POLICY PAPERS

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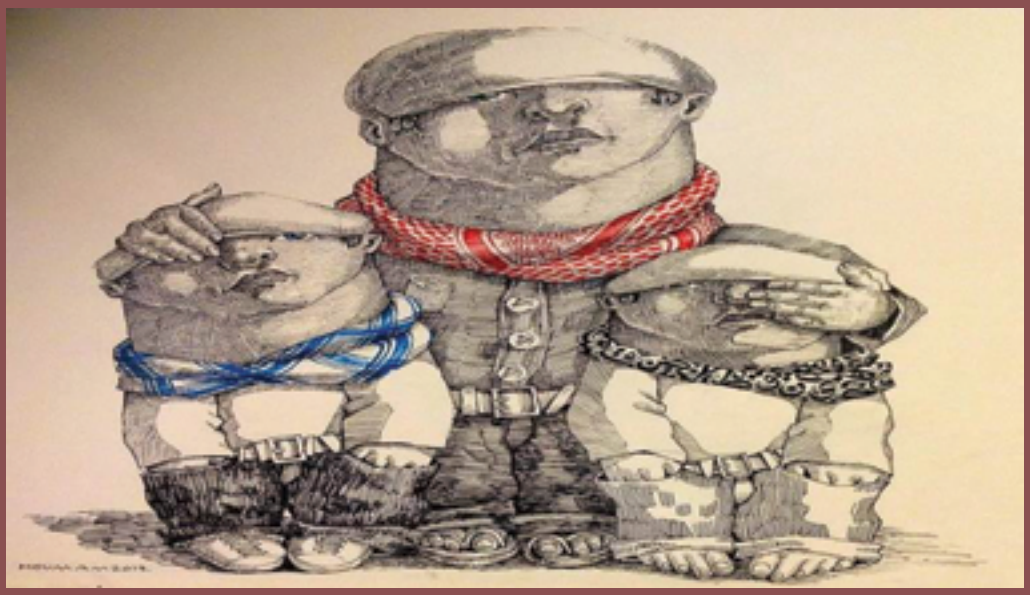

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What policies are needed to protect Syrian displaced persons in Lebanon?

Overlooked Priorities

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ABOUT THE ASFARI INSTITUTE AT AUB

The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship is a regional hub of a dynamic community of academics, practitioners, policymakers, activists, and members of the general public interested in exploring traditional and innovative forms of collective actions, locally-grounded policy debates and in advancing realistic solutions to the obstacles to effective civil society and citizenship in the Arab world.

In doing so, the Institute provides training workshops and programs beside regular teaching at AUB, encourages and provides evidence-based research in areas related to political participation, accountability and good governance, produces policy/ practice recommendations to improve citizens' engagement and civil society roles in mediation, deliberation and self-organization. It also promotes public awareness of civil society and civic engagement best practices in the region through its monthly meetings and seminars and stimulates fruitful dialogue among the region's varied publics through its programmatic activities of workshops, conferences, blog and publications.

The Asfari Institute is a research center based at AUB since 2012 and is a solid partner in consolidating AUB commitment to serve, educate and engage the Lebanese society. The Institute is mobilized to develop a new minor program on civil society and collective action with relevant AUB faculties. Among its new activities is the consolidation of three new lines of work: Civil Society Law and Governance, Culture as Resistance, and Civil Society in Conflict and Post Conflict Setting.

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Bridging Academia and Activism

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About the Project

THE LAY OF THE LAND:

A Social Mapping of Daily Practices in Informality amongst Syrian Displaced Communities in Lebanon

Funded by the Ford Foundation

This research project examines how, in the face of conflict and crisis, Syrian displaced individuals and communities in Lebanon are attempting to (re) organize themselves within the informal sector to secure access to essential services. We understand informality as a sector of goods and services that is outside of, but not necessarily disconnected from the formal purview of the state. In Lebanon, most citizens are already accessing resources such as water and electricity from within the informal sector. Whereas access to such services might ideally be seen as indissolubly linked to the rights of citizens, the distribution of such goods in Lebanon is hardly equal in practice. The access to goods and services by displaced populations is consequently further compounded in such a context where, by the nature of the country's political economy, must also acquire and secure their rights through informal networks.

By addressing this question of informalization and displacement, we reflect on practices of exclusion as experienced amongst Syrian displaced communities from different socio-economic backgrounds who are otherwise perceived as non-citizens in Lebanon. We aim to document through qualitative methods and life history approaches some of the ways Syrian communities have attempted to harness basic livelihood necessities. In so doing, we examine how the Syrian crisis is contributing to the reassembling of these networks, their hierarchies, and ultimately reshaping modes of governance and state borders between Syria, Lebanon and among Syrians themselves.

Introduction

Dr. Dina El-Khawaga[1]

This policy report is the culmination of three years of fieldwork with Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The report aims to spark a debate about reforming policies adopted by the Lebanese authorities and various international and donor organizations. It is an attempt to reach tangible gains for Syrian refugees that the Asfari Institute interviewed through researchers from different academic institutes and civil society organizations in Lebanon.

According to data compiled by international, aid, and developmental organizations over the past nine years, the number of Syrians crossing into Lebanon has surpassed the one million mark. Moreover, approximately an additional half a million Syrians have entered the country informally. The ethnographic study that we undertook, which involved 130 refugees, revealed the suffering they undergo, whether they are registered as refugees with UNHCR, or students at Lebanese universities and schools, with valid residency permits.

Through the course of our study - which also yielded two other publications within the framework of this research project - we found that the most pressing challenge Syrians face is the need to find a sponsor (Kafeel). Reasons for this include the need to comply with legal requirements for residency and/or to find work – even in the informal sector and for an income lower than their Lebanese counterparts. In this regard, the research's output reflected the patterns of exploitation and injustice practiced by all sorts of Kafeels. The results also showed the different bureaucratic difficulties Syrians face in terms of obtaining identification papers, proof of education, and employment certificates. Such an impossible task exasperates the countless other difficulties refugees face in their attempt to start a new life in Lebanon.

The report also reveals several challenges that refugee students face. This includes the low-quality education they are offered during afternoon-shift classes at Lebanese public schools. In terms of higher education, refugees encounter various hurdles impeding their registration at public universities, in addition to the major obstacles they face at private universities that offer partial scholarships, with no stipend. Thus, students are forced to work and study at the same time, which negatively affects their academic performance.

The third conclusion the report drew up was on the importance of refuting the stereotypical approach that international organizations have adopted towards Syrian women. These organizations portray women as a homogeneous cluster of victims in a patriarchal society, and as individuals that should be protected from their relatives. The interviews and research papers have illustrated how the propagation of this narrative downplays the contribution of women in displaced communities, and aggravates the sense of alienation they already feel in host countries. Moreover, many Syrians are outraged by how these organizations depict them as suppressors of displaced women. Additionally, Syrian women have not been properly engaged as active players that can have effective roles in negotiations related to self- and group organization, not to mention peace negotiations at various levels. This in turn has provoked widespread hostility among displaced communities towards International or aid organizations, which are referred to as Umam (Nations) - alluding to their operating method that follows the United Nations lead, and adopts its hollow rhetoric regarding aid patterns.

The fourth research outcome shows the difficult living conditions that displaced Syrians have to endure. In light of the absence of official tented settlements, most displaced Syrians resort to self-organizing in informal settlements and residential compounds. The Kafala system as well as the previous waves of Syrians in Lebanon have also

[1] Director of the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship.

contributed to the propagation of these housing options that are spread across most Lebanese cities. They take the form of temporary residences, common garages that house five to six families, and self-built houses by displaced Syrian tribes often in small Lebanese towns. Moreover, spaces not designated for living are also leased to displaced Syrians – these include storehouses, rooftops, and even passageways. Therefore, the report shows how diversified the displaced housing options can be, and how they do not fit the definition of a 'house.'

Moving to the fifth outcome, we realized the difficulties Syrians face in their everyday lives because of the absence of the necessary structures to manage services such as transportation, infrastructure, water, and sanitation. In other words, structures necessary for the stability of daily life in a safe manner, due to the ineffective, and sometimes nonexistent, delivery of these services by local authorities. In this regard, the resultant research papers have shown how the period from 2012 to 2016 was characterized by the introduction of initiatives aimed at founding such structure in major Lebanese cities. However, after 2017, these projects by entities such as the UN or western governmental organizations, started diminishing as per the exit strategy adopted after it grew apparent that the war was not ending anytime soon.

Building on the field work's findings, the Asfari Institute asked academics and researchers in the development sector to write on the main challenges facing the displaced to put forward necessary recommendations needed to adjust current policies. This is also needed to tackle the prevalent pessimism towards the issue of the displaced, and the clear apprehension of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), along with Hizbullah and the Amal Movement, who constantly escalate the rhetoric against displaced Syrians.

An important finding of this report is the "policy of no policy" that the Lebanese authorities use as their approach regarding this matter. Accordingly, local authorities, employers, and organizations backed by international entities deal with the displaced daily. Therefore, the publication of this Policy Report highlights the "policy of no policy" concerning the various sectors that involve Syrians in Lebanon, including construction, hospitality, and retail. The report also draws attention to the patterns around the provision of financial, health, and legal support to Syrian women, and the crumbling infrastructure erected by international aid organizations.

The "policy of no policy" was evident in the mechanisms for integrating the displaced Syrians at schools and universities. Even though Lebanon has been receiving tens of millions of dollars in international support for this process, Syrian students were segregated from their Lebanese counterparts, and low-level teaching cadres were appointed for their shifts. Moreover, scholarship policies were arbitrary, and mostly targeted general majors and the humanities fields at private universities. This did not take into account Syria's future needs or the preferences of these students to specialize in applied fields such as engineering, agriculture, pharmacy, etc. These practices led to a shocking deterioration in the level of education for thousands of children and adolescents, compared to the education level they received in schools back in Syria before 2011.

Some may attribute the absence of clear policies regarding displacement to the "weakness of the Lebanese state" in terms of its ability to implement effective measures in its territories. This is due to the sectarian and regional considerations that have long depicted Lebanon as a country where sectarian quotas overpower a unified national system. Nonetheless, contrary to expectations, the same authorities managed to devise a clear strategy backed by most political parties when it came to defining Lebanon's role in the reconstruction of Syria. In 2018, stories began to emerge about negotiations with Russia and China through the Lebanese Shiite political bloc to establish infrastructure projects to launch the reconstruction of Syria. There have also been headlines about utilizing Sunni influence to situate Lebanon as a mediator accepted by the European Union to start tenders for reconstruction from Northern Lebanon. Additionally, the FPM has put forward several initiatives regarding the development of the port of Tripoli and the construction of railway and power stations that serve both Syria and Lebanon to facilitate investment in the reconstruction process. The points mentioned above have made it clear that when there are direct tangible interests, the political will suddenly become present, and policy features become defined, regardless of sectarian divisions and financial sensitivities.

Hence, we chose to start this publication with a paper on the expected role of Lebanon in the reconstruction of Syria. The report includes six other policy papers that attempt to shed light on the priorities of displaced persons moving forward in a country that is undergoing a deep financial crisis and an ongoing popular uprising against the corruption of the ruling class and its political institutions.

Three of the policy papers show the absence of the political will in setting clear procedures regarding general humanitarian aid, the economic and social inclusion of women, or even the inclusion of women as active participants in the peace process. Accordingly, they illustrate the "policy of no policy" as a general approach that the Lebanese state adheres to. The three other papers detail priority sectors that need financial support, whether from Lebanon or from international donor agencies involved in the education sector. The papers also stress the need to improve the social context for students and provide the necessary life resources for them, the continuation of follow-ups regarding school dropout, and evaluation of the low-level of education they receive. The goal is to ensure that Syrian students at Lebanese schools and universities obtain the instruction for which the Ministry of Education is receiving significant financial aid.

As for the issue of water and sanitation, whose importance is more significant now with the outbreak of a pandemic in a densely populated region, the papers stress the need to provide additional resources that facilitate residency and living operations, for minimal economic requirements of foreign aid to bear its fruits.

This report concludes its recommendations with a paper emphasizing the necessity of refraining from sending displaced Syrians back to areas in their country deemed 'safe' – an operation named "forced return". This paper sheds light on the severity of this new policy approach and its grave effect on over a million and a half victims of the Syrian war. Political parties in Lebanon have been pushing for this option and have been strengthening Lebanon's relations with the Assad regime for material and symbolic gains from both tragedies: war and displacement.

Lebanon's role in Syria's future reconstruction plans

Bachar El Halabi[1]

Key Summary

- Reconstruction in Syria has been a topic thoroughly discussed in the past years by different stakeholders, although the war there has not yet reached its concluding ends.

- The lucrative financial opportunity reconstruction presents for regional and international stakeholders must not be a blinding factor from the urgency and the need for a political solution among different actors in the country.

- Lebanon, having taken major economic hits due to the 8-year war in Syria is positioning itself as viable partner in any future plans regarding reconstruction in Syria.

- By aligning itself with western and Arab policies in order to avert backlash or even sanction, Lebanon's role's in Syria's future reconstruction plans includes setting up a fluid legal and monetary structure in addition to developing the infrastructure (seaports, airports and international routes) to attract investors.

Introduction

Over the past few years, different politicians and policymakers have thoroughly discussed the prospects of reconstruction in Syria, mainly centering around the role "outside actors" could play in the process, given that the Syrian regime headed by president Bashar al-Assad, remains in power, yet with a battered economy and absolutely no funds to finance reconstruction in the country.

Additionally, major players in the Syrian war-scene, like Russia for instance, have tried to use reconstruction as a bargaining chip. Over a year ago, Russian President Vladimir Putin tried to sway western countries into funding reconstruction in Syria, in exchange for the return of Syrian refugees to their country; this seemingly a lucrative offer for westerners, especially that the refugee crisis has rocked the political scene in Western countries and served as a conduit for the rise of right-wing parties with anti-refugee agendas there.

However, with Assad holding on to power for now and the lack of any viable political solution to the ongoing war in Syria, these same Western countries (namely the U.S. and the EU) have little to no appetite in spending their own taxpayers' money on reconstruction plans in Syria. If anything, for western policymakers, financing reconstruction remains a powerful vehicle to be used in the future, in terms of attempting to extract concessions from an Assad regime so adamant on reestablishing its influence over every city and every town in the country. Yet, on a lower scale, neighboring countries such as Jordan and Lebanon, whose economies have taken a major hit due to the 8-year war in Syria, might have different calculations and interests in that regard.

Exemplary of that, following the tilt in the power-balance on the Syrian battle scene after the Russians and Iranians (in addition to Iranian funded sectarian militias such as the Lebanese Hezbollah) directly interfered militarily, different Lebanese politicians started expressing interest in the reconstruction of Syria. At some point, the topic received a fair share in local Lebanese media and the public debate. Initially, Lebanese Foreign Minister, Gebran Bassil – a close Hezbollah ally, hyped up the conversation, presenting it as an important opportunity for the country's ailing economy and increasing unemployment numbers. Rightfully so, the reconstruction of Syria, when it "takes off" along the lines of a political solution, will present to Lebanon a massive and much needed financial opportunity; however, Bassil or any other Lebanese politician discussing the topic should provide a clear strategy of how the country would partake the reconstruction process, especially that the war is still raging and regional and international players have yet to agree on a strategy.

[1]Former Program Officer at The Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship

Local Political Dynamics

Since the start of the Syrian revolution in 2011, and despite the fact that Lebanese political parties had different interests in the outcome of the war, the official stance of the Lebanese government, under Prime Minister Najib Mikati at the time until Saad Hariri's premiership today [2], has been to maintain neutrality (Paul 2013). In recent years, the dynamics of the Syrian conflict changed on the ground due to the Iran-Hezbollah-Russia's direct military intervention to safeguard their ally in power. With the balance of power shifting in Syria, the political rhetoric in Lebanon moved away from an "assuming neutrality" towards vocal requests for the need to officially reengage with the Assad regime.

The champions of the calls for reengagement with the Syrian regime have been Hezbollah, the Lebanese president Michel Aoun, minister Gebran Bassil, and a handful of Lebanese politicians that owe their allegiance to the Syrian regime. Each aforementioned actor has its own interest at play, whether political, financial or both (An-Nahar 2019). In order to further propagate the normalization rhetoric, pro-regime parties are amping up the discourse on two main concerns that have major appeal to the public. Aoun and Bassil are claiming that the need to reengage with the Syrian regime is a necessity in order to ensure the return of 1 million registered Syrian refugees in the country – according to UNHCR numbers (UNHCR 2019), in addition to the massive economic profit the reconstruction of Syria might pour into the Lebanese economy. According to the Aoun-Bassil duo, in order for Lebanese companies and workers to participate in Syria's reconstruction, the diplomatic ties between the two countries should be close.

However, it is inaccurate to use the notion of reengagement as a presupposition for economic prosperity in the country as much as it is inaccurate to hold the Syrian refugees in Lebanon responsible for the dire economic situation.

Lebanon's government has maintained a neutral stance towards the Syrian conflict, and has never cut ties with the Syrian regime as most of the world did. Diplomatic representation in both countries has remained the same throughout the war with the Lebanese ambassador in Damascus maintaining his duties regularly and the Syrian ambassador in Lebanon benefitting from the space the country has provided in order to propagate various messages to the world (Imtiaz 2017).

With the Syrian conflict inching towards its final stage and with the Syrian regime and its allies emerging as the clear victors, Lebanese allies are racing to translate the military triumph into political gains on the Lebanese political scene. Additionally, with Hezbollah's growing influence in Lebanon and the region, the Lebanese state is falling further in line with the Tehran-Damascus-Moscow axis. Therefore, the Lebanese camp that has good ties with the Syrian regime camp is piling up pressure on other counterparts to reengage with Assad, knowing that they will be able to further consolidate power in the country and help provide Assad, through Lebanon, with a "perceived" access to the world (Bachar 2019).

However, it remains important to explore the potential and the different assets the Lebanese state or businessmen have in playing a role in the reconstruction process.

Foreign Investments through Lebanon

Thus far, it seems that Lebanon's northern city of Tripoli is trying to model itself as a financial and trade hub on the Mediterranean in preparation for the reconstruction of Syria. The city, only 28 kilometers away from the Syrian-Lebanese border, with a port and an out-of-use railway that connects it to the Syrian interior, is expected to become one of Syria's windows to the world.

In the past few years, local authorities heavily invested in the Port of Tripoli in order to triple its size, raising its storage capacity from 400,000 containers to 1.3 million. The contract for the container terminal was granted to an Emirati company named Gulftainer, which signed a 25-year lease starting 2013 and will be investing up to US $100 million in the port's expansion (Chloe and Archie 2019). Of course, this highlights the role the UAE is eyeing for itself in Syria's reconstruction process and can be seen through the lens of the rapprochement steps the UAE took late in December 2018 when it reopened its embassy in Damascus, only to be pressured by the Americans to halt the process.

Additionally, the world's third-largest shipping group, French CMA-CGM, bought a 20% stake in Gulftainer Lebanon; the following year, the Saudi Arabia–based Islamic Development Bank approved an US $86 million loan to continue the port's expansion, which adds a French and a Saudi component to the different stakeholders

[2] When this paper was written, Saad Hariri was still prime minister before he resigned on October 29, 2019 and became caretaker prime minister.

eyeing a role in the reconstruction. According to the Port of Tripoli's director, Ahmad Tamer, the Russians and the Chinese are working with Lebanese local authorities in order to set up a Free Zone as part of a grand vision for luring in local, regional and international investors.

However, aside from the logistical and strategic importance of the port of Tripoli, Lebanon seems to enjoy another competitive factor that is its possession of intimate knowledge of the Syrian markets, an educated labor force and construction-related enterprises such as cement factories. Lebanese entrepreneurs have unique know-how, as they had already rebuilt postwar Lebanon and Iraq.

Lebanese Banks

After decades of state monopoly, privatization in the early 2000s opened up the Syrian banking sector. Foreign private banks were able to enter the Syrian market in partnership with local shareholders. Seven Lebanese banks were first to enter: Fransabank, Bank Audi, Blom Bank, Byblos Bank, Banque BEMO, Banque Libano-Française and First National Bank. With the 2011 imposition of international sanctions targeting Syrian regime officials and commercial entities—including banks accused of financing state repression—Lebanese bankers have become extremely cautious with all Syria-related transactions. In recent years, Lebanese bankers have stepped down from the boards of directors of their Syrian subsidiaries, downsized their Syrian bank branches and deconsolidated, distancing themselves from their Syrian operations. Some have written off their investments in Syria entirely (Rashad 2018). However, the banking and legal infrastructure is laid for Lebanese and foreign businessmen, once the decision to start rebuilding Syria is taken.

The Chinese Factor

With the Syrian regime rejecting any European and American role in reconstruction, the oil-rich Gulf countries – the West's main allies – remaining estranged, and the Russians and Iranians both suffering from sanctions-damaged economies, China, the world's second-largest economy, is emerging as the frontrunner in the reconstruction efforts once they start (Steven 2017).

Indeed, the Chinese firms are starting to show interest in possible investment opportunities in the Lebanese market. For instance, Qingdao Haixi Heavy-Duty Machinery Co. supplied the port of Tripoli with two 28-story container cranes capable of lifting and transporting more than 700 containers a day; moreover, safety signs inside the port are posted in English and Mandarin. Last December, the Chinese state-owned COSCO shipping company docked in Tripoli, inaugurating a new maritime route connecting China to the Mediterranean Sea. In May, a Chinese delegation to Lebanon outlined plans for a coastal railway between Beirut and Tripoli as part of broader investments in transport links across the region (David and Roshan 2019).

China typically funds infrastructure abroad through loans, usually requiring Chinese companies to undertake the construction. However, Chinese firms took plum contracts in Tripoli's port, including a new US $58 million quay, plus the manufacturing and installation of six gantry cranes, and no further investment has come until now.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In recent days, talks about reconstruction in Syria have toned down, especially after the United States pressured its Gulf allies to halt the process of rapprochement or bringing Damascus back into the Arab fold by granting Syria its seat again at the League of Arab states. Additionally, risks for investors in Syria remain high especially from a security perspective. Add to that the lack of transparency, a primitive legal infrastructure, weak judiciary, and widespread fuel shortages. All these are risky factors for private investors.

Therefore, it is in the interest of the Lebanese government to keep its distance from the Syrian regime or any involvement in Syria's reconstruction, until a political solution to the conflict is reached there; otherwise, Lebanon might face a backlash from the EU and the US at a stage when its economy cannot survive any blows (Paul 2019). With that, reconstruction of Syria shall remain, in the near future, a distant reality.

In the meantime, the government in Lebanon can only work to position the country as a viable partner in any future plans regarding reconstruction in Syria. To ensure that, Lebanon must work on setting up a fluid legal and monetary structure that attracts foreign investors and companies in order for them to set up their bases or headquarters in Lebanon, given the proximity of the country to the Syrian border.

Additionally, Lebanese infrastructure (seaports, airports and international routes), especially up north, must be expanded and developed in order to meet international standards. Syria's ports and airports (as well as most of its land borders) are closed to international trade; hence, a substantial proportion of goods destined for Syria, whether for humanitarian relief or for reconstruction in future, would inevitably travel through Lebanon. Finally, the Lebanese government might want to consider setting up a committee comprised of Lebanese businessmen and technocrats to remain engaged with different stakeholders and up to date regarding any talks related to reconstruction, in order to lobby and ensure Lebanon as a partner in any future plans.

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Displaced Syrians in Lebanon's Refugee Crisis: Gender and Humanitarian Aid Activism

Dr. Connie Carøe Christiansen[1]

Key Summary

- Most Syrians who came to Lebanon after the war broke in Syria in 2011 do not enjoy a legal stay in the country. These refugees are not involved systematically in the humanitarian aid activism addressing them; nevertheless, a share of them participates actively.

- A new area of convergence between Syrians and Lebanese (and Palestinians) emerged when the Syrian and Lebanese civil societies started to collaborate on different levels to meet the needs of Syrian refugees.

- Many NGOs in Lebanon tend to reproduce the categorization of Syrian refugee women as being vulnerable, partly due to conservative and patriarchal gender relations among Syrians, following the narratives found in the humanitarian sector. These ways of framing Syrian gender relations are effective in justifying that Syrians do not belong in Lebanon.

- Several NGOs tend to organize 'safe spaces' where women in particular may run away or recover from violence inflicted upon them from male relatives or others, and from their current hostile Lebanese environment. Meanwhile, the 'safe spaces' run by Syrian or Syrian diaspora organizations are spaces where refugee men and women articulate their rights, and discuss their wishes or reluctance to return.

- The way in which gender relations among Syrians are framed by the humanitarian sector is opposed by the Syrians involved in it as Syrians often indicate the importance of including refugees or 'beneficiaries' in the management and policy-formulating levels of the humanitarian sector; this seems to be a strategy to confront stereotyped and inexpedient casting of refugees.

Introduction

Humanitarian crises have become more complex as they now involve, in many cases, unwanted migration and a multiplicity of actors, including local organizations. Consequently, there has been an inclination for rethinking humanitarian aid and subjecting the organizations that provide humanitarian relief to critical scrutiny (Humanitarian Policy Group 2016, Mansour 2016, Sørensen & Plambech 2019). In Lebanon, international humanitarian agencies, and local, and diaspora NGOs are working to alleviate the desperate situation of Syrian refugees in the country, who in turn are engaged in humanitarian aid activities at all organizational levels. Despite the general categorization of refugees - irrespective of gender - as vulnerable, Syrian refugee women remain in need of specific protection, not only because of the war, but also because gender relations among Syrians are perceived as patriarchal and relatively more conservative. During war and conflict, these relations are twisted and tend to turn out as more harmful for women.

NGOs active in Lebanon's 'refugee crisis' tend to put several justifications for this need for protection and the 'safe spaces' that they provide for refugee women and girls. Despite the general assumptions attributed to Syrian women, and their ceaseless categorization under one group, they actually constitute a diverse group. Also, notwithstanding the general neglect of engaging Syrians systematically in humanitarian aid targeting Syrians (Mansour 2017), a considerable number of refugees participates in humanitarian work, and even initiates them (Napolitano 2017). Humanitarian aid activism of refugee Syrian women includes organizing life in makeshift settlements, communicating with agencies and NGOs, and training other refugee Syrian women. One survey that covered Syrian refugee activists in Jordan found that one third of them were women (Khoury 2017, 38).

This policy paper outlines how humanitarian policies and the conditions of humanitarian action in Lebanon's 'refugee crisis', tend, more broadly, to produce a contested field of action in which 'imagined' gender relations form a part.

[1] Consultant & Visiting Associate Professor at Lebanese American University 2017-2019

While 'dignity' and 'participation' are terms applied in the humanitarian framework, the lack of cooperation or resistance vis-à-vis the humanitarian sector and the close relationship of humanitarian action to informal citizenship or enacted citizenship are unwanted factors. When it comes to humanitarian aid, the principles appreciated are the ones grounded in international law: humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality (Humanitarian Policy Group 2016). The set of practices that are related to notions of belonging and rights, including reluctance or refusal to align with the genderscape – understood as the possible ways of being a gendered person – are nevertheless relevant for the strategies Syrian refugees apply. In Lebanon's humanitarian sector where gender is framed in a certain way, being a gendered person is only possible under specific conditions.

Consequently, these framings of gender have a bearing on political subjectivity and the claiming of rights that occur despite not enjoying those rights.

financial opportunity; however, Bassil or any other Lebanese politician discussing the topic should provide a clear strategy of how the country would partake the reconstruction process, especially that the war is still raging and regional and international players have yet to agree on a strategy.

Humanitarian aid addressing Syrians in Lebanon

Gender inequalities have been on the agenda of humanitarian interventions for almost two decades (Hyndman 1998, Busher 2010). Today, the effect of aid on women, men, girls and boys is to be taken into consideration. One example of measures taken to ensure this consideration is the 'gender marker' tool issued by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which is an assignment of an alphanumerical score that measures the impact of humanitarian projects on gender relations. In other words, the alleged neutral and apolitical humanitarian approach is one which is openly 'gender transformative'. However, in Arab societies, gender relations form a contested and highly politicized field of intervention and political reform that is better known, especially from a historical perspective, as the 'woman's issue'. Since the era of colonization, this issue has constituted a policy field in which by being for or against gender equality, 'modernizers' and 'conservatives' have demonstrated their propensity and reluctance respectively towards Western or European lifestyles and via them, their resistance to or support for the colonizers (Moghadam 2013, Ahmed 1992). After several Arab countries gained independence, they issued family laws in written form, that contrasted with other legislations framed by religious concepts and principles in order to demonstrate veneration of law makers for indigenous thought and custom. Today, policies that strive for gender equality tend to be perceived as propensity towards Western lifestyles. However, when the promotion of gender equality is instead introduced as 'gender transformative humanitarian aid', and as a condition for aid to the poor and powerless, it is depoliticized rather than treated as a political and contestable issue.

A new space of convergence between Syrians and Lebanese emerged with the influx of Syrian refugees when the war began in Syria in 2011. Local NGOs, funded by international donors, were among the first entities to cater to the needs of these displaced populations. Some local NGOs, such as ABAAD, had been already present in Lebanon prior to the 'refugee crisis'. The aforementioned NGO became involved in providing social services to the displaced. Another prominent NGO is Basmeh & Zeitooneh that was founded by a Palestinian-Syrian-Lebanese group after the influx of refugees. The central focus of the NGO is the dignity of Syrian refugees "as individuals", and its goal is to "remedy the approaches of other humanitarian agencies, which have reduced them to a mere number" (Basmeh & Zeitooneh, 2019).

The growth of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Syrian civil society, prior to the onset of the war and after it, provides the background for increased Lebanese-Syrian convergences, since some NGOs currently operating from Lebanon are of Syrian origin. These organizations continue to target Syrians through activities, with emphasis on the consequences of war and displacement. Examples of such organizations include a transnational Syrian network, headed by two Syrian women that has specialized in capacity building of civil society. Another NGO, Sharq, is registered in Lebanon and the UK and headed by a woman who came to Lebanon when the war broke out in Syria. The latter organization does not focus on humanitarian aid as it is usually defined, but promotes pluralism and independent thought, e.g. by publishing oral histories from pre-war Syria[2]. There are also Syrian diaspora organizations that are engaged in

[2] Name of the NGO is withheld due to security reasons.

activities in Lebanon and/or in Syria as a consequence of the war in Syria. An example of these organizations is Women Now, which is a diaspora-initiated organization. In sum, the influx of refugees from Syria to Lebanon has meant the emergence of a new space of convergence – among organizations, as Syrian and Lebanese NGOs have started to collaborate, and in organizations since in Lebanon, Syrian employees have become available for Lebanese NGOs- and vice-versa. However, convergences are not a novelty; in the relatively recent history of the two countries, their political developments have intertwined and clashed, while continuous cross-border migration, contacts and connections have become part of the daily routine (Diognigi 2017).

Lebanon did not sign the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Consequently, just like other migrants and refugees in Lebanon, Syrians should obtain documents that legalize their stay. Before the war in Syria, the border between the two countries was open and unhindered movement was allowed (Diognigi 2017, Eslev-Andersen 2016); today, most displaced Syrians lack legal residency, and their situation is precarious. Protests staged by displaced Syrians themselves have been limited: From June 2014 to January 2017, only 18 incidents of protest staged by Syrian refugees in Lebanon were registered. Syrian refugees were dispersed more widely across Lebanon in the onset of the influx from Syria, meaning they enjoyed less opportunities for organizing, protesting or performing other acts of solidarity; the protest or resistance reported occurred in areas where international agencies had not (yet) had access (Carpi 2015). Still, the lack of open protest should hardly be mistaken for consent. In fact, Carpi quotes both local Lebanese and Syrian refugees who are highly critical of the approach that international and local NGOs take towards them - they find that de-politicization is imposed on them, in contrast to the politicization of the NGOs themselves (Carpi 2015). The alleged neutrality of the donor community rings false not only in the ears of Syrian refugees, but also in the ears of employees of international donor organizations:

> *[3]"Paradoxically, while humanitarian aid is itself politicized, it serves primarily to thwart political discourse on Syria or to undermine any such talks. One senior official from an international organization supported that proposition: 'We [international organizations] somehow prevent a political discussion on Syria. We divert the attention away from the political sphere; there is no discussion of a political solution and no political discourse going on". (Mansour 2017, 9)*

In brief, the categorization of the situation in Lebanon as a humanitarian crisis obscures the political aspects of the crisis. International and local humanitarian aid organizations approach refugees as homogenized entities according to ethnic categories (Palestinian, Syrian, or Lebanese). They do not approach them as political subjects that have opinions about the kind of aid given, or about the latest developments of the war. A refugee selling UNHCR food vouchers in order to donate the collected money to the Free Syrian Army (Carpi 2015) is within this framework performing a practice that reveals subjectivity, which amounts to an enactment of citizenship (Isin 2012) – a practice of rights that this refugee does not enjoy in the host society. Humanitarian

[3] In the Lebanon Crisis Response plan the terminology for "persons who have fled and cannot return to Syria" is carefully spelled out as follows: Either they are "persons displaced from Syria" or they are "displaced Syrians" – i.e. Syrian nationals, or they are "persons registered as refugees by UNHCR" (p. 4); a terminology which mirrors that Lebanon is not a signatory of the Convention of Refugees, and does not accept the population in Lebanon from Syria as refugees (Erslev-Andersen 2016, Carpi 2015, Janmyr 2016). Here I use the term 'refugee' to denote all the categories spelled out in that report, and I use the term interchangeably with 'displaced'.

aid activism, widely assumed to be apolitical, interferes with and transforms power hierarchies of local communities, including gendered power hierarchies (Christiansen 2018).

Narratives of gender relations among displaced Syrians

Humanitarian response activities addressing displaced Syrians and organized by international and local NGOs across Lebanon range from holding handicraft workshops to forming neighborhood committees, supporting civil society activism and initiating business. These initiatives are aligned with the humanitarian policies and regulations, due to the high supply of funding in such areas. Participation of Syrian refugees occurs at several levels, including volunteering, working as employed professionals organizing relief, or acting as managers and/or initiators of humanitarian organizations.

A recurrent narrative among NGOs is that Syrian women have been forced to accept new income-earning positions, because the husband would have been either killed or had disappeared due to the war. Many women refugees have consequently become heads of households. Moreover, women refugees are less likely to be checked by Lebanese security forces compared to their male counterparts, which consequently contradicts the observation that refugee women are more vulnerable. The concomitant threat of this shift in power hierarchy within the family leads husbands to resort to violence towards their wives and children. Consequently, NGOs have been offering women and girls safe spaces where they can speak openly about violence and seek psycho-social support. These organizations have been also providing trainings in anger-management for Syrian refugee men. One NGO employee confessed that it is more difficult to attract Syrians than Lebanese (also considered vulnerable and eligible to protection) to their activities addressing violence in the family.

Another narrative repeatedly encountered among NGOs is that Syrian refugee women constitute a threat to Lebanese women in the local communities that are hosting a large number of refugees. As expressed by some NGO workers, being less demanding and more eager to satisfy a husband, Syrian are relatively more attractive to Lebanese men. In fact, this competition for Lebanese men is an issue that is frequently mentioned as a cause for tension between Syrians and Lebanese in local communities. A Lebanese volunteer in a Beirut neighborhood mentioned that to her dismay, many broken Syrian families give rise to children left to their own in the streets of the neighborhood. She claimed that Lebanese women would care more for their children.

One NGO started its activities by establishing safe spaces for women in the Palestinian camps that have received a large number of Syrian refugees. An employee who is part of the project explained:

"Both kinds of women [i.e. those who are alone with their children and those who have a husband with them] tend to stay at home where they feel they enjoy some degree of protection, especially during the cold weather months in the winter when they need to take very good care of children and make sure that they stay warm etc. Men, meanwhile, can move about more freely. Therefore, we provide women with a time and space to work. All Palestinian women in Shatila may enjoy a sense of security, but Syrian women do not have that, and the center provides certain services enabling them to move about[4]".

[4] Interview with NGO project worker, March 26, 2017.

This account supplements aid policies that designate Syrian women as subject to either male aggression or the humanitarian sector, and it contributes to a 'casting' of Syrian refugees based on the framing of Syrian gender relations as more conservative than their Lebanese counterparts, and oppressive for women. Outspoken gender inequalities among Syrians constitute a threat to Syrian women when transferred to the Lebanese context. This framing of a gender hierarchy is put to effect in NGO programming more generally as a moral justification for providing support to 'vulnerable refugee women'. Finally, it serves to underline that when gender equality constitutes the parameter, there emerges a hierarchy between Syrians and Lebanese, in which the Lebanese is the more gender-equal, inviting the idea that this hierarchy could exist more widely.

Safe spaces as a flexible methodology

A significant proportion of humanitarian action occurs in so-called 'safe spaces' addressing the female refugee population. This is a consequence of a consensus whereby female refugees are exposed to risks that range from xenophobia, starvation, poor health and poverty to sexual assaults. Hence, the conditions may result in 'negative coping strategies', e.g. taking money for sexual services, child marriages and trafficking (Freedman 2016, UNHCR 2016). The terminology in these discourses usually relies on the term vulnerable when referring to women and men, in order to outline the needs of Palestinian and Syrian refugees, and those of the Lebanese poor (see also Government of Lebanon 2017, UNHCR 2016). However, the needs of refugee women and men are distinct, and a host of NGOs offer women and girls protection in 'safe spaces' where men are excluded. This is in congruence with humanitarian aid policies that, after all, assume women to be more vulnerable, grouping them with children, the elderly, and people with disabilities (Lebanese Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 (2018 update)).

The perceptions of Syrian refugees by NGO employees in Lebanon have implications for how they are approached in the numerous projects addressing them. The way they are framed provides important information about the everyday status and rights, or about the informal citizenship rights - even though they have no access to formal rights - of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. In humanitarian activities, the 'casting' of refugees, particularly of women, as vulnerable, is put to effect. Also prevalent is the understanding that conservative gender relations among Syrians in themselves are representing a risk to women. Syrian activists, however, usually give this casting another twist, as for instance 'safe space' turns out to be a flexible notion.

For an NGO, a safe space may be a space offered to women enabling them to sew and embroider purses or bags to sell in order to make a small income. For a Syrian diaspora organization, it refers to a space where displaced Syrians can express their concerns and political desires without fearing repercussions. For other organizations, the safe space is a space where it is safe to discuss civil rights, and not a place where Syrian women and girls may escape sexual harassment or assaults. A young Syrian refugee man who trains women refugees in citizenship and rights in Lebanon, narrated his experience, as he first was a volunteer, and then was employed by a Syrian diaspora organization to assist in its activities. He detailed how he has become knowledgeable about approaching displaced Syrian women without violating gender norms, for example avoiding addressing women who are clad in niqab. He claimed he never experienced any problems with the husbands since he knows them too, and not only their wives.

"You have to talk with them. We try to build a safe space with them, where they can express their opinions. So, instead of saying to them for example, "The definition is like this and you have to do this", we start from the bottom, and ask them questions like, "Why do / don't you want to go back to Syria?" and "What do you need?", in order to know what happened.

We call it civil awareness. We make it public whereby anyone can come. We then select those who show interaction, and we follow up with them for six months at our leadership academy. We choose those who already have leadership skills in their community like teachers, and have experience working in the field. We are not teaching in a direct way; rather, we are raising the awareness of their community"[5].

The Syrian organizations that enter 'the aid industry' in Lebanon demonstrate that there are other ways to approach 'safe spaces' in their programming – ways that put emphasis on the possibility of voicing and discussing rights of both women and men.

For one Syrian CSO headed by two Syrian women refugees operating from Lebanon (officially the activists are just 'hanging out together'), the safe space does not address women only, but also young Syrian men who have come to Lebanon to escape military service. Activists have taken a different bottom-up approach to their activities. They have asked local support groups founded in Syria, for suggestions on how to reach out to the most vulnerable Syrians in Lebanon. Based on these suggestions, the activists have organized support groups where women who had lost their husbands discuss their situation with each other.

Alternative Perspectives from Outreach Refugee Volunteers

While some forms of engagement exist in organizations initiated by expatriate Syrians in Lebanon, and by the Syrian diaspora elsewhere, other forms are initiated by the humanitarian sector.

For some humanitarian aid policies, it is integral to activate local communities that are recipients of humanitarian aid to participate in aid activities. For example, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has founded the Outreach Refugees Volunteers (ORV) program, under the umbrella of community-based approaches. The objective of the program is to improve the outreach of the UNHCR to the refugee community, helping it to provide better protection. Volunteers are selected according to diverse criteria, and both men and women are included. According to the guidance issued, these ORVs are expected to provide "accurate and up-to-date information on protection concerns". Their activities aim to "empower communities to monitor the quality and impact of programs and provide feedback and suggestions to obtain better protection", by identifying and building on "the capacities, knowledge and skills of communities", by promoting "accountability towards persons of concern", and finally by building "mutual trust and transparency through efficient reciprocal communication and partnership"(UNHCR).

The volunteers are not paid any salary; however, they do receive a monthly stipend that is meant to cover transportation expenses, which is of high importance for the individual activist. The volunteers usually act as intermediaries and report needs and problems among their peers in the settlement to the international organization that partners with UNHCR. In the interviews that I conducted with a diverse group of these volunteers in the summer of 2017, the interviewees emphasized that they are not receiving any feedback on the reports that they pass from the community of aid recipients; thus, they are doubtful about the usefulness of their work.

In my discussions with ORVs, they presented an alternative perspective on refugee Syrian women who are categorized as vulnerable. Despite the presence of female ORVs, a woman who has managed to earn the respect of other women in informal settlements acts as an informal representative to officials. This parallels the shawish, an informal representative and/or leader of a community or a settlement.

Furthermore, ORVs willingly admitted that Syrian women are less demanding as compared to Lebanese women, but also emphasized that this is due to poverty, and not to their

[5] Interview with NGO trainer, April 9, 2019.

level of empowerment as women. The ORVs divulged about the lack of fulfillment of the basic needs of refugees, and how this evokes disappointment with the humanitarian system and occasionally results in rejections to participate in activities organized by humanitarian aid organizations or their representatives. These rejections could be seen as subtle enactments of citizenship – in order to make a statement, women and men refugees use the limited forms of agency that are available to them. The alternative approaches presented by ORVs, I suggest, indicate the potential transformations of delegating of power and control in humanitarian aid to the populations that are currently subject to the policies and practices of this sector.

Conclusion

In humanitarian aid and relief, several dilemmas have been amplified with the complexity of cases, requesting constant rethinking and adjustments. The humanitarian efforts in Lebanon after the influx of Syrians in the wake of the Arab uprising and war in Syria have been subject to severe criticism over issues such as poor coordination, lack of attention to the tension it created between host and refugee populations, and the competition for funding among organizations, which is overshadowing the humanitarian task itself, etc. Some of this criticism concerning conflict aggregating dimension, has given cause for new directions and priorities. The effect of humanitarian aid on the framing of gender relations has had less attention, if any.

The activism that provides humanitarian relief to Syrian refugees in Lebanon depends on and perpetuates particular narrow accounts of genderscapes among Syrians – in which there are outspoken hierarchical organizations between hetero-masculine men and their women, who are subject to this masculinity. These accounts intersect with citizenship transformation, since traditional and conservative characteristics of gender relations justify a victimizing approach to refugee Syrian women, and present Syrian refugee men as carriers of a masculinity that is too traditional for the Lebanese context. In other words, these characteristics are effective in justifying Syrian refugees as not belonging, and therefore not enjoying rights in Lebanon.

It is worth noting that when Syrian refugees are involved in the humanitarian aid activism that targets them or other Syrian refugees, narratives about gender relations shift. Instead of the condescending approaches that rest on ideas of a gender hierarchy between conservative or traditional Syrian refugees and Lebanese 'modern gender relations', the approach e.g. to the notion of safe space shift and directly invites activists to influence. This provides 'safe spaces' and humanitarian aid with alternative framings; it also presents counter-images to the predominant stereotype that women refugees are particularly vulnerable, and shows Syrian refugee women as able to act on themselves. It also encourages an articulation of rights, and refugee women taking charge of their own new status as heads of the household.

The share of Syrians in humanitarian aid activism allows both accommodation and resistance to some of the practices related to the victimization that aid practices tend to produce. In addition, such activism invariably has an impact on everyday belonging (Olivius 2014) - and may oppose or supplement normative images of Syrian refugee women as constrained by conservative gender ideologies and at the mercy of hostilities of their new environment. In this light, the participation and leadership of the displaced Syrians targeted in humanitarian action is essential, if an adverse effect on the 'casting' of refugees as vulnerable, oppressed and misplaced in Lebanon is to be expected.

Recommendations

- Increase formal and informal interaction, communication and cooperation between host country and Syrian NGOs. More convergence would present more nuances to the framing of refugee Syrians and their 'conservative' or 'traditional' gender relations that form the background for humanitarian practices

- Include displaced Syrians – or representatives of the targeted population – in humanitarian aid organizations at the level of leadership and policy formulation. The goal of this step is to enable more nuances and the emergence of counter-images of the targeted populations in these organizations, with positive consequences for the effectiveness of humanitarian aid

- Have host governments and international humanitarian agencies and organizations reconsider the apolitical framework of humanitarian aid needs and reformulate them in accordance with the types of organizations and other actors that are involved

- Pay more attention, at all levels of humanitarian aid practices, to how negative framing of recipients, including women, affect their ability to claim rights, enact citizenship and enhance relations of belonging to the host society

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The Precarity of Displaced Syrian Construction Workers in Lebanon

Jana Chammaa[1]

Key Summary

- The surge of refugees after 2011 and the heightened tension that ensued resulted in the termination of the open border policy and the introduction of a series of restrictive measures with detrimental consequences on the livelihoods of displaced Syrians.

- The Kafala sponsorship system prompted an increased dependency of workers on their sponsors and an increase in the inequality of power between employers and employees, thus institutionalizing the precarity of Syrian workers as it augmented the exploitation of workers by employers in the form of lower wages for labor-intensive and unsafe work.

- Syrian construction workers live in poor and crowded housing. They are subject to employer or sponsor profiteering, wage discrimination and delayed or inconsistent payment of wages. They also face discrimination and racism from employers, police officials and local communities, and they lack access to legal redress.

- The obliviousness of construction companies in safeguarding their operations against human rights risks and violations instigates the precarity of displaced Syrian workers.

- To prevent the continued exploitation and impoverishment of Syrian construction workers, the Lebanese government must be challenged to regulate the sponsorship system.

- Construction companies should be required to abide by human rights policies and make their policies public.

- Construction workers must gain access to information on ways of legal redress, which could be advanced by awareness-raising campaigns initiated by civil society organizations.

- International organizations should engage with the social needs, not just the material needs, of displaced Syrians in their aid interventions so that Syrian workers could replenish their social capital and build capacity to develop normal social interactions with local communities.

Introduction

Syrian construction workers have been a familiar feature of the Lebanese economy since the 1950s (Chalcraft 2005 & 2009). Prior to 2015, three bilateral agreements between Lebanon and Syria provided special rights and privileges for Syrian residents and workers[2]. Under these agreements, Syrians, with the showing of their national identification cards only, were entitled to a visa-free entry to Lebanon and granted a six-month residency permit at the border. The requirement of having a work permit was overlooked by Lebanese authorities, despite the large number of Syrian workers prior to the crisis (LEADERS Consortium 2019). Various sources estimate the number of Syrian migrant workers that were present in Lebanon prior to the 2011 crisis to be between 200,000-600,000 workers; however, their numbers fluctuated according to major events in the country, such as the civil war, the reconstruction period, the assassination of former prime minister Rafic Hariri and the 2006 war. Lebanon's reliance on Syrian workers in the construction sector has increased since the advent of the Syrian conflict, such that in the present, Syrians make up 70-80% of the construction workforce in Lebanon (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre 2018).

These special provisions for Syrian workers were put to an end in 2015, four years after the start of the Syrian conflict. The surge of refugees after 2011 and the heightened tension that ensued at the social, economic

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[2] The three bilateral agreements are: the 1993 Agreement for Economic and Social Cooperation and Coordination between Lebanon and Syria, the 1993 Agreement Regulating the Entry and Movement of Persons and Goods between Lebanon and Syria, and the 1994 Bilateral Agreement in the Field of Labor between the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Government of the Lebanese Republic.

and political levels resulted in the termination of the open-border policy and the introduction of a series of restrictive measures that had detrimental effects on the livelihoods of displaced Syrians in general and Syrian construction workers in particular. In January 2015, new criteria were introduced for new entries and for renewing residency permits, effectively dividing entries and renewals of Syrians into eleven categorie[3]s, each requiring a submission of documentations not easily attainable in the absence of financial means, valid personal identification or a signed "pledge of responsibility" by a Lebanese sponsor, otherwise known as the kafeel. In order to attain a legal status, displaced Syrians are required to submit a "pledge of responsibility" by a Lebanese sponsor or a valid rental lease contract or a work permit. The other option is to obtain a registration status with the UNHCR, which denotes signing a pledge not to work as decreed by the Lebanese government. The 'pledge not to work' means that refugees could only legally sustain their livelihoods through humanitarian assistance (CARE International Lebanon 2018). In mid-2016, however, the 'pledge not to work' was canceled, in another restrictive measure taken against Syrian refugees.

This policy paper outlines how humanitarian policies and the conditions of humanitarian action in Lebanon's 'refugee crisis', tend, more broadly, to produce a contested field of action in which 'imagined' gender relations form a part.

While 'dignity' and 'participation' are terms applied in the humanitarian framework, the lack of cooperation or resistance vis-à-vis the humanitarian sector and the close relationship of humanitarian action to informal citizenship or enacted citizenship are unwanted factors.

Setting the Context

The construction sector in Lebanon is characterized by its informality and the absence of formal written work contracts and benefits or social protection. Syrian construction workers often live in poor and crowded housing. They are subject to employer or sponsor profiteering, wage discrimination and delayed or inconsistent payment of wages. In short, Syrian construction workers are involved in labor-intensive, low-wage, exhausting and insecure working conditions (Chalcraft 2005). They also face discrimination and racism from employers, police officials and local communities, and they lack access to legal redress. Due to legal, social and political-economic barriers, construction work has become an arena for the exploitation and abuse of Syrian workers. The profound imbalance of power between employer and employee is sanctioned by government measures and regulations. These measures can be rightfully called policies of "manufacturing vulnerability", which aim to strip groups of their rights, reject their presence, and facilitate their exploitation (Saghieh 2015). These policies give the impression of the existence of a strong Lebanese state, protective of its citizens from outsiders, in line with a prevalent discourse against Syrians as a threat and competition (Saghieh 2015). Displaced Syrians workers are put at the mercy of other people and are left with two solutions: they either leave the country or accept exploitation (Janmyr 2016).

Political-Economic Barriers: Rationale Behind Lebanon's Labor Policy

One policy that distinguished Lebanon's response to the 2011 influx of Syrian refugees from that of previous refugee flows to the country is opposition towards the establishment of formal refugee camps run by UNHCR. Thus, Syrian refugees capitalized on historical networks of migration and employment, relying on the opportunities offered by Lebanese cities (Fawaz 2016). Two rationales triggered this response. Firstly, refugee camps in Lebanon are viewed as security threats because of the history of Palestinian camps and their permanence. Secondly, the non-encampment policy serves the state's labor market goals, particularly the interests of the Lebanese owners of businesses and capital by expanding the labor supply, lowering wages and increasing workers' precarity (Turner 2015). This has allowed previous levels of Syrian participation in the economy to be restored.

Over the past decade, Lebanon's economy has witnessed a shift in the distribution of employment with an increase in demand for cheap, low-skilled and labor-intensive workers. The increase in labor supply for informal, low-paid jobs drove down wages and enticed poor labor conditions (Errighi and Griesse 2016). This

[3] The eleven categories are: Tourists, work visitors, property owners, shoppers, students, transit entries, entries for those who have been displaced, medical treatment visits, appointments with embassies and entries under a "pledge of responsibility" by a Lebanese citizen.

means that state policy towards construction workers is based on the alignment of its interests with Lebanon's business elite (Turner 2015).

Legal Barriers: Unattainable Legality and Institutionalized Precarity

The kafeel or sponsor is usually the employer and is entitled, under the sponsorship system (kafala), to take control over the life of the Syrian employee. This system ties a worker's residency to a kafeel, who has to be a Lebanese citizen, who then serves as a bail (Lebanon Support 2016). In this way, the state delegates its authority to a Lebanese citizen, who is then responsible for the legal status of the worker and is legally accountable in case of any violation the worker might commit (Mansour-Ille and Hendow 2018). An employer could utilize this power discrepancy to his/her advantage and withdraw sponsorship at any time. This would result in Syrian workers losing their legal status at the discretion of their sponsor. The Lebanese kafeel can also extort Syrians for exorbitant amounts of money in order to sign a pledge of responsibility.

Kafala grants the employer or the sponsor a sense of authority and power over the status of construction workers, while the state then largely remains detached and uninvolved (Mansour-Ille and Hendow 2018). The sponsorship system produces increased dependency within labor relations because it makes a Syrian worker's legal and employment statuses highly dependent on the kafeel. Therefore, a work-based pledge of responsibility sanctions the kafeel's forced labor, exploitation and harassment of their workers (Lebanon Support 2016). This could take the form of low compensation, lack of formal written contracts, prolonged working hours, and the denying or limiting of leave.

Moreover, it has become increasingly difficult for Syrians to attain the required documents for the fulfillment of their legal presence or maintaining legal residency. According to the 2018 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR), 73% of those surveyed above the age of 15 do not have legal residency. Most respondents cited the cost of renewal as the main reason. The second most cited reason was the difficulty of finding a sponsor. In 2018, there was an increase to 62% of households with no members having legal residency, compared with 55% in 2017. According to the LEADERS Consortium report (2019), at the present, sponsorship is the only pathway for displaced Syrians who need to work.

A legal status is important for the displaced as it paves the way for them to access basic rights and fundamental services (Lebanon Support 2016). The absence of legality makes Syrians vulnerable to arbitrary arrest and detention; moreover, they can no longer seek legal services and subsequent juridical correction upon experiencing any derogatory acts. This lack of legal protection also puts them at risk of different types of abuse. Hence, many displaced Syrians have resorted to self-imposed limited movements to areas they are not familiar with due to fears of arrest and detention at both regular and ad hoc checkpoints (Janmyr 2016; Lebanon Support 2016). This affects their ability to go to their places of work or even gain access to work in the case of absence of legal status. In some areas, municipalities have resorted to curfews on Syrian workers (Janmyr 2016).

Curfews, which usually escalate as a result of security tensions in the country, are restrictive measures that hinder the mobility of refugees and promotes discriminatory and retaliatory practices against them. Following the Arsal battles in August 2014 between the Lebanese Army and extremist groups from Syria, Human Rights Watch identified at least 45 municipalities across Lebanon that imposed curfews on Syrians (Human Rights Watch 2014). Curfews are typically announced with a large banner erected in a main street, depicting the times during which 'foreigners' and 'foreign workers' - widely understood to refer to displaced Syrians - are not allowed to be outside or gather in large groups (Human Rights Watch 2014). Enforcement of curfews is usually applied by local municipal police; however, it has been reported that in some areas, local vigilante groups, some of them armed, were created with the tacit support of local authorities to enforce curfews and manage security, raising concerns about abuses such as beatings, raids and arbitrary arrests. These abuses are carried out under the pretext of protecting the social order. As of November 2019, a total of 60 incidents were reported grouped under curfews and restrictions according to the geo-located mapping of conflicts in Lebanon (Lebanon Support 2019).

Social Barriers: Minimal interactions with hosts and weak social capital

Displaced Syrians face discrimination and racism from employers, police officials and local communities, and they

lack access to legal redress. Additionally, they have weak social capital, which is an indicator of well-being in displaced settings, particularly the bridging type, meaning they have little to no connections with the host communities. Their interactions with the local host communities are at a minimal due to a history of discrimination and racism against Syrian workers in Lebanon.

Understanding social capital is key to improve an enabling environment towards social stability. Social capital is an indicator of well-being; the harder life gets, the more relationships tend to break down (CARE International Lebanon 2018). Social capital is defined as the ability to engage, get support from and influence other community members (CARE International Lebanon 2018). Social capital serves three main functions: 1) pooling of resources, 2) improving livelihoods, and 3) optimizing the use of limited resources (Uzelac et al 2016). It also enables access to information and opportunities. This could happen in the form of support from fellow refugees as bonding capital, that creates some form of a security net and provides emotional support. The other form of social capital is bridging capital. Bridging capital is the development of social relations with the host community in order to access housing, land, services and jobs. These relations can develop into meaningful friendships and lead to social integration and livelihood benefits (CARE International Lebanon 2018).

The protracted presence of Palestinian refugees and Lebanon's historical experience of hosting refugees has created hostility towards another refugee movement. The prolonged settlement of Syrians in Lebanon as migrant workers since the 1950s and as military forces between 1976-2005 fueled animosities against harboring new, potentially permanent categories of Syrians. Moreover, the severe economic downturn that ensued with the 2011 refugee influx further compounded resentment against Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Due to Lebanon's non-encampment policy, the majority of displaced Syrians resided in the same neighborhoods as Lebanon's poorest communities. Tensions grew as a result of perceptions of biased and presumably unfair support from the international community and became a part of the daily life of displaced Syrians. According to CARE International's report (2018), all refugees interviewed mentioned that at some point, they experienced some form of harassment or violence, mostly verbal, but also threats and physical violence, by their Lebanese neighbors. This feeling of insecurity has also been exacerbated by police forces due to fear of arrest at checkpoints, instigating self-imposed isolation and restrictions on mobility. Checkpoints, curfews and other measures are not only restrictive in terms of freedom of movement but also in terms of having a social life and paying visits to family, thus penalizing an entire community (Taslakian 2016). The application of curfews is noticed more in rural areas than in Beirut because 1) rural areas are geographically easier and more effective to control than the capital city and 2) police and law enforcement officers in Beirut are likely to be permissive and less inquisitive than those in the rural areas (Taslakian 2016). This creates a discriminatory situation within the refugee population based on their financial and social status. Moreover, these restrictive measures are often accompanied by racist media campaigns by Lebanese television channels and political parties. In June 2019, a campaign was launched against the employment of foreigners and called for reducing unemployment rates for Lebanon's youth. Banners carrying the slogan "If you love Lebanon, employ a Lebanese" were seen in different areas in Lebanon (Euro-Med Monitor 2019).

The Implications of Lacking Transparency and Commitment to Human Rights by Construction Companies

While Lebanon has long relied on Syrians migrant workers in its construction sector, there is scant literature that sheds light on the current situation of displaced Syrian construction workers in Lebanon. A report that was conducted by Business and Human Rights Resource Center (2018) showcased the obliviousness of construction companies in identifying human rights risks in their operations. The report identified six key risks to refugee workers in the construction sector: 1) unsanitary or unsafe accommodation on job sites, 2) dangerous violations of occupational safety and health, 3) extortionate sponsorship and recruitment fees, 4) lack of access to grievance mechanisms, 5) unequal, late or non-payment of wages and 6) lack of information on working conditions and rights abuses of construction workers due to the informal nature of the construction workforce.

The case studies conducted by the Asfari Institute showcased the effect of this lack of transparency by construction companies and Lebanon's sponsorship

system on the lives of displaced Syrian construction workers (Chammaa 2019; Chammaa & Husseiny 2019). Complaints by displaced Syrian workers were reiterated about their low wages and how they are not reflective of the risks workers face or the amount of effort exerted on construction sites. Even though most of the interviewed construction workers had their rents covered by their employers, they have to endure living in debilitating housing conditions in shared apartments or on construction sites, often in crowded and unsanitary conditions. Also, workers described their limited interaction with local communities, often confining themselves to their construction sites and barely having any money left at the end of the month to spend on leisure activities. They mainly interact with other construction workers from the Syrian community.

Conclusion

The construction sector in Lebanon has enormous potential to deliver decent jobs, living wages, and enhanced worker safety, and to contribute to overall economic growth, shared prosperity and development. However, the problems that plague the construction sector far outweigh the potential benefits (at least at the level of Syrian construction workers). The Lebanese economy is dependent on Syrian construction workers. After all, the presence of low-wage Syrian workers serves the Lebanese market's goals and its aligned interests with the Lebanese elite (Turner 2015). The sponsorship system, which subjugates Syrian workers and foreign migrant workers, should be regulated. Foreign workers should be granted a form of stable legal status that guarantees their basic rights and allows them to access work and other services.

The precarity of displaced Syrians is a result of a catch 22. How can displaced Syrians be granted a legal status that promotes their access to services and jobs amidst serious calls and actual efforts by Lebanese politicians and government officials to send them back to Syria? Lebanon's sectarian political system, its historic resentment and exploitation of migrant workers and refugees and now the diminished funding for refugees due to donor fatigue, makes the road to securing the socio-economic well-being of displaced Syrians in general, and construction workers in particular, mired with serious roadblocks that are difficult to overcome.

Recommendations

On the National Government Level:

- Simplify procedures and documentation requirements to obtain work permits and renew residency permits. This entails adopting a fair and transparent system for obtaining and maintaining legal residency without fees or sponsorship.

- The Ministry of Labor has a pivotal role to play as it is responsible for employment conditions, labor relations, labor inspections, and for shaping labor policy towards the employment of Syrian workers. These four areas reflect the critical challenges that Lebanon is currently facing (Ajluni et al. 2015).

- Take serious measures to reduce the growing informality in the construction sector by introducing, supervising and enforcing local labor laws with regard to minimum wage, working hours, and workplace health and safety. Formalization of the labor market in Lebanon should be a long-term goal, given that the needed changes to do so will take considerable advocacy, resources, political will and time.

- Support freedom of association and right to collective bargaining. The rights to freedom of association and collective bargaining are severely restricted in the construction sector in Lebanon, given the informality of the sector and the prohibition of refugees and migrant workers from forming unions. Syrian workers are in a precarious situation particularly due to the difficulty in attaining legal residency. Another reason is the lack of formal contracts which makes the workers feel unable to raise grievances against their employers.

- Develop reliable and frequently updated statistics to support the design, impact assessment and implementation of labor market policies.
- Recruit and train on-site labor inspectors. These inspectors should be incentivized and provided logistical support. These inspectors could be from the cohort of workers and supervisors of a construction company.

On the Civil Society Organizations Level:

- Play a more active mediation role between employers and employees. They can also provide legal support to workers to undertake arbitration or mediation with the employer (LEADERS 2019).

- Play a critical watch dog role in monitoring worker rights, working conditions and minimum workplace standards. They should seek to establish a more systematic way of sharing information about workplace violations and exploitation, refer cases to one another and undertake joint advocacy efforts towards the Lebanese government, donors and construction companies.

- Advance access to information and promote awareness of workers' rights, minimum workplace standards and redress mechanisms among workers. Civil society organizations working on issues related to labor rights have noted that workers are unaware of worker rights, decent working conditions, basic workplace minimum standards, and legal appeal mechanisms available to them (LEADERS 2019). There is also scant documentation on the working conditions and rights abuses of construction workers due to the informal nature of the workforce.

- Support construction workers right to organize and seek remedy for abuse and discrimination faced from their employers.

On the Construction Companies Level:

- Be required to abide by human rights policies and decent work principles. Construction companies should be required to make their human rights policies publicly available and accountable to state agencies.

- Commit to paying their workers a living wage, on time and for all the hours they worked.

- Engage with civil society organizations on human rights issues and the well-being of workers. This would help them to carry out their policies and improve the living and work conditions of workers.

- Allow government inspectors, NGOs, or trade unions to inspect construction sites for the detection of any abuse or risks and to enforce safety and health standards.

- Recruit and train on-site labor inspectors. These inspectors should be incentivized and provided logistical support. These inspectors could be from the cohort of workers and supervisors of a construction company. Hence, companies should be encouraged to put in place clear policies and procedures on worker health and safety.

On the International Financial Institutions and Donors Level:

- Hold companies accountable and require them to acknowledge and apply International Financial Institutions (IFI) safeguards and standards. One way of doing so is to commission reviews of adherence to their human rights standards in Lebanon, develop policies and make their findings public. Since the construction sector is partly dependent on heavy investment from IFIs and donor governments that rigorously safeguard human rights standards, there are reasons to be hopeful for improvements (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre 2018).

On the International Organizations Level:

- Engage with the social needs of displaced Syrians in their aid interventions, and not just the material needs, so that Syrian workers could replenish their social capital and build capacity to develop normal social interactions with local communities. Displacement can be an isolating experience for Syrians with weak bridging capital (who may not be used to making connections outside the family).

- Seek ways of reducing tensions, building bridges between Lebanese and displaced Syrian communities and promoting efforts that contribute to the social stability of Lebanon. For many reasons, the durable solutions promoted by the UNHCR (voluntary repatriation in the country of origin; integration in the host country; resettlement in a third country) are currently out of sight for the majority of displaced Syrians in Lebanon. Thus, it is an imperative to challenge narratives of refugees as burdens and competitors in order to reduce tensions between displaced Syrians and Lebanese hosts; more emphasis should be placed on commonalities between the two communities, allowing bridging social capital to increase.

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Advancing Support to Syrian Women: Hindrances and Recommendations

Kholoud Mansour[1]

Key Summary[1]

- The small proportion of women's meaningful participation in peace processes is not exclusive to the Syria's case. It remains a global challenge.
- International support must channel its pressure in a more coherent and strategic way to ensure that Syrian women are presented by at least 30% in all phases of the semi-stalled political process and in the transitional period.
- International support to Syrian women in peacebuilding efforts must be more coordinated and consistent with strategic vision on the why and how to better support Syrian women in their different capacities.
- Syrian women must be included in all processes of the design, implementation and evaluation. Most importantly, they must be included at the decision-making levels within the international structure; donor governments, UN agencies, international organizations and other stakeholders.
- International support should not, under any conditions, demand or expect Syrian women to have consensus positions in a very politicized and polarized environment.

Introduction

Prior to the Syrian uprising in 2011 and owing to the authoritarianism, discriminatory and emergency laws, and patriarchal system and values, the political representation of the Syrian women had been very poor and ineffective. Although Syrian women did not have legal restrictions to their participation, they only held 12.5% of parliamentary seats and 6% of the ministerial positions. Additionally, Syria was ranked 136 out of 190 in parliamentarian positions and 156 out of 174 in ministerial position in terms of women participation. In 2011, Syria came 124 out of 135 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report and made it below other neighbouring countries (Kapur, 2017; IPU & UN Women, 2017; Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2016).

The Syrian uprising has been perceived as a milestone for Syrian people but particularly for women. The birth and growth of grassroots women initiatives and groups during the nine years of conflict have been remarkable. They continue to play key roles in nonviolent activism in the political, humanitarian, development, media, health and human rights spheres and in peacebuilding efforts. However, the protracted violent conflict, transforming structures, forced displacement, and the ever-changing developments on the ground have undoubtedly impacted the role of Syrian women and limited the space for them at many fronts specially the political one.

This policy paper aims at examining the various structural and societal hurdles and the global structural design that limit the meaningful participation of Syrian women in the peace process. It additionally addresses the international support to Syrian women and examines if this support has resulted in more and better women participation in the peace process and the space in which international efforts should continue to support meaningful participation and effective inclusion of Syrian women.

Barriers vs Participation

There are several intersectional barriers at the local and national levels that obstruct women participation, discouraging them from entering the public sphere in general and the political one in particular. Cultural, physical and structural constraints can be considered as the overarching frame for broad challenges that face women. The protracted and violent conflict in addition to the control of the de facto authorities have directly impacted the security and the protection of Syrian women and hence their real participation in the public sphere. The general perception towards the politics field

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that is corrupt, dirty and unsafe space has pushed many women to leave or refrain from entering the political realm. The continuous and manifold forced displacement within Syria and abroad has also hindered women's success and meaningful engagement.

There are other limiting underlying factors that have systematically pushed Syrian women to the side-lines. Those factors include the repressive regime that has prohibited political activism for decades, changing de facto powers on the ground, the fragile milieu across the country and the legal and educational barriers that have been exacerbated by the conflict. The cultural and patriarchal norms and the economic disempowerment played their roles in further sustaining the political marginalisation of Syrian women. In addition, women in general have to bear supplementary burdens that are entailed in stigma, intense criticism, comparisons to men, exposure of their private details, defamation and vilification. All of these burdens and hurdles are coupled with the lack of intention by the opposition bodies to seriously believe in the importance and imperative of women's inclusion, thus worsening the situation for women's political participation. All these factors have not been positive in providing any safe or sustainable environment for many Syrian women to engage in the political sphere.

However, the small proportion of women's meaningful participation in peace processes is not exclusive to the Syria's case. It remains a global challenge despite the UN resolutions stressing the significance of equal participation of women in all peacebuilding efforts and the need for their effective inclusion at the decision-making levels. This is interrelated with the structural design and the current architecture of conflict resolution mechanisms that continue to exclude women and continue to be dominated by men. Recent statistics confirmed that only one woman has ever signed a final peace accord as chief negotiator. They also showed that only 4 percent of signatories, 2.4 percent of chief mediators, 3.7 percent of witnesses and 9 percent of negotiators are women (UN Women, 2012; CFR, 2019). Although many studies proved the presence of a strong relationship between women's participation and peace durability and sustainability, the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 has not helped increase women's meaningful participation in peace processes. For example, the Nordic Women Mediators (NWM) was established in 2015 to enable and strengthen Nordic women mediators and peacebuilders to advance the inclusion and meaningful participation of women in all phases of peace processes to achieve and sustain peace. Hence, it is crucial to address at the participation of Syrian women in the political and peace process as a broader and global challenge.

Despite the previous challenges, Syrian women have created new spaces and exhausted constant efforts to be engaged in the semi-stalled political process and informal peacebuilding efforts. The daily struggles and survival mechanisms have led them to change norms and perceptions and to occupy new leading roles in everyday life. This is a driving force and the human capital that must be invested in during the transitional and post-conflict era.

Syrian Women in Negotiation and Peace Processes

International support has deployed several models to enhance Syrian women participation in the peace process. One of the models that gained momentum and attention was the establishment of advisory groups at the margins of the negotiations and peace process. Examples of these include the Women's Advisory Board (WAB) to the UN Special Envoy and the Women's Advisory Committee (WAC) of the High Negotiations Committee (HNC). Another model to the international support to Syrian women is the convening of large conferences and fora for Syrian women from different political and civic spectrums to build consensus and forge unity. Several assemblies, workshops, and national consultations with Syrian women have been conducted to benefit from their expertise and knowledge in different areas of work, to enhance their political participation, to share and connect their experiences and to inform national action plans in some countries on women, peace and security. At the margins of donor conferences to support Syria, a few side events are organized to address the role of women in humanitarian and political actions in Syria.

International support to Syrian women, though cannot be over-generalized, has been contested despite its genuine intention and serious efforts. In the first round of peace talks in January 2014, there was no presence to women at the negotiations table. This representation did not much improve in the next rounds of negotiations and there was not enough international pressure to oblige all negotiating parties to include women by at least 30%. In the two experiences of the women advisory groups and with the dissimilarity in their strategic presence and financial and logistics details, they were criticized for their lack of transparency, consistency or clear selection

criteria. They were perceived as disconnected from the real needs and grassroots women structures on the ground and has probably led, at some point, to the halt of the inclusion of the Syrian women at the negotiations table in the peace process.

Some arguments address how international organizations and stakeholders, in a manner similar to the work of aid agencies, usually target the same women (and/ or their organizations) to support every time and reinforce what is called "donor-darlings". This results in deepening the imbalances and gaps between the grassroots women and those who have access to international structures, support and exposure. It also leads to the fragmentation of the efforts of the women themselves and impact the effectiveness and coherency of their work.

On the other hand, international support must channel its pressure in a more coherent and strategic way to ensure that Syrian women are presented by at least 30% in all phases of the political process and transitional period. In the establishment of the three groups[2] composing the Constitutional Committee in late October 2019, the UN was keen to have equal representation of women in the civil society group. Nevertheless, it would have been more constructive if more pressure was placed on the other two groups, especially the opposition, to include at least 30% of women in their groups, otherwise their seats remain empty. It is argued that many Syrian women groups are established under international pressure and hence do not have concrete grounds that ensure their sustainability and linkages to real demands, however; such pressure in peace processes might be, in some cases, the only and most operative guarantee to ensure more and better participation of women and to enhance their representation at the decision-making levels.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite the frustration, the protracted violent conflict, and the failure of the peace talks, there is always a big momentum to genuinely support Syrian women and ensure their inclusion at the decision-making levels. The international stakeholders should rethink their approach and find, together with the Syrian women, alternative strategies that enhance their presence and meaningful participation in the formal and informal peace efforts. The stakeholders should ensure that Syrian women have their space and their leverage in all phases of the political process and in post-conflict era. The representation of Syrian women in the political sphere should stem from the local and national needs and priorities and should emerge as an inevitable process. Nonetheless, international support remains useful to help Syrian women in their quest for meaningful participation.
Donor governments, UN agencies, international organizations, and other stakeholders can undoubtedly continue to work towards improving their support to Syrian women within the following pillars:

Coordination and Consistency

- International support to Syrian women in peacebuilding efforts must be more coordinated and consistent to avoid fragmentated work, efforts and resources. International stakeholders should have a strategic vision on the why and how to better support Syrian women in their different capacities, coupled with alternative strategies that ensure sustaining this support albeit the political and military developments on the ground.

- International support should consistently exert serious pressure on all negotiating bodies to ensure women are represented by at least 30% in the peace process and at the decision-making levels. This should be a precondition at any phase of the peace efforts and during the post-conflict era; women's seats must be kept empty in case of non-compliance.

- The work conducted by the international stakeholders to support women should be mapped, and the number of workshops and events, themes, attendees, resources and the impact of this support should all be specified. A cross reference among international actors would help address the overlapping, gaps and lessons learnt.

- At donor conferences to support Syria and the neighbouring countries and at other policy forums, there should always be separate panels to discuss the priorities and perceptions of Syrian women and to assess and explore new ways to enhance their meaningful participation at all decision-making levels.

[2] The committee is composed of three groups: the Syrian government, the political opposition group, and the third group that consists of individual representatives of civil society from different background.

Limiting Barriers

- International support must work to limit the barriers to the participation of women in the political process and ensure their security without jeopardizing them to further threats. This should be paired with continuous work and consultations with grassroots women organizations.

- The deployment of a political economy framework to analyse and understand the meaningful participation of Syrian women in the formal and informal peace efforts is key to move from rhetoric to practice and towards concrete actions. This is pivotal to unpack the normative barriers that obstruct the participation of women in the peace process amidst the violent conflict, and can concretely assist in limiting the physical, structural and cultural barriers.

Impact and Transparency

- Conduct periodical independent evaluations for all programmes and initiatives that aim at supporting Syrian women and enhancing their role in the peace process and ensure the accountability, transparency and impact of this support. This is crucial to cover many of the knowledge gaps in order to asses and analyse the effectiveness and sustainability of such support.

- Strengthen non-traditional structures and mechanisms that create a nexus between formal and informal processes to enhance the meaningful participation of women. Facilitate linkages between women engaged in the international peace process and mechanisms and women working at the community levels and ensure that the latter are informing the peace and negotiations processes.

- Evaluate impact of funding allocated to different models, programmes and initiatives to Syrian women and women organizations. Such evaluations should be always analytical, transparent, available to public and consulted and communicated with Syrian women. This is not only to identify the lessons learnt, challenges, and the way forward, but also to help rebuild the trust and creditability in the work of international actors in the Syrian context.

- International support should be willing to accept constructive feedback from Syrian women and incorporate this feedback, when valid and applicable, in future programmes. As such, Syrian women must be included in all processes of the design, implementation and evaluation. Most importantly, they must be included at the decision-making levels within the international structure – donor governments, UN agencies, international organizations and other stakeholders. Hence, Syrian women must lead or co-lead the coordination, facilitation, management and decision-making of all international programmes and projects that support Syrian women.

Do Not Depoliticize

- International support should not work on depoliticizing Syrian women to enhance their political participation. The way forward should be to directly support women's political initiatives and movements that have a political vision and a clear stance on the conflict and the developments in Syria.

- International support should not, under any conditions, demand or expect Syrian women to have consensus positions in a very politicized and polarized environment. This tendency towards forging unity and treating Syrian women as apolitical bodies rips them of their political agency, thus contradicting the international calls and intentions to support political participation of women.

Networks and Alliances

- International support should exhaust its efforts towards investing in grassroots women initiatives and enhancing their political capacity utilizing different mediums. As such, it should ensure a true nexus between grassroots women groups inside the country and women that have access to international support, between women in different political bodies and affiliations, and also between grassroots women individuals and initiatives and the international support.

- Mapping out all women's initiatives and organizations that have emerged since 2011, their structures, mechanisms and processes is key. It should identify the mutating dynamics among those groups and analyse their growth, development or disappearance beyond the security factor and lack of resources. This mapping must be available to the public without jeopardizing Syrian women to further risk or intimidation.

- Build linkages and alliances with other women mediators and peacebuilding networks in different countries and ensure that this linkage is consistent, strategic and maintainable.

- Treat Syrian women as active agents and not as mere voices or victims, especially women in refugee camps, and work towards building their political and economic agency. International support should work directly with grassroots women and displaced women and build novel networks.

Examples of Women Groups Founded Since 2011[3]

Women Now for Development - June 2012

Women Now is a Syrian non-governmental organization and was established in Paris in 2012. The mission of Women Now is to initiate programmes led by Syrian women to protect Syrian women and children across socio-economic backgrounds and empower women to find their political voice and participate in building a new, peaceful Syria.

Syrian Women's Forum for Peace (SWFP) - October 2012

SWFP was launched with more than 40 Syrian women from all walks of social and political life. It was convened in Cairo by Karama and supported in part by Donor Direct Action, with the aim of forging a united vision and reinforce a greater role for Syrian women.

Syrian Women Network (SWN) - February 2013

The Syrian Women's Network was established in Cairo in May 2013 with the support of Olof Palme International Center. SWN includes democratic, nongovernmental and independent individuals and organizations working on gender equality, democracy, human rights, civil peace, and transitional justice.

Syrian Female Journalists Network (SFJN) - 2013

The SFJN seeks to build bridges between media and the Syrian women's movement by empowering both females and males working in the field of media, propelling female journalists to take over leading positions in their institutions, and activating the role of the media in raising social awareness concerning gender equality and women's issues. The SFJN also works on improving the representation of women in the media.

Syrian Women's Initiative for Peace and Democracy (SWIPD) - January 2014

SWIPD was founded in Geneva by UN Women together with the Government of the Netherlands to support women's participation and voice in the Syrian peace process. It was established with the presence of 40 Syrian women.

Syrian Feminist Lobby (SFL) - July 2014

The Syrian Feminist Lobby is an independent, non-party political lobby group. It was launched in Istanbul with the support of the European Feminists Initiative IFE-EFI. SFL was launched by Syrian women's rights and political activists from different political backgrounds in order to strengthen the participation of Syrian women in the political decision-making process that has a major influence on the future of their country.

Women's Advisory Board (WAB) - February 2016

The Women's Advisory Board was formed of 12 women with the support of the UN Women, the Governments of Netherlands and Norway and Hivos. The WAB aims to consult and meet with the UN Special Envoy to Syria without participating in the peace talks.

Women's Advisory Committee (WAC) - February 2016

The Women's Advisory Committee was established of 12-14 women and supported by governments of Sweden and Canada. It emerged as a recognition of the need for more representation and participation of women in the political process. The WAC was working on articulating a gender perspective to the High Negotiations Committee. It was dissolved in November 2017.

Syrian Women Peacemakers - May 2016

The conference was organized by the UN Women for 130 Syrian political and civil society activists and was held in Beirut. The women met to build consensus, forge a statement of unity and overcome significant political divides.

[3] The list, though not exhaustive, is compiled by the author from various websites and Facebook groups.

Syrian Feminist Alliance - January 2017

The Syrian Feminist Alliance was founded in January 2017; it includes Syrian individuals and organizations. The Alliance works on peace, women and security, and the activation of UN Resolution 1325, and urges all actors to increase women's participation and include gender perspective in all peacebuilding aspects.

Syrian Women's Political Movement (SWPM) - October 2017

The SWPM was established in Paris in October 2017 by 28 Syrian women and feminists. It was formed out of a collective need to support Syrian women's demand for meaningful representation in the political process, including at the negotiating table and in all decision-making positions by at least 30%. SWPM aims to work on an inclusive, free democracy and sustainable peace and to contribute to the global women, peace and security agenda.

Toward a Framework for the Syrian Women Movement - June 2018

The Conference was organized by the UN Women for 200 Syrian women in Beirut in June 2018. Syrian women participants identified some key elements for a common framework for the Syrian women's movement despite their significant differences and diverse backgrounds across political, ideological and geographic spectrum.

Syrian Feminist Society (SFS) - November 2018

A civil society organization in western Aleppo suburbs and aims at supporting and empowering women and enhancing their role in the local councils and raise the political awareness of the Syrian women and enhance their participation at the local and national levels.

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From Warzones to Border Zones: The Nature of an Informal WASH and Shelter Governing Structure

Lara Azzam[1]

Key Summary

- In 2019, many displaced Syrians continue to suffer from the burdens of the high cost of living, the risks of being "illegal" and the lack of access to basic services such as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

- In light of the current aversive discourse on the return of Syrians to safe areas, continual dialogue and exchange between international actors and policymakers in Lebanon is very much needed particularly on the right of voluntary return as well as supporting the Lebanese government to enhance its infrastructure, service provision and increase livelihood opportunities for Syrians and Lebanese, especially in the poor areas.

- Based on a study conducted in Marjaayoun and Hasbaya, a majority of Syrian communities express their dissatisfaction towards the WASH services, and especially when it comes to the post-exit strategies adopted by NGOs and International agencies.

- The lack of access to governmental WASH services for Syrian refugees leaves them in desperate inhumane conditions that affect their personal hygiene and their short and long-term health, and extends to endanger the Lebanese and Syrian people's health and environments.

- A national strategy should tackle the interim period before the presumed return of Syrians - not to exclude those who choose not to return - particularly in terms of the legal status of displaced Syrians. As most Syrians residing in Lebanon currently lack legal status, this leaves them in a state of desperation and might push them to further areas of lawlessness.

Introduction

Lebanon is hosting the highest number of refugees per capita in the world (UNHCR 2010). According to the UNHCR, 995,512 registered Syrian refugees reside in Lebanon (UNHCR 2018), with claims of having an additional half a million unregistered Syrians. On May 6, 2015, the UNHCR suspended the new registration of refugees at the Lebanese government's request (Amnesty International 2015, 16).

In addition, Lebanon has not ratified the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its accompanying 1967 protocol (UNHCR 2010).

Therefore, the Lebanese government views the Syrians as guests, referring to them as displaced communities, not as refugees. The government's policy toward them is described as no-policy policy, or at best a highly inconsistent and random one. Lebanon has progressively adopted policies that reflect profound fears about the potential impact of a prolonged presence of Syrian refugees. This apprehension has affected everything from residency and mobility to access to employment, education, and healthcare, reflecting the country's past experiences with refugees. Currently, the government and the people fear that the presence of a large, mainly Sunni, Syrian population might undermine the delicate sectarian balance in the country and eventually transform it politically (Carnegie Middle East Center 2018).

With Lebanon's current government in place, one of its priorities is the return of Syrians despite reports by human rights groups that those returning face arbitrary detention and torture by the regime (Khodr 2019). This debate on the Syrians' return was preceded with funding cuts from international organizations and UN assistance shortages. This led to an increasing deterioration in the quality of life for refugees within Lebanese societies as a result of state policies - or lack thereof - political and social grievances, socioeconomic status and looming uncertainty. The foremost implication of this withdrawal reflected gravely on the WASH and shelter governing structure situation. Moreover, the Lebanese government's political deadlock and division over the

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displaced Syrians status has given local institutions leverage in managing the refugees' affairs and, further, has established more arbitrary implementation mechanisms. The already inadequate WASH and shelter services suffered from an additional flow upon the exit of the INGOs and funding cuts (Carnegie Middle East Center 2018). Therefore, informality as a governing structure continued, but with consequences that were more dire.

This policy paper is based on a field study for which 20 interviews were conducted with Syrian displaced families in the Lebanese southern areas of Marjayoun and Hasbaya post-exit of humanitarian actors. It explores the status of displaced Syrians in 2018 with regards to housing, WASH and shelter governing structure, particularly amid the post-exit of INGOs, the decrease of UN assistance and the political orientation toward increasing the pressure to return. The paper then devises recommendations to the relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

Living Expenses and Employment

All the interviewees identified high living expenses as the most pressing challenge, followed by access to jobs and legal restrictions. In December 2014, the Ministry of Labor issued a circular that limits the sectors open to Syrians to construction, agriculture, and cleaning (Bou Khater 2017). In turn, the decrees require Syrians seeking work to have a Lebanese sponsor, often an employer or "kafeel". Further, UNHCR-registered refugees seeking to renew their registration are ineligible to work in Lebanon on the grounds that they are receiving humanitarian assistance (Bou Khater 2017).

This has left Syrians with very limited options for employment and made them extremely vulnerable to exploitation by Lebanese sponsors who charge any rate they prefer without referring to any scale or standard. Sponsors also threaten to withdraw their sponsorship if they do not abide by their rules, and practice other forms of mental abuse as described by the interviewees.

Housing and Rent

Since the Lebanese government has refused to establish refugee camps for Syrians over fears of permanent settlement, most of the interviewees lived either in tents or tented communities. In this regard, rental prices were reported as the most significant burden in terms of financial difficulties. While formality is demonstrated in the need for the official sponsorship system, it has resulted in an informal governance structure which benefits the (Lebanese) landlords and employers who give very low wages to the displaced Syrians. This structure also grants employers a degree of control over their employees in return for a tent/shelter which they are in desperate need of. Hence, the aid sector should be better aware of these circumstances to be able to fill these gaps and provide better work and living conditions for the displaced communities.

Access to WASH Services

In Marjayoun and Hasabaya, the design phase of the exit strategy of humanitarian organizations began in the year 2017, whereby surveys were conducted and negotiations/capacity building activities were with the local authorities in order to integrate WASH needs of the Syrian refugees with those of the host community in the area, thus merging the services in return for service capacity upgrading from the IOs. Since then, displaced Syrians have become expected to pay for the services on the long-term, namely solid waste collection and sewage desludging services.

The post-exit strategy had different outcomes from those aspired by the IOs and the donors. The current situation is marked by unsatisfied local authorities, unchanged service provision and capacity, and untreated sewage and uncollected garbage at informal tented settlements (ITSs). The latter is being burnt and the sewage is undergoing desludging with buckets and then thrown in a nearby trench. The WASH situation is currently an acute health hazard that is going to result in the spread of disease, especially those that are water and air borne. Moreover, services and aid are insufficient, which necessitates a coherent WASH strategy.

Recommendations

On the National Government Level:

- A Lebanese national strategy vis-à-vis the exit of humanitarian assistance to refugees is ever more urgent. The lack of access to governmental WASH services for Syrian refugees leaves them in desperate inhumane conditions that affect their personal hygiene and their short and long-term health, and extends to endanger the Lebanese's health and environment;

- A national strategy should tackle the interim period before the presumed return of Syrians - not to exclude

those who choose not to return - particularly in terms of the legal status of displaced Syrians. As most Syrians residing in Lebanon currently lack legal status, this leaves them in a state of desperation and might push them to further areas of lawlessness;

On the Local Government Level;

- Municipalities and local governmental agencies should engage with the displaced communities to be informed about the services they (still) need since the repercussions extend to reach not only the Syrians, but also Lebanese, taking its toll on their lands and general health;

- Local authorities should closely engage with NGOs still working in refugee aid to address ways the WASH and shelter governing structure could be enhanced. Alternatives should be discussed and self-reliance strategies should be revisited in light of a mapping and needs assessment;

- There is an urgency for collecting baseline information about service and WASH provision and needs in all Lebanese governorates after the exit of humanitarian organizations and the funding cuts, particularly in areas with the highest number of displaced Syrians. Municipalities should generate information or be informed about quantitative and qualitative studies conducted by NGOs concerning needed infrastructure. Local authorities should constantly coordinate with camps' governing bodies or shaweesh on the needs and basic services lacking for the Syrian refugees since it is a collective responsibility and the dire consequences will affect both Syrians and Lebanese;

On the Communal and International Levels;

- International NGOs promoting self-reliance among displaced communities should be aware of the disadvantages of this strategy and plan for alternatives. They should learn from unsuccessful historical record of international assistance to foster refugees' self-reliance and shape their strategies based on the priorities of the displaced people and the host communities;

- International actors need to listen to what the displaced Syrians actually think; their specific concerns and priorities should be included in any Lebanese stay or return strategy as well as any political settlement to the war in their country;

- Continual dialogue and exchange between international actors and policymakers in Lebanon are needed, particularly on the right of voluntary return as well as supporting the Lebanese government to enhance its infrastructure, service provision and increase livelihood opportunities for Syrians and Lebanese, especially in the poor areas.

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Informality in Syrian Refugees' Higher Education Academic Supports in Lebanon

Dr. Vidur Chopra[1]

Key Summary

- Refugee learners at university struggle with pursuing and persisting in their education endeavors. They often turn to informal academic supports in times of need.

- Scholarships and financial aid are important institutional levers for expanding higher education access for refugee learners. When these are not available, refugee learners fill these gaps through borrowing money or working multiple jobs, which leaves little time for them to attend university and learn.

- When refugee learners struggle at university, they seek support through peers, but these supports are not systematically targeted or effective. Scholarships must be coupled with other academic supports, particularly those related to academic language and psychosocial wellbeing, to ensure refugee learners continue and succeed in higher education.

- Higher education programs for refugees must prioritize social and relational inclusion by creating opportunities for refugees and host-country nationals to build authentic and productive relationships with one another.

Introduction: Refugee education, informality, and academic supports

Under 1% of university-aged (18-24 years) refugees are able to access university globally (UNHCR 2018). Though the importance of expanding higher education access to university for refugees and its importance for achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals is established (UNESCO & UNHCR 2016), less is known about the experiences of refugee youth once in fact they are admitted at university. Drawing on research undertaken with Syrian refugee youth in universities in Lebanon in 2016, this policy paper outlines the many ways refugee youth located support to pursue their university education when in exile. It is relevant for higher education policy makers, administrators and program managers within universities and (I)NGOs, respectively.

For long, multilateral organizations such as UNHCR, in conjunction with host-country governments, have established policy and practice within the field of refugee education and protection (Dryden-Peterson 2016). Despite the role supranational organizations in extending opportunities for education and protection for refugees, research has documented the many ways in which refugees and other migrants use transnational and subnational, or local, networks to get by on a day-to-day basis (Hovil 2016, Horst 2006, Levitt 2001). Refugees rely on these informal networks for three reasons. First, the informality of these networks allows them to access the benefits of these networks without providing documentation, much unlike the way humanitarian aid works. These networks are informal for they largely depend on inter-personal relationships among extended friends, family and sometimes even among acquaintances. Moreover, unlike (I)NGO and governmental programs, these networks are flexible and respond in timely ways to refugees' changing needs. Finally, these networks generate a sense of solidarity such that support is relayed onward in the spirit of reciprocity, knowing well that when support is extended, it will also equally be available to individuals or groups in their times of need (Levitt et al. 2017, Fawaz 2017, Cecilia Menjívar 2006, Enriquez 2011).

The flexibility, informality, and solidarity within these social networks play a critical role in filling the gaps in existing programs and social safety nets, particularly when host states are unable, or even unwilling, to meet the needs of individuals on the move. However, the informality within these networks also entails uncertainty and unpredictability, making them unsustainable in the long run and exposing refugees and other migrants to greater vulnerability (Fawaz 2017, Levitt et al. 2017). For example, in the context of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, shawishes, or self-appointed leaders, mostly Lebanese men living around refugee settlements are known to

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restrict Syrian refugees' access to humanitarian aid and services (Kheir 2016). When the odds of accessing and continuing at university are abysmally low for refugees, what role do informal academic supports play and how do young refugees locate and marshal these academic supports toward their higher education pursuits?

Academic supports, like other social supports, emanate through sustained and recurring inter-personal relationships between individuals. Academic supports are important for all learners, including refugees, and are known to influence learning, engagement, and successful academic transitions (Stanton-Salazar and Spina 2003). These supports emerge in different forms: tutoring or targeted support for language acquisition; dedicated time and space for writing and completing homework and assignments; mentoring and guidance for goal setting; and systematic information sharing about learning opportunities and scholarships. Whether academic supports emerge from family, peers, acquaintances, or through formal institutions, they are most effective when embedded within relationships (Stanton-Salazar and Spina 2003, Dryden-Peterson, Dahya, and Adelman 2017).

While several such supports emerge through individuals' inter-personal networks, social-science research increasingly finds the importance of institutions in growing and sustaining these networks (Small 2009). The everyday practices of institutions like schools, universities, sites of religious worship, and professional settings shape relationships and the flow of information among individuals. Most often, newcomer refugees in urban settings are residentially segregated, economically disadvantaged and find their social networks therefore fragmented by displacement. This constricts the quality and quantity of refugees' relationships with host-country nationals and their access to material and non-material goods, including vital academic supports.

Schools and universities, as sites of learning, hold immense potential for refugee learners to develop productive relationships with many kinds of people: other refugees like them, host country students, and administrators and teachers. Relationships with administrators and teachers have proven to be vital for minority students' education pursuits. Not only do they help refugees learn well, when effective, they develop refugee learners' navigational capacities by familiarizing them with the "rules of the game" necessary for pursuing education within host-country contexts (Chopra 2018, Dryden-Peterson, Dahya, and Adelman 2015).

Creating and leveraging academic supports in pursuit of refugee higher education

Using data from 50 repeat interviews undertaken with 15 Syrian youth between 18-30 years in 2016, this research paper focuses on Syrian youths' academic supports and their experiences of university in Lebanon. Based on these data, this paper highlights three main recommendations, each elaborated below.

1. Accessing university: Increase financial aid and scholarships for higher education

Humanitarian funding for education is severely strained. In 2016, education received only 2.7% of all humanitarian funding (Global Partnership for Education 2017). One of the reasons host country governments and donors have hesitated in funding refugee higher education is associated with the large financial outlays accompanying higher education. The increased expenditure associated with creating university scholarships, training university teachers and administrators and supporting refugees' learning needs at university contribute to the increased costs of refugee higher education. Donors argue that majority of Syrian refugee learners in Lebanon are of primary-school age and have therefore deprioritized refugee higher education initiatives.

As eight years of conflict in Syria and associated displacement have passed, a few NGO- and university-funded scholarship programs have emerged for refugee youth to fund their university education. Insufficient to meet all learners' needs, these scholarships are vital mechanisms to facilitate university access. University tuition varies widely ranging between USD 700 in the country's only public university to upward of USD 15,000 in the country's elite private universities. When 70% of displaced Syrians in Lebanon live below the poverty line (Government of Lebanon and United Nations 2017), these scholarships are of utmost importance for refugee learners to access higher education. Repeatedly, participants in my study recalled that if it were not for these scholarships, they would have been working in Lebanon's informal sector, resorted to marrying early, or placed their education entirely on hold.

Given the limited number of higher education scholarships, Syrian youth have found ways to organize to fund their university education. Male participants, in particular, often borrowed small amounts of money from their Syrian friends based in Lebanon, and even in

Europe, to pay their university tuition. In other instances, male youth also worked multiple part-time jobs in restaurants and cafes to contribute toward university expenses. While they found these jobs through networks of Syrians they knew in Lebanon, these jobs necessitated participants' precariously juggling their time in ways that left little to no time for participants to complete their university graduation requirements.

2. Learning at university: Strengthen academic language learning and psycho-social supports

Scholarships are critical but insufficient levers to facilitate university graduation, particularly when they are not coupled with additional supports. In most cases, research participants struggled at university for they were unfamiliar with English, the language of instruction for most courses in Lebanon's universities. In other cases, participants deliberately chose to major in Arabic Literature, History, Law and Political Science, courses taught in Arabic, but not aligned with their long-term goals or interests. These struggles with language also impacted their sense of self-worth and they often described themselves as "weak" and "unconfident" in these circumstances.

Few universities had targeted English language supports available for Syrians. Though some scholarship granting organizations facilitated access to short-term, intensive English classes at the British Council and/or the American Language Centers across Lebanon, these classes mostly focused on the nuts and bolts and technicalities of the English language. They did little to rapidly develop participants' familiarity in academic English or their abilities to maneuver social contexts in Lebanon.

Participants recalled merely sitting in class and listening to an unknown language, but later going home, spending endless hours with the course textbook using translation applications on their phones. In other instances, academic support for language learning came from a single source: Lebanese peers that participants met informally, by "coincidence," when sharing a bench in class. These peers were instrumental in simultaneously translating lectures and materials from English to Arabic when participants could not follow the teacher's academic content shared in class.

Academic support was loosely organized, informal, and sometimes also emanated from university teachers. A few university teachers and administrators played important roles in facilitating refugees' learning on campus. While Syrian learners at university in Lebanon knew they lacked wasta, these officials provided concessions and extensions by allowing Syrian students to pay their tuition or submit their assignments late. In one instance, Lebanese teachers met Syrian students before and after class, translated key topics of the class into Arabic and also taught them the basics of writing emails in English. In doing so, these officials went above and beyond their traditional roles required of university lecturers. Beyond offering concrete and specific support, they also implicitly communicated to Syrians that individuals willing to help them learn were close. However, it is important to note that these examples were by far the exception and not the norm in the data.

Any examination of refugee youths' learning at university would be incomplete without sufficient attention to their prior learning experiences in Syria. Though participants had completed their schooling in part in Syria, and in part in Lebanon, in several instances conflict and associated displacement resulted them missing days and months of school-based instruction. Participants recalled the time missed learning when their schools were bombed inside Syria, or as they were fleeing and transitioning to

Lebanon. These interruptions had significantly influenced participants' academic foundations. Sana, whose 9th grade classroom was bombed in Syria and who only attended school for a month within an entire academic year recalled her struggles at university: "My basics are very bad because I don't understand. I just memorized everything in the past."

University- and NGO- based actors administering refugee higher education programs must recognize the different impediments to learning that refugee youth confront as they transition to higher education. Not only do refugee youth often need to learn in a new language of instruction, but they also require supplementary academic support to reinforce core ideas and concepts, necessary for academic success. Moreover, programs must also support students' emotional and psychosocial wellbeing when at university.

3. Experiencing university: Establish safe spaces within universities where refugee students have opportunities to develop relationships and allies with host-country youth

While universities are meant to create opportunities for intellectual exploration and to develop lasting relationships, for refugee learners, universities can represent hostile spaces marred with social exclusion. Though refugee higher education programs provided scholarships for Syrians to access Lebanese university and to enable social cohesion among Syrians and Lebanese, mere contact among Syrian and Lebanese youth is not enough to create meaningful and productive relationships that enable understandings of the 'other.' Higher education programs must consider pedagogical practices that can be integrated within the official curriculum and beyond, in extra-curricular activities, such that there are opportunities for Syrian and Lebanese students to define and work together toward shared and mutually constructed goals.

Threats or actual experiences of psychological harm undermine learning. Participants recalled their early days in university, instances when there were no productive relationships with their Lebanese peers. Though some participants knew other Lebanese students who helped them with translations in class, these were merely working relationships, ones that were not characterized as deep friendships. Participants also experienced discrimination and marginalization owing to their nationality, their refugee status, and their political affiliations. Like universities in other contexts, Lebanese universities are also highly politicized spaces. Given Lebanon and Syria's intertwined past and history, implicit and explicit discriminatory messaging around Syrian refugees' presence in Lebanon has also permeated its university campuses.

Refugee higher education programs have done little to help Syrian students make meaning of these practice and messages. When confronted with social exclusion on campus, participants found no one to help them navigate these realities. Though scholarship-funding organizations occasionally organized meetings with Syrian students to monitor and discuss students' academic progress, there was no space created for Syrian students to speak about these issues that so deeply impacted their sense of safety, and consequently their learning on campus.

Learning spaces like universities cannot ignore the developmental phase of their learners. Most refugee learners at university are emerging adults, a unique developmental phase, where they are finding their place in their learning communities, their societies and the world. I find that like young people at this developmental stage of life anywhere in the world, young Syrian refugees, too, asked themselves broader questions concerning their education and their life goals. Specifically, they sought to understand what it meant to live in Lebanon as youth, their rights and responsibilities toward their societies, and if education could activate pathways to durable futures in Lebanon and beyond; issues that even Lebanese youth consider as they come of age. In the absence of meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships between Lebanese and Syrian university students, many of these issues went unaddressed.

Conclusion

Organizations funding refugee higher education programs are far and few, but even those that do exist, have paid inadequate attention to the many different academic supports refugee youth need to access, continue and succeed at their higher education endeavors. In the absence of institutionalized, systematic supports, refugee youth will continue actively locating and piecing together academic support from loosely organized, informal social networks. While these networks are flexible and responsive to refugee youths' immediate learning needs, they are unsustainable in the long-run and depend on refugee youths' initiative and their abilities to locate these supports. Relying solely on these informal support networks exposes refugee youth to vulnerabilities and exacerbates inequalities and gaps in who is able to access and succeed in higher education.

The recommendations in this policy paper suggest ways to strengthen ways to support refugee learners at university. Future policy and practice within refugee higher education should usefully recognize the many different kinds of supports refugee learners require while at university; understande how, if at all, refugee youth locate these supports; and, systematically examine ways to institutionalize several of these support systems to ensure refugee youth successfully pursue their higher education.

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Higher Education Access for Syrian Refugee Students in Lebanon within the Limitations the Ongoing Conflict

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Key Summary[1]

- Higher Education access is vital area to deal with the post-conflict and reconciliation phase both in the home country of the students and the host countries. However, it is not considered as a priority in the Arab world after the Arab Spring in 2010. This can easily result in an uneducated and lost generation.

- The higher education policies in host countries, like in Lebanon for example, needs to be revised and take into consideration the political aspect and the lack of official documents for many students. There is an urgent need to creating an alternative system of enrollment system for refugee students in the host countries that simplify their entry to universities rather than complicate it.

- The financial aspect is a central issue for most of the refugee students fleeing a conflict in their home countries. Refugee students need to have the ability to access the job market during their studies and after they graduate. The result of not having this possibility is mostly exploitation of the students and delay, if not drop out, of their graduation.

- Scholarship programs are one of the most effective tools that can help refugee students pursue their higher education. They should be comprehensive and correspond to the needs of students. That is to say they should cover the expenses to all the field of studies, include foreign language training, if required, and take into consideration that the need of finances is quite high in the case of refugee students. Also, in the case of the presence of several scholarship programs, they need to collaborate and work together to have a wider and fairer outreach.

- Higher education program for refugees should take into consideration creating effective programs of integrating the refugee students both socially and academically. The lack of a positive form of integration can feed into the anti-refugee and anti-migrant sentiments.

Introduction

The importance of Higher Education in Conflict and Post-Conflict Contexts: The Syrian Example in Lebanon

Higher education is a worthwhile enterprise and is increasingly necessary to build substantial social, political and economic changes (Magill, Smith and Hamber 2009). Becoming a refugee can strip away so much from people – wealth, connections, community, opportunities, friendships and family. Education remains as one of the few ways through which people can rebuild social and financial capital in the case of an ongoing conflict and equally in the post-conflict phase. Here, it is important to refer to the role of education as a tool for reconciliation in the post-conflict phase and how it can remedy the grievances an armed conflict inflicts on a society (Hayes and McAllister 2009). It is quite unfortunate that the higher education sector has been neglected or given less importance in conflict-ridden and post-conflict settings (Law 2015). This neglect can be especially seen after the Arab Spring in 2010; since then, the higher education has been caught in a crossfire between the spreading conflicts in the Arab world and has not been used as a catalyst for recovery in the Arab war-torn countries (Barakat and Milton 2015).

There has been a sharp decrease in the number of Syrian students attending Lebanese universities since the uprising in Syria in 2011. This decrease is due to the several challenges surrounding higher education access to Syrian refugee students. The challenges can be financial or administrative. Some of these challenges include attainment of residence permits, acquisition of proof of previous studies, restrictions on the freedom of mobility, language barriers and the political affiliation of students. Lebanon, home to possibly as many as 2 million refugees among its population of nearly 6 million, has mostly excluded foreigners from its education system so as to reduce labor competition; however, this

[1] Researcher working on the subject of urban integration of Syrian refugees and forced migrants

step has weakened the country's economy and harmed poorer Lebanese.

Most societies aspire to boost the education level of their populations and most countries that have hosted refugees for more than seven decades would have recognized that integration may be more effective than exclusion. Lebanon's politics, shaped by decades of war and an ossified power-sharing agreement, has shown how the government functions in the interests of a handful of powerbrokers and everyone else is left to fend for themselves. Even if a part of the population is able to pay up to USD $50,000 for completing an undergraduate degree at a private university, the vast majority of students in Lebanon, and particularly refugees, cannot afford that. Most others make do, attending the more affordable state university or studying at a college that gives franchise for Syrian refugee students for economic, political or religious reasons.

For decades, Lebanon has excluded refugees from many professions and the training needed to carry them out. Refugees are not allowed to study medicine, dentistry, engineering or applied sciences and cannot become teachers or university lecturers in the state system. If they want to study, they are mostly forced to pursue their studies in the social sciences or humanities fields, and are very likely to still be excluded from teaching - one of the few jobs easily available to graduates in these areas. For many, university education is no longer seen as providing sufficient benefits to be worth the effort. Problems with quality have plagued the Arab world, and in Lebanon, the problem is no less than everywhere else. People have increasingly abandoned the state sector, despite several attempts at reform.

Consequently, refugees in Lebanon find themselves in an unfavorable position: they are excluded from the courses they wish to study, banned from working, and are unable to afford the private education that others enjoy. External help has been limited and unimaginative. Scholarships have certainly benefitted a handful of people, but they have often been either too limited in worth or have failed to address social obstacles and other factors that hinder college attendance.

Continued neglect to address the problem of higher education for Syrian refugees in Lebanon would result in negative consequences for both countries. The Palestinian refugees in Lebanon display a clear example of a long process of deprivation from higher education and eventually from the job market. As the Syrian conflict continues after 8 years, with no prospect of a political change, the lack of serious inclusive policies for Syrian students in Lebanon would continue to cause a socio-economic tension in Lebanon and would not help bring the Syrian conflict to an end.

Three Main Obstacles to Tertiary Education for Syrians in Lebanon:

The Educational, Economic and Socio-Political Entanglements

Lebanon has been one of the first destinations for Syrian refugees who were fleeing the conflict in their country, mainly due to its geographical proximity to Syria. Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees per capita (European Commission factsheet 2019). According to the European Commission's latest updates, there are more than a million and a half Syrians in the country. It is difficult to tell the exact number of the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon as the Lebanese authorities have stopped the UNHCR from continuing to register Syrians in the country since May 2015 (UNHCR report 2016). At that time there were more than 1,200,000 Syrians in Lebanon when the Lebanese population did not exceed 6,000,000 people. Nonetheless, in order to draw the full picture of the situation of refugees in Lebanon, we must not dismiss the Palestinian, Iraqi and the Sudanese refugee population.

1- Education:

At the very beginning of the Syrian uprising, many Syrian artists and students started moving to Lebanon, running away from the oppressing regime in Syria. Many of them found Lebanon as the best venue to continue their artwork and enjoy full freedom of speech considering that the country has had an exceptional reputation for being the place where liberty and progressiveness can be most enjoyed, compared to other countries in the region.[2] Also at the beginning of the uprising, there were vibrant and large Syrians student communities in Lebanon with more than 6,000 students at the Lebanese University, the only public one in the country. Soon after that, the situation got out of hand as the number of Syrian families crossing the border kept increasing in the in the second half of 2011.

[2] See Ziad Majed's article at: https://bit.ly/33ggv0D accessed on 05/08/2019

The first Lebanese policy response was reflected in the tightening of administrative procedures for obtaining the required papers for legal stay in Lebanon. The Lebanese authorities kept asking Syrian students to provide papers from their home universities, an option that was not viable for most of the Syrians in Lebanon who ran away from the regime's persecution. The policy did not take into consideration the nature of the displacement of the Syrian students, which had broader political dimensions. On the contrary, the Lebanese government started making it even more difficult for the politically active students to continue their studies. At this point, the number of Syrians ay Lebanese universities started to decrease, and more programs were urgently needed to cater to the increasing numbers of Syrians who were planning to pursue their higher education.

The number of Syrian students reached its peak in the 2010-2011 academic year; before that time, it was just increasing gradually due to the lack of possibility for Syrian students to be admitted in public universities in Syria. Right after the so called "influx of Syrian refugees" to Lebanon, the numbers started decreasing gradually. For example, in the academic year 2014-2015 the number of the Syrian students enrolled at Lebanese universities was 8,349 students at BA and MA levels. This number includes the 1623 Syrian students who are studying at Al Imam Al-Ouzai University, which specializes in Islamic studies.[3]

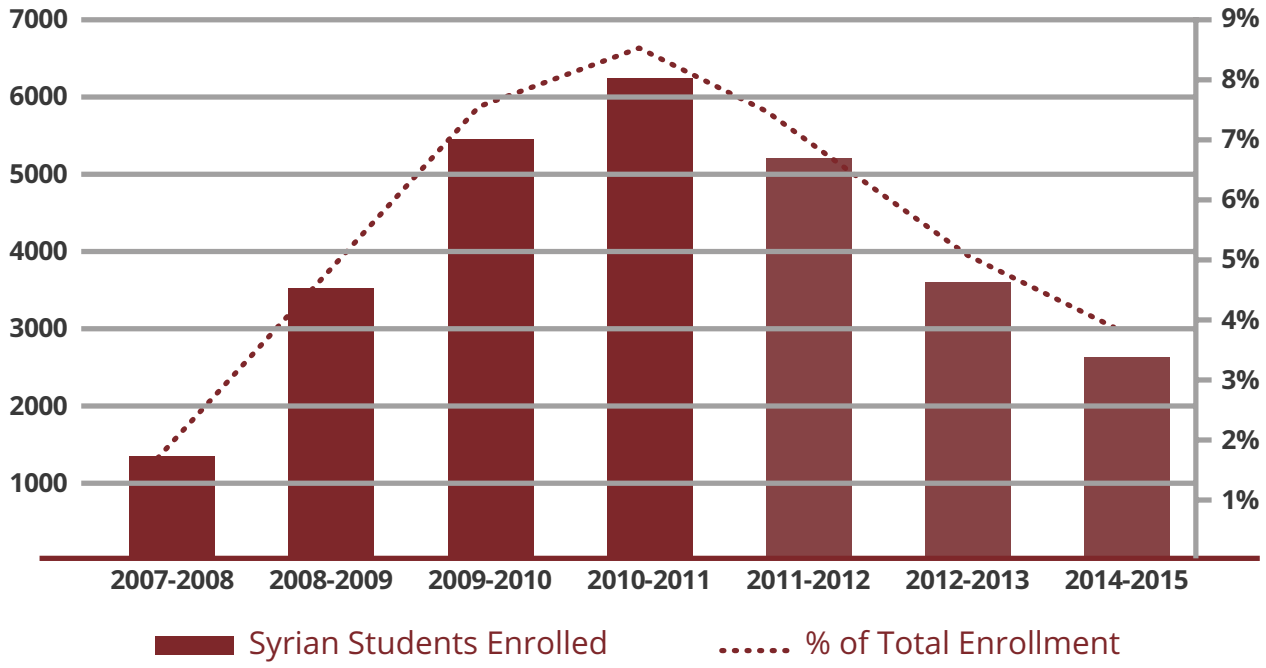

Table 1: *Syrian students enrolled in LU*[4]

In the academic year 2015-2016, the number of Syrian students enrolled in Lebanese universities in undergraduate and graduate programs went down to 7,072. In the following academic year, the number further increased to 6,232. Among those are 1188 enrolled at MA and PhD programs at Al Imam Al-Ouzai University.[5] It is important to mention here that Syrians aged between 14-25 make up almost 20 percent of the refugee population (Bayaner Ahmet et al, 2016).

Clearly, this sharp decline in the number of enrolled students reflects the policies and practices adapted to limit the access of Syrian students to higher education. Only a handful of private universities are accepting Syrian students or easing the admission process for Syrian students. This could mean that the Lebanese authorities have adapted a short-sighted policy approach which is reflected and tolerated by the socio-economic realities. That is to say that the public opinion is synchronized

[3] Personal communication with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) in Lebanon in September 2017.
[4] E-mail Communication between the author and the office of the rector of the Lebanese University in October 2017.
[5] The numbers of the enrolled students were given to the author by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Beirut while conducting a fieldwork in Lebanon in September 2017

with the authorities' policies and practices. For example, when we look at the job market, including the private universities as business venues, it is getting the highest supply of the labor while there is a clear lack of directing this labor into the right direction of demand. Take the Syrian graduate students in Lebanon who can either work informally and/or online, or they can work in construction and agriculture like any other Syrians in Lebanon.

2- The Local Economy and the Economy of the Scholarships:

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC ROOTS OF THE PROBLEM

Lebanon was very much dependent on the Syrian economy prior to the Syrian uprising in 2011 (Synaps Network 2017). The Lebanese market used to be crammed with cheap products imported from or manufactured in Syria, where they cost less. Meanwhile, Lebanon does not have the industrial facilities and the manufacturing ability to produce them. It also lacks the local labor force to get the job done. According to a 2015 World Bank report, since 2011, Lebanon has seen a drastic decline in many supplies, including key agricultural products that were coming from Syria (Cali and et al 2015). The report also showed that the refugee crisis in Lebanon has cost the country US $18 billion, mainly because Lebanon's imports that used to come from Syria now have to take other routes, raising their costs.

Despite the aforementioned repercussions of the Syrian crisis, there have certainly been a number of positive economic impacts. Since 2012, Syrians spent USD $900 million in purchases from the Lebanese market, using the credit cards provided to them by the World Food Program (Cali and et al 2015). They are also bringing cash or in-kind donations into the country. During such critical times, Lebanon is in desperate need for foreign money to be able to purchase imports and help pay for its massive US dollar denominated debt (Berthier, 2015). Construction and agricultural work is now almost entirely done by Syrians, to the extent that the Lebanese economy would be hit hard if they were forced home now.

The anti-refugee sentiment has been on the rise in Lebanon. This has been evident in several practices, such as the Lebanese authorities limiting the "flow" of Syrian refugees across its border and trying to push back some of the Syrian refugees back home. There is, of course, a strong political aspect to these practices. For example, Hezbollah has provided considerable support to the Assad regime and has been critical of those who have fled the country. Moreover, the Lebanese military has been involved in sending refugees back, and the highly partisan and political media has been constantly accusing Syrians of being behind the country's many economic, social and political problems, even though all of these issues predate their arrival.

The situation of Syrians does not look like it is going to get any better any time soon, in terms of mobility, security and social inclusion. With the recent developments, the procurement of residence permits is going to become almost impossible for Syrians. For the lucky Syrians who do have permits, they still have to overcome many obstacles that the administrations of education institutions present ahead of them. Many deem these practices by the Lebanese authorities discriminatory, especially that they are taking their heaviest toll on the Syrian students' population. George Haddad from Synaps Network expresses his concern saying:

"Sadly, these policies resonate with many Lebanese people who have the fear of Syrian students deciding to stay in Lebanon after obtaining a Lebanese degree and eventually entering the Lebanese job market and staying in Lebanon".

There is a growing fear amongst the Lebanese public that if Syrians have access to the higher education and the formal job market, then they are here to stay. This is evident when we observe the increasing verbal, physical and policy discriminations against Syrian refugees (Faek 2017). Syrians have long been seen as seasonal workers, mainly working in the agriculture and construction sectors. It is important to note that jobs

in the agriculture and construction sectors are neither covered with social security and healthcare nor wanted by local workers. When the Lebanese authorities proposed a labor policy targeting Syrians in Lebanon, the policy proposal mentioned that Syrians can occupy legal jobs only in farming and construction (Armstrong 2016). The proposal also included obliging workers to sign a document of return once the job contract is over. The policy, which applies to the Syrian university graduates who are only allowed to work in these two sectors, has not been yet put into effect; however, it will be adding up to the difficulties of obtaining a work permit for Syrians.

When Syrians are admitted to a Lebanese university, be it public or private, they have to sign a paper declaring that they would not take a job. However, everybody ends up doing some kind of job in the informal economy because most of the scholarships for Syrians are either partial or do not provide a stipend. This has led to a major change in the financial dynamics for Syrian students in Lebanon. According to Raza, a Syrian student pursuing his masters at the Lebanese University:

"Most students who arrived after the conflict started are not only paying their personal expenses but also have to send money back to their families".

The authorities know that most students are working but have done nothing either to regularize their legal situation or to protect them. All of these policies and practices put refugees in a more vulnerable position, both legally and economically, which has resulted in significant exploitation in the job market.

THE ECONOMY OF THE SCHOLARSHIPS

Many Syrians drop out of the scholarships they get for several reasons, according to research conducted by Kathleen Fincham (Faek, 2017). The first reason is that the scholarships do not always correspond to students' desires or the job market's needs. Most of the scholarships for Syrians at public universities are for social sciences and humanities. Graduates from these fields cannot even work as teachers in Lebanese schools because this profession is unionized. The second reason for drop outs is that most scholarships do not support the students financially, which makes it difficult for them to continue their studies. According to Hani, a Syrian student in Lebanon:

"Some of the students choose to decline the scholarship offers that do not include stipends or cover the tuition fee partially".

Other students have become well-experienced in the scholarship programs. Bayan, a Syrian student studying at the Lebanese University said:

"I came into few realizations with my numerous experiences with scholarships. The first one is that it is fifty percent luck to get one. The second is that you almost never get the scholarship you apply for. And finally, many students do not know about the

scholarships although announcements are all over social media. Maybe the students are still very fearful of the competition".

Back to the reasons for drop outs, the third reason is related to the freedom of mobility, especially for female students who do not feel secure going out in the evening in places like the Beqaa Valley. Most Syrian refugees live in informal housing areas located far from the city center and far from the university campuses as well. The last reason is that the scholarship donors have a strict policy of not supporting students who are not able to pass all their classes, especially in the Master's level. Shirine, a Syrian student in Tripoli, expressed her frustration over not being able to finish her master's degree:

"I applied to three different scholarship programs and they all refused my application because I only have four classes left to finish my master's. I work and study and it is very challenging to finish all the classes now, especially with no funding".

The majority of refugee students face these problems, even though they meet most of the administrative requirements. Only 5% of the Syrian refugees' population in the university age in Lebanon have managed to get their official documents, learn French or English, and live in areas where they can have access to universities – and these are deemed the lucky ones (Faek, 2017). Fincham highlights that both the quantity and the quality of scholarships offered for Syrians in Lebanon are "inadequate" and "insufficient". There are, however, scholarship programs that provide full scholarships and stipends for Syrians, such as the Dutcher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), the higher education scholarship program known as DAFI-UNHCR which is linked to the Higher and Further Education Opportunities & perspective for Syrians (HOPES), and the MasterCard scholarship program for Syrian students at the American University of Beirut (AUB).

Another issue stemming from scholarships is that these programs are dealing with specific universities that are willing to accept Syrians with fewer restrictions with official documents, residence permits or English/ French language skills. This is turning the scholarship enrollment into a business model. Another problem is that these scholarship programs encourage students to enroll in specific departments, and in some cases constrain them to certain majors. These departments are mainly the social science and humanities. This selective model of scholarship adds insult to the injury as the Lebanese system prevents Syrians from accessing the applied sciences departments. Due to the lack of sufficient financial aid, many students are pushed to resort to working informally to survive, and they end up losing their scholarships because they could not pass all their classes. Finally, the collaboration among scholarship programs is quite limited which leads to chaotic situations whereby. For example, one student could benefit from more than one scholarship program in theory while others would not be benefiting from any. Also, the number of beneficiary students does not correspond to the real numbers of enrolled students in many cases, and the dropout rate among students benefiting from the scholarships is quite high. We can elicit this from Amjad, a fourth-year student at the Lebanese University, explaining:

"To be able to stay in Lebanon, I had no choice other than re-applying again to a different scholarship. I was benefiting from SPARK but they stopped my

scholarship a year after I got it. I am a fourth-year student at a private Lebanese university. I am the breadwinner in the family now and I cannot afford leaving Lebanon. This is my third scholarship in the last two years".

Table 2: *Distribution of Syrian Students at LU Departments*

Department	Number of Students	Gender Distribution	
		Males	Females
Law and Political Sciences	235	152	93
Arts and Humanities	751	Almost 50% male/female	
Natural Sciences	206	82	124
Social Sciences	80	40	40
Journalism and Documentation	22	8	14
Fine Arts	29	Almost 50% male/female	
Economics	44	19	25

Source: *LU*[6]

3- THE JIGSAW PUZZLE OF GAINING OFFICIAL PAPERS/ DOCUMENTS IN LEBANON

The Syrian regime and the Lebanese government re-signed a higher education agreement in 2010 to renew collaboration in higher education and scientific research as part of Al-Taif agreement between the two countries in October 1989 (Sana, 2010). The agreement allowed Syrian students to study at Lebanese universities in all faculties and departments. There were no scholarship programs back then and Syrians did not have the right to access unionized jobs after graduation. Students were supposed to present the original copy of their high school diploma, notarized and stamped by the Syrian Ministry of Foreign affairs. Syrians were able to go back and forth between Syria and Lebanon without hindrance and they were able to acquire a residence permit in Lebanon once they were admitted to a university.

The number of Syrian students until the 2010-2011 academic year was increasing, especially at Lebanon's only public university because it was affordable. Moreover, students were able to get a seat there in the departments they did not manage to get admitted to in Syria due to the large number of students and the limited places in Syrian public universities.

The education agreement remained effective after 2011. The Lebanese authorities, along with the Lebanese University administration, were not willing to change anything about the conditions for admitting Syrian displaced students. On the contrary, obtaining legal documents and residence permit for Syrians started to grow more difficult and, in many cases, impossible. This is understandable due to the large numbers of Syrians who continued to cross the borders to Lebanon and the lack of administrative capacity to deal with refugees in a small country like Lebanon.

This led to many difficulties for Syrian students to be able to access higher education. For example, many students were not able to move between Lebanon and Syria because they were afraid of being persecuted there. Also, many students arrived without their university documents or high school diplomas. According to a survey done by HEAR in Lebanon in October 2017, 84 percent of the surveyed students did not have proper documents to apply to Lebanese universities and they were not able to go back to Syria and retrieve their documents from their home universities.[7] The majority of Syrians who fled to Lebanon were from counties such as Homs, Hama and Damascus due to the geographical proximity of these places to Lebanon.

[6] E-mail Communication between the author and the office of the rector of the Lebanese University in October, 2017.

[7] The survey was conducted by the author and a group of Syrian students, but the results have not been published yet.

Lebanon did not formulate any serious policy to comprehend and integrate the increasing number of refugee students. On the contrary, the administrative procedures became tighter, and the emphasis on having either a guarantor or a scholarship to be able to get a residence permit added fuel to the fire. Also, banning students from working while studying only added more illegality and complexity to the ability survive as a refugee student in Lebanon. Hence, these shortsighted policies made many students prone to exploitation. For example, many Lebanese were asking for up to USD $500 to be a guarantor and several employers were paying less than half of the salary to Syrian students, knowing that they cannot complain, and they need the money to survive.

The registration and admission of Syrian students into universities in Lebanon, has passed through three main stages. The first stage was from the beginning of 2011 till the end of 2012. At that time, the Lebanese government wanted to continue dealing with the Syrians the same way prior to 2011 in terms of issuing a visa waiver for a month then enabling students to get a residence permit if they provide proof of residence in Lebanon, by renting a flat, working in agriculture or construction, or having an official letter of acceptance from a Lebanese university. The majority of Syrian students could not meet these conditions, mainly because of the difficulty of retrieving official document from universities back in Syria, the financial burden of renting a place, and the uncertainty of the duration they wanted to spend in Lebanon, knowing that this condition relies on the end Syrian conflict itself. The situation inflicted burden on Syrian students, especially those who had started university back in Syria and completed a significant part of their degrees, as they had to start all over again and re-apply to a university as first year students. Even those who had to so were deemed the "lucky ones" because they could bring their notarized high school degrees with them. The rest were caught between losing the chance of having any access to higher education at all.

The second stage extending between 2013-2015 was marked by an increase in administrative changes for the Syrians in Lebanon. The UNHCR stepped in more seriously and started registering Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Registration did not actually give Syrians the full rights of refugee status but helped support families living in camps, and helped the organization keep a record of the Syrian community. Moreover, one of the conditions to be able to get residence permit, university admission or even a scholarship at some point, was to be registered with the UNHCR. At that time, there were more inclusion policies to administer a larger number of Syrians into the Lebanese education system. These policies started at the primary school level through the program RACE with the belief that the problem of higher education access for Syrians starts at the primary and school level in Lebanon. This program depends mainly on the two-shift system in which most of the Syrian pupils attend the afternoon school session, segregated from their Lebanese peers.

The third stage lasting between 2015-Present has been marked by the more administrative restrictions for the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon. What is at stake now for higher education access is working on increasing the number of students finishing high school in Lebanon. After more than eight years since the beginning of the conflict in Syria, the students who had gone to Lebanon with their high school or university degrees have either found a way to enroll at a Lebanese university, quit their studies and had to find a job to feed their families, or found an opportunity to study and live in a different country. Y. L, a Syrian student in Lebanon, spoke about his own experience in this regard:

"Most of the friends I know who came to Lebanon in 2011 and 2012 are either in Europe or North America now. Some got scholarships abroad, others were accepted as asylum seekers and left for Canada and other countries, and some others took the risky journey to Europe".

With the high rate of dropout at the high school level, Syrians will very soon be in the same position as the Palestinians. According to Mr. Anis Fadel Mohsen from the Palestinian Human Rights Organization in Lebanon, the exclusive policies in Lebanon had changed the fate of many Palestinian students. He explains:

"The Palestinians used to be the most educated group when they arrived in Lebanon. Due to the policies targeting them, they have become one of the least educated communities in Lebanon nowadays!"

Syrians in Lebanon also fall behind their peers in Turkey where there is an inclusion education policy in place for Syrian refugee children. However, in Jordan, the situation is not any better as the country has been accepting only registered refugees in its public schools. By having a quick look at the numbers of Syrians in Lebanese schools, one can see that there has been a sharp decrease between primary school children and high school students. This recent decrease reflects two main facts to consider. The first is that the school dropout rate for Syrian high school students is on the rise. The second is that the high school students who arrived from Syria are either not targeted in the Lebanese inclusion program or not willing to pursue their education.

Table 2: *Distribution of Syrian Students at LU Departments*

Grade	First Shift	Second Shift	Year
KG – 9th grade	43423	59024	2014-2015
10th – 12th grade	0	2000	2014-2015
KG – 9th grade	67000	124140	2016-2017
10th - 12th grade	0	3000	2016-2017
KG – 9th grade	67000	15000	Target for 2017-2018
10th – 12th grade	0	2000	Target for 2017-2018

Source: *MEHE Race Office*[8]

The number of Syrian students at Lebanese primary schools keeps increasing, especially in smaller towns and villages, due to the RACE program. However, the table above shows that the number of Syrian students at Lebanese universities is going to further decrease in the upcoming academic years.

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) is securing USD $160 for each student at the Kindergarten, US $363 for each student from primary school till grade 9, and US $600 for each high school student. This is not paid obviously by the Syrian families in Lebanon. According to Professor Maha Shuayb, the director of Centre for Lebanese studies:

"The MEHE has the incentive to keep their schools running by admitting Syrian students and at the same time, there is a good financial revenue coming from those students".

[8] The numbers of the enrolled students in the RACE prgrams were given to the author by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Beirut while conducting a fieldwork in Lebanon in September 2017.

It is important to note that the MEHE gives a financial support to teachers who want to enroll their children in private schools, which means that the Lebanese public schools are not that popular among Lebanese families, even among the teachers who work in the educational sector in Lebanon. This can help us understand why the two RACE programs are popular for the MEHE and why there is a full functional team working on them.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

The current situation for Syrian students in Lebanon does not seem to have a positive perspective. The rate of enrolled students in the Lebanese educational systems seems to be decreasing dramatically. This has been directly linked to the shortsighted higher education policies in Lebanon since the Syrian uprising in 2011. With the current administrative restrictions, less Syrians are able to cross the borders to Lebanon. With the Syrian conflict continuing and the regime gaining more power, the majority of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon will not be able to go back to Syria. That is to say that any policy solution should be politically-oriented and should take into consideration the political standing of most Syrian students in Lebanon. This creates an urgent need for a policy reform that should start at the school level and continue at the higher education level. If this is not done, another education collapse amongst the Syrian displaced community in Lebanon would be highly probably, just like in the case of Palestinians in the country. The evident discrimination against Syrians at both the authority and public levels, might even worsen the situation. Below are some policy recommendations that could be directed to the policy makers in the ministries of interior, and education and higher education, and to the private and public higher education institutions, to improve the situation for Syrian students in the ongoing conflict in Syria and in the post-conflict phase:

- Introducing new comprehensive policies that resolve the administrative difficulties that Syrian students face in Lebanon. For instance, instead of asking students to retrieve official papers from Syria, these documents could be replaced with any sufficient proof that students are able to provide such as university ids, university registrations, teachers recommendation letters and class attendance proofs.

- Facilitating the procurement of legal residencies of Syrian students in Lebanon.

- Creating more comprehensive partnerships between Lebanese universities and international universities that would be more inclusive of Syrian students. This partnership would create more opportunities for Syrian students to work on post-conflict reform of higher education in Syria, and train the students to handle the economic, political and social challenges of the ongoing conflict and the post-conflict phase in Syria.

- Establishing higher education preparatory programs for Syrian refugee students in several universities in Lebanon. These programs could be multi-functional. For example, some of these programs could address mending the gap between the lack of foreign language, and academic, and research skills. More importantly, these programs could create the space for more directive and effective scholarship programs.

- Enlarging the scale of international scholarship and students exchange programs to include Lebanese students as well. The international scholarship opportunities and the lack of access for Lebanese students is feeding into enlarging the gap between the two students' communities instead of working together and collaborating when it is highly needed.

- Considering distance education as a solution, while taking into consideration that the distancing and isolating model of online higher education for refugee students might have serious backlashes that could result in high rates of drop outs.

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