

Mona Christophersen,
Cathrine Moe Thorleifsson and
Åge A. Tiltnes

Ambivalent Hospitality

Coping Strategies and Local Responses to Syrian Refugees in Lebanon



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(Syrian refugee children playing by an improvised water source close to a community of makeshift plastic tents in Bebnine village.)

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Executive summary

This report examines both the impact of and the responses to Syrian forced displacement in Lebanon. The study uses a mixed methods approach combining a case-study in the Sunni-village of Bebnine in North Lebanon and a national opinion poll with a representative sample of 900. In-depth interviews were conducted with both Syrian refugees and the host community in Bebnine, in addition to a number of key-informant interviews. The opinion poll surveyed Lebanese attitudes to the presence of Syrians in Lebanon.

In the third year of conflict in Syria, Lebanon is the country in the region that has received the largest number of Syrian refugees. By October 2013, close to 800,000 refugees are registered or awaiting registrations by UNHCR in Lebanon. When work migrants and their families are included, the total number of Syrians in Lebanon is estimated well beyond one million. In a country of only four million people, the presence of Syrians in Lebanon makes immense impact.

The study's main finding is that the initial Lebanese hospitality towards Syrian refugees has come under constraint because the mass influx of refugees is causing increased competition for scarce jobs in the informal sector. With the absence of refugee camps, the self-settled refugees depend on support from local communities and aid organizations. The UN and local aid organizations are chronically underfunded and fall short of meeting the refugees' essential needs, particularly expenses for scarce housing. Refugees thus need to find additional income to the aid distributed.

The Syrian refugees can combine aid assistance with below-average wages. As an unintended consequence, many Lebanese, and particularly in the poorest segments of the population, are losing their jobs to cheaper Syrian labor or are left with an income that makes it hard to sustain their regular standard of living. Competition over scarce resources and jobs also seems to aggravate communal tensions. Attitudes towards Syrian refugees in Lebanon are characterized by contradiction. On the one hand, the Lebanese hosts have been remarkably hospitable and continue to absorb and support the self-settled refugees. On the other hand, intensified labor competition over time combined with a sense of differential financial treatment produce ambivalent attitudes and resentment towards the Syrian refugees. More than half of the Lebanese population surveyed in the opinion poll believes that no more Syrians should be allowed to enter Lebanon and almost all think that the border with Syria should be better policed. Furthermore, the opinion poll shows that many Lebanese are uncomfortable with having Syrians as close neighbors. Most Lebanese now want UN

refugee camps for Syrian refugees already in the country and the overwhelming majority believes that the international community should carry the economic cost of supporting the refugees. These ambivalent responses indicate that there are limits to Lebanese hospitality. The Syrian refugees, struggling to make ends meet, are increasingly being used as scapegoats for the poor economy and rising crime rates.

Additionally, fear is growing that the sectarian character of the conflict in Syria is threatening Lebanon's fragile sectarian political system. There is a rising anxiety that violence will spread to Lebanon and cause a new civil war, although the central government and local leaders are making vast efforts to prevent conflicts from escalating.

Introduction

The Syrian uprising that started with peaceful demonstrations for freedom and democracy in March 2011; has gradually been transformed into a civil war. The fighting has resulted in an increasingly large scale displacement of the civilian population to neighboring countries: Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq, and more recently, Egypt. Since the beginning of the unrest, Lebanon has received the largest total of Syrians fleeing the conflict. By 16th October 2013, 794,091 refugees were registered or awaiting registration with the UNHCR, representing the largest total in the region. The unofficial number is believed to be substantially higher and the Lebanese government claims more than one million Syrians are in Lebanon when labor migrants are included.¹ The total number of Syrians in Lebanon has thus surpassed 25 per cent of Lebanon's population.

The escalating violence in Syria results in the arrival of new refugees in Lebanon every day. Waves of new refugees fluctuate according to events inside Syria and more refugees are expected to arrive as the civil war continues. The mass influx of Syrians is putting Lebanese host communities under pressure. International and local NGOs are struggling to meet the mounting humanitarian emergency. Like Syria's other neighboring countries, Jordan and Turkey, Lebanon has implemented an open door policy towards the refugees. However, the consequence of Beirut's long-term official policy of 'disassociation', by refraining from taking sides in the Syrian conflict, has been an unwillingness to embrace the complexity and scope of the unfolding refugee tragedy.

Several studies and reports (MSF 2013, IRC 2012) have made valuable contributions in assessing the situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. These reports also inform this study regarding the profile of the Syrian refugee population. They have, nevertheless, tended to exclude the consideration of how the humanitarian crisis adds a new layer to already existing political and socio-economic dynamics in Lebanon. There has been an absence of data at lower levels of geographic specification. This is particularly needed in the context of Lebanon where there are no refugee camps and the refugees have settled themselves amongst local host communities.

The aim of this report is to augment the understanding of the situation of Syrian refugees and the Lebanese population at a time of heightened uncertainty caused by the threat and the reality of violence. It examines the dynamics and consequences of Syrian-forced displacement in Lebanon through a case study of the Sunni village of Bebnine and a national opinion poll. We are examining how the practices of Syrian displacement shape coping strategies, attitudes and conflicts within the local community.

¹ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>.

Located between Tripoli and the northern Syrian border, Bebnine is a village of approximately 35,000 residents and is considered one of the poorest in the northern Akkar region. Increased competition over scarce resources and jobs, a sensitive sectarian balance between Sunni and Shia and a shared perception of common uncertainties influence social experience in the predominantly pro-uprising village.

The report suggests that the marginalized refugees and Lebanese were not only passive victims of crisis, but actively drew on a diverse repertoire of coping strategies to deal with the challenges of self-settlement and adjustment to everyday life in Lebanon. In the absence of refugee camps, practices of generosity were widespread both amongst the host population and the refugees themselves. Nevertheless, prejudice and tensions are on the increase which suggests that there are limits to hospitality. Many residents expressed concern that the Syrian civil war would escalate into further sectarian violence in Lebanon, pushing Lebanon closer to war.

Method

The main qualitative fieldwork was carried out from late April to 16th May 2013. About 40 in-depth interviews were conducted with Syrian and Lebanese men and women in Bebnine: 26 men and 11 women. Of these, 17 were key informant interviews which provided background information and institutional responses to the challenges relating to Syrian refugees in Bebnine. Additional observations and interviews were done with informants in Beirut, Tripoli and the capital of the Akkar region, Halbe. The key informant interviews included eight representatives from various institutions in Bebnine, such as the municipality, schools, clinics and mukhtars². Seven NGO leaders were interviewed inside and outside Bebnine as well as three politicians representing the Sunni Future Movement and The Muslim Brotherhood. Interviews about livelihoods, coping strategies and challenges were conducted with 22 individuals: eleven Lebanese and eleven Syrians. Of these, eight of the Lebanese were men and three were women. Amongst the Syrians, there were seven men and four women. Their ages varied from 17 to more than 70, with a majority of young (20-30 years old) and middle aged respondents. Most people agreed, without hesitation, to be interviewed, although some of the key informants were busy and needed some time to schedule a meeting. The only institution we failed to meet after several approaches was a bureau providing Syrian domestic workers for Lebanese households. Interviews were conducted in English and simultaneously translated into Arabic by a field assistant depending on the respondent's command of English. Interviews were recorded and what appear as

² Mukhtars are locally elected leaders dealing with the registration of births, deaths and marriages as well as mediating community conflicts.

quotes in this report are a direct transcription of what was said in the interview, either directly from the respondent or as it was translated by the field assistant. Informants have been assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

Data from the qualitative fieldwork is supplemented by statistics from a national opinion poll which was conducted from May 15 to 21 by Information International on behalf of Fafo.³ Altogether, 900 Lebanese citizens aged 18 and older were successfully interviewed (44 per cent women and 56 per cent men). The sample was proportional to the size of each governorate (North, South, Nabatieh, Mount Lebanon, Beirut and Bekaa), according to the number of registered voters of each religious confession in each governorate. The sample was further stratified according to Lebanon's 26 districts and the interviews took place in the capital city of each district, except in some instances where other villages were also visited to ensure correct confessional representation.

The sampling consisted of several stages: first, the sampling of neighborhoods within each area; second, the random sampling of households within each neighborhood; and third, the random sampling of one adult from each household. No substitutions were allowed. Hence, if the selected individual was not at home after a subsequent visit, a non-response was declared. Extra visits were required in nine per cent of the cases and altogether 183 respondents (92 women and 91 men) refused to participate in the opinion poll, usually citing 'lack of interest' or 'lack of time' as the reason. An additional 56 visits were unsuccessful. Of those, 11 households were non-Lebanese, 12 households were ineligible for other reasons (principally households with members under 18 or with only old people incapable of answering the questions satisfactorily), and in 33 cases, the selected dwelling or building was vacant. Thus, a total number of 1,139 visits were necessary to reach the target of 900 interviews, resulting in a completion rate of 79 per cent.

The unfolding Syrian crisis and its spillover into Lebanon

The conflict in Syria started as a series of pro-reform demonstrations in March 2011, inspired by events in other Middle Eastern countries where people had more or less successfully risen up against authoritarian regimes. The short and relatively peaceful revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt did not occur in Syria. The Syrian regime's response to nonviolent demonstrations was excessively heavy-handed and violent. Soon the conflict in Syria took the form of a full scale armed confrontation, resulting in the formation of the Free Syrian Army in July 2011.

³ Poll results are available at, <http://www.fafo.no/ais/middeast/lebanon/91369-syrian-refugees.html>.

Many ordinary Syrians believed that al Assad's authoritarian regime would be swept away by the winds of the so-called Arab Spring (Metzler 2013, Nerguizian 2012). More than two years later, more than 100,000 people are believed to have been killed,⁴ four million are estimated to be internally displaced⁵ and at least two million have fled the country as refugees. What started out as a protest for democratic freedom has developed into a sectarian civil war. The opposition in Syria is dominated by a Sunni majority aiming to topple the minority Alawite regime.⁶ Christian minorities in Syria, about ten per cent of the population, have felt protected under Assad's rule and have tended to side with the regime, fearing their fate under Sunni dominance.

As is typical with conflict escalation, the country has disintegrated. The opposition is now made up of uncoordinated rebel warlords, Sunni Islamic Jihadi forces and entrenched al Qaida affiliates fighting the Syrian regime for control of different parts of the country (Metzler 2013).

In this context, the Syrian civil war has emerged from a political uprising to a sectarian war that is increasingly threatening to spill over into neighboring countries. Lebanon is particularly vulnerable due to its fragile confessional political system. The Shiite movements' Hezbollah and Sunni groups' increased involvement, on opposite sides of the Syrian civil war, reinforces the same sectarian divisions in Lebanon. Tensions are rising in Tripoli, where the population is polarized between those who support Assad and those who oppose him, cumulating in deadly battles between the Shiite Allawite neighborhood of Jabal Mohsen and the Sunni residents of Bab al Tabaneh. In the Shia Muslim district Dahiyeh in southern Beirut, the Lebanese army has had to break up fights between Syrians and the local Lebanese. In one way Lebanon is already at war, a war between Hezbollah and Lebanese Sunnis, although it is a proxy war, since the actual fighting mostly takes place outside Lebanon (Barnard 2013b, Filkins 2013, Recknagel 2013).

⁴ The number of casualties in May 2013 varies from 80,000 (UN estimate) to 94,000 by human rights groups that also provide figures as high as up to 120,000 (Reuters 15 May 2013).

⁵ Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC), <http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/syria>.

⁶ The Alawites are a branch of Shiite Islam and constitute about 12 per cent of the Syrian population. They are also a significant minority in Turkey and northern Lebanon.

The hardship of exile

The journey from Syria to a Lebanese village

Refugee self-settlement in Lebanon largely follows sectarian patterns. Sunnis tend to find shelter in predominantly Sunni regions, whereas Christians and Alawites tend to settle in areas dominated by Christians or Shiites (ICG 2013). Refugees are settling across the country, from urban cities to villages. Although the host population might be friendly and understanding towards the humanitarian needs of the refugees, small local communities lack the infrastructure, resources and experience to handle a refugee population of this magnitude.

Bebnine is one of the poorest villages in the deprived Akkar region of north Lebanon, the region with the highest overall poverty rate in Lebanon, at more than two times the national average and six times that of the capital Beirut. Poverty is particularly prevalent among female and elderly heads of households and people with disabilities (Laithy et al. 2008, Mouchref 2008).⁷ The Syrian refugees in Bebnine came from modest means in Syria. More well-off Syrians would rarely consider a village like Bebnine as their destination, but usually prefer to settle in urban areas.

The number of Syrian families reported by the mayor's office to be residing in Bebnine at the time of this fieldwork was about 600 to 900 families or around 5,000-6,000 refugees. Distributed in 540 households, it suggests an average household of six members. Ten to twenty Syrian families arrive in Bebnine daily. One expects the flow to carry on as the violence in Syria continues. During the timeframe of the fieldwork, the fighting in the Syrian border town of Qusair, in the Homs region close to the Lebanese border intensified, spurring a new wave of refugees to cross the border. The majority of Syrian refugees we encountered in Bebnine were from the Homs region.

While the men often had crossed the border with Lebanon illegally through the mountains, most women and children had travelled legally to Lebanon using their passports. The legal option was closed for many males as they often were wanted by Syrian authorities for anti-regime activities or for evading the army draft. Some of the men also traveled back and forth between Syria where they fought with the opposition and visited families in Lebanon. Family and work related bonds historically cross

⁷ Akkar is part of the North, a governorate which comprises about 21 per cent of the Lebanese population, but 38 per cent of the country's poor, and 46 per cent of the extremely poor. Furthermore, the North demonstrates the widest inequality within governorate (Laithy et al. 2008).

borders and a large number of Syrians had been commuting or residing in Lebanon permanently or seasonally before the outbreak of the Syrian conflict. Now work migrants not only tend to stay, but they bring their family to Lebanon as well, thus blurring the distinction between work migrants and refugees.

For some refugees, the flight is a single trip from their place of origin to Bebnine village. For others, the journey is divided into several phases. One family described how they fled Homs in a hurry. First, they went to Damascus to stay with their parents. After some time the parents decided to leave and go to Lebanon, so the family relocated with their in-laws in Hama. When the security situation deteriorated there, the family left Hama and went to Lebanon, but they did not join their parents since they already had other relatives in Bebnine.⁸

Many refugees experience family fragmentation when fleeing the violence. Samir (28) shared the following story:

The reason [my] family members have ended up in different countries is because when they [the Syrian Army] started to hit Homs, all of us went to different places in Syria. And when the different groups decided to leave the country, all of them went to the place [country] that was closest to them. When I left Homs, I first went to Damascus. From Damascus it was easier to come here [to Lebanon]. When we fled Homs, it was impossible for us to stay together. We couldn't. It was most dangerous for me, because the Army wanted me. For the others it was easier. They could travel openly, and they could find work, etc. But for me, I had to travel in secret; I had to hide. They came to find me once, but I managed to escape.⁹

Samir's story suggests that families prefer to stay in their homes as long as possible. It is when the violence directly endangers their lives that they decide to leave. At this moment, it is often too late to plan their exit. People flee in a hurry without their belongings and official documents. They will opt for the nearest place where they can find refuge, usually with family and friends in the direction where the access route is still open.

Nidal's (30) story reveals the loss of family and friends and the harsh conditions the refugee experience:

Two of my best friends were killed by government forces; other friends are still in jail. I fled Homs five months ago with my parents, four siblings, my brother-in-law

⁸ Fafo interview with Syrian refugee woman in Bebnine, 3rd May 2013.

⁹ Fafo interview with Syrian refugee man in Bebnine, 4th May 2013.

and his wife, and my nephew. We crossed the mountains at night in freezing and terrible conditions. We fled in a hurry and did not have time to bring identity papers. My grandparents are still in Homs. One of my brothers is also in Homs because he is afraid he will be captured by Interpol if he tries to escape to Lebanon. I worry about them.¹⁰

A large majority of Syrian refugees settling in Bebnine are Sunni Muslims and supporters of the Free Syrian Army. Several of the refugees interviewed had settled in the village of Bebnine because they considered northern Lebanon to be more hospitable or they already had friends or relatives in the village. Some refugees had chosen Lebanon as their destination due to worrying stories from relatives about the dire conditions in the refugee camps in Turkey and Jordan. Others, in turn, had traveled to Lebanon because it was the only route still open for escape.

Challenges for Syrian refugees in Lebanon

In Lebanon, Syrian refugees are grateful for being welcomed and assisted by the local community. The refugees, many of whom are traumatized by violence and the loss of family members, have to adjust to a new reality characterized by multiple hardships and challenges. Many refugees reported that they had arrived empty-handed because money and assets were confiscated before they were allowed to cross. It was unclear who the culprits were, although several hinted at Syrian soldiers and border officials loyal to the Syrian regime.

In general, the Syrians interviewed complained about the high cost of living in Lebanon compared to what they were used to in Syria and found assistance and donations insufficient to meet their needs. On the other hand, the donor community, from the UNHCR to international and local NGOs and not least local institutions providing health and education services, greatly wish to assist the refugees with their various needs, but lack adequate resources and funding to achieve their goals. The result is that although the refugees' needs are recognized, they cannot be fulfilled. Clinics and schools are trying to help by giving free assistance, but this strategy is not sustainable over time. The refugees have to develop their own strategies to cope with the donor community's shortcomings.

¹⁰ Fafo interview with Syrian refugee man in Bebnine, 1st May 2013.

Shelter: the main challenge

In contrast to Jordan and Turkey, refugee camps have not been established to house the hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. With no camps or organized shelter provisions, Syrian refugees in Lebanon often live with Lebanese host families in rented accommodation or makeshift shelters.

For refugees, finding shelter is increasingly a challenging task. In the beginning, people believed the crisis would be short-lived and the Lebanese showed hospitality by taking refugees into their homes and providing food. Polling statistics based on the survey implemented by Fafo in May 2013, showed that eight per cent of all Lebanese households consist of at least one member who is a Syrian refugee who had arrived in Lebanon after 15 March 2011 and altogether, 20 per cent of all households provide or have provided accommodation to Syrian refugees, either for free (six per cent) or for pay (16 per cent).¹¹

A major challenge facing Syrian refugees is poor and overcrowded housing. In the Akkar region, high population density and relatively large families have resulted in cramped housing conditions. Even prior to the Syrian crisis and the arrival of refugees, 43 per cent of the houses were overpopulated (Mouchref 2008). Although some of the Syrian refugees are living with Lebanese host families, the majority of Syrian households in Bebnine live in separate housing, improvised buildings and simple plastic tents, constructed directly on the ground.

When the Syrian crisis erupted, apartments were available in Bebnine. The first refugees that arrived were provided for by a benefactor who paid the rent as well as other necessities such as food. Later, refugees had to accommodate themselves by staying with relatives and friends or rent available shelters. After having stayed with a host family for a period of time, there was a tendency for 'guests' to be forced out on the open rental market. Since the start of the Syrian civil war, all the people we met in the village claimed that the monthly rent for an apartment in Bebnine had increased from around 200 USD to 450 USD per month. Similar rent hikes have occurred elsewhere in Lebanon (Kullab 2013). The lack of affordable accommodation in the village forces some Syrian families to share single-family homes.

Since almost all aid is distributed in-kind as food parcels, food coupons or bank cards for use in specially designated shops, paying rent is a major challenge for refugee households. Monthly expenses are far greater than the employment opportunities and other income available to them.

Refugees we met expressed anguish about their inability to pay the rent. They reported that landlords were exploiting the increased demand for housing by raising

¹¹ Some had provided shelter to refugees both for free and for pay.

the rent. We did not meet any refugees that so far had been evicted from their flats, but many lived in constant fear that it eventually would happen. The local charities engaged in assisting the refugees in Bebnine, confirmed that they had no funds available to give regular rent assistance. However, one of the organizations said they kept a fund for emergencies in case a family was threatened by eviction from their apartment due to failure to pay the rent. In such cases, they would aid the family with one-time rent assistance.

Those who cannot afford the open rental market live in makeshift shelters designed for use other than accommodation, usually without adequate water, electricity and sanitation. Refugees in Bebnine have turned shops, garages, store rooms, hallways and even a slaughterhouse into makeshift shelters. The latest arrivals to the village were often only offered improvised tents constructed with wooden poles wrapped in plastic. These refugees live directly on the ground with no protection against insects, snakes or water flooding into the tent during rainfall. Toilets are constructed over a ditch and cooking is usually done on makeshift stoves, sometimes outdoors. Refugee women described new challenges related to daily house chores; lack of water and electricity as well as household appliances such as a fridge, made everyday housework heavier and more time-consuming than it was in their place of origin. The local NGO workers, that were trying to assist the refugees, were often appalled by the poor living conditions of refugee families.

Even households living for free with host families or in improvised shelters struggle to make ends meet despite receiving assistance from the UN or other local organizations.

Aid: insufficient, unpredictable and difficult to access

The most important aid operator for Syrian refugees in Lebanon is UNHCR. The same is the case for Bebnine but UNHCR does not have enough capacity for registration facilities in every single village that hosts refugees. In the north of Lebanon, UNHCR has set up a registration facility in Tripoli. Refugees are required to contact this office to register as refugees. Without registration, the refugees are not eligible for UN donations.

At the time of the fieldwork, there was approximately a month wait to get an appointment to register at the UNHCR. After the registration was complete, it typically took another month before the refugees could go to the distribution center to pick up food vouchers. The distribution center was located in Qubayat, approximately an hour's drive from Bebnine in the opposite direction from Tripoli. Some refugees complained about the access to aid and the high cost of transportation.

We wish it would be easier to receive aid. We wish it would not be so far away. We will get an appointment [to register] in Tripoli. When we come, we have to wait

another month to receive the aid. Then we have to go to another place that is really far away [Qubayat], to pick up the aid. So in the end what we have to pay for the taxis is more than what we get. So it is very difficult.¹²

Refugees would most likely not go to collect the aid if the expense for transportation was more than the value of the aid. Seemingly this refugee is exaggerating to voice his frustration over aid that is insufficient and hard to access. Other refugees explained how they organized car pools and made other arrangements to help each other access the aid.

Like in other countries hosting Syrians, many refugees chose not to register with UNHCR out of fear of disclosing their name and place of residence to authorities associated with the Lebanese government. The UNHCR is obliged to cooperate with the host government for refugee operations. The cooperation does not necessarily include exchange of naming lists, but many refugees were anxious that their names would get back to the Syrian regime if they registered. This fear was reinforced by Lebanon's Hezbollah dominated government until March 2013.

Unregistered refugees, deprived of UNHCR assistance, are even more dependent on relief from various local NGOs. These organizations will, however, encourage refugees to register in order to ease the burden on their own limited funds by transferring most of the responsibility for the refugees to the UN. For Syrian newcomers to Bebnine, the difficulty with obtaining the right kind of aid at the right time was a source of frustration.

A family typically got vouchers worth 27 USD¹³ for each person in the household, for one month at a time, to be used in specially designated stores in Bebnine. For some, it took longer than the estimated two months required to get assistance from the UNHCR, as they arrived traumatized and exhausted and it could take weeks or sometimes even months for them to recover before they were able to face the effort associated with registering for aid.

To alleviate the gap, from the refugees' arrival to when they actually could pick up their vouchers from UNHCR several months later, local charities, sometimes with explicit political or religious agendas, would distribute mattresses, blankets and pillows, as well as food parcels to the refugees.

The Mayor's office in Bebnine registered all the Syrian refugees living in the village, but was not directly involved in aid distribution as they had no funds and no mandate

¹² Fafo interview with Syrian refugee man in Bebnine, 4th May 2013.

¹³ Refugees said the value of the food vouchers had been recently reduced from 31 USD to 27 USD per person per month. Refugees claimed this reduction was a result of the mass influx of refugees and shortages of funding, while UNHCR/WFP argued that the reduction was reflecting a lesser need for calories during summer than in winter (Ravelo 2013).

to do this. They registered name, place of residence and phone number and held regular meetings every other week with five organizations involved in refugee assistance in the village. Two of these organizations were located in the village and the others had offices in Halbe, the capital of the Akkar region. The organizations in Bebnine assisted all the refugees that approached them and did not prioritize according to any set of criteria.¹⁴

We visited one private organization running assistance from their mosque and the home of the leader and a NGO clinic that had been turned into a distribution center for refugees after the crisis. Both associations received their funding from Qatar, but only distributed assistance in kind. They kept records about the refugees and claimed to know all the individuals of the refugee community and their needs very well. They had no fixed criteria for their assistance, but said they distributed what they received from their donors to the best of their ability, usually on a first-come-first-served basis as the refugees approached them. The two organizations did share their lists of beneficiaries to avoid double support. They also assisted the refugees in finding accommodation and health services through their network and knowledge of the village.

While food parcels alleviated some immediate needs after arrival and UN food coupons continued to secure basic food consumption for most refugees, other needs were not covered. According to the mayor of Bebnine, the municipality does not have adequate resources to assist the refugees:

We do not have any money to help them. It is the job of the [central] government to help them, but they are doing nothing. The only ones that are doing anything are the NGOs. The government is responsible for coordinating between the NGOs. But the government is not doing this because we do not have a government.¹⁵ We live in a state of emergency.¹⁶

Many refugees who had recently arrived to Bebnine said they had received little, if any help from the UN or other organizations, usually because they lacked knowledge about where to go and search for assistance. Young males seemed more capable of acclimatizing themselves in a complex and disorganized aid landscape than the more vulnerable groups of Syrians such as disabled, unaccompanied minors, single parents, widows and the elderly.

Even registered refugees, obtaining assistance from the UN, international organizations and local charities, reported that the amount of support was insufficient to cover their

¹⁴ Two other organizations, the Akkar Network for Development (AND) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC) had special programs targeting female headed households.

¹⁵ The Mayor was referring to the Hezbollah-dominated government that resigned in March 2013 and the political difficulties to agree on a new government in the months that followed.

¹⁶ Fafo interview with mayor of Bebnine, 9th May 2013.

monthly household expenses. In addition to paying rent, refugees found it challenging to buy non-food items such as medicines and items for personal hygiene. Some also complained that they received the wrong kind of support: a woman refugee, who had newly arrived from Syria, complained quietly when a NGO coordinator offered her assistance in the form of extra mattresses: 'I don't need another mattress; I need food, we are hungry'.

Others complained about the poor quality of the aid:

The boxes that we get are only toilet paper or soap, and it is not well wrapped, or it is brushes that are broken. It is nothing good [quality] in the aid we are getting.

The same person complained about being treated poorly and about corrupt practices in the distribution of aid by the UNHCR:

When we go to receive aid we have to wait for several hours in the sun outside [the warehouse] before we are allowed to enter. They treat everybody in a very bad way. They give us tickets with numbers, like one, two and three. When they reach your number you can go inside. But now they [the distributors] are selling the first few numbers, so if you want to go inside first, they sell the first number for something like 13 USD. So they are using us.¹⁷

According to interviews with refugees and local charity organizations, the access to aid appeared challenging for recipients and delivery seemed unpredictable. A Syrian woman who had lived in Bebnine for half a year with a household of eight related the challenges they faced as follows:

We have received aid from the United Nations once. We received cushions, like a pillow and mattresses and a few cleaning detergents. And then the food cards which we can bring to the shop to buy food. That is all we got. They also told us that they could assist us with the rent of the flat, but they did not help us. We went to register our names with the UN, they put down our names and so on. In addition to the UN, we do not know who to ask for help, and nobody came to offer us anything. One time the UN called us and told us that they would come and visit us, but they did not come. We went only once to their office to register our names and tell them how many people we were. That was when we got the aid package. As for NGOs, we have no contact with them. We have not been in contact with local people helping Syrians and we have not seen any social workers.¹⁸

¹⁷ Fafo interview with Syrian refugee man in Bebnine, 4th May 2013.

¹⁸ Fafo interview with Syrian woman in Bebnine, 2nd May 2013.

In general, the Syrians we met complained that the aid they had received was unsatisfactory. Samir (28), an educated refugee who had stayed with his family for seven months in Bebnine said the following:

We are receiving help from a few [organizations], but it is very little. We get some from the Four Seasons (Arba Fosol) and Eitilaf. They give us coupons to buy food, but when we go to buy, the shops are not giving us the full amount. If we want to sell the coupons to other families, they give us less than the value.¹⁹

Trade in food vouchers has been reported by several news agencies. It takes several forms: the designated supermarket buys the voucher for less than the value and gives the refugee cash instead of food. The shop owner can later reimburse the full amount from the World Food Program (WFP) and profit from the transaction. Shops without agreements for vouchers accept the coupons from customers, but give food for a lesser value. Later they will trade them with shops that have agreements. WFP has recently cracked down on such misuse by cancelling agreements with several shops (Ohrstrom 2013). The misuse is also a reason that UNHCR planned starting to use bank cards valid in specially designated shops from September. They believe this will make illegal trade and misuse more difficult (Ravelo 2013).

Samir continued, claiming that reaching the donors was an ongoing challenge:

There is only one telephone line to the donors [UNHCR registration office] so it is really difficult to talk to them, because everyone is calling. When we finally come through on the line, they only give us an appointment that is after one month. They should have better phone lines in order to help these people.²⁰

The leader of a NGO network believed that UNHCR was trying their best to reach out to their partners in a synchronized and coordinated way. Still, UNHCR remains chronically underfunded, only securing part of their pledge from the international community, while the number of refugees keeps growing faster than any predictions (Alami 2013, Kullab and Anderson 2013). As another leader of a NGO network put it: 'The needs are growing but the resources are not'.²¹

The dialogue between various local NGOs and aid networks appeared weak and sporadic. The absence of coordinated refugee registration and aid provision increased the likelihood that some refugees obtain assistance multiple times, while others do not receive aid at all.

¹⁹ Fafo interview with Syrian refugee man in Bebnine, 4th May 2013.

²⁰ Fafo interview with Syrian refugee man in Bebnine, 4th May 2013.

²¹ Fafo interview with leader of local NGO network, 11th May 2013.

Local NGOs reported that a major challenge was insufficient or unpredictable funding to cover the needs of the growing refugee population. Those who had already implemented projects specifically targeting Syrian refugees said they needed additional financial support to extend and improve their services. Many were uncertain if they would receive sufficient funding to maintain current services in the near future.

Many Syrian refugees depend on support from compassionate individuals in their host community. Refugees we interviewed had received free housing and food or items such as mattresses, furniture and cooking utensils from neighbors and friends in the village.

More well-to-do residents in Bebnine confirmed that they were frequently handing out assistance to the poor in the village. A middle-aged woman said she regularly gave money to the poor, particularly during and around Ramadan. She would also receive regular visits from relatives who she knew were in difficult situations and hand them a hundred dollars or so. She did this behind her husband's back, but believed she had a religious obligation to help the poor. Syrian refugees did not seem to be included in this obligation.

Another rich resident of Bebnine provided financial assistance to Lebanese co-villagers in need with amounts ranging from 50 to 200 USD. He estimated that he helped four or five families that approached him every week. He also provided assistance to Syrians at the beginning of the Syria crisis, but when they started to come too frequently he gave up on them. He felt that the refugees shared information about his donations and sent each other to him to beg for money. Besides, he believed that they also got aid from the UN and NGOs, which the local Lebanese did not, so he prioritized in favor of the Lebanese.²²

Education: different curriculum and exclusion from exams

In Bebnine, the mayor's office had registered about 1,000 Syrians of school age, but only 500 were attending school. Few Syrian children are enrolled in public schools and Syrians students face difficulties adjusting to the local Lebanese curriculum. The science curriculum is challenging as it is taught in English or French after 7th grade, in contrast to Syria where it is taught in Arabic. For this reason, some private schools offer the Syrian curriculum to accommodate refugee students. Another obstacle was for Syrian students to participate in the Lebanese national exams, due to lack of official identity and education papers. The official exams are important for the students if they want to pursue higher education. The problem was solved in cooperation with the Syrian National Coalition in June by offering Syrian students an alternative exam that (hopefully) will be accepted in Syrian universities (Mpelembe 2013). Most Syrian refugee students will not afford to attend expensive Lebanese universities, which are mostly private. In addition, lack of secure and persistent funding makes it difficult for private schools currently

²² Fafo interviews with rich people in Bebnine, May 2013.

accommodating Syrian students, to plan for future activities. Most could not promise the continuation of education programs for the coming school year.²³

Several private schools have been established specifically to provide education for Syrian refugee children and youth in exile. In September 2012, the 'Iman school' (Madrasat al-Iman al-Islamiyaa) north of Bebnine opened an afternoon shift to accommodate the many Syrians who were not enrolled in schools at the time. The 'Iman Schools' are associated with the Muslim Brotherhood in Qatar and Saudi Arabia through their organization in Lebanon. The salaries of the teachers and other staff are covered by donations from unnamed Gulf charities including the Muslim Brotherhood (Naharnet 2012, The Daily Star 2013). Transportation costs for the students are not covered by these donations.

The school is open daily to Syrian children from 2pm to 6pm and has 970 students. The advent of afternoon shifts for Syrian refugees is conducted at Iman schools all over Lebanon such as Akom, Deir Amar and Tripoli. Today there are 18 Iman schools accommodating 18,000 students from kindergarten through high school. The curriculum in the afternoon shift is Syrian and the teachers employed are also Syrian. As one teacher in the Iman School explained, 'the students can feel that it is like Syria.'²⁴

Health: free consultation, expensive medicines

According to a report by Doctors Without Borders (MSF 2013), more than half of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon cannot afford treatment for chronic diseases and nearly one-third have suspended treatment because of the high cost. In Bebnine, refugees were able to visit health clinics for free as the UNHCR would cover 85 per cent of the fees and most doctors would refuse to charge the patient's co-fee. At the local NGO, Adela Istimaya's health clinic, Syrian patients paid half the price for a medical consultation, two USD compared to the usual four USD.²⁵ Although some Syrians confirmed this, they complained that when they searched for a particular doctor, for example the one in charge of vaccinating babies, the doctor would not be available during the allocated hours, which meant that the patient often had to come back outside the 'free hours' and pay for the service. Moreover, medicines and vaccinations were not provided free of charge and money to cover this were difficult to obtain for the refugees. In addition, the local medical centers experienced a shortage of medical and pharmaceutical supplies. Access to and cost of health care and medicines appeared to be an issue of great concern for refugees, particularly for families consisting of members with disabilities or chronic conditions.

²³ Fafo interview with the principal for the Syrian afternoon shift at the Iman school, 8th May 2013.

²⁴ Fafo interview with the principal for the Syrian afternoon shift at the Iman school, 8th May 2013.

²⁵ Fafo interview with the head of the Adela Istimaya organization, 9th May 2013.

Salma (38), her husband and five children arrived in Bebnine in search of refuge a month before we met. Salma invited us to the shelter for her family, a small narrow corridor next to a garage. With no windows, the air felt thick. There were piles of clothes in the corner of the room. The few items they had, such as mattresses, a washing machine and a cooking stove, were donated by locals. Salma and her husband must cope not only with memories of the horrors inside Syria, but also with providing for their disabled children. They are first cousins and admitted that as a consequence of this close family tie, three out of their five children were born with disabilities. Their oldest son and daughter were born with severe hearing impairment and their second son with a leg disability. During the two years since the start of the crisis in Syria, their second son had outgrown his prosthetic leg and no service centers have been available to assist them in replacing it. The too-short leg is now causing the boy back pain. Also, her older children need physical therapy, hearing aids and medication, none of which the family can afford. Luckily her two youngest are healthy, but Salma worries that all her children will suffer from further deterioration as a result of their poor and cramped living conditions and they lacked knowledge of how to access or afford the health services they needed.²⁶

Lack of access to medical care seemed to be a recurring theme for newly arrived refugees. Another woman refugee we observed was desperately seeking help for her sick baby daughter. The young mother, who like Salma had arrived in Bebnine a month earlier, claimed that other than a short consultation with a local doctor, she had received no assistance at all. She poured out her frustration to one of the managers at a local Women's organization.

Nobody has helped me. I do not have any blankets, I have no food and my daughter is sick so she does not get enough oxygen to her brain. My daughter is one year and five months. We have received no aid. I am searching for organizations to find help.²⁷

Both Salma and this young mother seemed confused about what services were available to them and where and how they could access medical treatment and equipment. The information turned out to be arbitrary, often in the form of rumors circulating amongst the refugees themselves and if they did hear about adequate services, the cost would often discourage them from following it up.

Safety and protection

Many residents of Bebnine reported an increase in robberies and theft and said that gangs were making the streets unsafe at night. Talk about sexual assaults circulated

²⁶ Fafo interview with Syrian refugee woman in Bebnine, 3rd May 2013.

²⁷ Fafo interview with Syrian refugee woman in Bebnine, 8th May 2013.

in local conversation, but it is a sensitive issue and we do not have solid data to verify its veracity. A female NGO worker held training sessions for Syrian refugee women on how to use the 'visa' cards²⁸ through which aid was transferred. They had opened a hotline for assistance with the cards, since most of the refugees who were entitled to the cards had no experience with using a bank card. Simultaneously they made sure to inform the women about another hotline for protection issues, particularly sexual abuse. Although not an expert on protection herself, the NGO worker sensed that this was an issue of great concern for the women. In every training session, some of the women would start to cry when they announced that the second number could be used if they needed to talk to someone, no matter the reason.²⁹

A gender-based rapid appraisal study carried out by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in August 2012 has documented that rape was one of the main causes of women and young girls fleeing Syria. Women who experience sexual violence in exile situations are thus re-traumatized. Some refugee women and children in Lebanon are also facing domestic violence born of stress, deprivation, trauma and frustration (El-Masri et al. 2013, Dettmer 2013a).

In Bebnine, the women's access to public space and freedom of movement was restricted already prior to the Syrian crisis. Some of the informants thus claimed that the security situation for women had not changed in any significant way as a result of the presence of Syrian refugees in the village. Others however expressed conflicting views, stating that it was more unsafe for women to be out after dark now than before the Syrian crisis. Rumors circulated in the village about crime and assaults against women caused by the presence of Syrian male refugees. Still, *mukhtars* in the village could not recall having mediated any conflicts that included Syrian refugees. Such rumors are therefore likely to reflect a growing resentment against Syrian refugees, rather than evidence of increased crime rates.

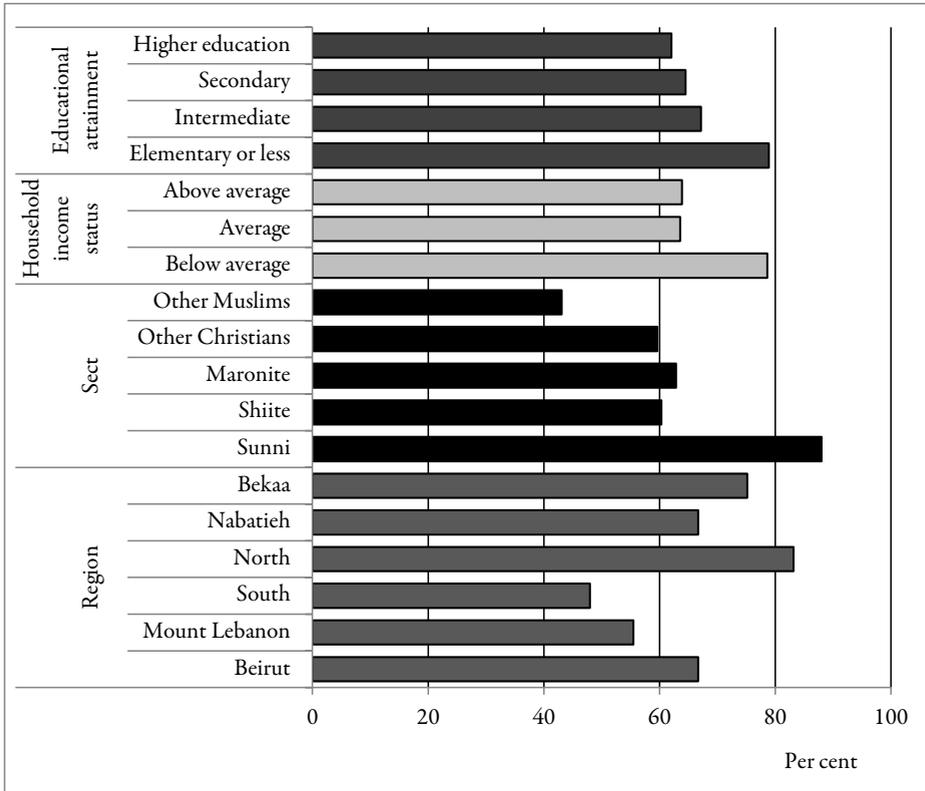
While not tapping into differences before and after the arrival of Syrian refugees, our poll shows that two-thirds agree with the statement that it is not safe for women to go out after dark. The number is significantly higher amongst Sunni respondents (88 per cent) and respondents in the North (83 per cent). In particular, respondents from poorer socio-economic backgrounds and with less education feel safer after dark (Figure 1).³⁰

²⁸ It is debit bank cards, but they were named 'visa cards' in the local discourse.

²⁹ Fafo interview with female NGO worker, 5th May 2013.

³⁰ The report contains an Annex with tables providing the detailed data on which the graphs are based. Additional results from the poll are found in Christophersen et al. 2013.

Figure 1 Perception of safety for women in own living area after nightfall. Percentage of respondents thinking it is NOT safe by place of living, sect, household income and educational attainment (n=900).



Coping strategies amongst Syrian refugees

For the vast majority of Syrian refugees, displacement to Lebanon results in the loss of livelihood and downward social mobility. In times of crisis and scarcity or when livelihood systems break down, households have to develop new strategies to secure the survival of family and dependents. According to Snel and Starting (2001:10-11), 'Coping strategies are a series of strategic acts based on a conscious assessment of alternative plans of action [..., often those] that are proportionally most useful to them.' Fafo and others have shown that in periods marked by crisis, households often combine several economic strategies to make up a new livelihood system to care for the family (Mitchel 2009, Hasselknippe and Tveit 2007, Kuttab 2006, Sletten and Pedersen 2003, Egset and Endresen 2002, Pedersen et al. 2002, Pedersen, Christophersen and Sletten 2002). Such strategies include a wide range of economic activities combined with new consumption patterns and aid benefits.

In this report we use coping strategies as a concept to describe actions used by a household to deal with displacement and dispossession. The premise for the following analysis is that people act in rational ways to make the best out of the situation they find themselves in. Even in a context of exile, loss of income and poverty, the refugees seek ways to make sense of their new circumstances. They will evaluate the opportunities and resources available to them and decide how these can be utilized to best benefit their household.

Syrians who used to work in Lebanon before the crisis seem to be less affected by the loss of employment income. Instead of supporting a family in Syria, many have now brought their relatives to Lebanon for their safety. Some of these relatives will claim refugee status and others will not. The migrant worker will nevertheless experience added family responsibilities with an often limited income. Many wealthy Syrians already own or rent apartments in Lebanon and some had branches of their businesses established a long time before the crisis. Although affected by the crisis, such business can continue to secure a livelihood. Others make ends meet by using savings, but for most this coping strategy is not sustainable in the long run as savings will be depleted.

Most of the Syrian refugees in Bebnine came from modest means with limited savings. Although welcomed by locals in the village and assisted with emergency charity and more longtime food aid from UN and international organizations, most of the refugees interviewed in Bebnine believed that the economic or material support they received was insufficient. They were creatively looking for alternative ways to find or supplement their income or reduce their consumption to sustain the needs of the family. We found that a combination of the following three coping strategies were the most common among the Syrian refugees in Bebnine; aid, reduced consumption, and looking for work

In a local café in Bebnine, we met with Mohammad (18). He wore worn-out plastic shoes, a ripped shirt and carried a green plastic bag. He spoke in a low voice as he shared his story. Mohammad was born and raised in the Syrian city of Idlib. After having graduated from high school he found employment with a local clothing factory. 'Life used to be good', Mohammad said, 'my salary was high and I had a car.' During the war, the clothing factory was confiscated by the Syrian government and Mohammad found himself without a job. His father was jailed and later killed by the Syrian Army. Another brother, a taxi-driver in Idlib, was jailed by the Syrian Police because he was a supporter of the 'revolution'. Mohammad fled out of fear of suffering the same fate as his male relatives. His six sisters and mother are left behind in Syria to take care of his brother's nine children.

Arriving alone in Bebnine six months ago, he had not registered with the UNHCR, fearing that his name would then be given to the Syrian regime. The rent for the flat he shares with his cousin is his largest monthly expense, 200 USD, followed by electricity (33 USD) and water (33 USD). Mohammad describes himself as lucky because he found work selling vegetables along the road. For a while he was employed by a Lebanese manager and received a 400 USD salary, although lower than the Lebanese workers who got 600 USD. He would send 100 USD a month with Western Union to his mother and sisters in Syria. After four months he lost his job and the last two months he has only obtained sporadic work. He estimates his monthly earnings to be around 100 USD, far from enough to cover the cost of living.³¹ We did not stay long enough in the village to learn how Mohammad coped with this challenge, and can only guess at his alternatives. He had to find more income, alternatively he could ask his landlord to give him more time to pay or he would have to move out of the flat.

A Lebanese family we visited had hosted a Syrian family of seven for free for two months. Neighbors then helped the Syrians find a flat for rent where they have stayed for the past six months. The family used to live in a place close to Aleppo and described their economic situation in Syria as 'average'. Riam, the mother in the family, said all the male members of her household used to work. Her husband worked as a car mechanic and all her five sons aged from 16 to 26 years old had left school and were also employed. The sons worked in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs, such as bartending, car mechanic, painting and aluminum work for windows. Now the male members of the family mostly sit at home, although they are searching for work regularly.

The boys are looking for jobs. Only the one that is 23 and the one that is 16 years old worked for a while, but they don't work any longer. They did not earn very much money ... Also the 18 year old worked for a while, but now he is staying at home. The one that is 23 went to Beirut today to search for jobs. The oldest boy has not worked at all and my husband neither has a job.³²

³¹ Fafo interview with male Syrian refugee in Bebnine, 3rd May 2013.

³² Fafo interview with Syrian refugee woman in Bebnine, 2nd May 2013.

The family paid 450 USD per month for the flat. Up until now they had used their savings to pay the rent, but now all their savings are gone. Riam claimed they had received aid from the UN only once; they were given mattresses, cleaning detergents and food coupons. She said they were promised assistance to cover the rent, at least part of it, but had received nothing. Paying the rent was the main challenge for the family. Recently, the income from the irregular jobs added up to only 13 USD a week, a welcome addition to cover small expenses like medicines, but not enough to pay the rent, even if all six male members of the family worked full-time. If the family did not obtain rent subsidies, they would probably be forced out of the relatively comfortable flat soon and have to accept much cheaper and more modest accommodation.

Although being a household with many able men, Riam's family members were not well-educated and had to compete for jobs in a highly pressured market for unskilled labor, just as Mohammad. Some refugee families would be even less fortunate than Riam and Mohammad; coming to Bebnine without savings and a network in the village. Typically, these were the families we found in the makeshift tents on the outskirts of the village. Others were more fortunate. They could reside with wealthier relatives and did not even self-identify as refugees or in need for assistance. Others had resources in the form of education and had been able to secure better paid jobs.

Samir was wanted by the Syrian police for evading military service. First he moved around in Syria to escape the police, but he found it impossible to get a job with the warrant hanging over him and he had to leave Syria. He spent six days in Lebanon searching for a place where he could live with his young pregnant wife. With the help of a local leader, he was able to convert an empty production hall into a living space for his family and returned clandestinely to Syria to meet his wife and newborn son. The small family stayed in Syria for four months before they decided that all of them should go to Lebanon. Samir went first, over the mountains, while his wife and baby traveled with passports across the border. Samir immediately searched for work in Lebanon.

First he found a job as a car mechanic, but being an academic and knowing nothing about cars, that did not work out well. He then heard that a school was starting classes for Syrian children and needed Syrian teachers. He secured jobs for both himself and his wife, who had been a teacher in Syria. Both of them were paid 330 USD a month. That made them into one of the better off households in Bebnine's Syrian community, both compared to other refugees and many local households. Their relative affluence was confirmed when Samir used his iPhone to show us pictures from his school. Still, he complained about how expensive everything was in Lebanon and that he could not even afford to buy a fan, a statement that is hard to comprehend when he did not pay any rent for his accommodation and received food coupons from the UN.

Other educated refugees have not been as fortunate as Samir. Fadi is 17 years old and still goes to school. He lives with his mother and sister, grandparents and two uncles and their wives and children. All the adults had higher education and held good

jobs in the public sector before they left Syria. They came to Bebnine seven months ago and like Riam, they have spent their savings to pay the rent. They rent a flat with four rooms and a kitchen and a bathroom for 250 USD a month.

Fadi's mother used to work as a teacher in Syria and has applied for work in Lebanon. Unable to produce her Syrian certificates as a teacher, she had not succeeded in obtaining a job. She had tried to work as a hairdresser to bring some money to the extended household. Every member of the household gets food coupons worth 27 USD each month, but she worried about the house rent now that the savings are spent.

Fadi's uncle used to be a student at Damascus University. Now he is working on construction sites doing tiling. Also, sometimes his wife, Fadi's aunt, assists him in the work. Together this household pools their money to pay the rent. They are more fortunate than Riam's family, since the rent is nearly half of what Riam has to pay. Still Riam's household consists of only eight members of one nuclear family, while Fadi's claims his household consist of four nuclear units with more than 20 people.

These examples show how refugee households utilize the wide range of resources they have available to make the best out of their situation. They have exploited social networks, savings, aid opportunities, education and work opportunities, as well as pooling resources to cope with displacement.

The coping strategy applied by Syrian refugees that has the most severe impact on the local community is that of employment in the unskilled labor market. Prior to the Syrian crisis, Syrian migrant workers typically accepted lower wages than the Lebanese due to the comparatively cheaper cost of living for their household in Syria. Now the Syrian refugees compete with Lebanese for even lower wages, since they can combine work and aid from UN organizations and local and international NGOs. This coping strategy is not available to the locals.

Refugees accept lower pay than the local standard since it is the total household income that matters. The examples above indicate that even for refugee households, these combined salaries are often so low that they cannot cover the household expenditures, including families that receive UN aid. Still it is the combination of aid and work that generates a livelihood system for many Syrian refugee households. This combination of aid and employment income has repercussions for the local population, which will be discussed later in the report.

Reduction of consumption

Reducing food consumption is a major coping strategy employed by Syrian refugees in the village. We found that many refugees only eat one meal a day, often a late lunch based on potatoes, which was the cheapest product on the market during this fieldwork. If they had two meals, it consisted of an additional simple breakfast with

bread, tea and *zaater* (herb). Many stated that chicken was eaten only once a month at most, usually upon receipt of food coupons.

Some of the refugees claimed that this eating pattern was not new to them. Having experienced scarcity before the flight to Lebanon, reduced consumption was already the norm. The economic benefit for further reduction in food consumption is thus limited.

Medicines were repeatedly mentioned as a challenge to obtain, as they were not included in the free aid packages and had to be bought for cash. As a consequence, some refugees had had to cut down on or altogether stop taking medicines they had used in Syria. A study by Doctors Without Borders (MSF) found that about 20 per cent of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon were in need of medication to treat chronic diseases but did not receive adequate medication (MSF 2012).

Rent for accommodation is the area with the largest potential for reduced consumption. Although not preferable among many refugee households, it is possible to move out of a comfortable rented flat to simpler lodging alternatives. Some of the alternatives are provided for free such as makeshift tents constructed by cardboard and plastic. Refugees struggling to pay rent for current housing dreaded this alternative. Still, it represents an efficient way to save money for households without regular employment income.

Selling assets

As stated earlier, most of the Syrian refugees arrived to Bebnine empty-handed and without assets to sell in order to generate extra cash. Riam said she had sold her gold to raise money for the trip to Lebanon. Several other refugees said they had tried to sell some of their food vouchers to raise money for other items that could not be bought with the coupons, such as medicines. Those that had sold food coupons complained that the transaction would typically only give them half the value of the voucher, which made it a poor deal for the refugees.

Newspaper articles that address this alleged practice of food voucher transactions, claim they were traded from 10 to 30 per cent below value (Ravelo 2013, Kullab and Anderson 2013, Ohrstrom 2013). Such transactions stimulate discussions in the same articles where some imply that sale of food vouchers intimates that the refugees get too much aid and can sell the surplus. Others claim that refugees sell their vouchers because they have many needs that are not provided by the aid available. Our experience from Bebnine is that most of the refugees we met sold their vouchers to raise urgently needed cash for medicine and rent. There were, however, examples of refugees who received more aid than their fair share. Some refugees had managed to get more mattresses and blankets than they needed, selling the surplus to obtain extra cash. This practice caused

frustration amongst the NGO leaders engaged in the distribution of mattresses and blankets to the refugees:

I work with the Qatari people, but now we are not helping [the refugees] anymore, this is because one guy goes first and pick up the aid, then he sends his daughter to pick up more, and another daughter and so on. They are using us. Some Syrians are liars and are using other Syrians. That is why [some] people are not believing them anymore and not helping them. ... Some of them [the refugees] took 75 blankets and they have a car and everything, and others have nothing. So now I do not trust anyone anymore. ... They take more than they need.³³

The NGO leader had devoted his life to helping needy people and felt betrayed when he caught people cheating. He admitted that they could not always assist people with all their needs, but that it was not acceptable to sell donations that could have been used by others.

Coping strategies for female-headed households

In the village of Bebnine, we saw that gender roles often followed a pattern where the males are the breadwinners taking jobs outside the household to provide for the family and women have the main responsibility for domestic life. This division of roles and labor may be preferred or enforced by cultural regulations. Gender roles are often reconfigured in conflict situations. Goldstein (2001) argues that war is cross-cultural and throughout history perhaps the most gender specific activity where fighters are predominantly men and women take more supportive roles, maintaining domestic responsibility. Still experience from 20th century wars, shows that while men are conscripted to military service, women face new responsibilities, filling the void after the men.

Around three-quarters of the displaced Syrians who have sought refuge in Lebanon are women and children.³⁴ Although some women came alone with their children, most households we visited in Bebnine had at least one adult male member. In households comprising able male members, securing additional funds to maintain household needs is mostly reserved for men. In female-headed households, the Syrian women take on new responsibilities traditionally reserved for men, such as being the principal income generator and dealing with local authorities outside of the home, as well as securing the livelihood for the family. Being a refugee in an unfamiliar place, characterized by poverty and sometimes with the added worry of a husband left behind fighting in Syria, makes everyday life very challenging.

³³ Fafo interview with female refugee in Bebnine, 8th May 2013.

³⁴ <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>.

The female refugees we interviewed said that their lives had changed dramatically. They lived close to strangers, including men that were not their relatives. Refugees creatively imagined the host families or other refugees as their new relatives. Some started using kinship categories like ‘mother, father, sister and brother’ to emphasize their obligations and roles associated with a close family, like providing protection or advice on how to manage in the local community.

Some NGOs, like the local women organizations and the Akkar Network for Development (AND), had acknowledged the particular challenges faced by female-headed households and had introduced programs targeting such households. AND is targeting general development in the Akkar region and has also started some projects for Syrian refugees because of the significant impact the Syrian refugees have in this region. After conducting an assessment, they decided to cooperate with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to implement cash assistance for female-headed households. Seven hundred families, including some in Bebnine, were provided with a ‘Visa’ card that was topped up with 300 USD each month.³⁵

A local NGO leader in Bebnine claimed that not all the households that were given assistance were in fact headed by women. Women often arrive alone with the children, leaving their husbands behind in Syria to fight with the opposition army and were de facto household heads upon arrival. Sometimes the husband would arrive later for a visit or to stay in Lebanon. Some of the women that benefited from the cash assistance programs had claimed their husband were dead in order to get access to extra money, but were in fact not widowed. This practice enraged the locals, because they felt that these women cheated the system. It also produced a general sense of mistrust from locals towards the refugees. We observed situations where refugees were applying for more assistance only to be met with accusations from the local aid workers of lying about their needs.

While Syrian refugee women do not usually work, some are accessing limited agricultural labor opportunities while others find casual work in small shops or domestic work to secure basic needs. This is particularly true if the mothers arrive alone and their children are small.

Fatima, a young mother of four children and with a husband still in Syria, said that she was constantly searching for casual work to supplement the limited assistance she received from UNHCR. She had lived in Bebnine for about a year and arrived shortly after her youngest child was born. Luckily, she had friends in the village and could live with a Lebanese host family. She had her own rooms and separate makeshift kitchen and bathroom, and she did not have to pay any rent. Still the aid coupons barely covered expenses for disposable diapers for her two youngest children, something she found a

³⁵ Fafo interview with NGO leader in Halbe, 11th May 2013.

necessity due to lack of adequate laundry facilities. In order to provide her household with food and medicines, she had taken on various jobs such as seasonal agricultural work and domestic work with local families. The income, a meager four USD a day, enabled her to buy bread and vegetables on credit from the local shop, because she constantly could pay off some of the debt. It also enabled her to afford medical expenses when necessary. The food coupons were spent in the local supermarket to buy diapers and food items not available in the local minimarket.³⁶

Small credits

Fatima could buy small amounts of food on credit because she had a proven ability to repay the shop owners. This coping strategy was not available to most of the Syrian refugees we met. To ‘buy on the book’, a system where the shop owner is writing the items purchased in a book to keep a record about how much the customer owes, seemed to be available only to a few in the village. The customer would typically repay the debt every week or month upon receiving his salary. The system is based on a degree of trust between the shop owner and the customer.

An owner of a supermarket in Bebnine confirmed this, sharing that, ‘I am never giving credit to Syrians that ask for it. They do not have work, so they will not be better off to pay later.’³⁷

According to this shop owner, such credit schemes were equally rare among the Lebanese inhabitants in the village. He said he only gave credit to around five per cent of his customers and usually only to people he knew well. The shops where Fatima received credit were much smaller and very close to her place of residence, which might explain the alternative policy. These shops only had local customers they knew well and could show more flexibility because of a higher degree of trust and knowledge about their customers.

Work migrants bringing their family to safety

Many Syrians have a long history of work migration in Lebanon. They have benefited from higher wages than they could find in Syria. At the same time, it has been cheaper to keep their families in Syria and in this way get more value for their salaries. The war and violence in Syria has compelled many of these migrants to bring their families to Lebanon.

³⁶ Fafo interview with female refugee in Bebnine, 13th May 2013.

³⁷ Fafo interview with shop owner in Bebnine, 10th May 2013.

Radwan (27) came from very poor circumstances in Syria. He was only seven years old when he left home and went alone to Lebanon to search for work for the first time. In the beginning, he took simple jobs for one US dollar a day to save money to send to his family. A family in Bebnine allowed him to put up a simple tent on their land. Radwan claims to have lived in this tent for 20 years now, commuting irregularly between work in Lebanon and visits home. When he grew older, he started working as a day laborer in agriculture. After several years in agriculture he found work in the supermarket, which both gave him steady employment and better pay.

Radwan continued to live in the tent in Bebnine, except for two and a half years when he did military service in the Syrian Army. Upon completing his service, he married a Syrian woman and now lives with his wife and two children in the tent. His income is about 400 USD a month, but he cannot afford to pay for better accommodation because of big economic responsibilities for his extended family: his mother, ten sisters and a brother. Radwan's father died when he was 12 years old. He used to send most of his income to his relatives in Syria as well as caring for his own family. Four months ago his mother, aunt and seven of his sisters came to live with him in Bebnine. He got permission from his landlord to erect another tent to provide for them. Radwan gives half his income to his mother and sisters. Most of the money is spent on food. In addition, they received a one-time donation from the UNHCR. Radwan's brother used to give money to the relatives when they lived in Syria, but now he has no money. The brother is fighting with the Free Syrian Army, so instead Radwan has to send him money, usually 200 USD every other month.

In this case, Radwan is the safety net for the family. They have been able to get a little aid, but not enough for this large family. Radwan's mother is old and as his sisters are between 15 and 25 years old, he does not expect any of them to find work to supplement the household income. As the only man, he expects to be the sole breadwinner for his extended household. Since their house in Syria is totally destroyed, Radwan does not anticipate that the situation for the family will change soon. He believes they will be unable to return to Syria for a long time after the civil war is over. During that time he can perhaps hope that some of his sisters have married and that his economic responsibilities will have been reduced.

Marriage and 'survival sex'

Marrying a Lebanese or foreign man was also reported to be a coping strategy among female Syrian refugees. For women, fleeing war and facing financial hardship, marriage can be a way to find protection under a male-headed household. Some marriage proposals came from already married men seeking an additional wife. Particularly, single mothers or widows are more inclined to accept a proposal from an already married man

when facing the hardships of exile. Marrying to become a second or third wife was not very popular among the local women. Among the Syrian women, however, marriage could be a way to cope with the stereotype of Syrian women as promiscuous, immoral and infectious, notions that increasingly circulate in local and national discourse.

Some Syrian women will accept a proposal to be a second wife as well as a cheaper wedding contract in order to find safety and economic support from a local man. It was also reported that some local men had married Syrian widows with children out of charity. The *mukhtar* condemned this practice, arguing that a man with means to an extra wife should be able to provide charity for the woman without marrying her. According to another key informant, he knew of five cases in the village where Lebanese men had taken a second wife from among the Syrian refugees. One village *mukhtar*, responsible for registering marriages in the village, also confirmed such marriages had taken place lately.

Early marriage was also reported to be a coping strategy for families in economic despair. To marry off a daughter at a younger age than usual is sometimes rationalized as a way in which to 'protect' the girls from rape and sexual violence. A key informant in Tripoli claimed to have recently seen several marriage contracts between rather young Syrian women and foreign Arab men, suggesting a kind of marriage 'tourism' where foreigners take advantage of the unfortunate situation many Syrians find themselves in. If such marriages can be called protection is also questionable.

Fieldwork findings reveal that prostitution is a sensitive issue. While some local authorities denied the occurrence of prostitution in Bebnine, other key informants confirmed that 'survival sex' was used as a coping strategy by Syrian women, often as debt repayment. Several men in the village claimed that Syrian women had offered their services to them, but the related stigma of the issue means that tangible information is difficult to obtain during limited fieldwork.

Local response to the Syrian refugees

Syrian refugees started to drift into towns and villages in Lebanon in 2011, escaping the escalating civil war. Most Lebanese expressed compassion and empathy for the refugees. Having painstaking experience with war, violence and instability, it has usually been the Lebanese seeking refuge in Syria and not the other way around. Lebanese particularly remember Syria's hospitality towards thousands of Lebanese displaced during the war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006. The time had come to give back, and most Lebanese welcomed the opportunity. The war in 2006 lasted for 34 days before a ceasefire was brokered and the refugees could return home. When the civil war in Syria started, most Lebanese believed it would be short as well. The Syrian civil war is now well into its third year and the influx of refugees is estimated to be more than a quarter of the original Lebanese population. Although continuing to appreciate that the Syrians are in an extremely difficult situation, in the very same sentence many in Bebnine could blurt out that they hate them. They are frequently using the Syrian refugees as scapegoats for the deteriorating Lebanese economy and other misfortunes in society. Others emphasize cultural differences, using real or imagined disparities to create a rift between the refugees and themselves. The strain on society and resources is felt in almost every community in Lebanon, creating a classic division of 'we' who belong and 'the others' who do not belong in 'our' community.

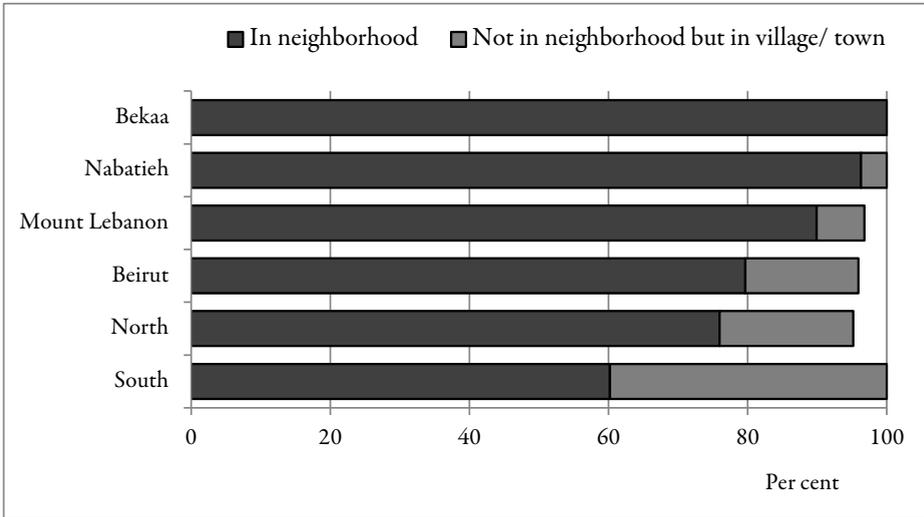
Most Lebanese have Syrian refugees nearby

Only two per cent of Lebanese households surveyed are without Syrians in their wider living area, i.e., their village or town, and 84 per cent report Syrians living in their neighborhood (*hara*) or immediate surroundings. Despite variation across regions (Figure 2), such a heavy presence of Syrians and Syrian refugees naturally leaves imprints on the Lebanese population.

Labor competition: 'they are stealing our jobs'

Bebnine, being one of the poorest villages in the Akkar region, experienced high unemployment even before the Syrian uprisings. Akkar is the most disadvantaged region in Lebanon where a majority of the population experience difficult living conditions and lives below the poverty level. The unemployment rates for the region

Figure 2 Percentage of households with Syrians in their neighborhood by region (n=900).



are the highest in the country: 13.5 per cent compared to a national average around eight per cent (ILO 2010, RMF 2013).³⁸ The Syrian civil war and the heightened political instability of Lebanon have worsened the already poor living conditions of the region.

Furthermore, Lebanon’s GDP has dropped from four to five per cent a year to around one per cent over the last two years. Foremost, it is the sectors of tourism and export trade that are suffering decline. Lebanon has traditionally benefitted strongly from tourists escaping the heat in other Middle East counties, particularly the Gulf, during the summer season. However, tourism dropped by fifty per cent in 2012, as tourists avoid instability. Export has declined due to the closing of Lebanese trade routes to and through Syria (Salem 2012).

In Bebnine, there are around 403 extended families. Among these there are 80-85 very big and influential families with several hundred members in each. Agriculture, construction and small businesses such as car and carpentry workshops are important for the economic livelihood in the village. The educated local middle-class are professionals such as teachers, doctors, nurses and independent business owners. The army has traditionally been, and still is, a major source of employment

³⁸ There is a general lack of statistical records in Lebanon, including unemployment; many of the references are thus rather old. The latest figures from the World Bank (2013) state that national unemployment is at 11 per cent and 34 per cent for youth, but these statistics are not broken down by region.

for Bebnine's male population. One informant claimed that more than 3,000 men from Bebnine were working in the army, which makes it the most important employer in Bebnine.³⁹ Generations of Bebnine's young men have turned to the army as a stable source of income. The village lost eleven soldiers in the battle of Nahr el Bared in 2007, an event that now is part of Bebnine's collective memory (Now 2007). A monument commemorating this heroic sacrifice is erected on the main road before the entrance to the village.

The army and security operation is the only sector of the labor market not directly affected by the influx of Syrians since employment is reserved for Lebanese citizens. As many of the Lebanese in Bebnine are poor and have fragile livelihood systems, they will employ similar coping strategies as described among Syrian refugees, although aid is not available to them. Lebanon lacks a centralized system that provides social welfare to its citizens to help them tackle poverty, distress and emergencies. Perhaps the most common form of safety net in Lebanon is private remuneration from relatives abroad, but this is something that poor Lebanese in a deprived village typically lack (Das and Davidson 2011). Thus, private financial transfer and institutional poverty assistance is uncommon amongst the Lebanese who most need it, e.g., many families in Bebnine.

According to our recent poll, local charities reach out to six per cent of all Lebanese households every year. How substantial their support is, is another matter and something for which we lack data. The share of recipients is not higher amongst the (self-ascribed) income poor than amongst the well-to-do, which suggests that the targeting is not particularly good. Instead, our polling data suggests that the poorest Lebanese households receive aid more often than other households from family and friends: 27 per cent as compared with an average of 11 per cent reported having received such support in the past 12 months. This confirms findings from the qualitative interviews that at least some poor Lebanese, also in Bebnine, have access to private income from better-off kin, something that most Syrian refugees presumably have not. In turn, this implies, that (some) poor Lebanese households can combine income resources in their coping strategies to make ends meet, although aid is not one of them.

Parts of the Lebanese middle- and upper-class have benefited from the mass arrival of refugees and increased demand for housing, food and services. Property owners can rent out housing at double rates. Empty, hitherto unused and poor quality areas originally not intended for human accommodation are put on the market and generate income. Shop owners benefit from a surge in sales and cheap Syrian labor. A manager

³⁹ Fafo interview with local leader in Bebnine, 9th May 2013.

of a local store admitted that he had fired Lebanese employees only to hire cheaper Syrian labor. He used to pay the Lebanese workers 50 USD per week and Syrian employees less than 30 USD.

I used to have Lebanese workers in the shop, but the Syrians take less money, so I kicked out the two Lebanese and put in a Syrian. The reason this happened was that these two Lebanese started nagging me and wanted more money. Then I told them that I could take in a Syrian that would take less than they had now. And they said to me, so why are you not doing that? And then I did. So we had this little conflict and they begged for it to happen. Of course the Lebanese are annoyed. But I do not think I am getting any enemies because of this. I am free to do whatever I want.⁴⁰

The manager of the store was the son of the owner and had an above-average income. He seemed to experience no solidarity with his staff or others who lost their jobs to cheaper Syrian labor, like many others we met in the village. His main focus was on making a profit for himself and his family.

While sections of the middleclass can benefit from the refugee influx, the majority of Bebnine residents experience it as a burden. The influx of cheaper Syrian labor has decreased work opportunities and reduced salaries. Whereas refugees can combine income with aid, most locals find it hard to sustain a living standard with lesser salaries.

Particularly, younger men expressed frustration with the lack of job opportunities and the consequences it had for their lives. Many young men in Bebnine drop out of school early to find casual work. Also, for those with an education, jobs are hard to find. Some young male informants felt that the Syrians were being supported to an unfair degree while their needs were being neglected. They reported that they had postponed marriage as they found it increasingly difficult to afford the cost of a wedding and accommodation for a new family.

Four men in their twenties have gathered in a café in Bebnine. All of them left school around the age of 12 when they were in seventh grade. Since then, they have searched for casual work to earn an living. They have worked in fishing, construction and garages. In the beginning, such jobs offered an attractive salary as an alternative to attending school. Several years later, their income is irregular and too small to build a future.⁴¹ Rami (25), one of the men, told us that he used to work as a truck driver, but

⁴⁰ Fafo interview with local leader in Bebnine, 10th May 2013.

⁴¹ For further reading on the link between education and employment in Lebanon, see Kawar and Tzannatos 2013.

that he lost his job to a Syrian because the employer could pay the Syrian less. Now he does not have a regular job and explains:

I am engaged, but cannot marry until God decides to help me. I have been engaged for ten years. I got engaged with my cousin when I was 15 years old. She is now 23 years old, but I do not know when I will be able to marry her. I am still fixing my home. ... My father built me a house before he died. It is for me and some of my cousins.⁴²

Rami's brother Ahmed (23) tells us that he was engaged very young, too. However, much to his disappointment, the engagement was broken off after seven years. Recently he met a Syrian girl in the village:

I have been engaged to a Syrian girl for one month. It is one of the girls that just came to the village, she is 21 years old. ... I am not really engaged, I have only talked to her parents. So we are still waiting. When I have enough money we will get engaged for real. Her parents did not want us to get engaged before I have finished the house. To do that I need 21 million Lebanese Lira, this is like 15,000 USD. My plan to get this money is to get back my previous job, [because] then I can take a loan from the bank. ... This is regular work so I will be able to pay back. The money is for the house and the engagement. As long as the house is ready everything will be okay. Then I can get engaged and get married quickly.⁴³

Ahmed used to have a steady job with a regular income, but a few years ago he was in a serious car accident. His injuries required a series of operations and he had to quit his job. His employer has, however, promised him his old job as soon as he regains his health. Ahmed was waiting for one last operation to recover completely. In the meantime, he takes casual jobs with less pay, but cannot wait for the day he can return to his old job and start planning his future.

The brothers are now competing over who will get married first. Rami was the more pessimistic of the two. Having already been engaged for ten years, he expected at least ten more years to pass before the marriage could materialize. He expressed his disillusionment thus: 'I have one regret in my life—that I am still alive and did not commit suicide. There is no future in Lebanon.'

Claiming that it was impossible to live a proper life in Lebanon, he falls into the category of young disappointed men that a leader of a NGO network claimed were prey to recruitment into militant groups. She believed it was easy to tempt young

⁴² Fafo interview with local leader in Bebnine, 1st May 2013.

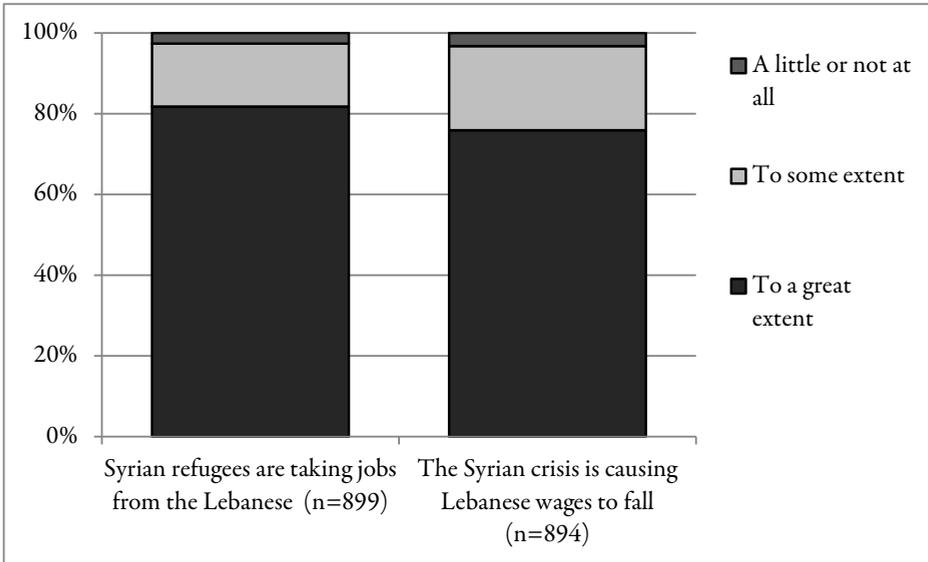
⁴³ Fafo interview with local leader in Bebnine, 1st May 2013.

men without hope for their future to carry weapons in the service of whoever offered them a small sum of money. If Lebanon finds itself on the brink of a new war, this observation casts a grim perspective for the future.

It is not only the youth that are affected by Syrian competition for work. Ibrahim (40) is the main provider for his household and works as a car mechanic. His average daily salary is 13 USD. One day’s salary at the garage fixing cars used to be 20 USD. Now the Syrians do the same work for half that amount. Before the arrival of Syrian refugees, Ibrahim used to have regular work. After the crisis, he finds himself in direct competition with cheaper Syrian labor. His daily wage has not dropped, but he gets less work, only half of the week. His income does not cover the expenses of his large household. As a consequence, last week they had to sell some of their furniture to cover the electricity bill (57 USD). Twelve out of his 16 children attend public school. To make ends meet, three of his sons work in construction on a sporadic day-to-day basis after school hours.⁴⁴

Our local findings in Bebnine correspond to findings from the nationwide opinion poll. The vast majority of the Lebanese polled believed that Syrian refugees were taking away jobs from the Lebanese and that the Syrian crisis to a great extent was causing Lebanese wages to fall (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Perception of the impact of the Syrian crisis on the Lebanese labor market. Level of agreement with two statements. Percentage of respondents.



⁴⁴ Fafo interview with a Lebanese man in Bebnine, 1st May 2013.

Prejudice towards Syrians

Labor competition and a sense of differential economic treatment have laid the foundation for growing tensions. On the one hand, Lebanese residents expressed a moral obligation to protect and help their Syrian ‘brothers’ traumatized by violent conflict. On the other hand, the added pressure on limited resources in an impoverished village produces prejudice. While practices of hospitality and compassion are widespread, the relationship between local Sunni Lebanese and their Sunni ‘guests’ is showing signs of wear and tear.

During interviews with Lebanese men and women in Bebnine, it usually did not take long before ambivalent sentiments surfaced. Syrians were stereotyped as thief-like, promiscuous, unclean, uncultured and with dubious morals. Some local women worried that their husbands would take a second Syrian wife since such marriages were registered in the village. Several Lebanese male informants also described how Syrian women literally ‘threw themselves at them’, adding to the perception of widespread prostitution. Some Lebanese women in turn referred to Syrian women as ‘husband-stealers’, and expressed fear that their husbands would take a second Syrian wife.

Many Syrians complain that they are poorly treated and exploited by the Lebanese. They talk about insults and racist remarks in encounters with Lebanese. In a school for Syrian students, the school mainly followed the Syrian curriculum which was taught by Syrian teachers. But in an effort to prepare the students for the official Lebanese exams, Lebanese teachers were engaged to teach the exam courses. The presence of Lebanese teachers produced strong reactions among the Syrian students.

The students get very angry from the Lebanese teachers. They do not like them and claim that they treat them in a very proud [and arrogant] way.⁴⁵

Prejudice is not only reflected in rude comments, but also in daily actions among Lebanese. Several respondents reported daily incidents of skirmishes between locals and refugees. We witnessed an incident one late night when two vehicles met in a narrow lane and neither one wanted to back up to let the other car through. The Lebanese driver claimed it was a one-way street and that the Syrian was driving in the wrong direction, while the Syrian insisted it was the Lebanese that was driving unlawfully. In the end, the Lebanese conceded and backed up his car. Returning to the site the next morning, it was obvious to us that the Syrian had been right. The Lebanese driver appeared to be annoyed because he believed he had the right to be right since this was

⁴⁵ Fafo interview with principal for school for Syrian students in Bebnine, 8th May 2013.

his 'home turf'. This example indicates how the process of stereotyping may be fuelled by rather banal and innocent events.

Stereotyping Syrians did not start with the Syrian uprising. A wide range of demeaning characteristics about Syrians have circulated in Lebanese public discourse and cultural production for decades, particularly related to nearly 30 years of de facto Syrian occupation (from 1975 until 2005). Syrians have been depicted as 'buffoon-like and dangerous', often referencing the Syrian government's military activities in Lebanon. Particularly, Sunnis and Christians were exposed to arbitrary violence and humiliation by Syrian security officers and soldiers. Now this is generating conflicting feelings towards Syrian refugees (ICG 2013).

Syrian refugees are often blamed for the bulk of Lebanon's daily crime. However, despite constant rumors in the village that the crime rates for theft and robbery had increased dramatically after the arrival of the Syrian refugees, the *mukhtars* in Bebnine did not report the mediation of any conflicts involving Syrian families. This suggests that the local discourse about increased crime and less security in the village probably is related to the growing resentment against refugees built on fear and prejudice rather than on statistics and evidence. A Lebanese newspaper article reported how media fed the notion of increased crime and lack of safety after the influx of Syrian refugees through biased reporting. Although Syrians are arrested on suspicion of criminal activity, national statistics show that it is not disproportionate to the increased number of Syrians in Lebanon (Zaraket 2013).

A local politician explained prejudice and negative attitudes towards Syrian refugees as part of general racism in Lebanon:

The Lebanese think they are better, so they are racist against Syrians, just as we are racist against Palestinians, the Ethiopians, the Philippines and every single different person. [...] The problem with the Syrian crisis is that the sectarian issue comes before the racist.⁴⁶

By this, the politician meant that although the Lebanese are racist against the Syrians, the sectarian dimension of both the conflict in Syria and the situation in Lebanon is overshadowing the importance of this racism because of grave repercussions from the sectarian tensions in both countries.

Not everyone blames the Syrians for everything that goes wrong though. A Lebanese man in Bebnine had established a shop to improve his standard of living. After

⁴⁶ Fafo interview with local politician in Tripoli, 13th May 2013.

successfully running the shop for two and a half years, a mob in the village stole everything inside his shop before setting it ablaze in January 2013.

I went to the court to get help, but nobody helped me. They could do nothing about it. I had no insurance. I kind of know who did it. All the people say something, but they say different things, so I am not sure. And I do not want to know. It was something that happened. I lost everything and there is nothing I can do. I do not know why people do this, but I think it is because of poverty. People here are not educated; all they care about is drinking and drugs. That is all these youth care about. [...] They could burn the house just to light their cigarette, they do not care. [... but it was] not just some youth, it was a big group of people.⁴⁷

Although this shop owner had his suspicions about the culprits, he was careful not to put the blame on Syrians. Instead, he told us that it was a Syrian that had helped him rebuild his shop. After the incident, a Syrian came to him and offered his help for free. He said the shop owner could reward him when things got better, which indeed happened, as the Syrian was hired upon reopening the shop.

While interaction between Syrian refugees and local residents was frequent in public spaces, such as shops and mixed schools, it seemed more limited in terms of forging deeper relationships (excluding those who had Syrian relatives or spouses). Polling data shows that across sects a majority of Lebanese feel uncomfortable having Syrians as close neighbors. Three out of five Lebanese assert they are uncomfortable with Syrians as close neighbors, a sentiment that is somewhat more prevalent amongst Sunnis than people from other sects and slightly more common in the north than in the other governorates, particularly Nabatieh (Figure 4). All the northern regions have a significant presence of pro-uprising Syrian refugees that might influence these attitudes, while Nabatieh in the southern part of Lebanon, has a predominantly Shiite population supporting Hezbollah and the Syrian regime. They tend to view regime friendly Syrians as allies or work migrants.

Lebanese skepticism about Syrian refugees depicted in Bebnine is also manifest in other polling results. For example, two in five respondents believe that some Syrians, but not all, can be trusted; however, just as many think that one has to 'watch out for Syrians' (Figure 5).

⁴⁷ Fafo interview with local shop owner in Bebnine, 10th May 2013.

Figure 4 Percentage of respondents feeling uncomfortable having Syrians as close neighbors. By place of living and sect.

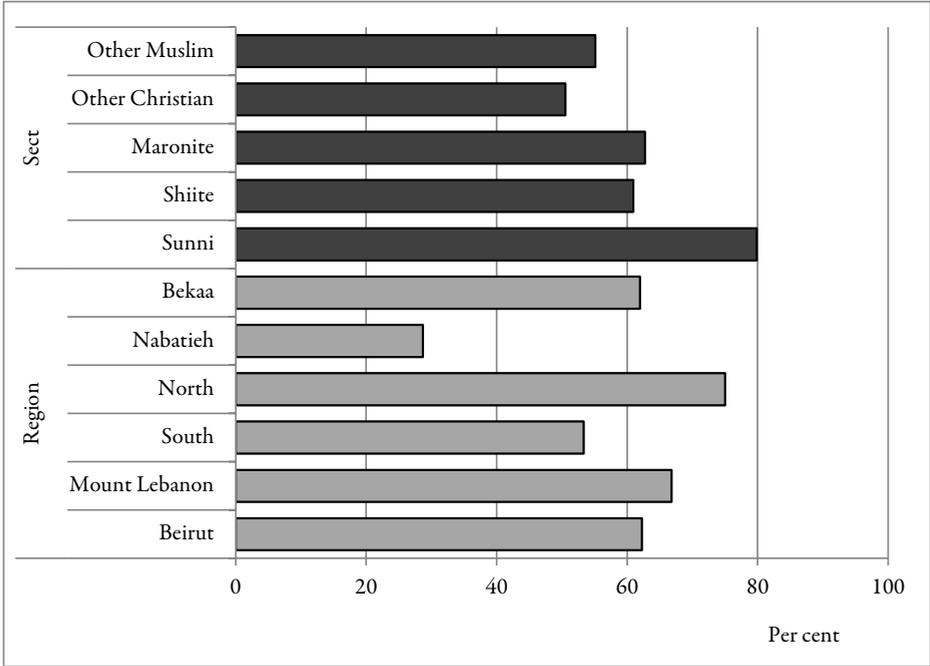
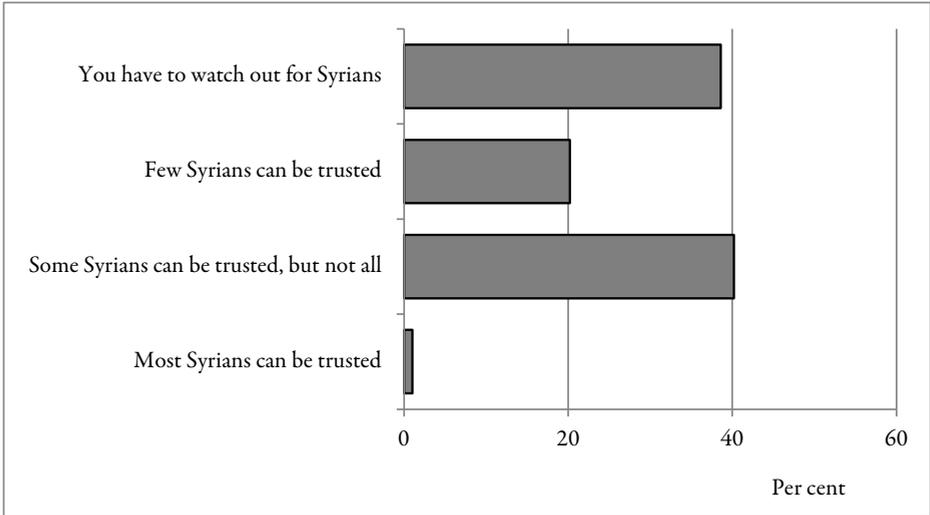
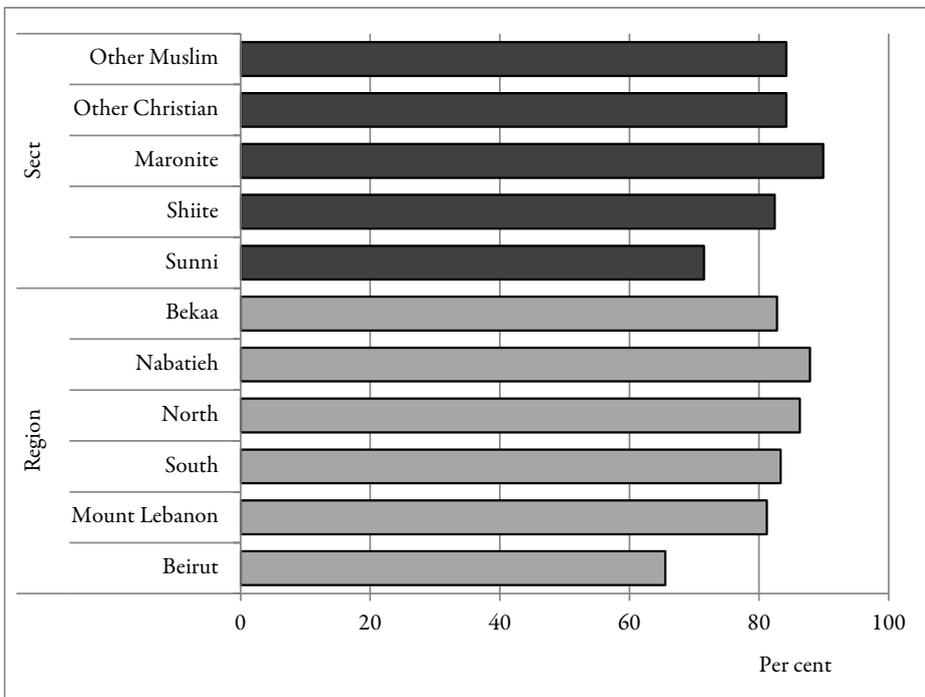


Figure 5 Degree of general trust in Syrians. Percentage of respondents (n=881).



Furthermore, attitudes towards intermarriage are strikingly negative across sectarian backgrounds. Over 80 per cent of the respondents in all regions except Beirut, report that they are uncomfortable with the prospect of Syrians marrying a family member (Figure 6). Even in Beirut, two-thirds of the respondents said they would feel uncomfortable about the prospects of a Syrian national marrying a family member.

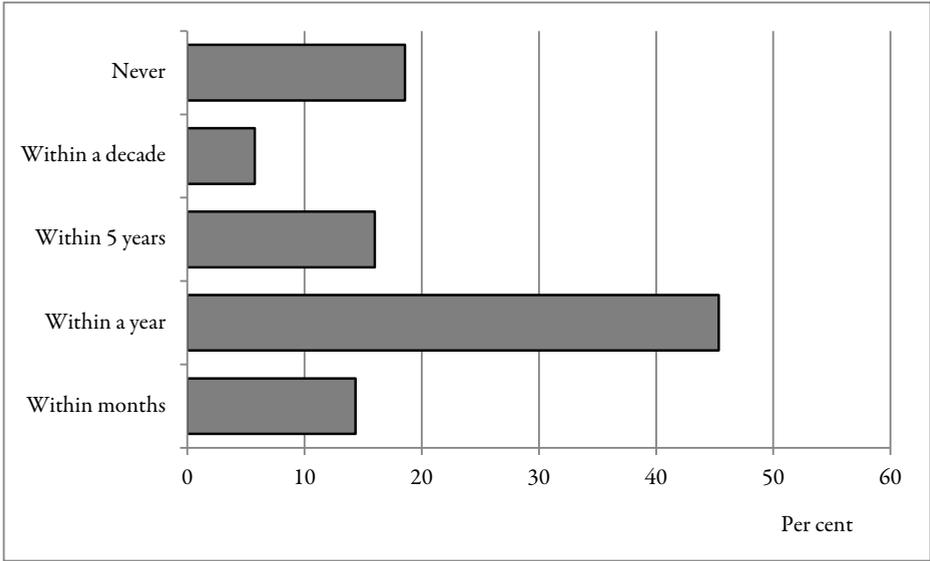
Figure 6 Percentage of respondents feeling uncomfortable with a Syrian marrying a family member. By place of living and sect (n=875).



It does not help Syrian-Lebanese relations that the Syrian conflict is dragging on without a solution on the horizon. In the opinion of most people, the displaced Syrians will remain in Lebanon for quite a while (Figure 7). While 60 per cent think the refugees will be in a position to return to their homes, or at least back to Syria, before another year has passed, 40 per cent think that it will take much longer, such as Radwan, the work migrant who brought his extended family to Lebanon after their house was destroyed in Syria. In fact, nearly 20 per cent believe they will settle permanently in Lebanon, or at least not be able to go back to Syria. In the north, twice as many, 40 per cent of the respondents in the poll, are of the opinion that the Syrian refugees will never return to Syria.

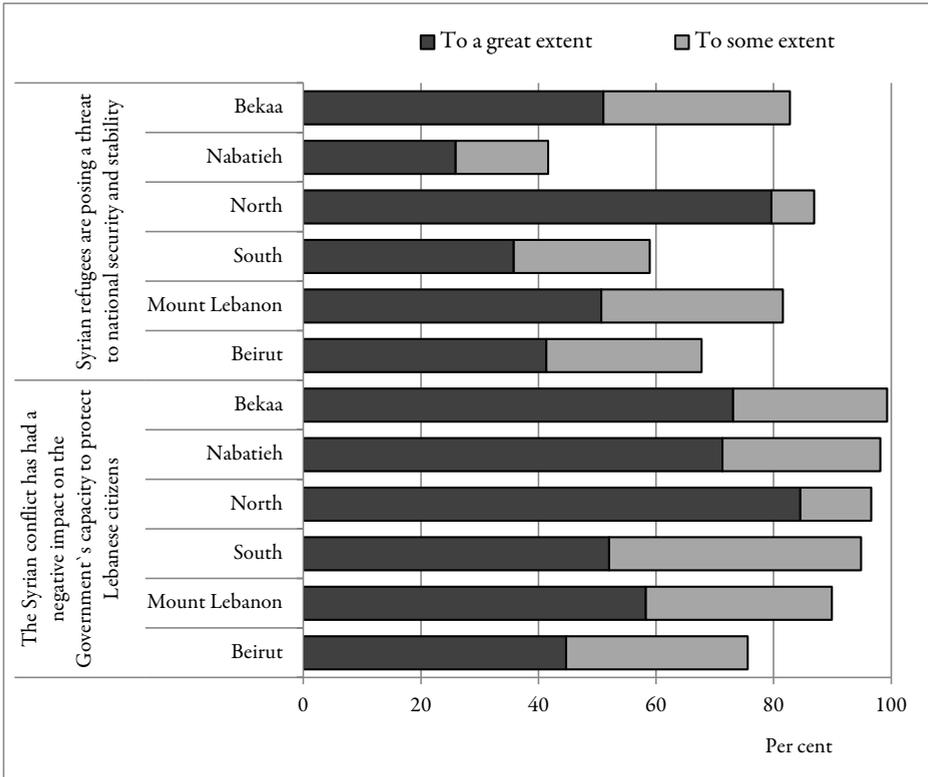
Furthermore, the poll shows that most Lebanese wish to restrict the influx of Syrian refugees: 89 per cent disagreed with the statement that Syrians should be able to enter Lebanon at will; 98 per cent agreed that the border with Syria should be better policed, but nearly two-thirds rejected the proposition that Lebanon should close its border with Syria. The attitudes towards refugee camps for Syrian refugees in Lebanon are conflicting, an issue we will return to towards the end of this report.

Figure 7 Opinions on when Syrian refugees can return to Syria (n=732).



Examining the polling results, one is struck by the fact that nearly half the respondents do not feel particularly safe and secure either for themselves or for their families. Moreover, as reported previously, two-thirds think it is unsafe for women to go out in their own neighborhood after dark and even 27 per cent are of the opinion it is unsafe for men to venture out after nightfall. When asked about the impact of the Syrian conflict on the Lebanese government's capability to protect its own citizens, 93 per cent think it has had a negative impact and three out of four believe Syrian refugees, to a greater extent, are posing a threat to national security and stability (Figure 8).

Figure 8 Percentage of respondents agreeing to a great or some extent with statements concerning the Syrian conflict and the Lebanese government's capacity to protect own citizens (n=899) and the threat to national security and stability that Syrian refugees may represent (n=892). By region.



Sectarian tensions on the rise

The relative homogenous ethno-religious character of Bebnine is a stabilizing factor in the village's encounter with mostly Sunni Syrian refugees, but it does not make villages like Bebnine immune from conflict. In May 2013, Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nassrallah, delivered two speeches, which were broadcast live, publically admitting that Hezbollah fighters played an active role in Syria in support of the Assad regime. This announcement was in direct conflict with the Lebanese government's policy of dissociation towards the situation in Syria, a policy Hezbollah had agreed to as the dominant partner in the government until March 2013.

Hezbollah's argument for deeper involvement inside Syria is related to their strategic partnership with both Syria and Iran. Syria is crucial for Hezbollah's access to modern and efficient weapons which are essential for their identity as a resistance movement against Israeli aggression. For this reason, the outcome of the Syrian conflict might pose an existential threat to the Lebanese movement, or at least weaken them significantly.

This chapter will explore in more detail the significance of the sectarian fault lines in Lebanon, how this is related to Syria and why it threatens Lebanon's stability.

Sectarian antagonism in Lebanon

The clues for Lebanon's fault lines date back to a disagreement about the historical past of the country between the Christians and the Muslims when Lebanon was singled out as a separate mandated area under the French after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1920 (Salibi 1988). The Christian Maronites expected their continued dominance in the new state would be under the protection of the French. However, other non-Christian Ottoman provinces were included in the new state, weakening the position of the Christian Maronites. This resulted in the formation of a deeply divided state (Butenschøn 2008:158-164). An informal power sharing model was introduced to bridge these divisions. The positions in state and government were distributed according to confessional lines, but conflicts around the justice in the power-sharing model soon emerged between the sects. When Lebanon achieved full independence in 1946, after the end of the Second World War, the major political players agreed that future stability in Lebanon was dependent on a continued power-sharing system. The political system is based on consensus and compromise between Christian and Muslim communities created in the Lebanese National Pact, called a corporate consociational form of government (Kerr 2012).

The influx of Sunni Palestinian refugees after the Arab-Israeli wars in 1948 and 1967, threatened to destabilize the sectarian balance fundamental to the National Pact. Divisions over the National Pact were mainly exacerbated by Sunni and Shiite resentment towards Maronite hegemony, which paved the way for 15 years of civil war starting in 1975. The Taif Accord ending the civil war, redefined the National Pact by shifting executive power from a single confessional group (Maronites) to more power-sharing between the three main confessional groups (Sunni, Shiite and Maronite). In addition, the Syrians, for all practical purposes, took control over Lebanon after the Taif Accord. Syria claimed their interference was necessary to guarantee Lebanon's stability, in order to maintain this fragile sectarian balance. Hamdan (2012) argues that current confessional tensions stem from long term confessional competition over power and the Syrian interference.

The polarization seen between Sunnis and Shiites in Lebanon since 2005 is directly related to the killing of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the end of Syria's long domination over Lebanon. Two rival political blocks emerged: the Shiite dominated 'March 8' in support of the Syrian regime and the Sunni lead 'March 14' viewing Syria as the perpetrator of Hariri's assassination. The two groups form the main fault line in current Lebanese politics (Knudsen & Kerr 2012).

When the uprising started in Syria in 2011, Lebanon was preoccupied with internal political issues. Hezbollah and their allies in the government had resigned in January and brought an end to Saad Hariri's unity government. After six months of negotiations, a new government was established with Hezbollah and their allies controlling the majority of the seats.

The policy of dissociation

The Mikati government adopted a policy of disassociation towards the conflict in Syria in an attempt to avoid a spillover into Lebanon. For Hezbollah, this has necessitated a 'precarious balancing act' (ICG 2013). After the war against Israel in 2006, Hezbollah's military strength was evident; a strength that Hezbollah painstakingly worked to transform into political power. Of particular importance is the Hezbollah 'take-over' of Beirut in 2008 in reaction to the government's plans to dismantle Hezbollah's clandestine telecommunication system. The political crisis was solved through the Doha Agreement which granted Hezbollah a long sought after 'blocking third' in the government.

Being part of the government, Hezbollah has tried to combine defending the Syrian regime and maintaining their hard-earned position in Lebanese politics. This strategy seemed to have worked for about the first two years of the conflict in Syria, despite Hezbollah's backing of Assad's regime and more or less clandestine support

to aid his troops. All this changed when Mikati's government broke down in March 2013. Hezbollah's decision to leave the government corresponded with intensified engagement by the group's fighters inside Syria.

Sunni refugees who arrived in Bebnine in the spring of 2013, claimed to have seen Hezbollah fighters inside Syria, particularly in the battle for Qusair.⁴⁸ Discussions about Hezbollah's involvement in Syria and Nassrallah's speeches were frequent during daily encounters with villagers and added to their worry that the war might spread to Lebanon.

Anti-Hezbollah sentiments are growing all over the region, not least because influential Sunni clerics, like Egyptian Yusuf al Qaradawi from the Muslim Brotherhood, are being listened to by millions of followers. He is now calling on all Sunnis to support the uprising against al Assad in response to Nasrallah's pledge to support Syrian government forces (Beaumont 2013). Hezbollah's rhetoric has shifted significantly from arguing that their role was to protect Lebanon from Israeli aggression to talk about the need to protect Shiite communities and interests inside Syria.

A prevailing sentiment among residents in Bebnine was that Hezbollah was putting the interest of the Shiite community before national interests. Several local leaders in Bebnine expressed a sense of loss and injustice related to Hezbollah's increased involvement in Syria. Some even said that Hezbollah, in their view, was reduced from a resistance group to a terror organization. A central leader in the village expressed his view on Hezbollah's participation in Syria this way:

It is too bad, because this is not national resistance. The very beautiful national resistance they did against Israel [in 2006] is gone. Today Hezbollah is not a national resistance movement, it is a militia. This is very different, so the beautiful image of Hezbollah is now changed. Now that image is terror.⁴⁹

Both Hezbollah's more open involvement on the government side in the conflict, as well as Lebanese Salafist involvement in support of the uprising, is pushing Lebanon closer to war. Our fieldwork in Bebnine coincided with the three week battle for Qusair in the Homs region close to the Lebanese border. The war in Syria had for months resembled a war of attrition between the Sunni Muslim fighters and the (Alawite) regime military forces. None of the parties had any significant gains that could alter the outcome of the conflict. Hezbollah's intervention was aimed at tipping this balance in favor of the regime. Of significance is Hezbollah's self-interest in protecting the Syrian regime to maintain the Irani-Syria-Hezbollah alliance

⁴⁸ Fafo interview with a Syrian refugee in Bebnine, 13th May 2013.

⁴⁹ Fafo interview with a local leader in Bebnine, 9th May 2013.

which facilitates transfer of money and weapons from Iran to Hezbollah. If Syria disintegrates further, it will be difficult for Hezbollah to maintain its position in Lebanon, both as a political power to be reckoned with, but not least as the best trained and equipped armed group in the country, even superior to the Lebanese army. Hezbollah is exploiting the political limbo created by their departure from the government, to gain more leeway in order to intensify their activities in Syria. This development prompted President Suleiman to urge Hezbollah to comply with the 'Baabda Declaration' of dissociation and distance Lebanon from the conflict in Syria (Saab 2013).

Hezbollah's open involvement in Syria is mirrored by an increase in Lebanese Sunni fighters, mainly Salafists, crossing the border to support the rebels in Syria. In the battle for Qusair, both Hezbollah and Sunni groups were represented alongside their Syrian counterparts, pushing the conflict further in the direction of a proxy war between Sunni and Shiite opponents in a regional context represented by Saudi Arabia and Iran (Sly 2013).

When an unknown group attacked Hezbollah areas in southern Beirut with rockets on 26th May 2013, the prospect for war spreading into Lebanon ratcheted up another notch (Barnard 2013a). Some analysts, portraying a worst-case scenario, predict an all-out regional war between Syria, Hezbollah and Iran on one side and everyone else on the other (Khouri 2013), which will make it difficult to keep Lebanon out of the war. So far, however, both Hezbollah and Sunni groups seem prepared to keep the war out of Lebanon. The Hezbollah leader confirmed this objective in a public speech on 14th June 2013 (Hassan 2013). If this will be attainable is another issue.

Strong fear of conflict escalation and civil war

Residents we talked to in Bebnine emphasized the peaceful nature of the village. Being a Sunni village they claimed residents showed respect and tolerance towards people of other faiths. The decision to stir up sectarian violence was felt to be outside the ordinary citizen's control. Sectarian conflicts were not a result of personal grievances among ordinary people but on the contrary, the outcome of a deliberate political decision. A middle-aged woman commented:

For a long time there was no problem between Sunnis and Shiites. And my mother told me that there did not use to be any problems between Muslims and Christians. We were living together in peace. But I feel that the Lebanese people are living like chess pieces. Some others are playing [with us] and conflicts appear. But leave the people alone and we can live together.⁵⁰

Local leaders are doing what they can to curb community tensions before they escalate into sectarian violence. The message that sheiks in the mosques, leaders in NGOs, teachers in schools and universities are sending is that Sunnis and Shiites are brothers in faith and should stop fighting each other.⁵¹

A politician described how his party organized meetings for hundreds of people to keep sectarian conflicts at bay. They were constantly working to teach people how to avoid participating in the sectarian game:

We have already paid the price for this game during the last 30 years when we were under Syrian rule. So let the Syrians pay the price themselves this time. We do not have a problem between Sunnis and Shiites [here in Libanon], it is between Salafists and Hezbollah. Still we do efforts to stop this conflict between Sunnis and Shiites, but we do it low profile.⁵²

⁵⁰ Fafo interview with a Lebanese woman in Bebnine, 5th May 2013.

⁵¹ A Daily Star article (Zaatari 2013) describes how sectarian tensions are building up in the southern city of Saida, where the city's sheiks of different sectarian shades are constantly working to prevent sectarian strife. They argue that Sunnis and Shiites are both Muslims and together they have to save the country from war and catastrophe.

⁵² Fafo interview with local politician in Bebnine, 10th May 2013.

Through local efforts, they assumed local conflicts could be contained and kept from escalating into sectarian strife. They focused on rapid response to any conflict by conceptualizing them as family disputes only. This is especially the case when tensions erupt between families with associations towards Salafists or the Shiite Alawites.

Despite these efforts to curb tensions, residents in Bebnine were anxious that sectarian conflict and war could spread into Lebanon. Tripoli has seen intensified fighting between Tripoli's Sunni Bab al-Tabbaneh and Shiite/Alawite Jabal Mohsen neighborhoods since the start of the Syrian conflict. During our fieldwork, the situation in Tripoli was calm, but the weeks before and after saw heavy gun battles leaving 30 people dead and 200 wounded. Decisions to intensify the conflict between the two neighborhoods appeared to be tightly connected to the development of the fight between the Sunnis and Allawis inside Syria. In May 2013, our informants linked it to the battle for Qusair.

A local politician confirmed this view, saying that the long standing conflict between the Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen neighborhoods were instigated (and paid for) by strategic decisions made by leaders located far away from the daily battles. The advent of fighting was usually only a phone call away when this benefitted the larger political picture:

The problems we see in Tripoli between Bab al Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen is a decision. They call: hello – ‘bom-bom’ [fighting starts], when they want to finish, they call again: hello – finish! So one night you see a big problem and the next morning you see flowers, it is all by decision. It is not personal, it is a political decision.⁵³

The conflict between these two neighborhoods dates back to the Lebanese civil war when Syria effectively occupied northern parts of Lebanon. Since then fighting between residents of Bab al Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen has been more or less directly related to Syrian affairs (Elali 2013). Although some distance from Bebnine, villagers followed the incidents closely. The main road from the village to Tripoli would be closed during fighting and sometimes they could hear the sound of heavy weapons. Villagers were anxious that the conflict would spread out of the original neighborhoods and stir up sectarian strife elsewhere in Lebanon, including their own area.

Polling data shows a high fear of conflict escalation amongst Lebanese. Seven out of ten consider it likely that serious violent conflict will break out in Lebanon during the coming 12 months (Figure 9), and two out of three fear that the current turbulent situation could take Lebanon into a new civil war (Figure 10).

⁵³ Fafo interview with local politician in Bebnine, 10th May 2013.

Figure 9 Percentage of respondents considering it very or somewhat likely that serious violent conflict will break out between sectarian groups in Lebanon in the next 12 months, by region (n=889).

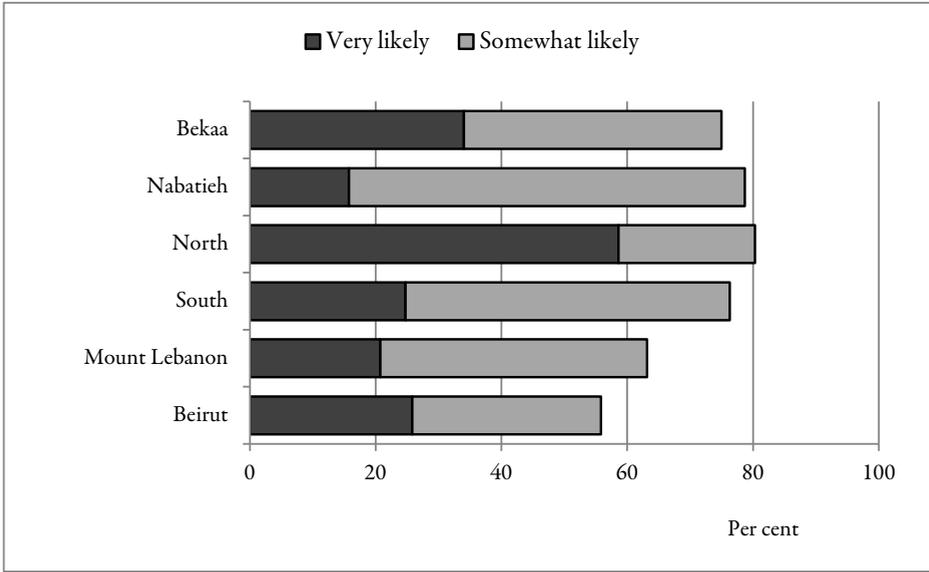
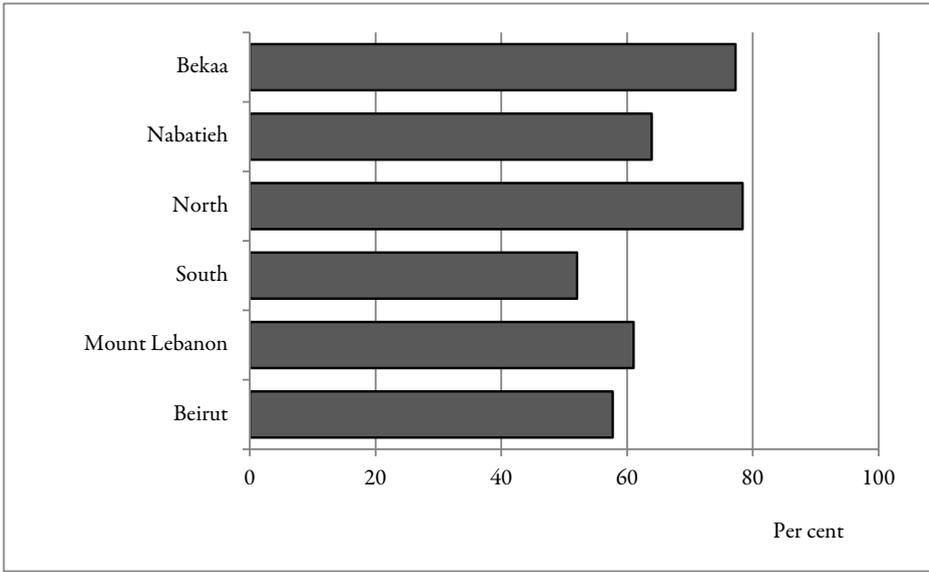


Figure 10 Percentage of respondents expressing fear that the conflict in Syria can lead to a new civil war in Lebanon, by region (n=900).



For many the question no longer seemed to be if but when a civil war will erupt. Bebnine residents believed that a future war would be significantly different from the Lebanese civil war in 1975-90. They envisioned a war between Shiite and Sunni where the Christian communities would aim for neutrality. Many feared that it would not be a war with clear front lines demarcated between areas controlled by different sectarian groups but characterized by more spectacular violence and terrorist attacks. They were afraid they would see a development similar to the car bomb killing dozens in Turkey in mid-May 2013, where civilians and not militias were targeted (Fahim and Arsu 2013). Lebanon is not unfamiliar with car bombs but previous bomb attacks were usually targeted and politically guided such as the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. Now the villagers of Benine fear terrorist acts which indiscriminately target civilians.

If the conflict develops into a regional war along Sunni Shiite lines, history has shown that these kinds of wars are likely to last for decades; forecasting a grim perspective for the Middle East (Recknagel 2013).

Mixed feelings towards refugee camps for Syrian refugees

As demonstrated earlier in this report, the polling results illustrate that most Lebanese want to restrict the entry of Syrian refugees into Lebanon. To achieve this, there is a need for better control at the border, although the majority of the Lebanese do not want the border closed. The polling results further reflect mixed attitudes towards establishing refugee camps for Syrian refugees.

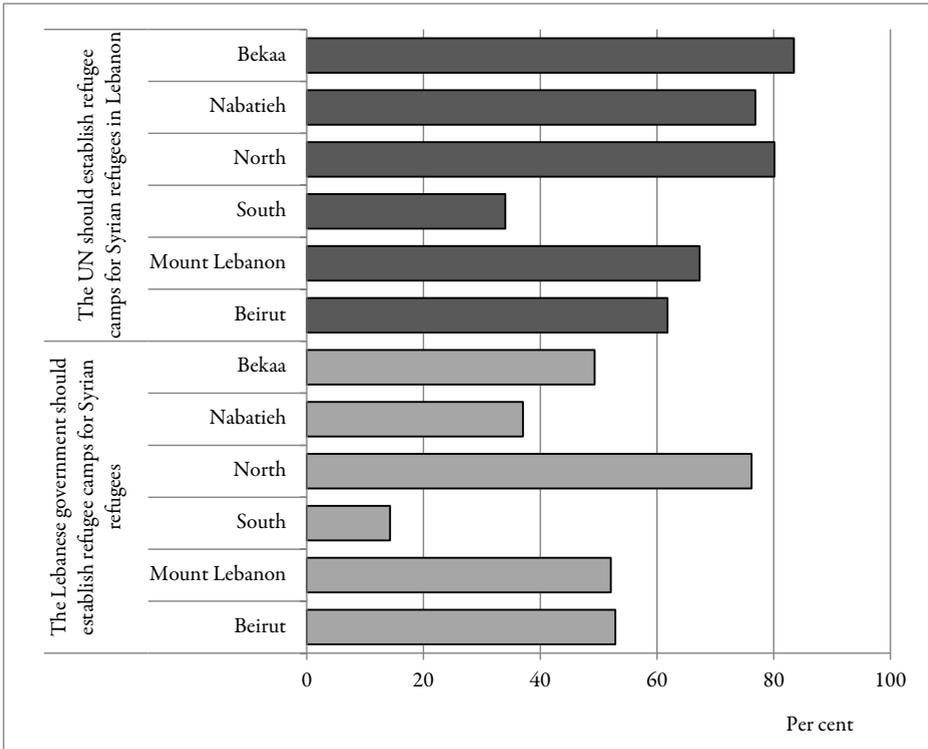
In total, 51 per cent of the respondents agree with the statement that ‘The Lebanese Government should establish refugee camps for Syrian refugees on Lebanese soil’ whereas 46 per cent disagree, and three per cent do not know what to think. Altogether, 70 per cent support such camps being erected by the United Nations. These poll findings can be interpreted in the context of the strain that the Syrian refugees put on the country’s meager resources and services. Even more important is the labor competition and growing resentment towards Syrians among the Lebanese population, as discussed earlier in this report. It can also be seen as associated with people’s concern over the deteriorating security situation and the risk for intensified sectarian violence and an outright civil war.

The reluctance to establish camps for Syrian refugees was said, by our informants, to be related to the experience of Palestinian refugees who have been in Lebanon for more than 60 years. Their history promotes fear that the Syrian refugees will generate multiple problems for Lebanon. One big worry is that camps will lead to the permanent settlement of Syrian refugees in Lebanon similar to what has happened with the Palestinian refugees. Such permanent settlement of Sunni Syrian refugees in Lebanon will further alter the

delicate sectarian balance that makes up the Lebanese political system. Secondly, many Lebanese fear that refugee camps for Syrian refugees will create pockets of power which would allow extremism to grow within the camps. This concern is expressly associated with the experience of the Palestinian refugees, not least around the role the Palestinians played in the Lebanese Civil War. An experience explained to be the reason the Palestinian refugees still lack many basic rights in Lebanon, even after more than 60 years of residency (Haddad 2000, El-Natour and Yassine 2007).

However, a closer look among the population polled in the north, shows that 76 per cent agreed with the statement that camps should be established by the Lebanese government and 80 per cent believe that the UN should establish camps for Syrians (Figure 11). The call for setting up transit centers to absorb the waves of refugees and prevent the refugees from taking jobs away from Lebanese workers found resonance among many of the informants in the qualitative study. In light of high unemployment

Figure 11 Perceptions on the establishment of refugee camps to accommodate Syrian refugees. Percentage who believe that the Lebanese government should establish such camps (n=894), and that the United Nations should do it (n=893). By place of living.



and economic hardship, and acknowledging the reduced capability of resources within the Lebanese state, 95 per cent believe that the international community should carry the economic costs of housing the Syrian refugees.

People's opinions about camps for Syrian refugees are no doubt formed by security considerations and the Palestinian experience. However, after the presence of Syrians in Lebanon is perceived to have reached one quarter of Lebanon's populations, the pressure on limited resources is felt in every community. Attitudes are starting to turn both among ordinary people and political leaders. In Bebnine the locals we met wanted the UN to establish refugee camps to ease the pressure on rented housing and not least on the competition for casual work.

Lebanese leaders were initially praised by the UN for the policy of self-settlement and integration of refugees in local communities. Into the third year of the crisis, the magnitude of a crisis that can grow out of control is convincing several political leaders to reconsider their policy. Discussions to allocate land for refugee camps have started and it is recognized that camps will make aid operations more efficient than is currently possible in scattered shanty camps popping up in Bebnine and elsewhere in Lebanon. There is, however, still a long way to go; especially since Hezbollah has been reluctant to recognize the plight of the Syrian refugees, fearing Sunni dominated refugee camps will have repercussions on Lebanon's stability. Others among them, President Michel Suleiman and several ministers, have instead been arguing that new refugees should be barred from entering Lebanon altogether (Dettmer 2013b). In the meantime, Syrian refugees are entering Lebanon in record numbers, stretching local resources and initial hospitality to its limit.

Conclusion

The presence of self-settled Syrian refugees in Lebanon seems to generate ambivalent responses in the host communities. On the one hand, Lebanon has been welcoming towards the Syrian refugee 'brothers'. On the other hand, the mass influx of and potentially long-term presence of displaced Syrians is experienced as a threat and burden. With the absence of refugee camps, the self-settled refugees depend on the hospitality and support of compassionate individuals and aid organizations. Both the UN and local aid institutions are chronically underfunded. Despite the institutions' knowledge of the refugees' needs and their wish to alleviate these needs, they fall short of the resources necessary to meet the essential requests. Currently these institutions offer assistance like education and medical services for free for a limited time. Such assistance is however not sustainable in the long run which creates unpredictability for both the refugees and the service institutions that aim to help them.

Many Lebanese households host Syrian families or support them in other ways, financially or materially. Simultaneously, most Lebanese believe that the Syrians are causing rents to surge as well as taking jobs from Lebanese and causing wages to decline. The Syrian refugees combine work for low salaries with the reception of aid, a coping strategy that is unavailable for poor Lebanese. The young Lebanese in the north, particularly from lower socio-economic backgrounds, feel that the Syrian refugees are supported financially to an unfair degree, while their needs are being neglected. The displaced Syrians in turn complained that aid (cash, goods and services) was unpredictable and difficult to access.

The Syrian crisis and the influx of refugees are putting Lebanon's already scarce resources and strained labor market under pressure. Competition over jobs also seems to aggravate communal tensions. While practices of hospitality towards the Syrian refugees were widespread, ambivalent feelings and negative prejudice frequently surfaced in the village of Bebnine. The national opinion poll reveals similar ambiguous attitudes. More than half of the respondents are not comfortable with having Syrians as close neighbors. More than two-thirds believe that the UN should establish refugee camps for Syrians and the overwhelming majority believes that the international community should carry the economic cost of housing the refugees. Almost all Lebanese polled in our survey said that the border with Syria should be better policed. These responses indicate that there are limits to Lebanese hospitality. The Syrian refugees, struggling to make ends meet, are increasingly being used as scapegoats for the poor economy, political challenges and increased crime rates.

Lebanon has requested billions in international aid to deal with the growing influx of refugees. Even with increased global support, Lebanon's stability is fragile. For an extended period of time, Lebanon's official dissociation policy towards the conflict in Syria kept the situation in balance. The Shia Hezbollah movement and Sunni groups' increased involvement on opposite sides in the Syrian civil war reinforces the same sectarian divisions in Lebanon. Both Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees alike fear the escalation of sectarian violence and not only a new Lebanese civil war, but an all-out regional war. For many, the question is not if there is going to be a war or not, but when it is going to break out. It remains to be seen whether Lebanon will become the fifth domino of the Arab Spring. So far the central government and local leaders are doing their best to prevent exactly this.

Annex: tables for graphs

Table for Figure 1: Perception of safety for children, women and men in own living area during the day and after nightfall. Percentage of respondents thinking it is not safe. By region, sect and household income (n=900).

		During the day			After nightfall		
		Children	Women	Men	Children	Women	Men
All		22	17	5	73	67	27
Regions	Beirut	31	26	9	71	67	33
	Mount Lebanon	14	10	1	62	56	20
	South	7	3	1	51	48	13
	North	47	37	13	91	83	53
	Nabatieh	8	5	-	73	67	6
	Bekaa	10	7	1	81	75	21
Sect	Sunni	42	33	10	92	88	41
	Shiite	8	6	2	65	60	10
	Maronite	22	16	5	70	63	36
	Other Christian	16	12	3	68	60	27
	Other Muslim	9	7	2	53	43	12
Household income status	Above average	13	9	2	70	64	21
	Average	22	16	5	71	64	25
	Below average	34	28	10	82	79	41

Table for Figure 2: Percentage of households with Syrians in their neighborhood and in their village/ town. By region.

	Syrians in neighborhood	No Syrians in neighborhood but in village/ town	No Syrians in village/ town	Total	n
All	84	13	2	100	900
South	60	40	-	100	98
North	76	19	5	100	208
Beirut	80	16	4	100	123
Mount Lebanon	90	7	3	100	218
Nabatieh	96	4	-	100	108
Bekaa	100	-	-	100	145

Table for Figure 3: Perception of the impact of the Syrian crisis on the Lebanese labor market. Degree of agreement with two statements. Percentage of respondents.

	Syrian refugees are taking jobs from the Lebanese (n=899)	The Syrian crisis is causing Lebanese wages to fall (n=894)
To a great extent	82	76
To some extent	16	21
A little or not at all	3	3
Total	100	100

Table for Figure 4: Percentage of respondents by degree of feeling comfortable having Syrians as close neighbors. By age groups, region and sect.

		Comfortable	Not comfortable	Do not know	Total	n
All		38	61	1	100	866
Age group	18-24	19	80	1	100	134
	25-34	37	61	2	100	192
	35-44	36	63	1	100	220
	45-54	48	51	2	100	184
	55+	45	55	-	100	136
Region	Beirut	36	62	2	100	114
	Mount Lebanon	32	67	1	100	208
	South	43	53	3	100	90
	North	24	75	1	100	204
	Nabatieh	71	29	-	100	108
	Bekaa	38	62	-	100	142
Sect	Sunni	19	80	1	100	134
	Shiite	37	61	2	100	192
	Maronite	36	63	1	100	220
	Other Christian	48	51	2	100	184
	Other Muslim	45	55	-	100	136

Table for Figure 5: Degree of general trust in Syrians. By age groups, region and sect. Percentage of respondents.

		Most Syrians can be trusted	Some Syrians can be trusted, but not all	Few Syrians can be trusted	You have to watch out for Syrians	Total	n
All		1	40	20	39	100	881
Age group	18-24	-	35	19	46	100	135
	25-34	2	40	17	42	100	197
	35-44		40	23	37	100	221
	45-54	-	42	24	34	100	190
	55+	3	44	17	36	100	138
Region	Beirut	2	41	22	34	100	121
	Mount Lebanon	1	35	20	44	100	217
	South	-	61	21	18	100	95
	North	1	26	16	58	100	198
	Nabatieh	-	58	28	14	100	108
	Bekaa	2	39	18	40	100	142
Sect	Sunni	3	42	21	34	100	235
	Shiite	-	55	23	22	100	238
	Maronite	1	26	20	53	100	197
	Other Christian	1	33	20	46	100	153
	Other Muslim	-	38	9	53	100	58

Table for Figure 6: Percentage of respondents by degree of feeling comfortable with a Syrian marrying a family member. By age groups, region and sect.

		Comfortable	Not comfortable	Do not know	Total	n
All		16	82	3	100	875
Age group	18-24	9	88	3	100	135
	25-34	15	82	3	100	193
	35-44	15	82	3	100	220
	45-54	21	77	2	100	189
	55+	18	80	2	100	138
Region	Beirut	33	66	2	100	116
	Mount Lebanon	15	81	4	100	213
	South	11	83	6	100	90
	North	13	86	1	100	204
	Nabatieh	11	88	1	100	107
	Bekaa	14	83	3	100	145
Sect	Sunni	26	71	3	100	235
	Shiite	15	82	3	100	233
	Maronite	8	90	3	100	198
	Other Christian	15	84	1	100	152
	Other Muslim	9	84	7	100	57

Table for Figure 7: Opinions on when Syrian refugees can return to Syria. Percentage of respondents by region.

	Mount						All
	Beirut	Lebanon	South	North	Nabatieh	Bekaa	
Within months	8	7	5	25	32	9	14
Within a year	30	46	43	23	56	83	45
Within 5 years	22	22	29	8	12	6	16
Within a decade	18	7	4	4			6
Never	23	17	19	40		2	19
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
n	105	183	75	162	98	109	732

Table for Figure 8: Level of agreement with statements concerning the Syrian conflict and the Lebanese government's capacity to protect own citizens and the threat to national security and stability that Syrian refugees may represent. Percentage of respondents by region.

	Agree to a great extent	Agree to some extent	Agree a little	Disagree	Do not know	Total	n
The Syrian conflict has had a negative impact on the Government's capacity to protect Lebanese citizens	All	66	27	4	3	100	899
	Beirut	45	31	17	6	2	123
	Mount Lebanon	58	32	4	6	1	218
	South	52	43	3	1	1	98
	North	85	12		2		207
	Nabatieh	71	27	2	-	-	108
	Bekaa	73	26	1	-	-	145
Syrian refugees are posing a threat to national security and stability	All	52	22	18	7	1	892
	Beirut	41	26	23	5	4	121
	Mount Lebanon	51	31	14	4	-	217
	South	36	23	33	5	3	95
	North	80	7	9	4		206
	Nabatieh	26	16	26	31	1	108
	Bekaa	51	32	14	3	-	145

Table for Figure 9: Likelihood that a serious violent conflict will break out between sectarian groups in Lebanon in the next 12 months. Percentage of respondents by region.

	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not so likely	Not likely at all	Do not know	Total	n
All	32	39	11	14	3	100	889
Beirut	26	30	21	22	2	100	120
Mount Lebanon	21	42	13	20	3	100	217
South	25	52	20	4	-	100	97
North	59	22	8	5	6	100	203
Nabatieh	16	63	4	14	4	100	108
Bekaa	34	41	4	18	3	100	144

Table for Figure 10: Percentage expressing fear that the conflict in Syria can lead to a new civil war in Lebanon. By region, age groups and sect (n=900).

		Have fear	No fear	Total	n
Total	All	67	33	100	900
Region	Beirut	58	42	100	123
	Mount Lebanon	61	39	100	218
	South	52	48	100	98
	North	78	22	100	208
	Nabatieh	64	36	100	108
	Bekaa	77	23	100	145
Age group	18-24	78	22	100	139
	25-34	69	31	100	199
	35-44	64	36	100	226
	45-54	59	41	100	193
	55+	67	33	100	143
Sect	Sunni	81	19	100	242
	Shiite	57	43	100	242
	Maronite	57	43	100	202
	Other Christian	67	33	100	156
	Other Muslim	74	26	100	58

Table for Figure 11: Perceptions on the establishment of refugee camps to accommodate Syrian refugees. Percentage that believe the Lebanese government should establish such camps (n=894) and that the United Nations should do it (n=893).
By region.

The Lebanese government should establish refugee camps for Syrian refugees	Beirut	53
	Mount Lebanon	52
	South	14
	North	76
	Nabatieh	37
	Bekaa	49
The UN should establish refugee camps for Syrian refugees in Lebanon	Beirut	62
	Mount Lebanon	67
	South	34
	North	80
	Nabatieh	77
	Bekaa	83

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Ambivalent Hospitality

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Sunni-village of Bebnine and a national opinion poll, this report investigates how Syrian refugees and Lebanese citizens cope with and respond to challenges caused by mass displacement.

More than two years into the Syrian conflict, Lebanon has received the largest number of Syrian refugees. Lacking refugee camps, Syrian refugees settle across the country where they depend on the UNHCR, local charities and their own livelihood strategies for survival.

Lebanese attitudes towards Syrian refugees are characterized by ambivalence. Host communities have been remarkably hospitable and continue to support the refugees. At the same time, intensified labor competition and the perception that Syrian refugees are given preferential treatment is generating growing resentment.



P.O.Box 2947 Tøyen
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