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REFUGEES OF THE ARAB SPRING

*The Syrian Refugees in Lebanon
April 2011-April 2012*

Sam Van Vliet and Guita Hourani

THE CENTER FOR MIGRATION AND
REFUGEE STUDIES

In Collaboration with
Carthage Center for Research and Information (CCRI) of the
Lebanese Development Network (LDN), Lebanon
And
The Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) of Notre Dame
University (NDU), Lebanon

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Carthage Center for Research and Information (CCRI), the Lebanese Emigration and Research Center (LERC) and the Center for Migration and Refugees Studies (CMRS)

PREFACE

The Middle East is the largest region in the world in terms of refugee stocks and flows. In recent years, large movements of Iraqi refugees flowed into Jordan and Syria. Iraqi refugees also reached Lebanon, Egypt and countries all over the world.

In 2011, refugees fleeing the civil strife in Syria started to leave their country. In 2012, the dimensions and pace of their movement grew, turning it in an authentic crisis of Syrian refugees. This was a human predicament for the refugees obliged to leave their homes. But the crisis also produced consequences for the receiving countries, which had to host the refugees and to provide for their needs.

Lebanon is one of the countries most affected by the crisis. This should not be a surprise given the geographical, historical and social ties between the two countries. In turn, these same ties shape the attitudes of the Lebanese state and society towards the crisis and the refugees.

Sam van Vliet, from the Carthage Center for Research and Information (CCRI) and Guita Hourani, from the Lebanese Emigration Refugee Center (LERC), have undertaken to review the manifestations of the crisis in Lebanon during its first year. Their paper particularly focuses on the attitudes and policies of the Lebanese state. But it also analyzes the interaction of these attitudes with those of the Lebanese society in its different components. In fact, the paper may be viewed as a study of the impact of the political and social environment on refugee policy-making. It is important to understand the Lebanese state policy toward Syrian refugees and the complexities of its active or passive formulation. But it also is significant for countries of the region in general and beyond. Time and again, in all regions, domestic politics has affected policies on refugees and asylum seekers. It should be noted that in their study, the two researchers also address the international legal framework and the role of the multilateral system, especially of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The humanitarian and political importance of the subject, regionally as well as conceptually, and the seriousness of the research undertaken by the two researchers have prompted the Center for Migration and Refugee Studies (CMRS) to publish the paper in its new Cairo Studies on Migration and Refugees series.

With the Cairo Studies on Migration and Refugees, CMRS aims at publishing innovative research on migration and refugees in the Middle East, Africa and globally. The series is open to well-established as well as to young researchers from AUC and from the regional and international research community.

Ibrahim Awad, Ph.D.
Director

ABSTRACT

This review of one year influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon is meant to reveal the political, communitarian and humanitarian factors that shape the State of Lebanon's policy towards it. The Lebanese government has lately adopted a 'disassociation' policy regarding the Syrian conflict with the objective of preventing the spill-over of the conflict and the destabilization of the country. Regional and international powers well understand the reasons for this policy, given Lebanon's geopolitical situation, its history and its 'special ties' with Syria. However, while Lebanon might be able to disassociate itself from the political entanglement of the Syrian crisis, it cannot distance itself from dealing with the growing numbers of Syrian refugees on its territory.

Since the beginning of the crisis, a policy of neglect has characterized the Lebanese government's de facto relationship to the humanitarian crisis of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Their basic needs for shelter, education and medical assistance have been met by a combination of packages devised, without Lebanon's participation, by the UN and the latter's implementing partners. The Lebanese government has also allowed unsupervised religious charities to dominate refugee assistance, adding to a sectarian approach to the Syrian refugee crisis. This policy is beginning to feed back into the tensions that already divide ethnic and religious groups in the country.

Against the background of these findings, this report analyzes the need for the Lebanese authorities to design an adequate refugee protection framework in consultation with the UNHCR and to devise a temporary protection status for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. A new agreement or Memorandum of Understanding between Lebanon and UNHCR should take into consideration Lebanon's complex history with refugees on its territory and the political consequences of hosting refugees of a neighboring state. This approach would facilitate Lebanon's obligation to abide by international refugee protection laws while, most importantly from the point of view of Lebanese sovereignty, prevent a further spillover of the Syrian conflict into Lebanon. Consequently, such a framework could provide a model for an adequate regional response to other migration flows of Arab Spring refugees in the Middle East.

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We also wish to thank all the persons who have responded to our interviews or questions, whether experts, refugees or Lebanese hosts, as well as all the organizations that cooperated with us during the research process.

Our greatest appreciation goes out to the members of the study team, each of whom worked hard and without compensation on this report. Gratitude is also due to Dr. Ibrahim Awad and Dr. Shaden Khallaf for reviewing an earlier version of the report and for their invaluable comments and suggestions, and to Dr. Assaad Eid for his favorable remarks.

In our names and the name of the team, we express genuine hope that our research findings will point the way towards improvements and better understanding of refugee interventions.

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I. INTRODUCTION

An episode of the popular Lebanese television talk show *Kallam Ennas* on Syrian refugees in March 2012¹ demonstrated the sensitive political context in which the reception of Syrian refugees is taking place in Lebanon. Representatives of Lebanese political parties, Syrian refugees, community leaders hosting refugees and aid workers debated passionately for two hours about the real number of Syrian refugees, their motives of refuge, the necessary response of Lebanese authorities, and the issue of armed anti-Assad elements among the refugees. The talk show guests failed to agree on any of the above issues. .

The talk show episode represented, in miniature, a situation that may well be feared by the Lebanese government: an absolutely sectarian view of the facts and the moral issues involved in the Syrian refugee crisis. Reviewing a year of Lebanese media coverage of the Syrian refugees in the country, one can observe that similar deadlocks are preventing a national consensus on how to approach the Syrian refugee crisis. Meanwhile, the Syrian refugee population is growing exponentially, amid speculations that the estimated 300 thousand Syrian migrant workers² are going to be urging their families to flee into Lebanon if the security in Syria does not improve, if they haven't done so already. Lebanon's national body dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis, the High Relief Commission (HRC), has to operate within a very sensitive domestic political context, and is limited in its capacity and financial resources.

As the history of other crisis refugee situations has taught us, effective implementation of humanitarian assistance to refugees requires the political will of local authorities. Yet because of the peculiar nature of Lebanon's governing structure, which makes unilateral action here difficult, and because of the memory of past religious-sectarian strife, the Lebanese government has shown hesitance and ambivalence in addressing the Syrian refugee problem. A review of the historical and social-political context of Lebanese-Syrian relations reveals the problematic position of Lebanon in dealing with this new group of refugees.

This report is a brief review of the uneasy welcome of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Due to financial limitations in conducting this research, this report does not claim to be exhaustive or comprehensive in its coverage of Syrian refugee living conditions in Lebanon. The Carthage Center for Research and Information (CCRI) and the Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) hope to conduct a follow up to this report if funds become available. In light of the current events and the likely further influx of Syrian refugees in Lebanon in the near future, this

¹ Syrian refugees [Television series episode]. (2012). *Kalam El Nas*: Lebanese Broadcast Corporation (LBC).

² Chalcraft, J. (2009). *The Invisible Cage, Syrian Migrant Workers in Lebanon*. Stanford University Press, p.148. Numbers of Syrian migrant workers in Lebanon are speculative and currently estimated around 200 to 400 thousand.

report concludes with a set of policy recommendations that can help stakeholders deal with the Syrian refugee crisis in a timely, humane, and secure fashion.

II. METHODOLOGY AND CONSTRAINTS

This review of the influx of refugees into Lebanon from the ongoing strife in Syria deals with the period April 2011-April 2012. It was jointly undertaken by the Carthage Center for Research and Information (CCRI) a sub unit of the Lebanese Development Network (LDN) and the Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) of Notre Dame University-Lebanon (NDU). The objectives of this study are to a) map out the influx of the Syrian refugees into Lebanon; b) analyze the Syrian refugees' humanitarian and security situation in Lebanon; and c) provide context-sensitive recommendations.

A mixed-method approach was employed to obtain our data. This included: a) a literature review; b) a media coverage review, summarized in a [timeline](#); c) observations and anecdotes retrieved during fact finding missions in Wadi Khaled and the Middle Bekaa Valley Region in 2011 and 2012; d) interviews with Syrian refugees; e) interviews with selected Lebanese host families; f) interviews with officials of local, national and international aid organizations; g) interviews with local Lebanese officials; and h) interviews with local and international political, economic and human rights analysts.

This publication, which is the first publically available report to track the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon from its beginning to a year later, comprehensively reviews the major issues for Lebanon arising from the crisis. The findings of this report have a two-fold function: they are preliminary to further scholarly explorations of the crisis in the framework of other studies on migration flows; and, from a policy perspective, they provide evidence-based arguments for our suggestions, taken from our extensive database collected during this research project.

III. THE POLICY CONTEXT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

3.1 Refugees in Lebanon

Lebanon has experienced mass waves of conflict driven displacement, both as a country of origin and as host country. The main identities of conflict-related displaced people in Lebanon are Lebanese, Palestinians and Iraqis, with smaller numbers of other refugees in the country. On the other hand, between 600,000 and 900,000 Lebanese nationals left the country or have relocated within Lebanon as a consequence of the 1975-1990 civil wars and the situation of insecurity

afterwards, which has erupted around such events as the Syrian occupation until the assassination of Rafiq Hariri and the various Israeli military invasions.³

Currently, the two main refugee populations residing in Lebanon consist of Palestinians, estimated at between 250,000 and 500,000, who have come to Lebanon from different migration flows, and Iraqis, of whom there are around 50,000.⁴ The violent history of Palestinian refugee communities in Lebanon (involvement in Lebanon's Civil War, the 'battle of the camps' and most recently fighting between Palestinian fundamentalist groups and the Lebanese army in the Nahr el Bared conflict in 2007) has had its effect on any refugee group on Lebanon's territory.⁵

3.2 Lebanon's refugee protection framework⁶

Lebanon is neither a party to the 1951 UN Convention related to the Status of Refugees nor its 1967 Protocol.⁷ This Convention, which provides a comprehensive codification of the rights of refugees at the international level, forbids returning them by force to their country of origin and establishes the principle that refugees should not be penalized for their illegal entry or presence.⁸ In the absence of this Convention, Lebanon treats refugees and asylum seekers as 'illegal immigrants'.⁹

UNHCR Lebanon assisted asylum seekers for several decades in accordance with an unwritten 'Gentleman's Agreement' with the Lebanese government, but this broke down in the late 1990s.¹⁰ Following several years of systematic detentions and deportations, especially of Iraqi and Sudanese¹¹ refugees, UNHCR reached a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with

³ United Nations, *The socio-economic impact of conflict-driven displacement in the ESCWA region*, New York, 2009, p. 29.

⁴ Ibid, p. 29. See also European Parliament (2011), *Effects of migration policies on human rights*, Directorate-General for external policies of the Union.

⁵ 'Palestinization' refers to the negative connotation of any refugee community seeking assistance in Lebanon, comments by K. Shaden, Adjunct Professor Center for Migration and Refugee Studies (CMRS), American University of Cairo, (2012, 5 29) [Via Email].

⁶ Clairissa Radyko has extensively contributed to the legal research of this study during her internship at LERC in the summer of 2011. Ms. Radyko is a Juris Doctorate (JD) student at Wayne State University in the United States of America.

⁷ UN General Assembly, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 28 July 1951, 150, vol. 189. This Convention is the key legal document in defining who is a refugee, their rights and the legal obligations of states. The 1967 protocol removed geographical and temporal restrictions from the convention.

⁸ Ibid. Article 33 of this Convention relates to the issue of refoulement: "[N]o Contracting State shall expel or return ('refoul') a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion."

⁹ Human Rights Watch (2012). *World Report 2012, Lebanon*.

¹⁰ Kagan M. (2011). "We live in a country of UNHCR" *The UN surrogate state and refugee policy in the Middle East, New Issues in Refugee Research Paper*, UNHCR Research Paper No. 201, p. 16.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 16.

the Lebanese Government in 2003.¹² This MOU states that Lebanon is not an asylum country, but only a transit country of temporary asylum. The memorandum appoints UNHCR as solely responsible for determining refugee status and allows persons of concern to stay in the country up to one year so that UNHCR can proceed with resettlement or repatriation.¹³

This shift of responsibility from the State to an international agency, shift, a reality in many Arab countries hosting refugees, has been criticized within the UN refugee agency for weakening the connection between territorial sovereignty and state responsibility “UNHCR [...] assume effective responsibility for delivering direct assistance to refugees [...] took over unnatural roles in order to fill gaps in the international refugee regime [...] This responsibility shift does not take hold everywhere in the global south, though it is nearly universal in the Middle East.”¹⁴

Despite the fact that Lebanon has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not consider itself to be an asylum country, critics argue that it bears responsibility to address protection and assistance needs of refugees and asylum seekers residing in the country. As signatory to other international agreements, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention Against Torture and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, they argue that Lebanon has even internationally obliged itself to protect refugees.¹⁵ The issue of non-conformity between Lebanese domestic policy and Lebanon's international commitments has been addressed by several local and international human rights networks.¹⁶

According to UNHCR, Lebanon lacks any legislation or administrative practice to address the specific needs of refugees and asylum-seekers.¹⁷ The UN agency has still been unable to secure a temporary protection status for Iraqi refugees in Lebanon.¹⁸ In addition to the risk of arrest, detention and deportation, refugees have few legal means to support themselves

¹² Memorandum of Understanding between the Directorate of the General Security (Republic of Lebanon) and the Regional Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Concerning the processing of cases of asylum-seekers applying for refugee status with the UNHCR Office, (2003, 9 9).

¹³ Ibid. See also ESCWA (2009). *The Socio-Economic Impact of Conflict-Driven Displacement in the ESCWA-region*, p. 29 and. Naufal, H. (2011). [La Situation des réfugiés travailleurs Syriens au Liban suite aux soulèvements populaires en Syrie](#), p.5.

¹⁴ Kagan M. (2011). “We live in a country of UNHCR” *The UN surrogate state and refugee policy in the Middle East, New Issues in Refugee Research Paper*, UNHCR Research Paper No. 201,p 3.

¹⁵ Naufal, H. (2011) . Naufal, H. (2011). [La Situation des réfugiés travailleurs Syriens au Liban suite aux soulèvements populaires en Syrie](#), p.5.

¹⁶ See among others, Lebanese Center for Human Rights (2011), *Asylum Seekers and Refugees in Lebanon: Languishing in Injustice*.

¹⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. [UNHCR Country Operations Profile 2012](#), Lebanon.

¹⁸The situation of Iraqi refugees is not comparable with the situation of Syrian refugees, since the former are considered 'foreigners' while Syrians are considered 'brothers' and don't require a sponsor, being granted a 6 months visa upon entering Lebanon, UNHCR Assistant Protection Officer and Public Information Associate, Beirut (2012, 6 6). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

and their family members. Without a legal refugee framework in place, refugees or asylum seekers in Lebanon are dependent on the Lebanese Higher Relief Commission, UNHCR and its implementing partners.¹⁹ In practice, local committees, charitable societies and municipalities provide most practical relief (shelter, food, healthcare, education) for refugees in their host areas.²⁰

The improper record of treatment of refugees and asylum seekers by Lebanese authorities received renewed attention when Syrians refugees in significant numbers started fleeing to the country to escape the conflict in Syria. The influx has been ongoing and growing throughout the 2011 to 2012 period. Lebanon's stance regarding Syrian refugees has furthermore been complicated by the web of overt and covert ties between Syria, the state of Lebanon, and various factions within the state of Lebanon.

3.3 Historical context of bilateral relations between Lebanon and Syria

Lebanon's relationship with Syria has been shaped by a shared history of domination by the Ottoman Empire and under the French Mandate. Geographical adjacency, inter-Arab migration and family relations have brought Lebanese and Syrians close, on a popular level. Since independence from French Mandate rule in 1943, Syria has refused to regard Lebanon as a fully independent sovereign state. Only very recently, in late 2008, were official diplomatic ties established between the two countries, opening up a 'path of rapprochement' following several years of anti-Syria sentiments in the country.²¹

That sentiment has its roots in the events that transpired during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), when Syrian troops entered Lebanon months before the official 1976 decision of the Arab League to deploy peace keeping forces in Lebanon. The end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990 saw Syria holding overall strategic and military power in Lebanon.²² Although popular demonstrations, most notably during the Cedar Revolution²³, resulted in the final withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanese territory in 2005²⁴, Syrian intelligence and political influence have

¹⁹ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. [UNHCR Country Operations Profile 2012](#), Lebanon.

²⁰ Note that the High Relief Commission is not mandated to operate in regions other than northern Lebanon, where refugees have to rely solely on the goodwill of local municipalities and communities, Syria Regional Response Plan, (2012, 3) *UNHCR*.

²¹ Yacoubian, M. (2010). *Lebanon's evolving relationship with Syria: Back to the future or turning a new page*. United States Institute of Peace, (33), p.2.

²² Chalcraft, J. (2009), *The Invisible Cage, Syrian migrant workers in Lebanon*, Stanford University Press, 2009, p. 136.

²³ The Cedar Revolution refers to the month long demonstration for 'independence' following the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, culminating in a massive anti Syria demonstration on March 14, 2005. The name of Cedar Revolution is said to be invented by American officials instead of the Lebanese name of 'Intifada al Istiqlal' (Independence Uprising) as friendlier alternative for the Western audience, *Now Lebanon, the Cedar Revolution*.

²⁴ Syria withdraws from Lebanon. (2005, 4 26) *BBC News*.

never completely ceased²⁵ and are considered to shape the interdependent relationship between the countries up till now.²⁶ In fact, powerful local allies of the Syrian regime have majority at present in the Lebanese parliament. Therefore, in addition to the longstanding treaties between the two countries, the close relations between the Syrian regime and the Lebanese government emanating from the majority deeply affect its action of effectively protecting Syrian refugees.

3.4 Lebanese-Syrian security treaties

Syria's special status in Lebanon became official with the *Syria-Lebanon Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination* signed on May 20, 1991, which comprised a set of agreements for the "effective Integration of the two Countries".²⁷ This cooperative military and civil defense framework is another aspect of the current interdependent relation between Syria and Lebanon. Critics have long argued that these agreements "deny the sovereignty of Lebanon".²⁸

The current Lebanese Mikati government has promoted a disassociation policy regarding the Syrian conflict. This means that Lebanon officially refrains from participating in any international sanctions or condemnations against the Syrian regime, referring to all problems occurring in its neighboring country as 'internal matters'. This policy aims to prevent a confrontation with the Assad government, or any spillover of the Syrian conflict into Lebanon²⁹.

Yet, the crisis in Syria, in addition to the influx of the Syrian refugees into Lebanon, has set in motion forces that question the viability of the 1991 Agreement.³⁰ Strong symptoms of the official position of the Lebanese government have been signaled in highly public forums: first, its "decision to disassociate itself from a U.N. Security Council statement condemning violence in Syria,"³¹ and second, its vote "against Syria's suspension from the Arab League,"³² refugees.

3.5 Syrian migration to Lebanon

²⁵ Yacoubian, M. (2010). *Lebanon's evolving relationship with Syria: Back to the future or turning a new page*. United States Institute of Peace, (33). See also Dailey, K. . UN Verifies Syrian Withdrawal from Lebanon (2005, 5 24) *Daily Star* and Naufal H. (2011). [La Situation des réfugiés travailleurs Syriens au Liban suite aux soulèvements populaires en Syrie](#), p.5.

²⁶ Chalcraft, J. (2009), *The Invisible Cage, Syrian migrant workers in Lebanon*, Stanford University Press, p. 16.

²⁷ Harris, W. (2009), Lebanese Democracy: Battered, Flawed, and Unmatched in the Arab World, Lebanon Renaissance Foundation. p. 12.

²⁸ Naufal, H. (2011). [La Situation des réfugiés travailleurs Syriens au Liban suite aux soulèvements populaires en Syrie](#), p. 5. See also Winbo, A. & Hjort, R. (2004). *Is Lebanon under Syrian hegemony: A historical research of the Lebanese-Syrian relations as portrayed in the post Lebanese civil war bilateral treaties*. Ekonomiska Institutionen, Linköpings Universitet, Statsvetenskap.

²⁹ Lebanon's PM prefers to disassociate with Syria, (2012, 1 29) *The National (Abdu Dhabi)*.

³⁰ United Nations, Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination between the Syrian Arab Republic and the Lebanese Republic, 1991, 157, vol. 1675, 1-28932.

³¹ Lebanon's U.N. vote on Syria ignites Debate, (2011, 8 5) *Daily Star*.

³² LBC Local News, Zahra: Lebanon's position in the Arab League a black point on its record, (2011, 11 15).

Since its independence in 1943, Lebanon has experienced several migration inflows of Syrians to its territory. The free movement of goods and persons between the two countries dates back to the establishment of both nation-states in the 1940s when Lebanon needed cheap labor and Syria needed a neighboring job market that allowed them entry and return.³³ During its economic boom of the 1950s and the 1960s, Lebanon became a routine source of employment for Syrian laborers. Interrupted during the war years, the routine returned during the post-war reconstruction period in the 1990s, when the Syrian work force in Lebanon peaked at an estimated of 600-700 thousand,³⁴ falling to 200-400 thousand by the year 2000.³⁵

The geographic proximity and the longstanding migration made Lebanon and Syria economically interdependent³⁶ and paved the way for many Syrian refugees to follow preexisting routes to Lebanon in 2011 and 2012.

3.6 Lebanon's current political discourse regarding the Syrian conflict

Contrary to most of Syria's neighboring countries, Lebanon has recently vowed to remain neutral in regard to Syria's 'domestic crisis'. Lebanon's response to the Syrian conflict was stalled by a five-month political vacuum, which resulted from the collapse of Lebanon's national unity government following the resignation of the ministers of the March 8 bloc on January 11, 2011.³⁷ The March 8 bloc supports the strategic alliance with Syria and is opposed by the March 14 bloc,³⁸ which supports the Syrian opposition and is against the Assad regime.

The Lebanese policy of disassociation has been defended and promoted by Lebanese Prime Minister Mikati, who claims that the bilateral treaties and agreements between the two countries forbid Lebanese interference in Syria's internal matters. The government is trying to maneuver through the entanglement of the Syrian-Lebanese relations, showing great contradictions in rhetoric and action. For example, in February 2012, Prime Minister Mikati stated "We disassociate ourselves politically, but we don't disassociate from the needs of our Syrian brethren and our humanity."³⁹ However, by the end of April, Mikati was declaring that

³³ Chalcraft, J. (2006). *Syrian migrant workers in Lebanon: The limits of transnational integration, communitarian solidarity, and popular agency*. Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute, (26), p.1.

³⁴ Baldwin Edwards, M. (2005). [*A Regional Study Prepared for the Global Commission on International Migration*](#). Research Institute for Urban Environment and Human Resources, Panteion University, Athens, Greece, p. 10.

³⁵ Chalcraft, J. (2009). *The Invisible Cage, Syrian migrant workers in Lebanon*, Stanford University Press, p. 148.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 55.

³⁷ Government collapses, (2011, 1 12) *Now Lebanon*. March 8 refers to popular demonstrations held on March 8, 2005 in favor of the Syrian regime and Syrian influence in Lebanon. The March 8 bloc is a Lebanese alliance coalition of mostly Shiite Muslim and Syrian-backed parties led by Hezbollah and include Nabih Berri's Amal Movement, Suleiman T. Frangieh Marada Movement, and Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement.

³⁸ March 14 is named after an anti-Syrian rally held on that date and is composed of anti-Syrian and anti-Hezbollah's arms. It is formed mainly of the Sunni Al Mustaqbal (Future) Movement led by former Prime Minister Saad Hariri and Christian Lebanese Forces lead by Samir Geagea as well as others with similar political views.

³⁹ Mikati lauds disassociation policy, promises aid to Syrian refugees. (2012, 2 28) *Daily Star*.

the assistance to Syrian refugees can't come "at the expense of Lebanon's security."⁴⁰ With the inconsistencies in the dissociation that is supposed to cover the relation between Lebanon, the Syrian government and its opposition, the Lebanese government finds itself in a delicate balancing game. It also threatens to endanger its relationship with the international community (especially the UN) and the rest of the Middle Eastern countries. Mikati publically expressed this dilemma stating "taking a position [against Syria] would hurt our geopolitical interests, while being against Arabs would force us to lose in several ways."⁴¹

IV. PUSH AND PULL FACTORS OF THE SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS⁴²

4.1 The Syrian uprising

Following the suppression by Syrian State forces of peaceful protests in the Syrian southern city of Dar'a in March 2011, civilian marches in support of the residents of Dar'a erupted in various cities in the country. In April 2011 the Syrian armed forces undertook their first wide-scale military operation in Dar'a. Protests intensified, and the violent repression by Syria's military forces led to counterblows by oppositional forces. On March 27, 2012 the United Nations (UN) estimated that more than 9,000 Syrians had been killed since March 2011.⁴³ Thousands are also reported to have been detained, tortured and ill-treated. The Syria cities of Homs, Hama and Dar'a reportedly suffered the highest number of casualties.

In all the host countries into which the Syrian refugees are fleeing, a direct causal relation can be drawn between events in Syria and refugee flows. Lebanon, for instance,⁴⁴ received enormous flows of Syrian refugees following a security crackdown in the neighboring town of Tall Kalakh in April 2011⁴⁵ and a heavy fighting in the city of Homs in March 2012.⁴⁶

4.2 The regional Syrian refugee crisis

The United Nations estimates that the Syrian conflict has so far resulted in the displacement of one million Syrians inside Syria⁴⁷ and the flight of 70,000 Syrian refugees and third country nationals into neighboring countries.⁴⁸ UNHCR predicts the regional refugee flow will increase

⁴⁰ Mikati: Assistance to Syrian refugees can't come at the expense of Lebanon's security.(2012, 4 29) *Naharnet*

⁴¹ Mikati lauds disassociation policy, promises aid to Syrian refugees. (2012, 2 28) *Daily Star*.

⁴² See the timeline, with a chronological overview of Syrian Refugees of push (Syrian conflict) and pull (Syrian refugee flows to Lebanon) factors, April 2011-April 2012.

⁴³ UN raises Syrian death toll estimate to more than 9,000, (2012, 3 27) *Reuters*.

⁴⁴ Les troubles en Syrie à une jet de pierre du Liban. (2011, 4 29) *L'Orient le Jour*.

⁴⁵ The Syrian uprising's refugees. (2011, 4 30) *Now Lebanon*.

⁴⁶ As Syria bleeds, neighbors brace for refugees, (2012, 2 10) *Reuters*. See also Homs Siege drives 2,000 Syrians to Lebanon, (2012, 3 5) *Daily Star*.

⁴⁷ One million people displaced in Syria: UN Chief. (2012, 4 15) *Al Arabiya News*.

⁴⁸ Syria Regional Response Plan, (2012, 3) *UNHCR*.

to 100,000 in the coming months.⁴⁹ The UNHCR map below shows major Syrian refugee flows to neighboring countries as of May 2012.

Regionally, Lebanon is the only host country in which no official refugee locations or camps have been established for the Syrian refugees. The complex relations of Lebanon with Syria on the economic and political levels are considered ground for the unique position of Lebanon as host country of Syrian refugees.⁵⁰

V. LEBANON'S RESPONSE TO SYRIAN REFUGEES

5.1 Identification of Syrian refugees in Lebanon

Lebanon has been receiving increasing numbers of refugees from Syria since April 2011 until the writing of this report. UNHCR has registered up to 15,074 refugees in northern Lebanon, where another 11,000 refugees 'are receiving aid but are not registered yet'.⁵¹ Furthermore, UNHCR has been unable to register the estimated 3,000 Syrian refugees in Tripoli and 8,500 refugees in the Bekaa.⁵² UNHCR conducts joint registration with the HRC in the north and with local authorities, such as municipalities and Dar ul Fatwa in the Bekaa Valley. Recently, the registration has been delayed because the security situation in the north has deteriorated since the end of May. UNHCR and implementing partners have sponsored public awareness programs to encourage Syrian refugees to register.⁵³ In northern Lebanon, most Syrian refugees originate from the area of Homs and to a lesser extent Hama, according to the UNHCR.⁵⁴ A small number of Syrian refugees (approximately 1,500) harboring in Beirut are receiving aid from the UNHCR in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs.⁵⁵ More than two-thirds of the registered refugees are women and children. On average, the refugees are young: almost half of registered refugees are under 18 years of age.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Syria Regional Refugee Response Update, (2012, 4 26) and update no 5, (2012, 5 16), *UNHCR*. See also, UN and partners seek 84 \$ to help Syrian refugees, (2012, 3 23) *UNHCR News Stories*.

⁵⁰ Schuman R. (2012), [After Libya, Syria: Towards a New Crisis on the Border of Europe?](#), Center for Advanced Studies, European University Institute.

⁵¹ Syria Regional Refugee Response Update, (2012, 4 26) and update no 5, (2012, 5 16), *UNHCR*.

⁵² Registration of Syrians in Lebanon, (2012, 4) and Syrian Regional Response Update, (2012, 4 26) *UNHCR*.

⁵³ UNHCR Assistant Protection Officer and Public Information Associate, Beirut (2012, 6 6.). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

⁵⁴ Registration of Syrians in Lebanon, (2012, 4) *UNHCR*.

⁵⁵ Syria Regional Response Plan, (2012, 3) *UNHCR*.

⁵⁶ Syria Regional Refugee Response Update, (2012, 4 26) and update no 5, (2012, 5 16), *UNHCR*.

Refugees stated they mainly fled for security concerns and most reported that they had never been in Lebanon before.⁵⁷ Other sources, interviewed in the field, contradict this claim, saying that many Syrians receiving assistance as 'refugees' have actually been residing in Lebanon before the crisis started.⁵⁸ It is true that before the crisis there was a significant number of Syrians residing and working in Lebanon, and they may have an incentive to stay in Lebanon while the violence in Syria continues. Syrian migration to Lebanon is ongoing, and as the struggle between the Syrian regime and the opposition becomes more violent, one can expect even greater outflows of refugees. Still, in the first year of the Syrian rebellion, the number of Syrian labor migrants continued to outweigh, by a considerable amount, the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.⁵⁹ However, these flows are entangled: some Syrian migrant workers, who used to work and stay in Lebanon without their families, are now asking their families to join them in Lebanon. Most Syrian refugee families still have one or more family members remaining in Syria, in most cases to protect the families' property.⁶⁰ In general, the traditional seasonal influx of Syrians to North Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley has changed quantitatively (an important increase) and demographically (with women and children outnumbering single men).⁶¹ Furthermore, a number of Syrian refugees seeking refuge in Lebanon hold Lebanese citizenship, acquired following the 1994 naturalization decree.⁶² As holders of Lebanese passports, these dual citizens can claim their rights not only as refugees, but also as Lebanese citizens and be eligible for government assistance and care.

5.1.1 North Lebanon

The reporting on the number of Syrians residing in Lebanon is highly unreliable due to poor border control, an unclear administration system regarding Syrians entering and leaving Lebanon, and inaccuracies and ambiguities in the figures published by Lebanese General Security.⁶³ Furthermore, speculation of the number of Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon is profoundly influenced by political interests.

⁵⁷ Outcome of questionnaire among Syrian refugees shows that in most cases, a family member was working or living in Lebanon before, which was the main reference for others to come. Syrian refugees in Wadi Khaled and Bekaa, (2012, 4 28; 2012, 5 2), Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

⁵⁸ Moukhtar from Al Hishe Village (2012, 4 29). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview]. Syrian migrants who have already been present on Lebanese territory prior to the outbreak of the Syrian uprising and resulting violence can be considered refugees "sur place" according to S. Khalaf, Adjunct Professor Center for Migration and Refugee Studies (CMRS), American University of Cairo, (2012, 5 29) [Via Email].

⁵⁹ Longueness, E., Director of the Department of Modern Studies, Institute Français du Proche-Orient (IFPO), (2012, 5 16). Interview by S. Menhem.

⁶⁰ Syrian refugees in Deir Ammar (2012, 4 28). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview]. Similar data obtained during interviews with Syrian refugees in Wadi Khaled, (2012, 4 28). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

⁶¹ Future Movement Project Manager in Taanayel (2012, 5 2). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

⁶² Syrian family in Wadi Khaled (2011 6). Interview by G. Hourani [Personal Interview]. See also Refugees flee Syria unrest into Lebanon, (2011, 7 17) *Daily Star*.

⁶³ Chalcraft, J. (2009). *The Invisible Cage, Syrian migrant workers in Lebanon*, Stanford University Press, p. 146-147.

Geographic proximity has led to family relations formation including inter-marriages and cross-border trades. These multi-layered connections have facilitated the influx of refugees into Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon from Syria.

The exodus of Syrian refugees since April 2011 followed these informal patent routes and family and trade connections and enabled many Syrians to take shelter with relatives or acquaintances in Lebanon. This is one of the reasons that this region has received a high influx of Syrian refugees from the same area, i.e. the Homs and Hama Governorates. Syrian refugees staying in Wadi Khaled or Tripoli state that they are acquainted with other Syrian refugee families as their neighbors from Homs.⁶⁴ According to a relief worker in the region, 80% of the Syrian refugees are family or clan related.⁶⁵ A local mukhtar of a village hosting Syrian refugees in Wadi Khaled refers to Syrian refugees as 'guests' because of the close kinfolk relations; only in rare cases, when Syrian refugees come from Homs or Idlib, does he refer to them as 'refugees'.⁶⁶

North Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley are both known for their poor infrastructure and limited local economy.⁶⁷ Social workers fear that the capacity of Lebanese families to assist their Syrian refugee 'guests' is eroding, and that soon the refugees will be under pressure to leave.⁶⁸

At first, over the border mobility amongst refugees was high and many refugee men used to return to Syria to participate in the Friday's demonstrations and/or to protect their property. However, with the militarized resistance, the increasing violent response of the Syrian army and the sealing of borders, refugee mobility has deceased and refugees don't return to Syria so often anymore since mid-November 2011.⁶⁹

Refugee and aid workers have confirmed that main reasons for seeking refuge in northern Lebanon are security and protection. Many Syrian refugees have expressed their intention to return to Syria once the security situation improves. Others claim to be committed to the fall of Assad, although these responses are often registered in the presence of Future Movement (Tayyar Al Mustakbal) officials.⁷⁰ As the situation in Syria becomes ever more violent, the economic landscape has deteriorated, in a spiral that adds economic factors to the political and

⁶⁴ Syrian refugee families in Deir Ammar, Tripoli (2012, 4 28). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

⁶⁵ Senior Relief Worker, Beirut (2012, 4 26). Interview by S. Van Vliet and M. Sislian [Personal Interview].

⁶⁶ Moukhtar from Al Hishe Village (2012, 4 29). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

⁶⁷ Syria Regional Support Plan, (2012, 3), p. 41, *UNHCR*.

⁶⁸ Syrian refugees face housing shortage,(2012, 5 5), *Daily Star*.

⁶⁹ Increased insecurity and the militarized resistance with even a harsher response from the Syrian regime, made people decide not to go back anymore.' Senior Relief worker, Beirut, (2012, 4 26). Interview by S. Van Vliet and M. Sislian [Personal Interview].

⁷⁰ Interviews and observations, Deir Ammar and Wadi Khaled (2012, 4 28). Interview by S. Van Vliet and W. Mehanna. The Future Movement (Tayyar Al Mustakbal) was founded by the late Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and is mostly formed of Sunni Lebanese residents and emigrants. The Movement has one of the largest blocks in the Lebanese parliament.

security motives that drive the refugees. In the words of a local mukhtar in Wadi Khaled: "The displaced would say: I don't want to go back, there is no security and there is no work, from where shall I eat?"⁷¹

Syrian refugees have stated that the lack of basic necessities, like baby milk, gasoline and drinking water in Homs has obliged families with babies to seek assistance in Lebanon.⁷² Sources have noted that a black market in assistance goods has emerged, as many Syrian refugees exchange their received assistance goods for cash. Given the gaps in the administration of assistance, it is said that many Syrian workers who have been residing in Lebanon before the crisis take advantage of the system by receiving assistance and returning to Syria on the same day.⁷³ These rumors, be they truth or false, have resulted in complaints about Syrian refugees that they constantly deny receiving any assistance: "you give him the east and he asks you where the rest is."⁷⁴

⁷¹Mukhtar from al Hisheh Village, Wadi Khaled, interviewed by Suzan Menhem, (2012, 4 29).

⁷² Syrian refugees, Deir Ammar, Tripoli, interviewed by Sam van Vliet, April 28, 2012.

⁷³ Mukhtar from al Hisheh Village, Wadi Khaled, interviewed by Suzan Menhem, (2012, 4 29). Similar statements have been obtained in the Bekaa Valley by G. Hourani, (2012, 5).

⁷⁴ Moukhtar from Al Hishe Village (2012, 4 29). Interview by S Menhem [Personal Interview].



Lebanon

As of March 2012

FOB
Field Operations and
Geographic Support Section

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Mediterranean Sea



Figure 1: Syrian Refugee Response Operation, UNHCR Regional Refugee Response, March 2012

5.1.2 The Bekaa Valley

Most of the Syrian refugees in the Bekaa originate from Homs or villages in Damascus Governorate, located near the Lebanese border. There is a trend among Syrian refugees who enter Lebanon through the Wadi Khaled area to move to the southeastern Bekaa Valley,⁷⁵ where there are Sunni co-religionists.⁷⁶ According to a Future Movement member, the Syrians in the Bekaa were marginalized even before the Syrian crisis.⁷⁷

Contacting Syrian refugees in the Bekaa is very difficult. Syrian refugees categorically refuse to speak to anyone, to be interviewed or to be photo- or video graphed. They will not even release information to Lebanese General Security for fear that the information will be passed to Syrian intelligence, and they or their families will be targeted.⁷⁸ Their freedom of movement is more restricted in the Bekaa Valley due to the presence of Syrian sympathizers.⁷⁹ The Syrian refugees thus end up in limited Sunni enclaves; many Lebanese families even hide the fact that they host Syrian refugees.⁸⁰

Since neither the Lebanese High Relief Committee (HRC) nor the UNHCR are mandated to operate in the Bekaa (UNHCR didn't have a field office in the Bekaa until March, 2012⁸¹), the Future Movement's NGOs has stepped in to assist the Syrian refugees.⁸² Future Movement officials were very protective of Syrian refugees, preventing our team from speaking to them when they could, explaining that the refugees are afraid of talking to strangers.⁸³ Given the violent situation in Syria, refugees show a lot of fear in releasing information on their identity, both in Wadi Khaled and the Bekaa. Many Syrian refugees we were able to contact claimed to trust the Future Movement only, and would only speak in the presence of Future Movement activists.

5.2 Overview of actors involved in Syrian refugee assistance

The framework of actors involved in humanitarian relief programs for Syrian refugees is complex. A field visit by the Islamic Relief to Lebanon and Jordan concerning assistance to Syrian refugees concluded that "The humanitarian situation relating to the Syrian Refugees in [...] Lebanon is as confusing and ambiguous as the political situation in Syria. Most of the

⁷⁵ UNHCR Assistant Protection Officer and Public Information Associate, Beirut (2012, 6 6). Interview by S. Van Vliet, [Personal Interview].

⁷⁶ Mukhtar of Saadnayel, (2012, 5 2). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

⁷⁷ Project Manager Future Movement in Taanayel, Bekaa, (2012, 5 2). Interviewed by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

⁷⁸ Mayors and local residence in the Middle Region of the Bekaa Valley who wish to be remain anonymous, (2012, 5 2). Interview by G. Hourani [Phone interviews].

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ HRC warns of halt to Syrian refugee aid, (2012, 3 17) *Daily Star*.

⁸² Field visit observations in Bekaa Valley, (2012, 5 2). Observations conducted by M. Abi Adam, W. Mehanna and S. Menhem.

⁸³ Field visit observations in Bekaa Valley, (2012, 5 2). Observations made by W. Mehanna.

information obtained about the Syrian refugees in the region is based on speculation and guesses, the same regarding plans and future possible scenarios of a [...] humanitarian response. This is due to the sensitivity of the political situation in both countries relating to Syria and the uncertainty over how the situation in Syria is likely to develop.⁸⁴

In March 2011, the Lebanese government formed a tripartite committee as the main umbrella under which aid to the Syrian refugees would be undertaken, headed by the Lebanese High Relief Commission (HRC) in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).⁸⁵ This tripartite committee started working 'under the auspices of the United Nations', reflecting the guidance of the Lebanese Minister of Social Affairs Salem Sayegh who stated: "Working under the UN would be discrete and more effective in this case."⁸⁶

UNHCR currently intervenes in accordance with its international mandate in protecting and assisting refugees. According to a UNHCR protection officer,⁸⁷ the UN agency works on an 'ad hoc basis' with the Lebanese authorities, because the 2003 MOU with the Lebanese government is outdated and does not reflect the issue of the Syrian refugees.

The focus on assistance programs for refugees in the small area of Wadi Khaled, instead of the urban areas of Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon, or locations in the Bekaa Valley, has been criticized.⁸⁸ UNHCR coordinates regular inter-agency meetings in the north, the Bekaa and in Beirut, including 'all agencies' involved in humanitarian assistance programs.⁸⁹

Parallel to the UN coordinated refugee protection framework mentioned above, a range of local NGOs and charity organizations with private funds are also providing assistance to Syrian refugees in different areas of Lebanon. While charity assistance and welfare has a long history in Islamic tradition, in Lebanon it is considered to be "an integral component of ethnic and sectarian politics."⁹⁰ The importance of social welfare is particularly significant when states fail to provide basic public goods and social services.⁹¹ Moreover, with the HRC limited by financial constraints and political sensitivity and the UNHCR not having access to certain areas,

⁸⁴ Islamic Relief (2012), *Field Mission Visit to Lebanon and Jordan to assess the humanitarian situation as a result of conflict in Syria*.

⁸⁵ Abu Faour: High Relief committee responsible for Syrian refugees. (2011, 10 27) *Now Lebanon*.

⁸⁶ Syrian refugees begin to trickle back across the border, (2011, 3 31) *Daily Star*.

⁸⁷ UNHCR Assistant Protection Officer and Public Information Associate, Beirut (2012, 6 6). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

⁸⁸ Syrian refugees in Lebanon, preparing for the worst, (2012, 2) *Refugees International*.

⁸⁹ Syria Regional Response Plan, (2012, 3) *UNHCR*.

⁹⁰ Camment, M. & Sukriti, I. (2010). *Bricks and Mortar Clientelism: The political geography of Welfare in Lebanon*. World Politics 62 no. 3, p. 381.

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 381.

the gap in aid is being filled by Islamic charities,⁹² labeled as the “primary provider for Syrian refugees” in Lebanon.⁹³

Many of the non-UN regulated welfare programs for Syrian refugees in Tripoli, the Akkar region and the Bekaa are coordinated by the Future Movement, a political organization with a predominantly Sunni support base.⁹⁴ Following the fact that most of the Syrian refugees are Sunni, and the Future Movement supports the Syrian revolution,⁹⁵ their welfare programs are considered to reflect a strategy of 'political mobilization'.⁹⁶

A coalition of 30 Islamic charities is coordinating the assistance to Syrian refugees,⁹⁷ of which some affiliated actors, such as the Lebanese Zakat Fund of Dar el Fatwa (the Higher Islamic Council) and al Azhar mosque in Majdel-Anjar⁹⁸ work in close cooperation with the Future Movement. These charities have been receiving financial support from Gulf countries, mainly Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar, distributed through Future Movement networks.⁹⁹ Representatives of many Islamic charities involved in humanitarian assistance are also politically active in support of the Syrian uprising, thereby mixing humanitarian aid and political motivation.¹⁰⁰

No official governmental body seems to regulate these welfare activities. Charity spokesmen have spoken out against the lack of involvement by the Lebanese authorities and the UNHCR in places like Tripoli.¹⁰¹ A UNHCR officer stated that the UNHCR has attempted to include all assistance providers in coordination meetings. However, the UNHCR prefers to cooperate with official international organizations.¹⁰² Local residents in Wadi Khaled note a lack

⁹² Syrian refugees face housing shortage (2012, 5 5) *Daily Star*.

⁹³ Charities to establish refugee camps if the state won't act (2012, 4 3) *Daily Star*.

⁹⁴ 'If you want to speak to a Syrian refugee, you first have to go to the Future Movement; they handle all the areas of- and the assistance to- the refugees', was a common referral from local residents, Wadi Khaled, Tripoli and the Bekaa Valley (2012, 4 28; 2012, 5 2). Observation made by S. Menhem, M. Abi Adam, S. Van Vliet.

⁹⁵ The Future Movement has organized many rallies in support of the Syrian uprising. See for example Ex-PM reassert solidarity with Syrian revolt in Sunday Speech (2012, 5 1) *Daily Star*.

⁹⁶ For an analysis of strategies of political mobilization by sectarian parties through welfare, see Camment, M. & Sukriti, I. (2010). *Bricks and Mortar Clientelism: The political geography of Welfare in Lebanon*. World Politics 62 no. 3, p. 415.

⁹⁷ Charity leader says HRC admits errors in Syrian refugee dealings,(2012, 3 30) *Daily Star*.

⁹⁸ Al Azhar refers to the Al Azhar mosque in Majdel-Anjar in the Bekaa which acts as central point of aid distribution from Islamic charities in the Bekaa area. Information obtained by G. Hourani, (2012, 5 2).

⁹⁹ Information gathered during field visit to Tripoli, (2012, 4 28). See also Kuwait, Lebanon jointly offer aid to Syrian refugees, (2012, 3 27) *Kuwait News Agency*.

¹⁰⁰ Some local charity offices visited show the Syrian Revolution Flag and pictures of tortured Syrian activists, Tripoli (2012, 4 28). Observation made by S. Van Vliet. See also, Loose network provides for thousands of refugees,(2012, 3 14) *Daily Star*.

¹⁰¹ Similar criticism has been heard from the representative of 30 Islamic charities involved in Syrian refugee assistance in : Charity leader says HRC admits errors in Syrian refugee dealings,(2012, 3 30).

¹⁰² UNHCR Assistant Protection Officer and Public Information Associate, Beirut (2012, 6 6). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

of coordination between the different agencies involved in assistance providing to the Syrian refugees and even mention that there exist 'a kind of competition' between these agencies.¹⁰³ With the increasing funds from the Gulf countries arriving in the area, relief workers have noticed duplication of assistance.¹⁰⁴

The Coalition of Islamic Charities has evolved as an influential body pressing the Lebanese government to increase aid efforts and acting as a parallel assistance network besides the tripartite committee of the Lebanese MoSA, HRC and UNHCR.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, Syrian refugees in Tripoli seem to be unaware or critical of the assistance provided by the UNHCR or related international organizations (the UNHCR operates a field office in Kobayat, in the Northern Akkar region, and not in Tripoli: see Figure 2). In interviews, refugees claim to rely on food, shelter, medical care and education provided by charities rather than international organizations.¹⁰⁶ A similar situation has been described by the mukhtar of Saadnayel, Bekaa, stating that "we don't receive anything from the Lebanese state."¹⁰⁷

Reports also show refugees complaining about the uncertainty of 'ad hoc donations from generous individuals and mainly (Islamist) charitable organizations'; the evident lack of institutional sustainability and leaves Syrian refugees uncertain about the type of assistance they can rely on in the near future.¹⁰⁸ A Human Rights Watch researcher has noted that in areas under a centralized UNHCR/HCR coordination, refugee operations have been more successful than in areas where refugees had to rely on local coordinating partners: "In Saadnayel, we have heard more complaints from refugees saying that they have registered with the local municipality or with Al Azhar mosque in Majdel-Anjar, but only received assistance twice. Or the manner of distribution is in an uncoordinated and ad hoc manner, and also very humiliating. This assistance doesn't meet their needs; both in terms of the types of assistance and the way they receive it. There are a lot of gaps also in this assistance."¹⁰⁹ A local mukhtar in Wadi Khaled also made this point from a different perspective. According to him, Syrian refugees "are getting many different types of assistance, sometimes in the same day."¹¹⁰

Furthermore, a senior relief worker has expressed similar complaints about unregulated refugee assistance by local charities:

¹⁰³ Mukhtar of Al-Hisheh in Wadi Khaled, (2012, 4 29). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

¹⁰⁴ Senior Relief Worker, Beirut, (2012, 4 26). Interview by M. Sislian and S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

¹⁰⁵ HRC: Authorities to seek public housing for Syrian refugees, (2012, 3 28); Syrian refugees face housing shortage (2012, 5 5) *Daily Star*.

¹⁰⁶ Syrian refugees in Deir Ammar, Tripoli (2012, 4 28). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

¹⁰⁷ Mukhtar of Saadnayel, (2012, 5 2). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

¹⁰⁸ Syria Street (2012, 4 19) *Al Jazeera*; Syrian refugees in Deir Ammar Tripoli, (2012, 4 28). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

¹⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch Researcher in Beirut, (2012, 4 2). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

¹¹⁰ Mukhtar of al Hisheh village in Wadi Khaled, (2012, 4 28). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

"Gulf money has many political motives behind their assistance. When that kind of money comes in, mostly cash, there is no adherence to international standard procedures. This means that assistance should be provided following assessment of gaps, monitoring, keeping track of records, and coordination with UNHCR and HRC, in order to avoid duplication of assistance."¹¹¹

Complaints of lack of coordination and clientelism have also been observed on the governmental level. An HRC spokesperson admitted that refugee issues are politically contentious,¹¹² and NGO workers notice that the response from Lebanese authorities regarding assistance to Syrian refugees varies with the political sensitivities and attitudes to the Syrian regime and the ethnosectarian interests of the government actors. A senior relief worker indicated that "Initially, the government would not release the money for refugees, because the government is Shia and those were Sunnis. It was a huge issue. Even now, the money is allocated but not being released. There was one HRC person at a coordination meeting actually saying that money would not be released because the refugees are Sunni. I could not believe that he said that."¹¹³

Local municipal mayors in the Wadi Khaled have complained that the Lebanese government doesn't provide assistance to Syrian refugees because "they are close to the Assad regime".¹¹⁴

Following the enormous influx of Syrian refugees that have fled since the more violent phase of the revolt began in March 2012, the HRC has started negotiations with foreign donors to assist Syrian refugees and has taken a more responsible approach in response to requests by local agencies to coordinate the flow of international aid.¹¹⁵ A senior relief worker stated that the UNHCR and major donors could not respond to the Syrian refugee crisis until December 2011 because the Lebanese government refused to declare it an official emergency.

In March 2012, in coordination with the tripartite committee of the HRC and the MOSA, seven UN agencies, and 27 national and international NGOs and host governments, UNHCR launched a regional appeal for 84 million dollars to address Syrian refugee needs; 20% of the total amount was secured by April.¹¹⁶

5.3 Humanitarian assistance of Syrian refugees in Lebanon

According to the UNHCR, it and its implementing partners, the High Relief Commission (HRC) and local charities, are currently providing assistance to about 24,000 Syrian refugees, of whom

¹¹¹ Senior Relief Worker in Beirut, (2012, 4 26). Interview by M. Sislian and S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

¹¹² Response to Syrian Refugee Crisis in flux, (2012, 3 13) *Daily Star*.

¹¹³ Senior Relief Worker in Beirut, (2012, 4 26). Interview by M. Sislian and S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

¹¹⁴ Mayors of Wadi Khaled villages, (2012, 4 28). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

¹¹⁵ HRC: Authorities to seek public housing for Syrian Refugees, (2012, 3 28) *Daily Star*.

¹¹⁶ UNHCR warns of funding shortfall for operations to help Syrian Refugees, (2012, 4 20) *UNHCR*.

half are jointly registered by the UNHCR and HRC. Among the refugees, the level of basic need is high, and the impact on local hosting families is considerable.¹¹⁷ Many refugees complain about their deplorable living conditions and request more assistance in accommodation and household equipment.¹¹⁸ Refugees show more appreciation for local charities than the HCR or UNHCR, despite its earlier mentioned inherent disadvantages: "When we are sick or need anything, we don't get anything from UNHCR, that's why we turn to the organization we are with now."¹¹⁹

5.3.1 *Shelter*

Providing shelter for Syrian refugees in northern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley is proving to be the greatest challenge for Syrian refugees and aid agencies.¹²⁰ Most Syrian refugees residing in the country sides of Wadi Khaled or in the Bekaa Valley are staying with host Lebanese families in private homes or in school or municipality buildings. Syrian refugees in cities are often obliged to rent apartments, but the renting costs are subsidized in different ways.¹²¹ A senior relief worker testified that 80 percent of the Syrian refugees who stay with Lebanese host families share clan relations, while the 20 percent who have none stay in schools or empty shelters.¹²² Many buildings in Wadi Khaled hosting Syrian refugees are overcrowded, with 50 refugees under one roof in some cases.

Along with its partners, the UNHCR has been assessing 'appropriate shelter solutions', including renovation, rehabilitation and refurbishment of Lebanese houses to host Syrian refugees, upgrading certain public buildings to create 'collective shelters' for them, and the provision of temporary shelters for those who are without any other possibility of accommodation.¹²³ Despite these efforts, housings shortage has highly increased with the arrival of new Syrian refugees. On May 5, 2012, the Islamic Coalition of Charities made another urgent appeal to HRC to increase aid efforts, stating that there are not enough buildings left to accommodate Syrian refugees: "The [Lebanese] Higher Relief Committee is neither paying the cost of rent for families nor paying the cost of finding buildings for the families."¹²⁴

Rental prices have risen significantly following the scarcity of homes and the high demand of housing for the refugees. Relief workers have also expressed concern that the

¹¹⁷ Syria Regional Response Plan, (2012, 3) *UNHCR*.

¹¹⁸ Syrian refugee family in Wadi Khaled,(2012, 4 29). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

¹¹⁹ Syrian refugee family in Deir Ammar Tripoli, (2012, 4 28). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

¹²⁰ Syrian refugees face housing shortage, (2012, 5 5) *Daily Star*. Confirmed by Future Movement Project Manager in Taanayel, (2012, 5 2). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

¹²¹ Syrian refugee families in Wadi Khaled, Tripoli and the Bekaa, (2011, 6 ; 2012, 4 28; 2012 5 2). Information gathered by G. Hourani ,S. Menhem and S. Van Vliet [Personal Interviews].

¹²² Senior Relief Worker in Beirut, (2012, 4 26). Interview by M. Sislian and S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

¹²³ Syria Regional Response Plan, (2012, 3) *UNHCR* . See also, Lebanon Update, Support to Displaced Syrians, (2012, 4 20-27; 2012, 4 27- 2012, 5 4) *UNHCR*.

¹²⁴ Syrian refugees face housing shortage, (2012, 5 5) *Daily Star*.

hospitality of Lebanese host families is ending now the Syrian refugees create an increasing financial burden¹²⁵. UNHCR confirmed that the host communities accommodating Syrian refugees are 'tired and at the end of their capability after one year hosting Syrian refugees'.¹²⁶

The establishment of refugee camps is considered an option to house an influx of refugees and also to centralize aid efforts. However, the Lebanese government has so far opposed plans for Syrian refugee camps in northern Lebanon. Hezbollah stated in March that refugee camps would pose 'a threat to Lebanon's security and that of its neighbor'¹²⁷. UNHCR stated to prefer enabling Syrian refugees to stay with host families, but considers refugee camps as a 'last resort',¹²⁸ noting the negative experience of Palestinian refugee camps in the country.¹²⁹ Last April, the Coalition of Islamic charities announced to establish refugee camps if Lebanese authorities don't address the Syrian refugee housing problem.¹³⁰

5.3.2 Health

Primary health conditions are poor and education opportunities for Syrian refugees are limited.¹³¹ According to UNHCR, the HRC is providing food and secondary health care in northern Lebanon.¹³² Syrian refugees can access several specialized hospitals, sponsored by Islamic charities, in Tripoli to get free medical care.¹³³ In the Bekaa Valley, no healthcare is provided by the Lebanese government. and the Future Movement provides free medicines every 20 days and covers health care expenses through the Rafiq Hariri Foundation.¹³⁴ CARITAS has toured around Lebanese villages in the Bekaa hosting Syrian refugees with a mobile clinic to provide medical, health and nursing care.¹³⁵ Meanwhile, relief workers report that increased numbers of Syrians are accessing Palestinian medical services in Lebanon.¹³⁶

5.3.3 Education

Reports mention that many Syrian refugee children residing in urban areas in Lebanon are not attending schools, since Syrian families are unable to cover the school fees and additional costs.¹³⁷ Education to Syrian refugee children in Lebanon is said to be hampered by security

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ UNHCR Assistant Protection Officer and Public Information Associate, Beirut (2012, 6 6). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

¹²⁷ Hezbollah rejects Syrian Refugee Camps in Lebanon, (2012, 3 10) *Daily Star*.

¹²⁸ Response to Syrian refugee crisis in flux, (2012, 3 13) *Daily Star*.

¹²⁹ UNHCR Assistant Protection Officer and Public Information Associate, Beirut (2012, 6 6). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

¹³⁰ Charities to establish refugee camps if state won't act, (2012, 4 3) *Daily Star*.

¹³¹ Lebanon Update, (2012, 4 13) *UNHCR*.

¹³² Syria Regional Response Plan, (2012, 3) *UNHCR*.

¹³³ Mukhtar from al Hisheh Village in Wadi Khaled,(2012, 4 29). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

¹³⁴ Mukhtar of Saadnayel, (2012, 2 5). Interview by S. Menhem and Future Movement Project Manager in Taanayel,(2012, 5 2). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

¹³⁵ CARITAS Project Manager, Beirut, (2012, 4 26). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview.]

¹³⁶ Senior Relief Worker in Beirut, (2012, 4 26). Interview by M. Sislian and S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

¹³⁷ Children pay the price of Syria's conflict, (2012, 4 23) *The National*.

concerns. A 40 % drop out rate has been reported by Save the Children, related to the difference between Syrian and Lebanese school curricula and the fact that Syrian boys traditionally dropping out to pursue vocational trainings.¹³⁸ In the Bekaa, many Syrian refugee children are simply not attending schools.¹³⁹

No official decree has been made by the Lebanese authorities to allow Syrian refugee children to attend Lebanese public schools. Syrian refugees mention that the UNHCR and Save the Children have provided school materials, but provide no support for school fees.¹⁴⁰ Revision and remedial classes are provided by a local NGO, supported by UNICEF, for Syrian children in the Bekaa Valley.¹⁴¹

5.3.4 Cash or in kind assistance

Charities related to the coalition of Islamic Charities in northern Lebanon are providing cash or in kind assistance. A local mukhtar of a village in Wadi Khaled hosting many Syrian refugees estimated that 80 % of the aid comes from individuals, mainly Syrian businessmen, located in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey.¹⁴² This assistance is mostly provided in cash. Last year in August, on the occasion of Ramadan, each Syrian refugee family in Wadi Khaled is said to have received \$200 USD disbursed by one individual philanthropist.¹⁴³ Despite their gratitude for the assistance provided, Syrian refugees are worried about not knowing what kind of assistance or how much they will receive the next month.¹⁴⁴

5.4 Security Conditions affecting Syrian refugees in Lebanon

Security incidents in Lebanon, related to the Syrian conflict have left a perception of insecurity among Syrian refugees residing in the country. Security has especially deteriorated in the border areas in northern Lebanon and in the Middle Bekaa region. Given the close cooperation between Syrian and Lebanese military networks and the security agreements between the two countries continuing to be in effect, Syrian refugees express fear for their safety in Lebanon.

More direct security incidents along the Syrian-Lebanese borders, such as the death of a Lebanese camera man in Wadi Khaled and gunfire reaching Lebanese villages have led to security fears among Syrian refugees and their Lebanese host communities.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁸ Islamic Relief (2012), [*Field Mission Visit to Lebanon and Jordan to assess the humanitarian situation as a result of conflict in Syria.*](#)

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Syrian refugees in Wadi Khaled, (2012, 4 28). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

¹⁴¹ UNICEF (2012) , [*UNICEF Supports Syrian Refugees Seeking Safety in Lebanon*](#) *UNICEF supports Syrian refugees seeking safety in Lebanon.*

¹⁴² Mukhtar from al Hisheh Village in Wadi Khaled,(2012, 4 29). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

¹⁴³ Field visit observations in Bekaa Valley, (2012, 5 2). Observation made by M. Abi Adam.

¹⁴⁴ Syrian refugee family in Deir Ammar Tripoli, (2012, 4 28). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

¹⁴⁵ Lebanon Update, (2012, 4 13) *UNHCR*.

5.4.1 Legal protection of Syrian refugees in Lebanon

UNHCR officials have stated that Lebanese regulations allow Syrians to renew a 6 months visa with the Lebanese General Security once. After one year of stay in Lebanon, Syrians officially must return to Syria to be able to renew their Lebanese visa. In practice, many Syrian refugees are overstaying their visa because they fear returning to Syria. Despite assurances, UNHCR has been unable to agree on a temporary refugee status or agreement for Syrian refugees to renew their visa in Lebanon.¹⁴⁶

With the absence of a clear refugee protection framework in the country, Syrian refugees seem to have little basis on which to claim protection rights in the country and are officially considered as 'illegal immigrants'.¹⁴⁷

5.4.2 Non-Refoulement

Following the 2003 Memorandum between the UNHCR and the Lebanese government on the treatment on asylum seekers and refugees in the country¹⁴⁸, Lebanese authorities are supposed to notify the UNHCR about detention of asylum seekers and allow the UN refugee agency to conduct refugee status determination. The UNHCR reports that government officials have offered some assurances regarding protection, detention and deportation of Syrian refugees, but as of yet there is no public, official agreement on the issue.¹⁴⁹ However, there have been reports of Syrian refugees sent back to Syria.

Since the end of May, heavy fighting on the Syrian side of Lebanese northern border and rumors about agreements between Lebanon and Syria to stop illegal border crossings has created a climate of fear amongst Lebanese residents and Syrian refugees. Rumors are rife that the Lebanese will allow military interference by Syrian forces.¹⁵⁰ In the same period, the Human Rights Watch repeated its appeal to Lebanon to provide Syrian refugees "with at least temporary asylum, and above all refrain from detaining them or deporting them back to their country".¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ UNHCR Assistant Protection Officer and Public Information Associate, Beirut (2012, 6 6). Interview by S. van Vliet [Personal Interview].

¹⁴⁷ Nabil al Halabi, Human rights lawyer, President Lebanese Institution for Democracy and Human Rights, Beirut, (2012, 4 12) .Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

¹⁴⁸ Memorandum of Understanding between the Directorate of the General Security (Republic of Lebanon) and the Regional Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Concerning the processing of cases of asylum-seekers applying for refugee status with the UNHCR Office, (2003, 9 9).

¹⁴⁹ UNHCR Assistant Protection Officer and Public Information Associate, Beirut (2012 6 6). Interview by S.Van Vliet, [Personal Interview].

¹⁵⁰ Concern over border safety from Wadi Khaled figures,(2011, 5 25) *Daily Star*. See also Lebanon, Syria armies agree to halt illegal border crossings, (2011, 5 25) *Daily Star* and Border towns fearful of Syrian incursion as Lebanese troops redeploy, (2011, 5 28) *Daily Star*.

¹⁵¹ HRW: Lebanon Must Offer Syrians Asylum, Not Detention(2011, 5 20) *Now Lebanon*.

The UNHCR has confirmed that in the early phase of the Syrian refugee influx into Lebanon (March-May 2011), many were detained by Lebanese security forces on the charge of illegal entry. The UN refugee agency observed that the refugees have been released and that Lebanese authorities have adopted a 'laissez aller' policy approach to illegal entries of Syrian refugees to Lebanon. A UNHCR officer stated that the UN agency has received assurances that no Syrian refugee will be arrested, unless for committing serious crimes in violation of Lebanese law.¹⁵²

According to Syrian refugees and activists, the Syrian army has been mining the borders and trying to prevent minors from leaving the country since November 2011.¹⁵³ These statements have been confirmed by Human Rights Watch in March 2012.¹⁵⁴ During the same period, the borders between Syria and Lebanon were reportedly closed off, and neither the Syrian army nor the Lebanese armed forces were allowing any refugees to cross the borders in either direction.¹⁵⁵ Recently, HRW stated that Lebanon has met 'the minimum standards' in maintaining the borders open and adhering to non-refoulement, thereby abiding by international regulations.¹⁵⁶

5.4.3 Syrian-Lebanese intelligence cooperation on Syrian refugees

Many Syrian refugees, expressing the fear of being kidnapped or of raids by Lebanese security forces, refuse to register with the Lebanese Higher Relief Council, fearing the close relationship between Lebanese institutions and Syria's intelligence apparatus.¹⁵⁷ It is believed that Hezbollah is "helping and protecting the Syrian regime politically, economically and through intelligence".¹⁵⁸

In a recent move, the Lebanese Ministry of Interior (MoI) sent out a request to the mayors and municipalities in the Bekaa to provide lists of names and locations of Syrian refugees in their jurisdiction. Stories of kidnappings and the protracted strength of Syrian intelligence in Lebanon combined with the assumption that the current Lebanese government, with a prominent Hezbollah representation, remains close to Syria', have led to overall fear

¹⁵² UNHCR Assistant Protection Officer and Public Information Associate, Beirut (2012 6 6). Interview by S. Van Vliet, [Personal Interview].

¹⁵³ Syrian refugee family in Deir Ammar Tripoli, (2012, 4 28). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].. The border area is said to be de-mined by the Free Syrian Army in the beginning of 2012.

¹⁵⁴ Army Planting Banned Landmines, (2012, 3 13) *Human Rights Watch*.

¹⁵⁵ Borders shut down in face of refugees fleeing Syria, (2011, 5 20) *Daily Star*.

¹⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch Researcher in Beirut, (2012, 4 24). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

¹⁵⁷ Refugees from Syria on Edge in Lebanon, (2012, 2 22), *The New York Times*. Information confirmed during field visits in Wadi Khaled and the Bekaa Valley (2012, 4 28; 2012, 5 2) by M. Abi Adam, W. Mehanna, S. Menhem and S. Van Vliet [Personal Interviews].

¹⁵⁸ E. Hanna, Retired Lebanese General and Security Expert, Louaizé, (2012, 5 4). Interview by M. Sislian [Personal Interview].

among Syrian refugees in the country.¹⁵⁹ According to a Human Rights Watch researcher "The failure of the Lebanese government to make strong statements against this allows this fear to persist."¹⁶⁰

5.4.4 Border incursions by Syrian armed forces into Lebanon

Analysts argue that Syria intends to keep the Syrian-Lebanese border porous and dangerous in order to prevent it from becoming a passageway for sustaining the revolt in the country: "The Assad regime fears that if the crisis in Syria were to become even more violent and sectarian, outraged Sunnis next door would act in solidarity with their Syrian brethren to help undermine Mr. al Assad's rule".¹⁶¹

VI. IMPACT OF SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS ON LEBANON

Ever since the arrival in Lebanon of Syrians fleeing political unrest in their country, their presence has caused intense political controversy. Labeling of this new group is defined by political affiliation. Analysts criticize the Lebanese government for its 'reluctance to recognize the problem' of effectively protecting and assisting the Syrian refugees in Lebanon.¹⁶²

6.1 Political Impact

Various analysts have commented on effects of the Syrian conflict and particularly the Syrian refugee crisis to Lebanon's delicate political and economic stability.¹⁶³ At first, Lebanon received the Syrian refugees as victims of the Syrian conflict, but now they are becoming a 'political problem'¹⁶⁴: "In a country where Syrian refugees have lingered for a year in an uncertain welcome, living under a government partially sympathetic to the Syrian regime, the political baggage of housing refugees is enormous."¹⁶⁵

The division in Lebanese internal politics between March 8 (pro Syrian regime) and March 14 (pro Syrian opposition) reveals the close relationship between Syrian and Lebanese politics. The Syrian refugees in Lebanon, meanwhile, fear that Sunni-Shia tensions in the Bekaa Valley or Sunni-Alawi tensions in the North (Tripoli) will generate animosity among Lebanese host families on the ground. Therefore, Syria specialist Balanche argues that Syrian refugees in

¹⁵⁹ Syrian refugees in Lebanon recount terror, (2012, 3 5) *Associated Press*.

¹⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch Researcher in Beirut, (2012, 4 24). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

¹⁶¹ Syria finds it useful to have a fuzzy border with Lebanon, (2011, 5 19) *Daily Star*.

¹⁶² As Syria bleeds, neighbors brace for refugees,(2012, 2 10) *Reuters*.

¹⁶³ Syrian division reflected closely in Lebanon, (2012, 3 23) *BBC News*; Lebanon: In the shadow of the Syrian storm, (2012, 4 16) *Al Sharq al Awsat*; Syria Street,(2012, 4 19) *Al Jazeera*.

¹⁶⁴ F. Balanche, Director Research and Study Group for the Mediterranean and the Middle East (GRIMMO), Lyon,(2012, 5 7). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Via Email].

¹⁶⁵ Syrian refugees face housing shortage, (2012, 5 5) *Daily Star*.

Lebanon should be protected provided that they don't use Lebanon as a base against the regime of Bashar Assad.¹⁶⁶

Apart from the pro- or anti- Assad sentiments dividing Lebanese sectarian fractions and their stance regarding Syrian refugees, several issues have impact on the reception of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, whether in higher political circles and on the ground. First of all, there is the memory of Lebanese refugees who were welcomed by Syrian families during the civil war and the 2006 war, creating a sentiment that Lebanon should return the favor of hosting their neighbors temporarily. Host families in Wadi Khaled openly mentioned that they host Syrian refugees because at some point "they will do the same for us."¹⁶⁷

Secondly, the fact that Lebanon is hosting about half a million¹⁶⁸ (mostly Sunni) Palestinian refugees, which has contributed to the sectarian Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), results in a mixed response to (mostly Sunni) Syrian refugees. The international community has failed to solve the Palestinian refugee issue, leaving Lebanon to deal with the Palestinians as a de facto permanent reality. Lebanon wants to prevent a repetition of the Palestinian scenario which resulted in a 'state within a state' and will face difficulties in enforcing demilitarization of Syrian rebels groups in the country.¹⁶⁹ A British official reportedly stated: "The issue of Syrian refugees is not seen as a humanitarian problem in Lebanon. It's a confessional issue. To offer an organized, public and large-scale sanctuary for Syrian refugees, in the manner of the Turkish response, would be too much for the Shia and the Christians."¹⁷⁰

Many Lebanese are therefore reluctant to establish refugee camps, as this will generate a more permanent reality allowing Syrian refugees to reside in Lebanon as it did for the Palestinians. Likewise, the arrival of more Palestinians and Iraqis to Lebanon, as third country nationals fleeing from Syria, is considered a threat by the Lebanese. UNHCR has stated that it acknowledges this complex context of Lebanon in receiving Syrian refugees and the limited possibilities of the Lebanese authorities to provide refugee assistance.¹⁷¹

Finally, for many Lebanese, the traditional influence maintained and security provided by their powerful neighbor Syria is regarded as a *fait accompli*. Many fear the potential repercussions from hosting Syrian refugees and a possible spillover of sectarian conflict to

¹⁶⁶ F. Balanche, Director Research and Study Group for the Mediterranean and the Middle East (GRIMMO), Lyon,(2012, 5 7). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Via Email].

¹⁶⁷ Mukhtar from al Hisheh Village, Wadi Khaled, (2012, 4 29). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

¹⁶⁸ The actual number of Palestinian refugees is topic of continuous debate.

¹⁶⁹ F. Balanche, Director Research and Study Group for the Mediterranean and the Middle East (GRIMMO), Lyon,(2012, 5 7). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Via Email].

¹⁷⁰ Syria Street, (2012, 4 19) *Al Jazeera*

¹⁷¹ UNHCR Assistant Protection Officer and Public Information Associate, Beirut (2012 6 6). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

Lebanon. These internal divisions regarding the reception of Syrian refugees explain the government's official approach of political disassociation and limited humanitarian assistance.

6.2 Economic Impact

Another frustration among Lebanese communities is the competition Syrian refugees can provide in the Lebanese job market. The Lebanese economy needs Syrian workers and the movement of persons has continued throughout and after the Civil War in Lebanon.¹⁷² According to Nassib Ghobril, Syrian workers tend to perform labor-intensive jobs that are not filled by Lebanese; as such the influx of more Syrian workers will not affect the employment of Lebanese in various sectors of the economy.¹⁷³ Elisabeth Longuenesse from the French institute of the Near East (IFPO) in Beirut argues that the presence of refugees can result in ‘saturation of the labor market’, emphasizing that “Everything depends on the political reception and assistance provided by aid agencies for Refugees (UNHCR) or by the Lebanese state.”¹⁷⁴

Lebanese host communities fear that the arrival of more Syrian labor migrants, as well as third country nationals (Palestinians and Iraqis from Syria) can result in more competition and lower wages down. This fear has been expressed by Jean Pierre Katrib, a Lebanese strategic and political analyst:

"Based on what I know there are 100,000 refugees in Lebanon. 60-70,000 are middle to upper class Syrians who are well established and 30-40,000 are the ones who are in need of assistance. If the crisis in Syria prolongs, the 60-70,000 would generate well to our economy, but what I am worried about are the 30-40,000 to become 50-60,000 and generate sectarian tensions [...] as well as elevating problems of unemployment. If the government's stance towards them continues to be that of indifference, how can we absorb such an enormous number of refugees properly?"¹⁷⁵

6.3 Security Impact

The Syrian refugee crisis will have ramifications for Lebanese security as well as that of the wider region, especially if mistreatment of refugees occurs and Lebanese political parties try to

¹⁷² F. Balanche, Director Research and Study Group for the Mediterranean and the Middle East (GRIMMO), Lyon,(2012, 5 7). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Via Email].

¹⁷³ N. Ghobril, Chief Economist, Head of the Economic Research & Analysis Department, Byblos Bank Group, (2012.5.1) Interview by M. Sislian [Personal Interview].

¹⁷⁴ E. Longuenesse, Director of the Department of Modern Studies, Institute Français du Proche-Orient (IFPO), (2012, 5 16). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview].

¹⁷⁵ J.P. Katrib, Political and Strategic Analyst, Quantum, Beirut, (2012, 5 2). Interview by M. Sislian [Personal Interview].

use this issue for political gain.¹⁷⁶ Security treaties between Syria and Lebanon are still in effect, as retired General Hanna points out: "There is a covert governmental policy otherwise they wouldn't have been able to stop a ship transferring weapons to Syria this week."¹⁷⁷ Lebanon legally cannot allow the Syrian Free Army to operate from its territory according to the terms of the National Pact with Syria, which states that Lebanon will never be a passage for operations against Syria.¹⁷⁸

VII. Conclusion

7.1 Preliminary Observations

A review of one year media coverage of Syrian refugees in Lebanon reveals the complex and sensitive nature of the topic. The uneasy welcome of Syrian refugees in Lebanon derives in part from the traumas associated with the influx of Palestinian refugees and their role in the Lebanese Civil War. In addition, the historical interdependent relationship between Syria and Lebanon complicates a situation where Lebanon is hosting Syrian refugees, of whom many are opposing the Syrian regime.

The uneasy response regarding Syrian refugees is visible in the reactions of Lebanese government officials and Lebanon's public debate. The Lebanese government, cannot afford to openly confirm the presence of refugees as 'victims of Syrian state aggression' or even facilitating Syrian opposition in the country, but understands at the same time its obligations to adhere to primary humanitarian and protection needs. The absence of a framework of official refugee policy in Lebanon and the pressure from different sectarian camps in the country to act, sharpened by international influence, makes every government decision contradictory. The official disassociation policy of the Mikati government regarding the Syrian conflict, accepted by the international community, has refrained Lebanon from direct involvement in the Syrian conflict, but a non-active or even neglecting approach regarding Syrian refugees is potentially dangerous.

The Lebanese authorities seem to have provided the UNHCR and its implementing partners with the responsibility of providing humanitarian assistance to the Syrian refugees, while allowing at the same time a great role for Islamic charities in assistance efforts. This approach presents not only a denial of State responsibility, but has also left the Syrian refugee community in the country vulnerable to various ideologies in exchange for assistance.

¹⁷⁶ S. Kawakibi, Acting Director Arab Reform Initiative (ARI), Paris, (2012, 5 1). Interview by G. Hourani [Via Email].

¹⁷⁷ Retired Lebanese General E. Hanna, Louaizé, (2012, 5 4). Interview by M. Sislian [Personal Interview].

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

7.1.1 The State-to-UN responsibility shift

The UNHCR currently operates without a clear mandate to assist Syrian refugees, because no government decree has been issued to clarify the official legal status of the refugees. With the absence of a new Memorandum of Understanding between the Lebanese government and the UNHCR, nor any legal status or national asylum framework, refugee assistance programs are ineffective and remain focused on emergency response. This allows the Lebanese government to refrain from making any decision regarding basic refugee rights, such as housing (refugee camps), protection (from detention or refoulement) or education (admission of Syrian children to Lebanese schools). Furthermore, the UNHCR is being hampered in its access to the residence areas of Syrian refugees, especially in the Bekaa.

The current understanding between UNHCR and the Lebanese government resembles the 'State-to-UN responsibility shift' outlined by Kagan and others,¹⁷⁹ where a hosting government administers the negative rights/liberties, such as detention, permission to work, deportation and non-refoulement, while the UNHCR is responsible for the positive rights/liberties, such as freedom of speech, access to education and access to health services. This responsibility shift is 'obvious' according to a UNHCR protection officer, confirming that the UN agency mainly lobbies for temporary protection for the Syrian refugees while acknowledging that the Lebanese authorities cannot bear more obligations, given the country's financial and political limitations.¹⁸⁰

The Lebanese government has chosen to shift responsibility to avoid having to address the 'political problem' of indirectly accusing its neighbor state of persecution.¹⁸¹ Also, refugee populations expect more from the UN than from the Lebanese State and also orientate their aspirations via UNHCR to third country resettlement.¹⁸² According to Syria expert Balanche "[...] Beyond the discourse of solidarity with the Syrian opposition, the leaders of these [Western] countries know that many Syrians are trying to take this opportunity to migrate via Lebanon."¹⁸³

Lebanon can avoid these developments by assuming responsibility for the assistance and protection of Syrian refugees. A Memorandum with the UNHCR should allow for Refugee

¹⁷⁹ Kagan M. (2011). "We live in a country of UNHCR" *The UN surrogate state and refugee policy in the Middle East*, New Issues in Refugee Research Paper, UNHCR Research Paper No. 201. See also R. da Costa, *Rights of Refugees in the Context of Integration: Legal Standards and Recommendations*, Legal and Protection Policy Research Series, UNHCR, POLAS/2006/02/June 2006. For further information on these rights see Hollenbach, D. (2008). [Refugee Rights: Ethics, Advocacy and Africa](#). Washington, DC Georgetown University Press.

¹⁸⁰ UNHCR Assistant Protection Officer and Public Information Associate, Beirut (2012 6 6). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

¹⁸¹ Kagan M. (2011). "We live in a country of UNHCR" *The UN surrogate state and refugee policy in the Middle East*, New Issues in Refugee Research Paper, UNHCR Research Paper No. 201, p. 14

¹⁸² Ibid, p. 7.

¹⁸³ F. Balanche, Director Research and Study Group for the Mediterranean and the Middle East (GRIMMO), Lyon,(2012, 5 7). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Via Email].

Status Determination (RSD) by the UN refugee agency, while the government provides temporary visas for Syrian refugees. In ascertaining the RSD of Syrians, it will remain difficult to create a process that would completely differentiate between Syrian laborers and real refugees, who fear repercussion by the Syrian state upon return to their country.¹⁸⁴.

7.1.2 The complicated nature of Lebanese Islamic charities

According to media analysis and the Syrian refugees themselves, Islamic charities have so far provided the greater part of the aid reaching the refugees and have carried the burden of their humanitarian assistance. The generosity of Lebanese host communities has been remarkable in the manner of supplying Syrian refugees with basic needs, like shelter, food and clothing. The advantage of local charities is their access to locations of refugees and more visceral understanding of their needs, using traditional cultural and religious channels to distribute their aid. This is in sharp contrast to UN agencies or international organizations, which lack local knowledge and are unable to cover all areas where refugees reside.

However, there is a political danger posed by the fact that many Islamic charities combine humanitarian and political motives, which affects not only the refugees themselves but, ultimately, the host community and Lebanon. This dual intention has complicated their assistance. Moreover, assistance from the charities has been criticized of being ill coordinated, lacking sustainability and professionalism (provided mostly in cash), and being ad hoc in nature. This does not only decreases the effectiveness of assistance, but also allows duplication and misuse of assistance to persist, while creating possibilities of a sectarian approach to the Syrian refugee crisis. Therefore establishing camps under the auspices of the UNHCR might better protect the refugees from potential manipulation and might as well prevent sectarian or religious exploitation of the charitable sector.

Syrian refugees, meanwhile, have shown a pragmatic attitude in accepting all assistance and understanding that certain donors have interests in using their suffering for political gain. Refugees risk, however, to be used in a swaged situation where they may call more loudly for the fall of Al Assad in the presence of their Lebanese and international assistance providers. Doing so, they can unconsciously be dragged into a sectarian struggle, with more far reaching consequences than they may now foresee. With livelihood opportunities even further worsened than they were before the Syrian conflict, many do not expect a soon return to their country. Most refugees consist of families of mothers and children with high needs of assistance; in sharp contrast to the silent single Syrian workers Lebanon is used to deal with.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. This has been confirmed by E. Longuenesse, Director of the Department of Modern Studies, Institute Français du Proche-Orient (IFPO), (2012, 5 16). Interview by S. Menhem [Personal Interview]. UNHCR stated that RSD has been conducted for some urgent protection cases, but no agreement on resettlement has been agreed up till now, because of political objections. UNHCR Assistant Protection Officer and Public Information Associate, Beirut (2012 6 6). Interview by S. Van Vliet [Personal Interview].

These facts only confirm the importance of the Lebanese State to adopt an active approach towards the Syria refugee crisis. By assuring a clear balance between UN and State responsibilities and improving coordination mechanisms of local charities, a new refugee protection framework should be developed to assure better protection and humanitarian assistance to Syrian refugees.

As international human rights law supersedes bilateral political and security agreements with Syria, Lebanon has to refrain from deportation and detention of Syrian refugees. With the economy increasingly affected by the Syrian conflict, Lebanese host communities will more and more demand an active role of their government in relieving the burden of hosting refugees.

On the other side, UN agencies and implementing partners have to be aware of the political sensitivity involved in assistance to Syrian refugees. Not only should they continue to include Lebanese beneficiaries in their relief programs, international actors need to increase mechanisms that can integrate local Islamic charities into the general assistance program. This will improve their access to more various areas, but also improve the coordination, quality and effectiveness of Islamic charity efforts.

The sectarian nature and combination of political and humanitarian motivations of some charitable foundations and external donors, remains a dangerous component that must be addressed. While allowing Lebanese citizens and Syrian refugees alike to demonstrate freely and express their opinions, authorities should be wary of violent and possible insurgents or intelligence agents among the protestors. Rigorous regulations regarding international, regional and local funding can limit military support to undesirable actors while at the same allowing humanitarian assistance to be funded in a regulated matter.

Lebanese government should furthermore respond to the widespread fear among Syrian refugees of intimidation, border incursions or kidnappings by Syrian military intelligence in Lebanon. Proper investigations and clear government statements regarding the country's sovereignty can decrease the perception that Syria still controls Lebanon's internal affairs and show that Lebanon is capable of securing international refugee rights while at the same time neutralizing possible negative effects on its political and social security.

7.2 Recommendations for further research

This research project invites for further research on the assistance and protection of Syrian refugees in Lebanon within the regional context of migration developments. Taking into account the vibrant and dynamic nature of conflict driven migration flows and the increase in the numbers of refugees as we complete this report, further research is highly recommended.

Related to the constraints outlined in the methodology section of this report, this research does not claim to be complete. The preliminary observations outlined above explore guidelines for further in-depth research that would gather more empirical data from the Syrian refugees to address questions like: a) their socioeconomic and demographic characteristics in their country of origin; b) the level of humanitarian aid received and c) motivations of migration (resettlement) or voluntary repatriation.

Finally, further research can elaborate more on the effects of the Syrian conflict and the Syrian refugees and their consequence on the sociopolitical situation and economy of Lebanon. A better understanding of the political reception of the Lebanese government and the framework of international and local assistance programs for Syrian refugees provides useful insights on prospects for social peace in Lebanon and opportunities for developing a better regional refugee protection policy following the popular uprisings in the Middle East.