken from us. Both regime and opposition parties are on the same line and do not seek to protect our basic rights.”¹¹⁶ A similar concern was expressed by another Palestinian interviewee, that “people might get over the political divisions. But the question remains about the integration of the Palestinian community. Maybe people will accept it but not the next political leaders.”¹¹⁷

However accurate the sentiment, there was one common fear among respondents: the profound resentment that they, as people who left the country, expect from those who stayed in Syria. “Divisions will remain between those who stayed and those who left, accepting one another again might prove difficult,”¹¹⁸ as refugees might face “accusations of ‘giving up on Syrian identity.’”¹¹⁹ Another respondent expressed concern over “resentment from those who stayed against those who left. This will require time.”¹²⁰ A representative of an international organization shared the observation that in workshops with Syrians organized in Lebanon, an immediate divide would arise between the two groups. While introducing themselves, those who remained in Syria would state: “Proudly living in Syria.” Those who had left would often be considered traitors, as those who had remained perceived them to be living a better life, despite the fact that they had escaped for safety reasons and that their lives may in fact not have been better.

There was one common fear among respondents: the profound resentment that they, as people who left the country, expect from those who stayed in Syria. “Divisions will remain between those who stayed and those who left, accepting one another again might prove difficult,” as refugees might face “accusations of ‘giving up on Syrian identity.’”

Many respondents lamented the shattered trust between, and within, Syrian communities and wondered how things reached the point where so many people had lost their humanity: “the ones considered smart today are the ones who hurt others,”¹²¹ explained a respondent. “We have become aggressive and hostile, a brother killing his brother, and for silly reasons.”¹²² The atrocities committed by all sides have led to a deep hatred among some, opening the door to criminality, looting, and gangs. It is now common to kill for a small amount of money, for a piece of land, or even over a small disagreement or difference in opinion. As stated by a respondent, “the farmer who became a warlord will never go back to being a farmer.”¹²³ Another interviewee regretted that the “reason behind the changes to the Syrian society is money. War has deprived Syrians of dignifying means of earning a living and caused widespread poverty.”¹²⁴

Acquiring New Skills, Knowledge, and Awareness

Being displaced in Lebanon has not been an entirely negative experience for everyone, as many interviewees explained. Lebanese society is quite westernized, with individuals enjoying more autonomy than in Syria, and lifestyles in the two countries are very different. Many respondents, in particular the youth (aged 18 to 25), indicated that some good actually came out of their interactions in Lebanon. Syrians have had the chance to become more “politically mature,” despite the violence. Interviews with youth also highlighted the important notions of “education” (*ta’lim*), “expertise” (*khebrat*), and “know-how” (*maslaha*)—words that were repeated frequently.

Many of the youth were actively involved in civil society activities and intensive work on behalf of organizations in Lebanon (Syrian, Lebanese, or international). Many reported that they had learned new skills related to activism, assistance, mediation, conflict resolution, and psychological support through jobs, volunteering opportunities, and workshops. They also said that they had become more accepting of the “other,” whether Syrian or Lebanese, and of different religions or political positions. Many NGO representatives interviewed believe that the beneficiaries of their awareness programs are more open-minded and less likely to condemn an entire “community” or “sect” because of violations committed by a member of that community.



A refugee receives vocational training in northern Lebanon in how to make fishing nets as part of a co-operative, while attending college, November 6, 2013. (DFID)

The value of such programs was confirmed by respondents: “Youth are now more aware, thanks to a lot of work in the field as they benefited from capacity-building efforts.”¹²⁵ Another respondent also praised the maturity she had gained through her efforts with NGOs: “I used to hate an entire sect, but I have grown past this blind hatred, thanks to my involvement in local civil society in Lebanon.”¹²⁶ A 21-year-old Syrian from Daraya expressed the same thought: “I used to hate the Alawi for killing my uncle; this was like a lump in me. But today I understand that no one is responsible for the actions of others. Only those who caused his assassination are responsible.”¹²⁷ Another young man in Akkar was thankful for the support of civil society in training him and believing in him:

“Thanks to civil society here, I have learned a profession and I’m earning a living. My stay in Lebanon opened new horizons for me and new opportunities.”¹²⁸

This interaction provided Syrian refugee youth in this study with some of the necessary tools to deal with issues of respect and tolerance and to support diversity and reject violence. “Civil society here also taught me not to disrespect an entire sect,” said one young man.¹²⁹ “We have to treat all people with respect and humanity. I have thrown sectarianism away from my mind.” The youth have been inspired to develop mechanisms and techniques to deal with their own challenges and issues. One young man cited peacebuilding and conflict-resolution efforts to end clashes between the Alawi and Sunni communities in the areas of Jabal Mohsen and Bab El Tabbeneh between 2008 and early 2015: “Tripoli can learn lessons from Northern Lebanon. For instance, they [NGOs] opened a café in a spot between Jabal Mohsen and Bab El Tebbeneh where Sunni and Alawi can now meet and interact. There are many activities and initiatives that can help calm the situation.”¹³⁰ These respondents and others like them will potentially use the knowledge and skills they have acquired in Lebanon to play a positive role in rebuilding relationships in Syria after the war. They asserted a willingness to go back home and assist their communities.

Lost Education

The knowledge and skills gained by youth working with civil society should not divert attention from the catastrophic situation of Syrian refugee children being deprived of quality education. In their current economic situation,



A 15-year-old Syrian refugee cleans fish in a shop next to his home in an underground shelter in El Akbiya, Lebanon, September 2013. He has not been to school in three years. (Shawn Baldwin/UNHCR)

most Syrian parents cannot afford to educate their children. Many said they could not send their children to the local school because they could not afford the transportation fees, which no assistance program covers. Even when children are accepted to a school, families struggle to provide school supplies or materials requested by teachers for school activities. A 37-year-old father of four said: “I can hardly afford to pay the school fees, so I struggle when my daughter asks me to buy a white dress and black shoes to celebrate Mother’s Day with her classmates. How can I afford that?”¹³¹ When they do attend Lebanese schools, according to respondents, children face discrimination, humiliation, and violence.

Due to the differences between the Lebanese and Syrian educational systems,

those who do go to school in Lebanon are not always able to get official recognition of their previous studies. The Lebanese Ministry of Education has set up special school shifts for Syrian children in public schools,¹³² but barred Syrian teachers from giving lessons using the Syrian curriculum.

Syrian NGOs have tried to respond to the need for education via community work, providing a parallel education system for Syrian children using Syrian teachers and applying the Syrian curricula with the help of NGOs or Lebanese private schools. The initiative has the advantage of requiring minimal fees and providing

education for free for orphans. However, the program cannot grant a diploma upon completion of the curriculum, while the opposition coalition diplomas are only recognized in Turkey. Thus, many children need to go back to Syria and risk their lives to pass the ninth grade and the Baccaalaureate exams.

Despite such efforts, the right to education of tens of thousands of Syrian children is being violated, creating a generation of children who have lost out on educational opportunities, with all the negative social and economic consequences this will likely lead to. As one respondent said, the “first victim of the war in Syria was the schools and the education system. Now, the children are not welcome, they are considered a burden on families.”¹³³ Another respondent stressed how “the youngest are not going to school and will remain ignorant. Even those inside Syria are not able to properly continue their education because of the war. This will complicate the future tremendously.”¹³⁴

Some families need their children to work and earn money for rent. Many children are used to asking for charity or working in unsuitable jobs for children, exposing them to the danger of being harassed or abused in the streets. The absence of educational structure and socialization in children’s lives is, according to some, creating a generation of violent children, with consequences for the role they will play in the future of their country or the ones hosting them. A young respondent warned: “We have to invest in the next generation to spread tolerance and acceptance. Either we sow these seeds or someone else will sow other types of seeds.”¹³⁵

VII. Refugee Expectations and Priorities for Return and Coexistence

With no exception, all Syrian refugee respondents wanted an end to the overwhelming harshness of their displacement experience and to return home: “People are now exhausted and want this war to end.”¹³⁶ One interviewee declared, “we just want to rebuild our homes. We don’t want to rely on any assistance from anyone.”¹³⁷ Another said, “I just want my home and to live in peace.”¹³⁸ A refugee living in Taalbaya claimed what he called his “right to return,” alluding to the Palestinian’s never-ending situation of exile: “I want to return [to Syria], there is no lovelier place than one’s land and country. We saw what happened to the Palestinians. We are now sensing, like them, this need for a ‘right to return’ . . . The present circumstances won’t allow for any proper return for another 4 to 5 years.”¹³⁹

A number of widely shared priorities for return and coexistence can be identified from the interviews in Lebanon, including safety and security; shelter, livelihoods, and reconstruction of homes and infrastructure; the provision of education and psychosocial support; and family reunification. At the same time, views on the importance and feasibility of justice and coexistence for return varied widely among respondents.

Safety, Security, and Political Settlement

As the Syrian conflict enters its seventh year, displaced communities wish for the restoration of peace and stability so that they can return home. When asked about their priorities for going back to their country, safety and security were the first requirements. One man summarized the mindset of most of the displaced who participated in this study: “I don’t think anyone would return under the present circumstances. When safety and security is restored and people can be assured of not being arrested, people will start going back, even if it means living at first in a tent.”¹⁴⁰ Another said that return would require “making sure there won’t be any actions of revenge or retaliation, and focusing on peacebuilding.”¹⁴¹ The end of the conflict and the conclusion of a political settlement were seen as paramount guarantees for stability, so people could return. “Only a political agreement on both regional and international levels can guarantee the return and the end of violence,” stated a man living in Beirut.¹⁴² “Social reintegration can be a very easy process in Syria as long as the political will is there.”

There were, however, concerns about the durability of any solution to the conflict. “Who can assure you of protection and safety once you go back? The situation can flip anytime,” said a man from Raqqa.¹⁴³ A woman stressed that “our region is now controlled by Hizbullah and the Syrian army. We can’t go back unless they leave.”¹⁴⁴ Another respondent showed the same type of preoccupation with the fate of armed factions in the country: “We will return after a political solution is found. But how? We are heading towards the unknown, with so many factions fighting. What if a new armed group appears despite a peace agreement?”¹⁴⁵ Someone else raised the “issue of dealing with parties who do not seek peace.”¹⁴⁶

Demilitarization was, therefore, seen as one of the “essential steps”¹⁴⁷ needed to ensure security and safety and as a “key component for reducing divisiveness.”¹⁴⁸ One woman spoke of the “need for safety to return. But look at

all those armed groups, who will save us?”¹⁴⁹ A man living in Halba shared that “once you get the militias out, solutions can be managed.”¹⁵⁰ Some respondents brought up with pride the fact that they had never taken up arms. A Syrian Palestinian from Yarmouk made it clear that “even if I were to starve, I wouldn’t take up weapons. If I were going to pick up a weapon, I would have done it in Syria, but I have no side to fight for.”¹⁵¹ According to a young woman concerned for her generation, security would signify “pushing youth away from weapons and military loyalty and end the killing and looting mentality, along with extremism.”¹⁵²

Some interviewees from middle to higher social classes spoke about the contours of a political settlement as a factor for enabling a return to the country. A man from Homs pointed to “Syrian intellectuals who might raise the ceiling of their demands as per the resolution of the conflict, unlike regular Syrians who are not politicized and who just want the fighting to end to return home.”¹⁵³ Those who were keen to express their political opinions laid out different demands for considering return, such as guarantees for partisans of all political factions, and “for people to earn their rights back and guaranteeing fundamental liberties without fear of persecution.”¹⁵⁴ One man cited “secularism” as way to “ensure a sustainable peaceful future for the country away from religious extremism.”¹⁵⁵

In contrast, respondents with limited income did not insist on any particular preference regarding the substance of the needed political agreement. “It doesn’t matter who is in power, we want to live in peace and dignity,” said a man living in the Shatila camp in Beirut.¹⁵⁶ According to a representative of a Syrian NGO interviewed in Beirut, the more vulnerable strata of respondents were “not interested in who dominates who in tomorrow’s Syria.”¹⁵⁷

A few politically literate interviewees were confident as to what they did not want: a “solution even close to Lebanon’s Ta’if Agreement,”¹⁵⁸ referring to the peace accord that helped end its civil war. One respondent made it clear he would not consider returning to Syria if this type of deal was reached.¹⁵⁹ Others, namely opposition partisans, said they would not go back to Syria as long as Assad remained in power. “As long as this regime remains, I won’t go back,” said a 26-year-old man living in Tripoli.¹⁶⁰

Those with no political affiliation were concerned about “dismantling the entire intelligence networks”¹⁶¹ or at least “putting a stop to the intelligence services’ doings and reforming them,”¹⁶² as those institutions had harmed and terrorized the Syrian population for so long. In contrast, pro-regime respondents affirmed the “need to reestablish the authority of the state along with international guarantees to remove non-state armed groups in different regions of Syria.”¹⁶³

Reconstruction: Properties, Livelihoods, and Social Services

Among the other priorities for returning home, all respondents agreed on the importance of shelter, livelihoods, and physical reconstruction of homes and infrastructure, “enabling all necessities of life,” as stated by a man living in Bar Elias in the Bekaa.¹⁶⁴ Another interviewee contended that “the reason behind displacement was the lack of all basic necessities of life. Bring these back and the people will return.”¹⁶⁵ Many were motivated by the idea of being part of rebuilding their country. “I would return to my country even to live in a tent,” said a 33-year-old man from Daraya.¹⁶⁶ Another explained: “Syrians won’t need help, let them return and they’ll rebuild their homes. Compensations can support such efforts.”¹⁶⁷ “Physical reconstruction is key for people’s return,” he added.¹⁶⁸ “Those working in commerce and industry and the working class have an important interest in returning to Syria,” said one man.¹⁶⁹ With investments in infrastructure and reconstruction, “the economic wheel will restart.”¹⁷⁰

Compensation and restitution for the destruction and loss of homes and properties was a strong claim made by many respondents, who felt it would accelerate and facilitate their reintegration into their local communities. However, many respondents were skeptical of the likelihood of reclaiming their property (such as houses, apartments, and

shops), wondering how this could be achieved in the present circumstances. A young woman from Daraya expressed the unlikelihood of returning any time soon: “Returning will not be easy. How do we get those occupying our house to leave and give it back to us? . . . That place called home is now foreign to us. Our home isn’t ours anymore. Even our country isn’t ours anymore. It now belongs to other groups.”¹⁷¹ One challenge lies in the enforcement of any decision granting people their properties back. Indeed, land restitution will be a very difficult process.

Some interviewees explained that their homes had been occupied by internally displaced Syrians, who themselves have suffered and were forced to leave their own houses and towns. Other interviewees asserted that displacement was part of a deliberate strategy to group people in cities according to their religion or political affiliation. This “directed displacement” or “demographic engineering” will have important implications for peacebuilding and coexistence at the end of the conflict.¹⁷² Interviewed refugees said

Some interviewees explained that their homes had been occupied by internally displaced Syrians, who themselves have suffered and were forced to leave their own houses and towns. Other interviewees asserted that displacement was part of a deliberate strategy to group people in cities according to their religion or political affiliation.

they will refuse to go back if they cannot return to their own cities and regions, but, again, they are also skeptical about reclaiming their homes (because either they understand that those who are living there are in difficult situations or the new inhabitants are relatives). The logic of receiving reparations and relocating to another area or neighborhood is not what most Syrian refugees want at this point. As such, the issue of return appears to many as a complex, unsolvable maze.

However, as this research involved mainly Sunni respondents, we must be cautious in generalizing about the willingness and desire of non-Sunni minorities settled in Lebanon to return to their places of origin at the end of the conflict, which is a common overarching issue following sectarian civil wars.¹⁷³ Additional criteria

and conditions might be envisaged by the members of minority communities regarding the decision to return to Syria.

Returnees will also need to work and maintain livelihoods. As stressed by a Syrian Palestinian respondent, “we don’t need help from anyone. We can work and take care of ourselves. We work with dignity.”¹⁷⁴ In losing their jobs and livelihoods through displacement, many refugees saw the crumbling of their local social fabric, in which each individual had a role and function. Resuming work and reestablishing a social status back home was deemed essential for restoring their dignity and social significance, regardless of class.

Access to health care and schools represented important preconditions of return for Syrian refugees, especially for families with children and for young people. Restoring the pre-war level of such social services was a high priority for respondents. As already mentioned, Syrians are facing huge obstacles in trying to educate their children in Lebanon for various reasons, including high fees and discrimination. Some refugees said that they were thinking of emigrating to Europe just to enroll children in schools, especially because those who have gone to Europe have reported back that education is affordable and accessible.

Reliable Information

An important factor concerning the possibility of returning home is reliable information about the actual conditions in Syria. Refugees need to know if the conditions they feel are necessary for return do in fact exist. But how would they access such information? Would they trust the reports of neighbors, acquaintances, media, and/or political actors? Most refugees interviewed, for example, said they would wait until they were certain that the region is safe and they would not risk any danger. They would not necessarily trust calls to return from

political leaders or rumors, and they would not go back spontaneously, even if a peace agreement was reached. All priorities related to security, safety, reconstruction, livelihood, education, and health care, many said, need to be ensured before they decided to return. NGO representatives interviewed also emphasized this point: refugee communities need to be accurately informed of the conditions in their places of origin, as it can be a problem if decisions about return are made based on rumors or indirect sources.

Psychological and Psychosocial Support

A key theme in most of the interviews was the need for psychological or psychosocial support after all the suffering the displaced communities have been through, both in Syria and as refugees. This type of support was mentioned by almost all the interviewees as a means to “mend broken souls.” It would help people who were experiencing anxiety and who had developed different phobias. The death and loss of family members, the fear of dying in a bombing, the trauma from blasts and explosions, the endurance of siege and hunger, the constant anxiety, the frustration and mental distress of their present situations—such trauma has gravely affected the Syrian population, and displaced communities continue to carry a great deal of this anxiety and suffering.

Psychological or psychosocial support is a critical need that would help returnees to deal with such harms and serve as preventive therapy against anxiety and depression, ahead of the shock many will experience when they return to a radically different—and destroyed—landscape in Syria. One Syrian Palestinian whose wife had had a miscarriage was much affected by the prolonged state of distress. “I need to find myself again. I need to build myself again,” he said.¹⁷⁵ Above all, “people need to help themselves first,” stated one woman.¹⁷⁶

“We are psychologically affected, we are tired, we are sick. Despite all this, we are surviving” was a common view expressed during interviews.¹⁷⁷ Anxiety has also affected children. One young woman described how her nine-year-old brother would start screaming and crying each time he heard a noise.¹⁷⁸ A 25-year-old man living in Beirut warned that it was “easy to repair stones, but psychological wounds are much harder to heal.”¹⁷⁹ Nevertheless, such “psychological effects need to be dealt with,” said another man living in the Bekaa.¹⁸⁰



A Syrian refugee from Idlib, and her son with disabilities, living in Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley, January 30, 2017. (DFID)

Family Reunification

“Our priority is to reunify the family. My father is in Greece with one of my brothers, another brother and sister are in Germany, and another brother and sister are in Holland. My mother made it to the United States.”¹⁸¹

Family fragmentation has impacted Syrian refugees very profoundly. Many stories of family dispersion were heard from interviewees who expressed their wish to ultimately reunite with their families. A 21-year-old woman from Homs said: “I can forgive and forget. My wish is to return with my family. If each one of us would think like that, we might be able to coexist once again, without preconditions.”¹⁸²

As mentioned above, Syrian society is based on close family ties and respect for the elderly, with young women and men tending to live with their parents until they are married. Finding themselves dispersed in different countries is a heavy burden on most Syrian families, who are often seeking or planning to reunite their members, generally in a resettlement country. With dispersion also comes division and fragmentation along political affiliations, which have affected the unity of families and their internal cohesion. It will be very challenging to recreate previous levels of cohesion in Syria, even though many interviewees wished for things to return to the way they were.

Coexistence and Social Repair

Beyond family and kinship, the notion of coexistence (*ta'ayush*) evoked a wide range of views among respondents.¹⁸³ Many believed it was the cement of Syria's social future and the core of the dynamics of social repair.¹⁸⁴ "It's a great concept, humanity, kindness, respect. We need to spread it through awareness and dissemination efforts of the concept of rights and humanity," said a man from Daraya.¹⁸⁵ There was a clear set of ideas that constituted coexistence for some interviewees, including "respecting people from all communities and colors and accepting differences"¹⁸⁶ and "interacting with each other based on our humanity."¹⁸⁷ However, political and social fragmentation due to the conflict, as highlighted in the previous section, has had a serious impact on refugees' perception of coexistence.

Many interviewees thought that Syrians would be ready to maintain social ties despite the devastating impacts of the war. "The crisis did not affect the core coexistence within Syria," said a man living in Beirut.¹⁸⁸ "God created us so that we can all live together. He never said, kill one another. In Europe they used to slaughter each other, now they have the European Union," said a 26-year-old man living in Tripoli.¹⁸⁹ These "social ties were always there, they will not disappear," asserted another respondent.¹⁹⁰ "Once people return to Daraya, the social ties



Syrian refugee families share living quarters in a mosque and in tents in the front yard, in the Bekaa valley, Lebanon, July 26, 2012. (Salah Malkawi/UNHCR)

will blossom again and many beautiful things can occur. Civil society NGOs can provide great assistance with this."¹⁹¹ Other interviewees did not "think [their] resentment will reach the point of 'no return' in terms of [their] ability to coexist,"¹⁹² as "Syrians are kind people. We strive for peace and stability, but away from those provoking violence."¹⁹³

For many respondents, coexistence is "the most precious thing."¹⁹⁴ "We were living it fully, without any hatred. We had no idea who belonged to which community . . . Regions were open to each other. I had friends from Shi'a and Alawi communities. I have no issue with a particular community, I have a problem with the idea of killing," said a 25-year-old woman from Deraa.¹⁹⁵ According to

another respondent, "we are human beings above all, not reduced to sects. We can coexist beyond our sectarian identity."¹⁹⁶ "If we decide collectively to forget in the name of coexistence, we can make it happen again," said another. "I am in favor of diversity and coexistence."¹⁹⁷ Said a Palestinian Syrian: "Coexistence is everything. Otherwise we'd become like Lebanon."¹⁹⁸

According to respondents, coexistence means refraining from inciting hatred and sectarianism. “How do we deal with divisions? I start with myself and start by not preaching hatred against a particular sect, even if they killed my uncle. We cope with it, it will take time . . . We won’t be able to forgive easily. But at the end of the day, we are a kind people and we will forgive each other. The flow will return to its course, as we all have drunk from the same source,” stated a young woman from Daraya.¹⁹⁹ A few respondents even rejected the need for the very notion of coexistence, arguing that “it implies we are fragmented and divided, which we are not.”²⁰⁰ Another interviewee felt the same way, stating that “this concept is not meant for a people who share the same history and customs. This concept prefigures the existence of divisions.”²⁰¹

Others, however, while holding the idea of coexistence in high regard, felt it had become an empty shell of a concept. According to one woman, “Coexistence used to exist, today it’s only acting, it’s no longer real. The Sunni are being crushed on the head, it is not acceptable. Despite this, we have to rebuild our society together through coexistence, it’s going to be a never-ending struggle.”²⁰² Another interviewee voiced some concerns about the viability of coexistence in certain Syrian regions: “There are areas where there was no diversity in the first place. It will be hard to achieve cohesion and coexistence there, such as in Idlib or Hama, unlike Homs, Aleppo, or Damascus.”²⁰³

Some argued that “restoring social ties will be easier in the countryside than in urban areas,”²⁰⁴ something that touches on the renowned cleavage within the Syrian context, between the *hadâra* (cities) and the *bâdiya* (countryside villages), which scholars, including Ibn Khaldun, often refer to.²⁰⁵ Traditionally, rural settings are more socially conservative and attached to religious attributes and conventions. As such, social ties tend to be much stronger in remote villages and smaller town units, nourishing the hopes of many respondents to restore social cohesion there if the original communities can return. As stated by one woman, “a major responsibility falls on tribal elders to work to unite Syria and prevent its fragmentation.”²⁰⁶

Some interviewees struck a less optimistic cord. “Coexistence is doomed. Nothing of that exists anymore. It’s in God’s hands now,” said a Syrian Palestinian living in Ain El Helwe camp.²⁰⁷ It is “now a dream,”²⁰⁸ said another originally from Al Sabinah camp. “I don’t see how things can get back to the way they were. Something has been broken. Coexistence will not be like before. Divisions appeared even within the same families, so imagine how deep they are between regions and factions,” said a respondent originally from the Aleppo suburbs.²⁰⁹ As another interviewee indicated:

[There is a] desire to rebuild social ties, still many limitations also exist, like what happened in Lebanon . . . There is no issue of coexistence in Syria, but after what happened in Zabadani, it’s going to be difficult to restore it . . . The people from our region are the ones responsible for the death of my fiancé. I can’t go and live with them again . . . We paid too high of a price. We can’t go back to lesser than what we had . . . I refuse to return and to reconcile. I can’t coexist with these people anymore.²¹⁰

A sense of fatalism was well represented in responses. “Coexistence today is going to be difficult,” declared a 30-year-old man from Homs.²¹¹ Some refugees from Daraya also had a dark perspective on the issue: “Coexistence is exactly what we had been living in Syria before the war. It may be hard to go back to it, how can a criminal and his victim live together now?” asked one.²¹² “Coexistence is going to be very hard from now on. This will need specific mechanisms to support it and for people to accept it once again,” said another.²¹³ A 30-year-old man from Daraya indicated that “in regions with many different communities, sectarianism will be an obstacle, and it will be very different to coexistent once again . . . To forget will be hard, we have endured blunt genocide. Things are more complicated than ever.”²¹⁴ Another respondent from Daraya said that “coexistence no longer exists. With people returning in the future, there will be many disputes and conflicts, revenge actions even. These are inescapable consequences of civil wars.”²¹⁵

A young woman was concerned with how feasible coexistence would be with those who took active part in the conflict, stressing her “fear of hate being incited . . . Regular Syrians will coexist. The issue will lie with those who received military training. They constitute a danger to the Syrian social fabric . . . Those trained by the military can form a strong mobilization force against hate.”²¹⁶ Political opinions were also a factor in those who expressed pessimism about the chances of coexistence.

Justice and Accountability

Clear disparities on issues of justice and accountability emerged from the interviews. Many respondents felt that it would be difficult to hold anyone accountable for human rights violations and atrocities. Indeed, some expressed disbelief in justice: “Justice? We haven’t witnessed the notion of justice yet,” said a Syrian Palestinian woman from Al Sabinah Camp.²¹⁷ “I don’t know what justice means. I haven’t seen it either in Syria or Lebanon,” stressed a 39-year-old man from the Aleppo suburbs.²¹⁸ A man from Homs declared: “There is no justice. Each party will want to achieve justice from his point of view.”²¹⁹

Many believe that justice will not be an option in post-war Syria: “The Lebanese model of general amnesty could be an option. Accountability will be very difficult in the Syrian context, as everyone committed violations. How will we hold everyone accountable?”²²⁰ Although “accountability is important,” stressed another interviewee, “if the stronger party eats up the rights of the weak, then the latter shall wait for his time to turn back against the oppressor and the cycle shall never end.”²²¹ Prosecutions were deemed unrealistic by some: “We don’t even know who committed which crimes . . . There is no possible justice here . . . It’s unrealistic to start prosecutions. Are we going to put the entire Syrian population on trial?”²²² Eventually, “we need to acknowledge there is no single reason or person responsible for this war and coexist once again,” said a man from Daraya.²²³

Many people expressed the fear that criminal proceedings after the war would provoke problems and tensions. “Accountability will create additional discord (*fitna*). What they need is rehabilitation, not judicial prosecutions. They couldn’t help but be in such a position, they were a slave of the situation,” explained a Syrian Palestinian woman living in Saida.²²⁴ “A judicial process might create more problems at the expense of social justice and equal development among all regions,” suggested a 25-year-old man from Idlib.²²⁵

Many respondents said they would rely on divine justice. One man said that “accountability is not probable. It’s too late for those who died (*rabet ‘ala elli mat*). Only divine retribution is possible.”²²⁶ Other respondents expressed similar views: “Even if they escape human justice, they won’t escape divine retribution;”²²⁷ “God shall punish the perpetrators. Yes, there must be accountability, but nothing will happen, otherwise the country will be even more fragmented;”²²⁸ “Justice will only come from God. We shall forgive because God can forgive. We want to live in peace.”²²⁹

Many also spoke of the need and their willingness to consider forgiveness. “Victims must forgive the killers on the condition of having their rights acknowledged and preserved,” said one woman.²³⁰ Syrians “are known to be a kind and merciful people when the dust settles. Our traditions and culture favor the notion of return and forgiveness,” said another.²³¹ A man from Daraya stated: “I am ready to forgive and live in peace once again, or else the cycle of violence will never end.”²³²

Some people discussed forgiveness in relation to forgetting, although with different viewpoints on the matter. A 21-year-old man explained how “our nature will not allow us to forget, but we can handle this, cope with it and ignore it, to be able to live in peace.”²³³ According to a 27-year-old woman, “We have to forget, forget for the sake of saving the country, whatever the cost. I shall forgive too, but maybe others won’t.”²³⁴ For some respondents, it

was important to “let bygones be bygones (*elli rah rah*), otherwise, the violence will never end,”²³⁵ as “forgetting will be essential, for my children, for their sake, for them to live in peace one day.”²³⁶ Another respondent “would forgive the one who arrested me, enough it’s over (*khalas*).”²³⁷ A Syrian man from Daraya stated: “It’s impossible for me to forget, even though I know I will need to forgive.”²³⁸

In contrast, some interviewees felt strongly that they could not forgive perpetrators and called for their prosecution. “I can’t forgive those who bombed my house. I can’t forget. Every day, we suffer because of them,” said a Palestinian Syrian.²³⁹ Another had the same position: “It’s impossible for me to forgive, even if the criminals are prosecuted. Most of my friends were killed, including one of my cousins.”²⁴⁰ Resentment is strong in part because displaced persons’ futures have been so disrupted: “I am not ready to forgive. Anyone who held a weapon should be held accountable. My future, my education are gone because of those people. If accountability doesn’t happen, I will still coexist with them on condition that sufferings stop.”²⁴¹

As such, there should be “no forgiving of those who committed atrocities, they had a choice. They could have refused this and left, like we did.”²⁴² “Judicial accountability is a must before I can think of returning to Syria,” stated one man.²⁴³ There should be “no mitigating circumstances . . . for those who participated in the conflict. They could have left, like we did. They need to be prosecuted for what they did.”²⁴⁴ “There won’t be forgiveness without anything in return, like punishing those who committed a crime. There can be no stability without accountability.”²⁴⁵

For these respondents, criminal proceedings represent a key condition for the restoration of social cohesion. “Justice and peace come together,” stated a young woman from Homs.²⁴⁶ “Justice is at the root of everything. Without accountability for those on all sides, we’d be living in a jungle,” added another man from Homs.²⁴⁷ “There needs to be judicial accountability and an acknowledgement between the oppressors from all parties and the victims, otherwise we might end up in an eternal cold war, like in Lebanon. At least all heads of parties need to face prosecution for what they did. This will greatly help people to return.”²⁴⁸ Others expressed similar thoughts: “There must be prosecutions against the criminals from all sides, while providing all the accused with judicial guarantees,”²⁴⁹ and “those who have committed crimes need to be prosecuted, not executed but jailed. Let them rot in jail. Maybe some conscience will come out of it.”²⁵⁰

Among those who hoped for accountability, however, many lacked confidence in the Syrian judicial system and preferred international institutions (like the International Criminal Court) or an Arab court to carry out trials. According to a victim who had lost a relative, “accountability should be carried out in international courts, not Syrian ones. In Syria, the man who killed my uncle is considered the ‘protector of the nation.’ He would never be convicted.”²⁵¹ Others were defiant about any international judicial body, as they had lost all trust in the international community, which had “[taken away] the chemical weapons and left us with Bashar [Al Assad].”²⁵² This is why one 48-year-old woman living in Qob Elias preferred “prosecution through an independent mechanism, not Syrian, an Arab court for instance, not necessarily an international tribunal.”²⁵³

Some respondents—namely, those with higher educational backgrounds, such as students, lawyers, and activists—spoke of institutional reform as an entry point to achieving justice and coexistence, not necessarily focused on the judiciary but on state building in general. Most refugees, though, stated that the Syrian judiciary was corrupt and would have difficulty in fulfilling its obligations regarding accountability. Among the reasons why many

Clear disparities on issues of justice and accountability emerged from the interviews. Many respondents felt that it would be difficult to hold anyone accountable for human rights violations and atrocities. Indeed, some expressed disbelief in justice: “Justice? We haven’t witnessed the notion of justice yet.”

respondents would not hold the perpetrators accountable was the belief that, with violations committed by all sides, finding Syrian judges who would prosecute in a fair and independent way would prove difficult.

Non-Judicial Processes

Those who have little or no trust in Syrian courts or in international tribunals pointed to the potential to achieve “reconciliation through local mediators with high credibility, as long as they ensure fairness and justice,”²⁵⁴ or allowing “tribal courts to take part in accountability efforts.”²⁵⁵ One tribal leader living in Akkar was very confident in the role he and his peers could play: “We are skillful in reconciling people. Syrians are kind and have a good heart. They will listen to us and forgive one another.”²⁵⁶ Tribal leaders have a saying that goes, “*Al majêless madêress* [in our culture, the councils are the equivalent of schools or places of wisdom].”²⁵⁷ According to this leader,

Tribal law, even in urban centers, will help to prevent the return of violence and bring things back to normal. But if foreign actors stay, we won't have any role as tribal leaders. Tribal leaders can have a huge impact and manage reconciliation between people and neighborhoods. Tribal courts were even recognized by the state. [The state] even referred cases to us when seeking social peace in particular circumstances. In tomorrow's Syria, the state, whatever it will look like, will need to include these parameters if it wants to succeed . . . we can guarantee genuine reconciliation processes on a local level through a *dakheel* [mediator], as a guarantor from each side guarantees the deal and they will stick to it.²⁵⁸

Many interviewees corroborated the importance of the elders and dignitaries of each village, who they believed could take on prominent roles in finding local solutions between people in efforts to reconcile and protect people's rights. “Family and tribal elders still have great influence. Their authority is still widely recognized despite the war, especially in the countryside,” said a young man from the suburbs of Aleppo.²⁵⁹ Another respondent from Daraya stressed that “each region has its own specificities to deal with the issue of divisions.”²⁶⁰ This was also mentioned by a 27-year-old man, living in Taalbaya:

In each region, you must find the right instrument to achieve local reconciliation. Intermediate mechanisms are important in this process. All parties must be included, whether the regime, the elderly figures or local forces . . . Reconciliation initiatives are needed led by local reconciliation councils and the acknowledgment of the different grievances and ensuring necessary compensation. In each locality there is a head of clan and elderly figures who can be the core of the reconciliation councils and make them work.²⁶¹

A young man living in Tripoli also declared “we have to rely in the intervention of religious figures and elderly figures. They will know how to influence the people, each one at his own level. Each neighborhood still has its local elder, they will listen to him.”²⁶²

Fewer respondents directly or indirectly pointed to the need for other nonjudicial transitional justice processes. A 33-year-old man from Homs spoke about the option of what he called “conciliatory justice [*adâla tasâfohiya*], because all parties have committed crimes and violations” and looked to “South Africa as a model to be integrated as a part of the political settlement.”²⁶³ Two other respondents said they had no greater wish than to “uncover the truth, even if it's not enough. People need justice,”²⁶⁴ and that “compensation is not essential, nothing can compensate for our losses. What I want to know is why my father died? This would be the greatest compensation for me.”²⁶⁵ Preserving memory and writing the history of what happened were also mentioned as a means of transmitting the truth to future generations.

VIII. Conclusion: Restoring Dignity, an Essential Step towards Coexistence

This study examines the experiences of Syrian refugees in Lebanon since their displacement started as well as their expectations and perspectives on issues of justice, coexistence, and return. The range of refugee profiles led to a variety of responses, depending on factors such as gender, age, political affiliation, religious faith, and social class. The study depicts the views of respondents on their past, present, and future, in light of the high levels of distress, exhaustion, and frustration they feel due to their displacement and their experiences in host communities of being seen as threats and nuisances. The responses revealed the reasons behind their displacement, including persecution and torture; the loss and enforced disappearance of loved ones; the loss of housing, land, and property; hostilities; and fear of kidnapping and being drafted by the army or forcibly recruited by armed groups.

At the same time, interviews revealed that most respondents planned to go back to Syria should sufficient conditions of return be ensured, acknowledging that this will require time and hard work, with no guarantee of success. The report highlights the impact of war and displacement on individuals, families, and the Syrian social fabric, which is now deeply fragmented, with dangers of sectarianism and its associated discord, incitements of hatred, and continued political violence.

Critically, a common word and concept appeared throughout the interviews, *karama* or “dignity.” From the richest to the poorest, from the most integrated to those trying to escape Lebanon’s harsh living conditions, dignity was identified as a common loss, beginning with the very fact of their displacement by a war that has changed their lives forever. Furthermore, the humiliation and discrimination faced by refugees impacted on people who had been used to a certain social and economic level in Syria, despite a quasi-absence of civic and political rights.

Dignity is a very important concept in the Arab world. Children are educated to preserve their dignity, to live in dignity, and to prioritize dignity in their decision making. The concept is well depicted in Arab literature and taught in schools as a key theme. Dignity is a pre-Islamic concept and has been praised by poets of the Jāhiliya,²⁶⁶ such as Antarah Ibn Shaddad,²⁶⁷ who wrote at length about dignity, self-esteem, and self-honor. As one of his verses goes:

Don't offer me life elixir with humiliation.

Offer me rather a drink of colocynth with dignity (pride).

Dignity is also very present in Islamic culture. Indeed, the Qur’an and prophet of Islam mention pride, honor, and humility. Most Arabs have been educated on prophetic traditions stating that “the strong believer is better than the weak one” or “the upper hand is better than the lower one,” urging people to work to provide for their needs and preserve their dignity. The Qur’an also preserves the rights of the poor in different verses. For example, in “Sourat Al-Dhuha,” it forbids the humiliation of orphans, stating: “So, as for the orphan, do not oppress (him). And as for the petitioner, do not repel (him). But as for the favor of your Lord, report (it).”²⁶⁸ Islam, as do

all religions, also encourages reconciliation and forgiveness. And many respondents made religious references in speaking about justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation. However, forgiveness has a stronger implication when the victim is in a position of power, because he or she is not being forced to forgive, making the act genuine and true.

In their responses, refugees mourned the loss of the dignity they used to enjoy in Syria through a form of nostalgia that made some forget what had sparked the revolution. The atrocities of the war may have decreased their level of expectations for the future. Dignity would now come down to a tent on their homeland soil. Nevertheless, dignity could also allow a reconstruction of their relationship with the Syrian state via reforms that would lead state institutions to treat them as human beings. Dignity and the power to decide for oneself would, according to them, allow them to forgive those who were executing orders and to limit criminal prosecution to commanders. Dignity would also allow them to expect the divine justice they believe in.

The atrocities of the war may have decreased refugees' level of expectations for the future. Dignity would now come down to a tent on their homeland soil. But dignity could also allow a reconstruction of their relationship with the Syrian state via reforms that would lead state institutions to treat them as human beings.

Dignity is related to reversed gender roles. In fact, women are now often in what were traditionally men's roles. Despite this, there is a sense of satisfaction among women regarding these new tasks. Many have learned new skills and aspire to create and establish their own businesses in order to consolidate this newly acquired autonomy. However, while men may to some extent appreciate the emergence of such roles, because they were raised to be the breadwinners and decision makers within families, they also feel their own roles have been undermined.

New roles have reached not only women but also youth, some of whom have acquired knowledge and skills to reinvest in their country in the future. They seek to bring into a future Syria

elements of openness, tolerance, and the blossoming effects of a newly established Syrian civil society. They also have managed to prove themselves in a host society that denies their rights and fears their integration and long-term establishment, hence giving them a sense of dignity and self-esteem.

Syrians interviewed for this study consider Lebanon to be a counter-model of how to deal with the different aspects of the Syrian tragedy. Lebanon's continuous "cold war" among religious sects and communities represents a nightmare for the distraught Syrian communities to whom sectarianism in its Lebanese sense would be devastating for the future of Syria. A deficient and imperfect political solution, such as Lebanon's Ta'if Agreement, is also seen as an obstacle to peace and stability in the long run, and the neo-liberal economic approach encountered in Lebanon makes many Syrians afraid of losing their basic socioeconomic rights when the time comes for reconstruction.

While the framework for this study was not dignity but coexistence and reconciliation as envisioned by the beneficiaries of a possible future transitional justice process, the findings could not ignore this notion. Discussions confirmed the idea that transitional justice should be context driven. The Arab Spring has opened the door to new concepts and ideas related to the cultures and histories of the Middle East and North Africa. We are now facing a new generation of responses to the needs of a society through its own concepts and not the concepts that led previous processes elsewhere. The process that would rebuild social ties and lead to sustainable peace is wider than the individual coexistence or reconciliation between the victim and the perpetrator. It is above all about reconciling individuals with state institutions and other groups. As stated by a respondent, "we will return when we will be able to raise one flag above Syria, one state, one authority. Otherwise there can be no guarantee for safety."²⁶⁹

Recommendations

This report examines the importance of establishing conditions that will facilitate the return of displaced populations to Syria and the rebuilding of relationships between individuals, groups, and institutions. While return processes will ultimately depend on a political resolution to the current armed conflict, which may seem far off at the moment, some steps can be taken now that are likely to have positive implications for return and coexistence in the future. These include integrating the views of displaced populations into discussions and policies regarding conditions of return; supporting community-level processes in ways that can help to restore dignity among displaced persons; addressing sexual and gender-based violence, women's exploitation, and child marriage; providing educational assistance; integrating property and land restitution into policy discussions; promoting interaction between communities; and supporting future of research of this kind.

- 1. Integrate the views of refugees into discussions and policies regarding conditions of return.** Integrating the views of refugees into discussions and policymaking initiatives related to conditions of return and coexistence is paramount. Indeed, all the interviewees appreciated having their opinions on these issues communicated through this research, even though for security reasons they preferred not have their identities disclosed. Many of them welcomed such an initiative and hoped it would contribute to establishing conditions that would facilitate their return to their homeland. Appreciation was also expressed by representatives of civil society organizations and INGOs, who felt that studies like this one are very important as guides for future programming, but also a way to better understand the situation of the beneficiaries of their work and the impact of their activities. Comparative studies have shown that consultative and participatory processes, especially in fields that require a certain degree of public ownership, lead in almost all cases to more accepted policies and context-adapted decisions that can be implemented more easily.
- 2. Support community-level processes with implications for return and coexistence.** Community-level efforts to alleviate the suffering of displaced Syrians are essential. However, the ongoing conflict does not always allow for long-term planning, and civil society organizations are obliged to respond to urgent needs as expressed by refugees. There was, in part, an expressed reluctance among organizations to address return and reconciliation/coexistence for different reasons. Reconciliation (*moussâlaha*) is currently a negatively perceived word, while return looks unlikely to happen soon. Discussion forums on conflict transformation provide a platform of exchange for participants from different origins and backgrounds, but this must be complemented by further work on conditions of return and the future of Syria as seen by its citizens.

Coexistence is not something that can be imposed on the parties to the conflict after a political settlement. It is a process that needs time and effort and an inclusive approach among all stakeholders, with a massive commitment from civil society organizations and INGOs, at minimum ensuring that their initiatives/

programs contribute to the restoration of dignity among displaced Syrians. The displaced will also need access to reliable information about the conditions in Syria before they go back. The provision of psychosocial support, especially to children, is an example of an intervention that can be made now that has implications for return and rebuilding relationships in the future. Transitional justice can also be an important element of this, but the specific forms that such processes take should be determined by Syrians, including displaced populations, so that they are appropriate to the local context.

- 3. Address sexual and gender-based violence, women's exploitation, and child marriage.** Interviews reveal that the fear of many families of sexual and gender-based violence had pushed them to leave Syria in order to protect their loved ones. This type of violence is a common practice in the Syrian war and is committed by all parties, with young girls often kidnapped to serve as "wives" or "sex slaves" for combatants. However, fleeing the war has not removed all sources of danger, as the exploitation of women through human trafficking and forced prostitution continues to represent a huge problem, as mentioned by numerous refugees. Young girls, sometimes perceived by low-income families as an additional mouth to feed, are also often obliged to marry at a very young age and are thereby deprived of their childhood. Timely focus is needed on such gender-based issues, as they will have a significant impact on the Syrian social fabric and the future generation that will reconstruct the country. INGOs and local civil society organizations, with the support of the international community, should help to empower women, educate young girls, and raise awareness among Syrian families and parents in order to reduce these practices and protect women and girls as future actors in rebuilding Syria.
- 4. Provide educational support.** The research demonstrates that children are among the biggest losers of the war in Syria. Indeed, children have suffered psychologically and continue to suffer because of the social and economic situation of their parents. In particular, large numbers of refugee children do not attend school because their parents cannot afford the school or transportation fees or because they are needed as wage earners. The next generation of Syrians risks being characterized by missed education and violence. Educational activities led by INGOs and civil society organizations should be supported by the international community and host countries. Furthermore, a common mechanism to recognize and provide the equivalence of Syrian diplomas for parallel means of education should be put in place, to boost the schooling of refugees.
- 5. Consider property and land restitution.** Demolished houses and shops and confiscated lands and businesses constitute major obstacles to return for Syrian displaced populations. Views among respondents included a total rejection of the possibility of resettling in another area, along with significant skepticism about the chances of reclaiming their land, property, and houses. Nevertheless, the issue is a vital one when considering return and future relationships among local communities, with acute risks of permanent dispossession leading to new tensions and undermining social peace. It is therefore paramount to integrate land restitution into any displacement settlement process in the interests of future cohesion between different groups and the prevention of sectarianism and politically driven divisions.
- 6. Promote interaction between communities.** Violence, destruction, and displacement during the conflict have fragmented Syrian society, including along sectarian and political lines. Ignoring the warnings of fragmentation conveyed by many respondents would only further fuel sectarianism and division. Preventing and reducing sectarianism should be a paramount priority when considering strategic programming and social repair in the Syrian context. Some civil society organizations and INGOs have already started working on this immense challenge. Interaction between different groups and communities (with a particular focus

on children, youth, and women) should be promoted to foster a culture of mutual respect, tolerance, and acceptance and to prevent sectarian violence from worsening or recurring in the future.

7. **Support future research.** This study focused on Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Refugees' experiences in Lebanon differ from those in Turkey and Jordan, which constitute clearly different contexts. Their experiences have impacted the social fabric of Syrian society but also their concerns, expectations, and plans regarding the future. From interviews, Syrians who left Lebanon for Europe are facing different challenges, which will influence their decision on whether to remain in their host country or return to Syria at the end of the conflict. In order to have a more accurate and broad understanding of Syrian refugee experiences and views regarding return and rebuilding relationships, it is recommended that donors support similar research in Turkey, Jordan, and European countries.

Endnotes

1. See Roger Duthie, ed., *Transitional Justice and Displacement* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2012); and Megan Bradley, ed., *Forced Migration, Reconciliation, and Justice* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015).
2. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, July 28, 1951, 189 U.N.T.S. 150, art. 1; OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of the Refugee Problem in Africa, September 10, 1969, 1001 U.N.T.S. 45; Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, November 22, 1984.
3. A comprehensive survey on return assessment is currently being undertaken by Oxfam, based on 1,000 respondents divided into focus groups, which should greatly complement this study.
4. Beddawi Palestinian Camp (Northern Lebanon), Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp (Saida, Southern Lebanon), Shatila Palestinian Camp (Beirut), Saadnayel Informal Settlement (Bekaa), Faour Informal Settlement (Bekaa), Reyak Informal Settlement (Bekaa), Halba Informal Settlement (Akkar).
5. There are no official UN figures. "Syria Death Toll: UN Envoy Estimates 400,000 Killed," *Al Jazeera*, April 23, 2016, www.aljazeera.com/news/2016/04/staffan-de-mistura-400000-killed-syria-civil-war-160423055735629.html
6. See UNHCR, *Women Alone. The Fight for Survival by Syria's Women Refugees* (2014), www.unhcr.org/ar/53bb8d006.pdf
7. See UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), "Hitting Rock Bottom: Children's Suffering in Syria at Its Worst," March 2017, press release, https://www.unicef.org/media/media_95077.html
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12. "Syria Chemical Weapons Attack Toll Rises to 70 as Russian Narrative is Dismissed," *The Guardian*, April 4, 2017, www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/04/syria-chemical-attack-idlib-province
13. UN Human Rights Council, Out of Sight, *Out of Mind: Deaths in Detention in the Syrian Arab Republic, Commission of Inquiry on Syria*, Human Rights Council, A/HRC/31/CRP1, 3 February 2016, www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/A-HRC-31-CRP1_en.pdf
14. Amnesty International, *Human Slaughterhouse. Mass Hangings and Extermination at Saydnaya Prison, Syria* (London, February 2017), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/5415/2017/en/>
15. American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative, *Reasons for Displacement, Documenting Abuses Against Syrian Civilians* (December 2013), www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/directories/roli/syria/syria_report_documenting_abuses_against_syrians_web.authcheckdam.pdf; and John Balouzieh, *Hope and Future: The Story of Syrian Refugees* (Time Books, 2016), 20.
16. Cf. among other reports Amnesty International, *The Human Cost of Fortress Europe: Human Rights Violations Against Migrants and Refugees at Europe's Borders* (London, 2014), www.amnesty.ch/de/themen/asyl-und-migration/festung-europa/dok/2015/die-kampagne-sos-europa/bericht-the-human-cost-of-fortress-Europe; Human Rights Watch, "Why Do People Risk Their Lives to Cross the Mediterranean?" July 28, 2015, www.hrw.org/news/2015/07/28/why-do-people-risk-their-lives-cross-mediterranean
17. UNHCR Turkey Page, updated February 16, 2017, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=224>
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19. Ahmet İcduygu, *Syrian Refugees in Turkey: The Long Road Ahead* (Migration Policy Institute, April 2015), www.migrationpolicy.org/research/syrian-refugees-turkey-long-road-ahead
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28. UNHCR Lebanon Page, updated February 16, 2017, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>
29. The Lebanese authorities introduced a new immigration system in January 2015 for Syrians containing 11 different visa categories, in addition to incorporation of the Syrian nationality to the sponsorship system (the *kafala*), the latter becoming the primary status for those wanting to work legally within the Lebanese territory under a Lebanese sponsor. See also Karim El Mufti, “Official Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon, The Disastrous Policy of No-policy,” Lebanon Support, January 10, 2014, <http://daleel-madani.org/story/official-response-syrian-refugee-crisis-lebanon-disastrous-policy-no-policy>
30. ALEF and PAX, *Trapped in Lebanon: The Alarming Human Rights and Human Security Situation of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon* (May 2016), <https://alefiban.org/publications/trapped-lebanon/>; and Cf. among other reports Amnesty International, *Pushed to the Edge: Syrian Refugees Face Increased Restrictions in Lebanon* (London, 2015), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/1785/2015/en/>; and Human Rights Watch, *I Just Want to Be Treated Like a Person: How Lebanon’s Residency Rules Facilitate Abuse of Syrian Refugees* (January 2016), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/01/12/i-just-wanted-be-treated-person/how-lebanons-residency-rules-facilitate-abuse>
31. Lebanon Support, *The Impact of Progressively Constrained Legislations and Increased Informality on Syrians’ Daily Lives* (2016), <http://daleel-madani.org/resource/syrian-refugees-livelihoods-impact-progressively-constrained-legislations-and-increased-inf>
32. See Map 1 representing the places of origin of Syrian interviewees in Lebanon and Graphs 1–5.
33. 31-year-old single male from Damascus, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
34. 27-year-old single male from Reef Idlib, middle class, socialist affiliation, living in Beirut.
35. 26-year-old divorced female from Reef Idlib, middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Beirut.
36. Ibid.
37. 27-year-old single male from Reef Idlib, middle class, socialist affiliation, living in Beirut.
38. 31-year-old single male from Damascus, higher income, no particular affiliation, living in Beirut.
39. “Syria’s Worst Massacre: Daraya Death Toll Reaches 400,” *The Guardian*, August 28, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/aug/28/syria-worst-massacre-daraya-death-toll-400>
40. 37-year-old married male from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Bekaa.
41. 33-year-old married male from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalabaya.
42. Respondents lost their homes, properties, apartments, farms, arable land, and businesses, such as shops or private institutes. Only a handful had news as to what had become of their belongings. A few interviewees reported that their properties were not destroyed but had been either occupied or confiscated by parties to the conflict.
43. 21-year-old single female from Daraya, middle class, no particular affiliation, living in Al Marj, Bekaa.

44. 27-year-old single male from Daraya, lower middle class, no particular affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa. On the need to address torture, see Eric Stover and Elena O. Nightingale, *The Breaking of Bodies and Minds* (New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1985), 336.
45. “Cautious Calm After Renewed Ain al-Hilweh Clashes,” *The Daily Star*, February 26, 2017, www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Feb-26/395185-one-injured-in-renewed-ain-al-hilweh-clashes.ashx; “Armed Clashes Erupt in Ein El-Hilweh Camp,” *Middle East Monitor*, September 22, 2016, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20160922-armed-clashes-erupt-in-ein-el-hilweh-camp/>
46. “Clashes Rock Beddawi Refugee Camp, Killing One,” *The Daily Star*, March 9, 2017, www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Mar-09/396741-palestinian-refugee-in-beddawi-camp-succumbs-to-wounds.ashx
47. “1 Killed, 7 Wounded in Burj al-Barajneh Clashes,” *The Daily Star*, March 10, 2017, www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Mar-10/396940-armed-clashes-in-beirut-suburb-of-burj-al-barajneh-casualties-reported.ashx
48. The UNHCR has reported the existence of roughly 4,300 informal settlements throughout Lebanon, with more than 2,200 settlements containing more than four tents. Almost a quarter of the Syrian refugee population is living in these settlements. UNHCR, InterAgency Mapping Partners, *Refugees in Informal Settlements, Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon, IAMP V33*, December 2016, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=12808>
49. The interviews took place in winter during a particularly cold week. Children were playing without socks in the muddy alleys in between tents and it was obvious from their physical appearance that they had a poor diet.
50. See Hala Abou Zaki, “Les réfugiés de Syrie dans le camp de Chatila: conflit de légitimité et solidarités entre “nouveaux” et “anciens” réfugiés,” *Confluences Méditerranée*, num. 92, January 2015, 49-59, www.cairn.info/revue-confluences-mediterranee-2015-1-page-49.htm
51. Cf. for instance “Syrian Refugees Burden and Benefit for Lebanese Economy,” *Reuters*, April 17, 2013, www.reuters.com/article/2013/04/17/us-crisis-lebanon-refugees-idUSBRE93G0MW20130417
52. 55-year-old married male from Homs, low income, opposition affiliation, living in an informal settlement in Halba, Akkar.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. 27-year-old married male from Reqqa, middle class, no political affiliation, living in an informal settlement in Riyak, Bekaa.
56. 27-year-old married female, used to live in Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Rachaya, Bekaa.
57. 33-year-old married male from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
58. 37-year-old married male from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
59. 48-year-old married female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
60. Cf. “Syrian Youth Worry About Draft,” *Al Monitor*, October 27, 2014, www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/10/syria-youth-flee-military-service-back-up.html
61. 26-year-old divorced female from Reef Idlib, middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Beirut.
62. 47-year-old married male Palestinian from Al Sabinah Camp, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
63. Interviews with Palestinians refugees were much more emotional, which reflected the precarious situation they were in.
64. Palestinian refugees have endured tremendous suffering, whether coming from the Yarmouk or the Sabinah camps, trapped by armed hostilities. “UNRWA Condemns Attack on Sbeineh Palestine Refugee Camp in Syria,” May 30, 2013, <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/unrwa-condemns-attack-sbeineh-palestine-refugee-camp-syria>. The siege of Yarmouk caused severe hunger and starvation among residents as well as water shortages and disease. “Desperate Palestinian Refugees Starve as Battle Rages in Damascus,” *The Guardian*, April 17, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/17/desperate-yarmouk-refugees-starve-as-battle-rages-in-damascus>
65. 47-year-old married male Palestinian from Al Sabinah Camp, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
66. 52-year-old single female Palestinian from Al Sabinah Camp, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.

67. 36-year-old married male Palestinian from Al Sabinah Camp, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saïda, southern Lebanon
68. Women's presence in the workforce was recorded at 10% in 1960, 7.9% in 1981, 12.2% in 1989, and 12.3% in 2003. In Baudouin Dupret, Zouhair Ghazzal, Youssef Courbage, and Mohammed Al-Dbiyat, *La Syrie au Présent, Reflets d'une Société* (Sindbad: Actes Sud, 2007), 184-187.
69. For more background information, see Norwegian Refugee Council, *Women Refugees in Lebanon and the Consequences of Limited Legal Status on their Housing Land and Property Rights* (Lebanon, March 2016), <https://www.flyktninghjelpen.no/globalassets/pdf/reports/women-refugees-in-lebanon.pdf>
70. 38-year-old married male Palestinian from Yarmouk, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saïda, Southern Lebanon.
71. The *'asabiya* is a sociological notion developed by the 14th-century Arab thinker Ibn Khaldun. On a contemporary note, Michel Seurat describes the *'asabiya* as "communal solidarity that solely bestows authority, thus guaranteeing social cohesion." Michel Seurat, "L'Etat de Barbarie, Syrie 1979-1982," *Esprit* (November 1983). Cf. Olivier Roy, "Groupes de Solidarité en Moyen-Orient et en Asie Centrale. Etats, Territoires, Réseaux," *Les Cahiers du CERI*, num. 16 (1996). On the *'asabiya* notion as highlighted by Ibn Khaldun, cf. Heena Qadir, "Sociological Insights of Asabiyyah by Ibn Khaldun: An Inevitable Force for Social Dynamism," *International Journal of Recent Scientific Research* 4, no. 8 (August 2013).
72. 21-year-old young single female refugee, from Hums, student, living in Akkar.
73. 36-year-old married male from Deir Zor, used to live in Birze near Damascus, low income, no political affiliation, living in Baddaoui Refugee Camp, Northern Lebanon.
74. 37-year-old married male from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
75. 48-year-old married female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
76. 47-year-old married male Palestinian from Al Sabinah Camp, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saïda, Southern Lebanon.
77. 30-year-old single male from Raqqa, higher income, pro-regime affiliation, living in Beirut.
78. 52-year-old single female Palestinian from Al Sabinah Camp, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saïda, Southern Lebanon.
79. 29-year-old married female Palestinian from Deraa, used to live in Al Sabinah Camp, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saïda, Southern Lebanon.
80. 35-year-old married male from Homs, low income, no political affiliation, living in an informal settlement in Faour, Bekaa.
81. 22-year-old divorced female from Daraya, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Ablah, Bekaa.
82. 39-year-old married male from Aleppo Suburbs, low income, opposition affiliation, living in Shatila Palestinian Camp in Beirut.
83. Cf. Dupret et al, 199.
84. 25-year-old single female from Deraa, low income, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa, who stated that "it was forbidden to discuss . . . religious issues."
85. In June 1979, 83 Alawi military officers were killed at the Military Academy of Aleppo, and in June 1980, an assassination attempt was made against President Hafez Al Assad.
86. For more on the Alawi control of the Syrian state, see cf. Seurat; and John McHugo, *Syria: A Recent History* (Saqi Books, 2014).
87. 21-year-old single male from Daraya, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
88. 22-year-old divorced female from Daraya, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Ablah, Bekaa.
89. 21-year-old single female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Al Marj, Bekaa.
90. 27-year-old single male from Reef Idlib, middle class, socialist affiliation, living in Beirut.
91. Ibid.

92. 39-year-old married male from Aleppo Suburbs, low income, opposition affiliation, living in Shatila Palestinian Camp in Beirut.
93. 30-year-old single male from Raqqa, higher income, pro-regime affiliation, living in Beirut.
94. 27-year-old married female, used to live in Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Rachaya, Bekaa; 27-year-old married male from Raqqa, middle class, no political affiliation, living in an informal settlement in Riyak, Bekaa.
95. 33-year-old single male from Homs, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
96. 31-year-old single male from Damascus, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
97. 55-year-old married male from Homs, low income, opposition affiliation, living in an informal settlement in Halba, Akkar.
98. 39-year-old married male from Aleppo Suburbs, low income, opposition affiliation, living in Shatila Palestinian Camp in Beirut.
99. 26-year-old divorced female from Reef Idlib, middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Beirut.
100. 48-year-old married female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
101. 25-year-old single male from Idlib, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
102. 30-year-old married male from Homs, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Tripoli, Northern Lebanon.
103. 33-year-old married male from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
104. 25-year-old single female from Deraa, low income, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
105. 26-year-old single male from Homs, middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Tripoli, Northern Lebanon.
106. 48-year-old married female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
107. 37-year-old married male from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
108. 25-year-old single male from Idlib, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
109. 26-year-old divorced female from Reef Idlib, middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Beirut.
110. Ibid.
111. 35-year-old married male from Homs, low income, no political affiliation, living in an informal settlement in Faour, Bekaa.
112. 27-year-old single male from Reef Idlib, middle class, socialist affiliation, living in Beirut.
113. 22-year-old single female from Daraya, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
114. 26-year-old divorced female from Reef Idlib, middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Beirut.
115. 33-year-old single male from Homs, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
116. 28-year-old single male Palestinian from Yarmouk, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
117. 30-year-old single female Palestinian from Yarmouk, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
118. 27-year-old married female, used to live in Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Rachaya, Bekaa.
119. 25-year-old single male from Idlib, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
120. 30-year-old single male from Daraya, low income, no political affiliation, living in Bar Elias, Bekaa.
121. 27-year-old married female, used to live in Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Rachaya, Bekaa.
122. 25-year-old single female from Deraa, low income, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
123. 26-year-old single male from Homs, middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Tripoli, Northern Lebanon.
124. 30-year-old single male from Raqqa, higher income, pro-regime affiliation, living in Beirut.
125. 23-year-old single female from Zabadani (Damascus Suburbs), middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Al Marj, Bekaa.

126. 22-year-old single female from Daraya, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
127. 21-year-old single female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Al Marj, Bekaa.
128. 26-year-old single male from Homs, middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Tripoli, Northern Lebanon.
129. Ibid.
130. Ibid.
131. "Lebanon Public Schools Welcome Syria's Displaced Children," *France 24*, webdoc.france24.com/lebanon-syria-war-displaced-children-school/
132. 37-year-old married male from Aleppo Suburbs, low income, no political affiliation, living in an informal settlement in Saadnayel, Bekaa.
133. 48-year-old married female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
134. 21-year-old single female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Al Marj, Bekaa.
135. 30-year-old single female Palestinian from Yarmouk, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
136. 27-year-old married male from Reqqa, middle class, no political affiliation, living in an informal settlement in Riyak, Bekaa.
137. 30-year-old single male from Daraya, low income, no political affiliation, living in Bar Elias, Bekaa.
138. 52-year-old single female Palestinian from Al Sabinah Camp, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
139. 37-year-old married male from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
140. 27-year-old single male from Daraya, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
141. 23-year-old single male from Aleppo Suburbs, lower middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Halba, Akkar.
142. 33-year-old single male from Homs, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
143. 27-year-old married male from Reqqa, middle class, no political affiliation, living in an informal settlement in Riyak, Bekaa.
144. 23-year-old single female from Zabadani (Damascus Suburbs), middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Al Marj, Bekaa.
145. 25-year-old single female from Deraa, low income, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
146. 33-year-old single male from Homs, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
147. 31-year-old single male from Damascus, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
148. 22-year-old single female from Daraya, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
149. 29-year-old married female Palestinian from Deraa, used to live in Al Sabinah Camp, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
150. 55-year-old married male from Homs, low income, opposition affiliation, living in an informal settlement in Halba, Akkar.
151. 38-year-old married male Palestinian from Yarmouk, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
152. 25-year-old single female from Deraa, low income, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
153. 33-year-old single male from Homs, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
154. 21-year-old single female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Al Marj, Bekaa.
155. 27-year-old single male from Reef Idlib, middle class, socialist affiliation, living in Beirut.
156. 39-year-old married male from Aleppo Suburbs, low income, opposition affiliation, living in Shatila Palestinian Camp in Beirut.
157. Representative of the Syria Center for Policy Research, interviewed in Beirut on February 2, 2017.

158. 30-year-old married male from Homs, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Tripoli, Northern Lebanon.
159. The Ta'if Agreement of October 1989 ended the civil war in Lebanon and introduced power-sharing arrangements through constitutional amendments that gave birth to the Second Republic of Lebanon. Yet, it could not shield the country from political deadlock, fragmentation, and sectarianism.
160. 26-year-old single male from Homs, middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Tripoli, Northern Lebanon.
161. 48-year-old married female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
162. 33-year-old married male from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
163. 30-year-old single male from Reqqa, higher income, pro-regime affiliation, living in Beirut.
164. 30-year-old single male from Daraya, low income, no political affiliation, living in Bar Elias, Bekaa.
165. 30-year-old single male from Reqqa, higher income, pro-regime affiliation, living in Beirut.
166. 33-year-old married male from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
167. 33-year-old single male from Homs, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
168. Ibid.
169. 31-year-old single male from Damascus, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
170. 30-year-old single male from Reqqa, higher income, pro-regime affiliation, living in Beirut.
171. 21-year-old single female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Al Marj, Bekaa.
172. Ibid.
173. Ted Robert Gurr, *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1993); and Chaim Kaufmann, "Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars," *International Security* 20, no. 4 (Spring 1996).
174. 38-year-old married male Syrian Palestinian from Yarmouk, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
175. 38-year-old married male Palestinian from Yarmouk, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
176. 27-year-old married female, used to live in Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Rachaya, Bekaa.
177. 52-year-old single female Palestinian from Al Sabinah Camp, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
178. 22-year-old divorced female from Damascus, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Bekaa.
179. 25-year-old single male from Idlib, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
180. 30-year-old single male from Daraya, low income, no political affiliation, living in Bar Elias, Bekaa.
181. 30-year-old single female Palestinian from Yarmouk, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
182. 21-year-old single female from Homs, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Halba, Akkar.
183. As explained above, in the context of this research, the interviewers did not introduce the term reconciliation [*moussâlaha*] in questions with interviewees, instead using the more neutral concept of coexistence [*ta'ayush*], which invokes the ideas of conciliation and appeasement in light of the divisions and tensions that have arisen from the conflict. The term reconciliation only appears in the study when it was used directly and unprompted by the respondents themselves.
184. On the issue of social repair, see Laurel E Fletcher and Harvey M. Weinstein, "Violence and Social Repair: Rethinking the Contribution of Justice to Reconciliation," *Human Rights Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (August 2002): 573-639.
185. 27-year-old married male from Reqqa, middle class, no political affiliation, living in an informal settlement in Riyak, Bekaa.
186. 30-year-old single male from Daraya, low income, no political affiliation, living in Bar Elias, Bekaa.

187. 48-year-old married female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
188. 33-year-old single male from Homs, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
189. 26-year-old single male from Homs, middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Tripoli, Northern Lebanon.
190. 22-year-old single female from Daraya, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
191. Ibid.
192. 21-year-old single male from Daraya, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
193. 26-year-old divorced female from Reef Idlib, middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Beirut.
194. 25-year-old single female from Deraa, low income, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
195. Ibid.
196. 27-year-old married female, used to live in Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Rachaya, Bekaa.
197. 25-years-old single male from Idlib, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
198. 52-year-old single female Palestinian from Al Sabinah Camp, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
199. 21-year-old single female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Al Marj, Bekaa.
200. 30-year-old single male from Raqqa, higher income, pro-regime affiliation, living in Beirut.
201. 33-year-old single male from Homs, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
202. 21-year-old single female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Al Marj, Bekaa.
203. 22-year-old divorced female from Daraya, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Ablah, Bekaa.
204. 27-year-old married male from Raqqa, middle class, no political affiliation, living in an informal settlement in Riyak, Bekaa.
205. Seurat, 24. On Syrian peasantry, see Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of its Lesser Rural Notables and their Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
206. 22-year-old divorced female from Daraya, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Ablah, Bekaa.
207. 38-year-old married male Palestinian from Yarmouk, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
208. 36-year-old married male Palestinian from Al Sabinah Camp, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
209. 37-year-old married male from Aleppo Suburbs, low income, no political affiliation, living in an informal settlement in Saadnayel, Bekaa.
210. 23-year-old single female from Zabadani (Damascus Suburbs), middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Al Marj, Bekaa.
211. 30-year-old married male from Homs, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Tripoli, Northern Lebanon.
212. 33-year-old married male from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
213. 27-year-old single male from Daraya, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
214. 30-year-old single male Syrian from Daraya, low income, no political affiliation, living in Bar Elias, Bekaa.
215. 37-year-old married male Syrian from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
216. 26-year-old divorced female from Reef Idlib, middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Beirut.
217. 36-year-old married male Palestinian from Al Sabinah Camp, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
218. 39-year-old married male from Aleppo Suburbs, low income, opposition affiliation, living in Shatila Palestinian Camp in Beirut.

219. 33-years-old single male from Homs, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
220. 25-year-old single male from Idlib, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
221. 37-year-old married male from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
222. 30-year-old married male from Homs, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Tripoli, Northern Lebanon.
223. 30-year-old single male from Daraya, low income, no political affiliation, living in Bar Elias, Bekaa.
224. 30-year-old single female Palestinian from Yarmouk, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
225. 25-year-old single male from Idlib, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
226. 38-year-old married male Palestinian from Yarmouk, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
227. 37-year-old married male from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
228. 52-year-old single female Palestinian from Al Sabinah Camp, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
229. 47-year-old married male Palestinian from Al Sabinah Camp, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
230. 48-year-old married female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
231. 33-year-old single male from Homs, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
232. 30-year-old single male from Daraya, low income, no political affiliation, living in Bar Elias, Bekaa.
233. 21-year-old single male from Daraya, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
234. 27-year-old married female, used to live in Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Rachaya, Bekaa.
235. 27-year-old married male from Raqqa, middle class, no political affiliation, living in a refugee settlement in Riyak, Bekaa.
236. 35-year-old married male from Homs, low income, no political affiliation, living in a refugee settlement in Faour, Bekaa.
237. 33-year-old married male from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
238. 37-year-old married male from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
239. 30-year-old single female Palestinian from Yarmouk, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Saida, Southern Lebanon.
240. 23-year-old single male from Aleppo Suburbs, lower middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Halba, Akkar.
241. 21-year-old single male from Daraya, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
242. 48-year-old married female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
243. 31-year-old single male from Damascus, higher income, no political affiliation, living in Beirut.
244. 22-year-old divorced female from Daraya, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Ablah, Bekaa.
245. 25-year-old single female from Deraa, low income, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
246. 21-year-old single female from Homs, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Halba, Akkar.
247. 35-year-old married male from Homs, low income, no political affiliation, living in a refugee settlement in Faour, Bekaa.
248. 30-year-old single male from Daraya, low income, no political affiliation, living in Bar Elias, Bekaa.
249. 21-year-old single female from Homs, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Halba, Akkar.
250. 35-year-old married male from Homs, low income, no political affiliation, living in a refugee settlement in Faour, Bekaa.
251. 21-year-old single female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Al Marj, Bekaa.

252. 48-year-old married female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
253. Ibid.
254. Ibid.
255. 55-year-old married male Syrian from Homs, low income, opposition affiliation, living in an informal settlement in Halba, Akkar.
256. Ibid.
257. Ibid.
258. Ibid.
259. 23-year-old single male from Aleppo Suburbs, lower middle class, opposition affiliation, living in Halba, Akkar.
260. 30-year-old single male from Daraya, low income, no political affiliation, living in Bar Elias, Bekaa.
261. 27-year-old single male from Daraya, lower middle class, no political affiliation, living in Taalbaya, Bekaa.
262. 30-year-old married male from Homs, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Tripoli, Northern Lebanon.
263. Ibid.
264. 48-year-old married female from Daraya, middle class, no political affiliation, living in Qob Elias, Bekaa.
265. 30-year-old single male from Daraya, low income, no political affiliation, living in Bar Elias, Bekaa.
266. *Jāhiliyya* or “State of Ignorance,” is the pre-Islam period as described in the Quran and Islamic culture.
267. Pre-Islamic poet and knight, born as a slave to an Ethiopian princess and taken as a slave by his father, a respected warrior. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antarah_ibn_Shaddad
268. Chapter 93 of the Qur’an.
269. 52-year-old single female Syrian Palestinian from Al Sabinah Camp, low income, no political affiliation, living in Ain El Helwe Palestinian Camp in Saida, Southern Lebanon.

Appendix

Synopsis 1: Findings on Current and Future Community-Level Efforts for Syrian Communities

Since the beginning of the Syrian conflict, significant community-level efforts have been undertaken for Syrian communities inside and outside the country. The level of commitment and the kind of activities differ from one institution to another, including UN agencies, INGOs, and local NGOs. Local NGOs, whether Lebanese or Syrian, employ different strategies, depending on how they see the challenges related to assistance, protection, coexistence, fragmentation, and justice. It is worth repeating here the positive impact on Syrian refugees, particularly young Syrian volunteers, working with INGOs and NGOs through activities and different trainings that have helped them to gain valuable skills that can potentially be used in their homeland when they return.

Syrian Civil Society Organizations

Historically in Syria, civil society was weak, as community-level efforts, whether for charity or women's issues, were nonexistent or controlled by the regime through various organizations. Local groups usually had a very limited capacity to act, as in other Arab Spring countries, with government oversight, like the requirement to have a representative of state security forces on the board. The Syrian conflict, however, led to an increase in community-level efforts through the emergence of multiple structures, networks, and institutions working on civic, political, and social rights, trying to enhance the political knowledge and participation of Syrians as well as to respond to people's needs inside and outside Syria. As detailed above, ten Syrian organizations based in Lebanon and Turkey were interviewed for his study, to shed light on their efforts to address issues of significance for the displaced and potentially for their eventual return.

Socioeconomic Empowerment and Education

As detailed in this report, many refugees in Lebanon described how they had lost their dignity because, by law, they are unable to work and earn a living to support themselves and their families. Emergency response is covered by the local efforts of Syrian NGOs in Lebanon, which provide winter kits, food security, and shelter. But according to a Syrian activist, "Relief is not the sole need. The need is to feel dignified and for their children to receive an education." Different Syrian organizations are therefore also responding to this need via vocational trainings, small business management lessons, and education for children.

As education is also an essential need, some Syrian organizations provide a parallel educational system to fill the education gap. Given that Lebanon prohibits the establishment of Syrian private schools, these projects are run under the cover of associations or with the support of Lebanese private schools. One of the schools visited by the researchers in the Bekaa has approximately 1,200 pupils. Other NGOs are also trying to fill this gap by teaching children languages, math, and sciences and providing a peace education program to embrace tolerance and respect towards all communities and religions. This program also gives students an opportunity to express their frustrations and opinions without violence, which helps them to deal with their anger and trauma.

High illiteracy levels also exist among adult women, especially those from rural areas, where young girls are generally forced to marry at a very young age (12 and 13), a fact that had been hidden in official statistics in Syria but was uncovered by the war. Thanks to Syrian organizations, some women have learned English and others how to use computers. Some of them have plans to develop their own projects.

Political and Rights Literacy

When the conflict started in Syria, nobody expected it to last as long as it has or to lead to such atrocities. Different organizations were originally created to work with youth and prepare them to become active players during and after the transition and the building of a new Syrian state, based on the rule of law, nondiscrimination, and citizenship. With time, however, these activities became capacity-building efforts for the future.

Some organizations try to address the issue of civil documentation, such as the lack of official identification papers and birth or marriage certificates, which represent a great challenge for Syrians in Lebanon. There are also efforts to produce educational videos on citizenship and nonviolent activism. Believing that human rights education is very important for building peace, some organizations are engaged in documenting and monitoring human rights violations in Syria and Lebanon and have produced periodic reports. Along the same lines, other organizations have trained and encouraged young refugees to be active on social media and become “effective voices” (*aswât fâ’ila*), in order to build cohesion and life skills for Syrian youth in Lebanon.

Conflict Resolution and Transitional Justice

Some Syrian organizations, especially those based in Turkey, also focus on conflict resolution/transformation and transitional justice. Many fear the “demographic redistribution and ethnic cleansing that is starting to happen as a result of this war,” as “the cost will mostly be born by Alawi, in Idlib mostly Sunni and in Hassake mostly Kurds,” according to a Syrian activist based in Turkey. Therefore, some of these groups support the reintegration of Arab displaced persons and refugees in Kurdish regions, while others work to build capacity in conflict resolution and transitional justice in Syria.

Transitional justice ideas have been promoted since 2012, focusing on documentation, capacity building and assistance for memory preservation, and legal support. However, according to activists, there is a lot of doubt and mistrust about the concept of transitional justice among Syrian communities. People link it to the idea of “moving on,” “reconciling and giving up on accountability and real justice,” explained a Syrian activist.

Lebanese Civil Society Organizations

Lebanese civil society organizations are quite active in supporting Syrian communities in Lebanon, though they take a different approach from Syrian NGOs. They have provided aid and assistance to Syrian refugees since 2012. Lebanese organizations are also active in promoting dialogue and restoring social ties, employing a participatory approach to help alleviate the sense of a missed life and missed opportunities for refugees. Some NGOs provide legal protection for Syrian refugees and try to mediate between them and Lebanese authorities. Legal professionals active in Lebanese associations support imprisoned refugees, who constitute a vulnerable category without basic rights. Syrians in Lebanese prisons have difficulty accessing legal counsel and have limited social networks to rely on.

Besides building refugees’ capacities, Lebanese organizations work on children’s rights and women’s rights. As many Syrian families rely on their children as breadwinners, children face a range of dangers in the streets, including harassment. Lebanese NGOs try to sensitize parents about these threats, in order to prevent them. Some organizations focus on raising awareness of the negative impact of early marriage and that the acceptable marriage age in Lebanon is 17, not 13 or 12. They also contribute to vocational training of young people who can then make a living with dignity and acquire valuable skills.

International Organizations and UN Agencies

Based on their specific mandates, UN agencies and international organizations are very active in supporting the Syrian community in Lebanon. These organizations provide a wide range of assistance to Syrian refugees across the region, through humanitarian programs, protection monitoring, human rights advocacy, and economic sustainability. The general feeling among international organizations is that current efforts fall far short of covering all refugees' needs: "This crisis is so massive, so incredible it has a 'no hope' aspect to it." As highlighted by a representative of an international organization, "aid does not replace dignity," as "humanitarian aid is the response to the absence of a political response."

Some agencies have started working on conditions of return as part of their core missions to help refugees to be resettled in third countries or to make sure that the decision to go back "is based on a safe and voluntary return." Other organizations' representatives stated that the process of "returning is a political act" and insisted on "returnees being able to make informed decisions about their choice to return." It is, therefore, paramount to convey accurate information, which "doesn't trickle down all the way to the settlements and camps."

Emergency Response to Daily Needs and Economic Sustainability

Most refugees interviewed in Lebanon were registered with UNHCR, even though not all were benefitting from its cash-assistance program or other assistance they are entitled to as a refugee with an official status. In coordination with the United Nations, international organizations provide basic assistance to those considered most vulnerable (cash assistance, fuel vouchers, winter kits) and mobile clinics that offer legal counsel to refugees and assist families in registering babies (up to the age of one) with the government.

Youth Skills and Adult Empowerment

As detailed in previous sections, many refugees and activists highlighted the issue of education and dignity. INGOs focus on the needs of children, organizing drawing, music, singing, and theater classes based on peacebuilding approaches and English lessons. Many young interviewees reported that they were volunteering with different INGOs, which was viewed very positively. All INGOs stressed the fact that there is also a need to empower adults through vocational training, so that they could afford to meet their own financial needs. Syrians accepted aid when they were in distress. However, it was reported that they now often have "empty looks," an indication that they have lost hope.

Insights on Syrian Refugees from the Perspective of Civil Society

Working with Syrian refugees is not an easy task, but it contributes to an understanding of the Syrian context that can guide programming and policymaking. All organizations (local and international) stated that they plan their activities according to the needs of beneficiaries, which are determined by needs assessments, focus-group discussions, and questionnaires. Monitoring and evaluation programs are also used to evaluate ongoing activities and improve programming, according to the impact reflected by beneficiaries. Through these evaluations, organizations collect data, report on arrests and other issues, and produce research. They also provide contextual analysis and advocacy tools.

The issue of return and reconciliation lies outside the mission of most organizations, with a few exceptions, as described above. Conditions of return, according to many NGO representatives who were interviewed, will depend on political negotiations and the way the conflict ends—whether through a negotiated settlement or

the victory of one party. They considered reconciliation to be a very sensitive topic. They also avoid the use of terms such as “social cohesion,” preferring “social stability,” in order to avoid issues related to the integration/nationalization of Syrians in Lebanon.

Representatives of organizations all asserted that there is a lack of trust in NGOs because the Syrian regime previously supported sectarianism and religious institutions more than secular ones, as a means of maintaining control through division. This sectarianism was then reinforced by political divisions related to the conflict. Such fragmentation was hidden by a security umbrella, and the regime has nourished the resulting mistrust. The impact and success of these new Syrian organizations, therefore, greatly depends on developments on the ground: small successes can quickly vanish and the power to influence diminishes considerably when massacres reduce the overall level of trust, including in NGOs.

Activists insisted that the analysis of conditions of return should include economic factors and ensure that return processes are as inclusive as possible. They believed that poor conditions in Lebanon (the “incredible destruction of dignity and self-esteem”) were pushing Syrians to go back, even with minimal conditions in place for their return. (As previously mentioned, interviews with refugees bore out that fact that despite the humiliations, many had decided to remain in Lebanon, because it would be easier to go back to Syria once conditions allowed, not because they would prefer to settle in the country.) Some NGO representatives recognized that humanitarian assistance is considered insufficient for the needs of Syrian refugees.

Activists confirmed that there is a deep fragmentation of Syrian society and communities. The fragmentation would be an obstacle for return. Those who remained in Syria believe that they sacrificed more than the refugees who fled. The marginalization and isolation of communities has led to very localized thinking about solutions, making it very difficult to have broader national thinking about the impact on civil society ways of intervention and programmatic goals. In order to rebuild social ties, it was advised not to adopt a top-down approach to make people work together, especially given the extensive loss of trust between people.

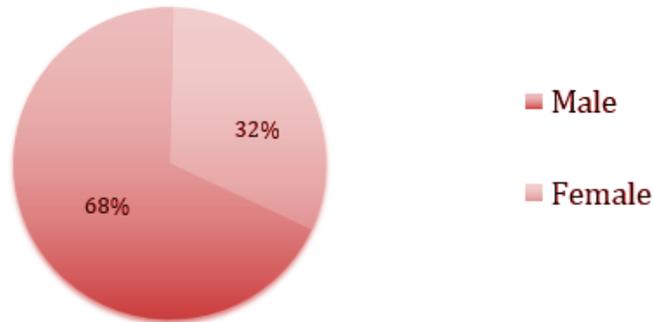
Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Gender	Age	Place of Origin	Family Status	Religious Faith	Social Status	Affiliation	Location in Lebanon
M	30	Homs	Married	Christian	Middle class	No particular affiliation	Tripoli
M	26	Homs	Single	Sunni	Middle class	Opposition	Tripoli
F	21	Homs	Single	Sunni	Lower Middle class	No particular affiliation	Halba Akkar
F	22	Daraya	Single	Sunni	Lower Middle class	No particular affiliation	Bekaa
M	27	Reqqa	Single	Sunni	Middle class	No particular affiliation	Bekaa Settlement
M	30	Daraya	Single	Sunni	Low income	No particular affiliation	Bekaa
M	38	Aleppo Suburb	Married, 3 children	Sunni	Low income	No particular affiliation	Bekaa Settlement
M	21	Daraya	Single	Sunni	Lower Middle class	No particular affiliation	Bekaa
F	21	Daraya	Single	Sunni	Middle class	No particular affiliation	Bekaa
F	25	Deraa	Single	Sunni	Low income	No particular affiliation	Bekaa
M	37	Aleppo Suburb	Married, 4 children	Sunni	Low income	No particular affiliation	Bekaa Settlement
M	23	Aleppo suburb	Single	Sunni	Lower middle class	Opposition	Akkar
F	48	Daraya	Remarried, 3 children	Sunni	Middle class	Opposition	Bekaa
M	31	Damascus	Single	Christian	Higher income	No particular affiliation	Beirut
M	27	Idlib Suburb - Ariha	Single	Sunni	Middle class	Socialist	Beirut

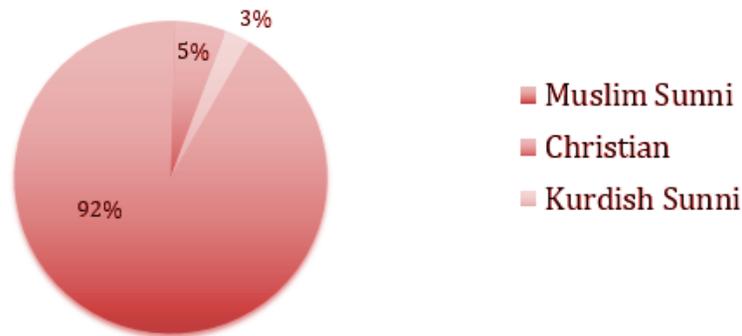
M	33	Daraya	Married, 3 children	Sunni	Middle class	No particular affiliation	Bekaa
M	37	Daraya	Married, 3 children	Sunni	Middle class	No particular affiliation	Bekaa
M	55	Homs	Married, 8 children	Sunni	Low income	Opposition	Halba Settlement Akkar
M	33	Homs	Single	Sunni	Higher income	No particular affiliation	Beirut
M	25	Idlib	Single	Sunni	Higher income	No particular affiliation	Beirut
M	30	Reqqa	Single	Sunni	Higher income	Regime	Beirut
F	26	Reef Idlib	Divorced	Sunni	Middle class	Opposition	Beirut
F	23	Damascus Suburb Zabadani	Single	Sunni	Middle class	Opposition	Bekaa
M	35	Homs	Married, 5 children	Sunni	Low income	No particular affiliation	Bekaa Settlement
F	22	Damascus	Divorced, 1 child	Sunni	Lower middle class	No particular affiliation	Bekaa
F	27	Deraa	Married, 4 children	Sunni	Middle class	No particular affiliation	Bekaa
M	27	Daraya	Single	Sunni	Lower middle class	No particular affiliation	Bekaa
M	36	Deir Zor - Living in Damascus - Birze	Married, 3 children	Sunni	Low income	No particular affiliation	Badaoui Refugee Camp – North Lebanon
M	39	Aleppo Suburb	Married, 6 children	Sunni Kurdish	Low income	No particular affiliation	Shatila Camp Beirut
M	43	Damascus/ Al Sabinah Camp (Syrian Palestinian)	Married, 6 children	Sunni	Low income	No particular affiliation	Badaoui Refugee Camp – North Lebanon

M	47	Damascus/ Al Sabinah Camp (Syrian Palestinian)	Married, 4 children	Sunni	Low income	No particular affiliation	Saida Ain El Helwe Camp
F	52	Damascus/ Al Sabinah Camp (Syrian Palestinian)	Single	Sunni	Low income	No particular affiliation	Saida Ain El Helwe Camp
F	29	Deraa (Syrian Palestinian)	Married, 3 children	Sunni	Low income	No particular affiliation	Saida Ain El Helwe Camp
M	36	Damascus/ Al Sabinah Camp (Syrian Palestinian)	Married, 3 children	Sunni	Low income	No particular affiliation	Saida Ain El Helwe Camp
M	28	Damascus/ Yarmouk camp (Syrian Palestinian)	Single	Sunni	Lower middle class	No particular affiliation	Saida
F	30	Damascus/ Yarmouk camp (Syrian Palestinian)	Single	Sunni	Lower middle class	No particular affiliation	Saida
M	38	Damascus/ Yarmouk camp (Syrian Palestinian)	Married, no children	Sunni	Low income	No particular affiliation	Saida Ain El Helwe Camp

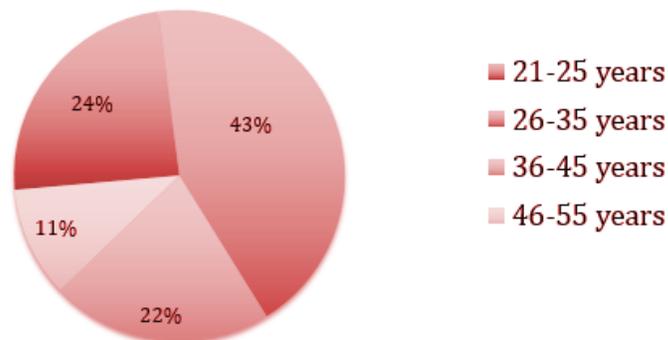
Graph 1
Gender Distribution of Refugee Respondents



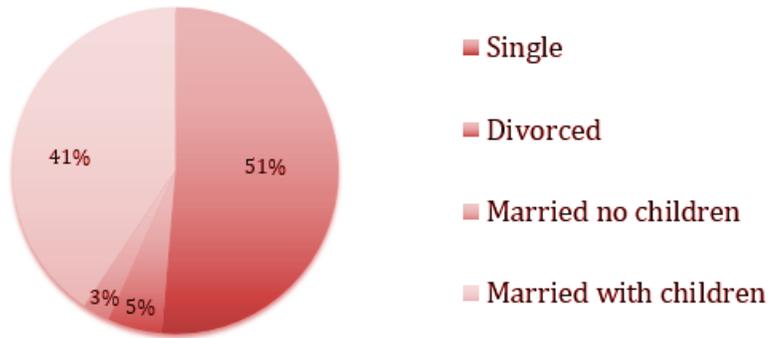
Graph 2
Confessional Affiliations of Refugee Respondents



Graph 3
Age Distribution of Refugee Respondents



Graph 4
Family Status of Refugee Respondents



Graph 5
Social Condition of Refugee Respondents

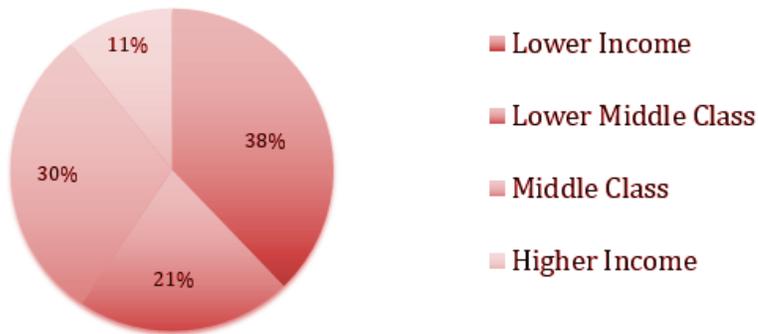


Table 2: List of Interviews with Local and International Organizations in Lebanon

Organization	Meeting Date and Place
Amel Association	January 17, 2017, Beirut
Association Justice et Miséricorde (AJEM)	January 27, 2017, Roumieh Prison
Beyond Reform and Development	January 26, 2017, Beirut
Caritas Lebanon	February 2, 2017, Sin el Fil
Women Charity League	February 7, 2017, Halba, Akkar
International Committee of the Red Cross	January 23, 2017, Beirut
Norwegian Refugee Council	February 3, 2017, Beirut
Oxfam International	February 1, 2017, Beirut
UNHCR	January 23, 2017, Beirut
OHCHR	February 10, 2017, Beirut
Search for Common Ground	February 3, 2017, Beirut
OCHA	February 2, 2017, Beirut
Economic and Social Council for West Asia (ESCWA)	February 14, 2017, Beirut

Table 3: List of Syrian NGOs Interviewed in/from Lebanon

Organization	Meeting Date and Place
Baytna Syria (Turkey)	January 23, 2017, via Skype
Badael (Turkey)	January 24, 2017, via Skype
Dawlaty	January 25, 2017, Beirut
Syrian League for Citizenship (SL4C)	January 25, 2017, Beirut
Nuon	January 26, 2017, Beirut
Center for Civil Society and Democracy in Syria (Turkey)	January 28, 2017, via Skype
Bassamat	January 31, 2017, Taalbaya, Bekaa
Basmeh w Zeitooneh	February 2, 2017, Beirut
Syria Center for Policy Research	February 2, 2017, Beirut
Choubbak Amal	February 2, 2017, Beirut

Cover Images. Top row, from left: Syrian refugees in Lebanon, February 22, 2012 (Pieter Stockmans). Syrian refugees in Lebanon, March 2013 (Jos de Vod/Cordaid). A 15-year-old Syrian refugee cleans fish in a shop next to his home in an underground shelter in El Akbiya, Lebanon, September 2013. He has not been to school in 3 years (Shawn Baldwin/UNHCR). Middle row, from left: Syrian refugee families share living quarters in a mosque and in tents in the front yard, in the Bekaa valley, Lebanon, July 26, 2012 (Salah Malkawi/UNHCR). A Syrian refugee from Idlib, and her son with disabilities, living in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, January 30, 2017 (DFID). Syrian refugees in Aarsal, Lebanon, days before over 1,000 families escaped increasing fighting on the Syrian side of the border, November 2013 (M. Hofer/UNHCR). Bottom row, from left: Syrian Refugee in Lebanon, 2014 (plus8gmt/flickr). Refugees arriving in Lebanon may be forced to live in cellars, stables, garages, and even vacant lots (Sam Tarling/Caritas Internationalis). A refugee receives vocational training in northern Lebanon in how to make fishing nets as part of a co-operative, while attending college, November 6, 2013 (DFID).

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