

Perceptions of Security

Among Syrian Refugees and Lebanese
Host Community in Marj - West Bekaa



Photo cover: Beqaa, Lebanon - May 03, 2013: Syrian Refugee children in one of the tented camps in Beqaa Lebanon.
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Introduction

With more than one million Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the country has reached the highest rate of refugees to residents in the world today¹. This reality presents, without a doubt, a very serious challenge to the security and stability of Lebanon in a region that is already in turmoil. The international community has unanimously and continuously extended gratitude and appreciation to the Lebanese government and people for their generosity and welcoming of the refugees, and has shown significant support to Lebanon's efforts. However, the relative stability remains precarious and hardly sustainable. International aid has reached only a small percentage of the amount requested by the host countries, notably Lebanon², to cover the cost of hosting refugees and the crisis' implications on the host society and economy. The international community has also failed to share the demographic burden by not resettling an ample number of refugees in third countries. Refugees from Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan have reached a level of desperation that has forced them to take their chances at sea in the hope of reaching a safer land where they can provide a better future for themselves and for their families. Thousands of men, women, and children³ have perished as a result. In Lebanon, further legal, political, economic and social complexities have added to the already harsh reality, making the situation extremely volatile and dangerous not only for refugees but for the Lebanese host communities and Lebanon in general as well.

This has led the Lebanese Government to establish new regulations regarding the entry of Syrians into Lebanon in an effort to limit the economic, security, social, environmental, and demographic repercussions, after it had initially completely opened the borders and left the management of the crisis to international organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and municipalities.

1 By the beginning of 2015 Lebanon had the third largest number of refugees worldwide, and by far the largest ratio to the population with 232 per 1,000 inhabitants as per the World Bank http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SM.POP.REFG?order=wbapi_data_value_2014+wbapi_data_value+wbapi_data_value-last&sort=desc; and Forbes, McCarthy N. (2015), <http://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2015/06/18/the-countries-with-the-most-refugees-per-1000-inhabitants-infographic/#6128e7db2c0a>

2 Lebanon requested \$11 billion at the 2016 London Conference over the next 5 years and has received pledges for less than 4. Jordan is estimated to spend \$870 million a year supporting refugees, which counts up to 5,628% of its fair share. According to Oxfam's fair share study released in February 2016, most wealthy countries are not contributing their fair share for aid response - humanitarian appeals are now only funded at 50% and collectively, rich nations have so far offered places to 128,612 Syrians, only 28% of the minimum they should. Practical examples can be given from Russia contributing less than 1% of its fair share of aid and the US taking in 7% of its share of refugees. See <https://www.oxfam.org/en/campaigns/rights-crisis-lebanon-jordan-crisis-syria/syria-refugee-crisis-your-country-doing-its-fair>

3 Estimated number of refugees dying while attempting to reach Europe is 2,500 in 2015 alone

In Lebanon, further legal, political, economic and social complexities have added to the already **harsh reality**, making the situation extremely **volatile** and **dangerous** not only for **refugees** but for the Lebanese **host communities** and Lebanon in general as well.

The new regulations only allow refugees entry under exceptional humanitarian cases, and revoke refugee status upon crossing back to Syria, which could lead to an increase in illegal entry, lack of official registration, and the loss of the ability to effectively guarantee refugee rights and monitor marriages and births.⁴

The case study at hand centers on the village of Marj in West Bekaa. Marj represents the archetypal host community as its majority population is Sunni Muslim, it is close to the Lebanese-Syrian border, is mostly agricultural land, and boasts a welcoming socio-cultural environment, all of which have made it a favorable destination for refugees, whose numbers have now exceeded the number of the villagers themselves⁵. Five years into the Syrian conflict, and with no near end, the hope of refugees returning to their places of origin is fading, and the initial temporary arrangements are no longer adequate to sustain such protracted displacement. The lack of resources coupled with an increase in refugee needs have inevitably led to tension among the refugee population and with their host communities, a tension that has become associated with a serious security threat as well as discrimination and prejudice.

4 Legal Agenda (2015) Statement About the Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, Legal Agenda, Retrieved from <http://www.legal-agenda.com/newsarticle.php?id=884&folder=legalnews&lang=ar>

5 Marj has a population of 15,000 and hosts approximately 20,000 Syrian refugees

Methodology

For the purpose of this research, a qualitative approach was used through a review of the literature on refugees and specifically refugee-related security issues. The aim is to provide a detailed understanding of theories in the field, along with monitoring media reports from 2014-2015 to analyze how the media is portraying refugees and security problems involving them. This approach has helped identify basic trends relating to crime rates, conflict, humanitarian aid, and security perceptions.

Both quantitative and qualitative tools were used as primary sources. The quantitative tool was used to gauge the perceptions of refugees and the local community. The data was obtained through a questionnaire whose purpose was to obtain a random sample of answers on the perceptions of security in both the Syrian refugee and the Lebanese host communities. The questionnaire was designed to complement surveys conducted by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and/or international NGOs in that it explored the involved individuals' perceptions of security, their main concerns and opinions on life-threatening conditions. The questions were also aimed at identifying the level of tension that exists between the refugees and the host community. Around 130 questionnaires were distributed to and filled by 50 Syrians and 80 Lebanese with the help of ten students from the Government and International Affairs Department at Notre Dame University (NDU) and a local partner.

To begin with, and while it did not include a sufficiently representative sample, the survey explored the opinions and perceptions of refugees residing in Marj and focused on the key threats they face and their relationship with the Lebanese security forces and with the Lebanese host community. In parallel, a survey was also distributed to a random sample of the town's Lebanese population in order to gain access to both communities' viewpoints on similar issues and, in particular, to understand the Lebanese community's stance on the presence of a large number of Syrian refugees in their town, the associated challenges as well as the perceived threats, be them economic, social, political or security-related.

Simultaneously, the qualitative input was acquired through in-depth interviews with influential community leaders and political figures who are involved and are in contact with the Syrian refugee community. These included local members of Parliament, the head of the municipality, the *mokhtar*⁶, the local mosque's imam, the public school director, the leader of the Scouts

6 Locally elected neighborhood representative, equivalent to Justice of the Peace

Association, and three leaders in the informal tented settlements (referred to as *shawish*). These interviews were used to complete the information-gathering process.

An inductive method was used to build on the input of these three trajectories and the interaction among them to present a proper understanding of the situation, which can be used to better approach the specific case of Marj, and shed further light and propose practical recommendations as to how to deal with the presence of refugees altogether in this respect.

In order to reach such conclusions, a set of questions had to be answered:

1. What are the root causes behind the tension between Syrian and Lebanese communities?
2. How are perceptions being constructed?
3. What is the effect of such perceptions on protection provision and access to assistance for both communities?

Determining the root causes behind the tension between both communities is a crucial step towards tackling these causes and understanding how this tension can be mitigated... This is acquired based on the quantitative approach through the questionnaires distributed to the refugees, the qualitative approach through the interviews conducted with the local community, and the analysis of media reports. After determining the root causes, it is important to tackle the issue of how perceptions towards the other community are formed. Perceptions are key in reducing tensions as prejudices and stereotypes constitute a major hurdle against peaceful coexistence and are rarely accurate. Breaking down these pre-conceived notions of the 'other' opens the door to forming a solid base for a new relationship between the two communities. This evaluation will also be based on the questionnaires and the interviews conducted. Finally, determining the effect that these perceptions play in terms of security, assistance, and reasons for refugees' stay in Lebanon will facilitate the use of these results on a larger scale; in addition, this will also enable ALEF to use the research for evidence-based advocacy and evidence-driven community action.

Literature Review

Defining Refugees and Their Effect on Host Communities

Refugees are individuals who flee their country because they are confronted with serious threats to their lives or liberty and after exhausting all other possible solutions⁷. This characterization given by Loescher (2002) adds that refugees provide a clear relationship between humanitarian concerns and international security. Loescher states that one of the main concerns relayed by refugees in the Middle East and Africa is the poor security in their first countries of asylum, which often have a detrimental human rights record. These security fears include being subjected to harassment and detention at the hands of the local police; others have faced even harsher realities, such as being deported.⁸ In addition, Loescher specifies that a large number of the countries in the Middle East and Africa lack stability, and as a result refugees suffer from severe economic and social insecurity as their freedom of movement is restricted, they are not allowed to work, are not given enough assistance, and are not given the chance to integrate with the local population. Refugees are also seen as a threat to the host country's stability and state security, whether in the developing or industrialized world.⁹ According to Loescher, refugees can be perceived as both a direct or indirect threat; in terms of the former, a refugee crisis may be exploited by armed combatants and shelters used as a site from which they can launch attacks. As an indirect threat, refugees pose a huge burden on the host country's economic development and infrastructure, not to mention the increasing tensions with the local community, particularly communities where social cohesion is difficult to attain due to ethnic and religious divisions.¹⁰

One of the main concerns relayed by refugees in the Middle East and Africa is the poor security in their first countries of asylum, which often have a detrimental human rights record.

7 Loesche, G. (2002) Blaming the Victim: Refugees and Global Security, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Volume 58 Issue 6, p. 47

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid. p. 48

10 Ibid. p. 49

This impact is echoed by Golubovic (2011), who indicates that there is a shift from depicting refugees as the humanitarian representation of a consequence of insecurity, to a representation of a cause of insecurity on the political, economic, social, and environmental levels. Golubovic points out that the burdens posed by refugees on host countries are exacerbated by the fact that these countries are already fragile, developing states, and, at times, the refugee population becomes overwhelming¹¹. He concludes that the refugee population will naturally be more affected by these demographic changes, as they will suffer from increased hostility by the local population, discrimination, and human rights violations by the security forces and the state, which will in turn force them to resort to other means of survival like theft, lawlessness, and prostitution.¹² Golubovic also indicates that the situation could take a different turn whereby refugees receive support from international and local NGOs, who are all the while neglecting the local population. This indirectly leads to new social divisions and challenges among the refugee and host communities.¹³

Mandel (1997) goes further to dissect the causes of perceived security threats from the refugee population, which comprise increases in economic burdens and social services (food, employment, shelter), increases in political risks (instability, flow of arms), and cultural disruptions (questions of identity, increased tension based on race, ideology, religion, and language).¹⁴ Mandel suggests that developing states tend to be more concerned with political disruptions due to their fragile political order, while developed states tend to be more concerned with economic disruptions due to the danger refugees pose to their high living standards. Because of the increased burdens and sense of risk, refugees are used as scapegoats for real or conceptualized problems such as a rise in crime rates and overpopulation. This perceived threat rises and falls depending on the willingness of refugees to return to their home states, and may lead to confrontations within the receiving state especially if it cannot control the high influx of refugees and consequently the use of refugee camps as a training ground.¹⁵ Another consequence mentioned by Mandel may be the rise of xenophobia and the pressuring of the state to expel the refugees, keep them in camps in remote areas, or close the borders entirely. This happens chiefly when refugees enjoy different cultural habits, traditions and beliefs from the local population. A final consequence may be discrimination in terms of employment opportunities, the services provided by the state, the quantity and quality of goods offered to camps, among others, as refugees are seen as temporary residents with nothing to offer long-term.¹⁶

Because of the increased burdens and sense of risk, refugees are used as scapegoats for real or conceptualized problems such as a rise in crime rates and overpopulation.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid. p. 72

14 Mandel, R. (1997) Perceived Security Threat and the Global Refugee Crisis, *Armed Forces and Society*, Volume 24 Number 1, pp. 80-81

15 Ibid. pp. 82-83

16 Ibid. pp. 84-85

A wider scope is presented by Salehyan and Gleditsch (2006) who point out that refugees play a key role in spreading conflict outside of their home country since refugee movement leads to the expansion of their social networks to other states.¹⁷ A clash may also occur in case the host country attempts to cut off the aforementioned network and cross-border activities. An additional form is the establishment of ties with the domestic opposition, and providing both motivation and material needed to launch an attack against the government. Furthermore, Salehyan and Gleditsch noticed that the majority group in a host country could feel a sense of threat if the refugees are of the same background as the minorities, thus opening the possibility of changing the demographic balance.¹⁸

Milton, Spencer, and Findley (2013) point out that there has been a much stricter set of rules for asylum seeking since the 9/11 attacks in New York City. This is not only applicable to the US, but is spread across many other nations as well who feel threatened from a large number of asylum seekers. Milton, Spencer, and Findley believe that this direct relation between refugees and terrorism is not totally unfounded, as the miserable conditions in which most refugees live and the frequent violations by the host state could push a number of them to adopt violent ideologies.¹⁹ Some of the main factors highlighted that could lead to radicalization include religious indoctrination, unemployment, lack of free movement, and lack of access to education, all of which are present in the average refugee camp, not to mention the poor living conditions such as lack of sanitation, health care, and shelter. When such personal experiences resonate with propaganda issued by terrorist groups, refugees become much more susceptible to embracing extreme messages and being recruited by these groups.²⁰ Another very important factor indicated by Milton, Spencer, and Findley is the presence of many refugee camps on the borders with their conflict-ridden country of origin, which makes it easier for militants to infiltrate the camps seeking safety and opportunities for recruitment.²¹

Cohen (2002) notices the increase in strict measures following the events of 9/11, however, she also argues that violence emanating from refugee camps long precedes the attacks due to the camps' militarization and the failure of local and international actors to neutralize this phenomenon. Cohen states that the presence of armed combatants in refugee camps leads to the belief that all refugees are combatants. The end result is that innocent individuals become subject to harassment, intimidation, and forced recruitment into militant groups. Cohen stresses that the inability to distinguish between civilians and armed elements leads to undermining the civilian character of the refugee camp as a whole.²²

17 Salehyan, I. and Gleditsch, S. (2006) Refugees and the Spread of Civil War, *International Organization*, Volume 60 Number 2, pp. 339-340

18 *Ibid.* pp. 343-344

19 *Ibid.* p. 623

20 *Ibid.* pp. 625-626

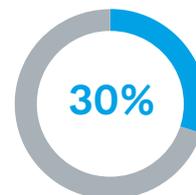
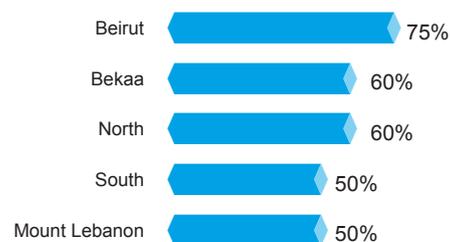
21 *Ibid.* pp. 627-628

22 Cohen, R. (2002) Refugees, Terrorism and Humanitarian Assistance, In *Defense of the Alien*, Volume 25, pp. 27-28

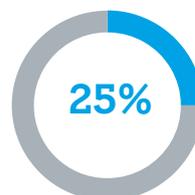
Lebanese Studies on Safety and Security

Crucial to this report is the examination of local research and media reports that have addressed the Syrian refugee crisis over the past two years. A survey was conducted in Lebanon by the Institute of Political Science at the Saint Joseph University (USJ) in 2015 to measure Syrian refugee perceptions of safety, security, and access to services, as well as Lebanese perceptions towards refugees regarding said services and the threats they believe to be posing to the local community. Based on 1,800 questionnaires distributed to 1,200 Syrians and 600 Lebanese in over 120 cities, towns, and villages in Lebanon, refugees appear to mostly worry about security. Approximately 30% of Syrians in Beirut, the North, and the Bekaa said they did not feel safe. This feeling of safety increases among those living in apartments and decreases among those living in informal settlements. Over 75% of Syrians in Beirut did not feel welcome compared to over 60% in the North and the Bekaa, and approximately 50% in both Mount Lebanon and the South. Another major difficulty relayed by Syrians was their inability to cross Army checkpoints as a result of the absence of legal papers, and out of the 1,200 surveyed, 293 stated they were assaulted; 86% of those assaults were blamed on Lebanese offenders.

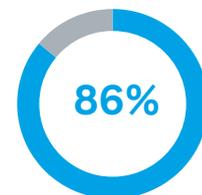
Syrians refugees that did not feel welcome



Syrians in Beirut, the North, and the Bekaa said they did not feel safe

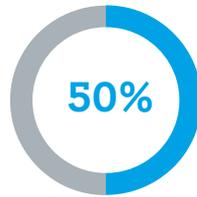


Syrians stated they were assaulted



Assaults blamed on Lebanese offenders

With regards to the Lebanese, 50% of those interviewed said they do not feel safe in most regions, and 13% stated Syrians assaulted them.²³



Lebanese do not feel safe

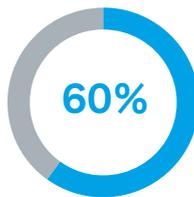


Lebanese stated Syrians assaulted them

The American University of Beirut (AUB) and INGO Save the Children also conducted a local survey in 2014 to measure social cohesion rates and intergroup relations between Syrian refugees and the Lebanese community in the Bekaa and in Akkar. Results showed the following:



Lebanese that feel a threat to their livelihood and values



Lebanese that perceive the Syrian presence in the country as being an existential threat



Lebanese that supported restricting refugee movement, including restricting their political freedoms

The resentment and tensions are clearly present in the communities, as two-thirds of the Lebanese in both Akkar and the Bekaa believe a conflict is likely to occur. In Akkar, participants claimed they wanted refugees to leave their towns immediately. Syrian refugees, on the other hand, also said they feel their values and livelihoods are at stake, but a majority does not perceive the Lebanese presence as being an existential threat. Moreover, less than fifth of the refugees contacted believe a conflict could occur with the Lebanese communities.²⁴

23 Al Sharabati, C. and Nammour, J. (2015) Survey in Perceptions of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, Institut des Sciences Politiques, Université Saint Joseph

24 Harb, C. and Saab, R. (2014) Social Cohesion and Intergroup Relations: Syrian Refugees and the Lebanese Nationals in the Bekaa and Akkar, Save the Children

Shift to Decentralization: The Rising Role of Municipalities

A range of media reports and articles released in 2014 and 2015 made the effort to shed light on the refugee crisis in Lebanon through reporting on its effect on the local economy, imposed curfews, living standards, legal frameworks, rights, aid, and security and arrests. Helou (2014) reports that amid the absence of a functioning Lebanese government, which prevents the adoption of adequate policies to deal with the presence of Syrian refugees, many municipalities have taken the lead through imposing curfews, which goes against the constitutionally protected freedom of movement²⁵. This move was justified as being a necessary reaction to recurrent problems such as theft, neighborhood complaints about strangers on the streets in the evening, and altercations between refugees and locals and even among refugees themselves. These incidents should fall under the authority of the security forces and, even if they occur, should be solved through legitimate security measures rather than through the infringement on the freedom of refugees. Other municipalities adopted this as a preventative measure to “avoid headaches” even though no security incidents had occurred in the town.²⁶

Musharrafy (2015) reported in Annahar newspaper that some municipalities were using refugees as a bargaining tool to receive more support for their respective towns, or funding for a specific project, as seen with the municipality of Al Karkaf in Akkar where a decision was taken to ban Syrian refugees from residing in the town²⁷. The decision was later put on hold after interventions from the Interior Ministry, the governor of Akkar, and the Children’s Rights and Emergency Relief Organization (UNICEF).

Amid the absence of a functioning Lebanese government, which prevents the adoption of adequate policies to deal with the presence of Syrian refugees, many municipalities have taken the lead through imposing curfews, which goes against the constitutionally protected freedom of movement.

25 El Helou, M. (2014) Refugees Under Curfew: The War of Lebanese Municipalities Against the Poor, Legal Agenda, Retrieved from <http://english.legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=674&folder=articles&lang=en>

26 Ibid.

27 Wansa, S. (2015) Official Authorities in Lebanon Play with the Future of the Syrian Refugees, Legal Agenda, Retrieved from <http://legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=979&folder=articles&lang=ar>

Impact of the Refugee Crisis on the Local Labor Market

Ghassan Diba, head of the Economics Department at the Lebanese American University (LAU), argues that the Syrian refugee presence in Lebanon has increased consumer demand as Syrians pour their savings and international aid into the Lebanese economy. Markets now use local material instead of importing them from Syrian factories as they did prior to the crisis, and the infrastructure, while exacerbated, has always been weak. Meanwhile, former Labor Minister Charbel Nahas stated in 2015 that despite Syrians benefiting activity at the Beirut International Airport, which now serves more Syrian air passengers, and the Beirut Port which is now the closest route to Damascus, the damage on the labor market and income distribution is incomparable.²⁸

According to Choufi (2015), approximately 86% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon reside in impoverished and marginalized areas, with the Bekaa Valley hosting the highest number of Syrian refugees. This has led to labor competition between locals and Syrians, including Syrian laborers who were present in Lebanon prior to the conflict, particularly over low-skilled jobs such as construction, which has led to a decrease in wages. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) reports that between July and October 2014, 89 incidents of conflict over employment opportunities occurred in the Bekaa, but the actual number is believed to be much higher. Refugees also face exploitation by landowners and influential political figures and parties in the area who offer them protection in return for working for very low wages.²⁹

Caspani (2015) argues that the level of poverty in which most Syrian refugees live has led to a growing number of Syrian children, some as young as six years old, to find employment to help support their families, with some suffering abuse from their employers. This would undoubtedly have negative consequences on the long term since work comes at the expense of education.³⁰ Based on UNHCR records, there are about 366,000 Syrian refugees who are of school age, and many of them have not regularly attended school for over three years.

The level of poverty in which most Syrian refugees live has led to a growing number of Syrian children to find employment to help support their families

28 Wehbe, M. (2015) The Impact of the Syrian Crisis on Lebanon: Small Advantages, Huge Damage, and Overwhelming Racism, Al Akhbar, Retrieved from <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/23099>

29 Choufi, E. (2015) The Conflict in Bekaa: Refugees Compete with Syrian Workers, Al Akhbar, Retrieved from <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/2244503>

30 Caspani, M. (2015) Child Labor on the Rise Among Syrian Children as Crisis Spirals, Reuters, Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/07/01/us-syria-children-labour-idUSKCN0PB6C920150701>

Perceptions of International Aid Among Syrian Refugees

Decreasing international support has been primarily evident through the World Food Program's (WFP) reduction of its food voucher program by half in 2015 due to a "severe lack of funding", which has put even more strain on already vulnerable families.³¹ The blame placed on aid agencies by refugees was clearly seen during High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres's visit to a tented settlement near Deir Al Ahmar in February 2015. One refugee stated, "We have gone from injustice in Raqqa to injustice here," and added that Guterres benefited from the visit, but the refugees did not.³²

Hallak (2015) also argues that because of the poor conditions of the informal settlements, heavy rain and strong winds dismantle refugee tents and lead to water seeping in destroying their clothes and sheets. This lack of appropriate shelter makes it nearly impossible to withstand harsh weather conditions. This has often led to refugees asking the Lebanese Government and emergency services to improve their conditions while also blaming UNHCR and other aid agencies for their inadequacy.³³

Furthermore, storms and inclement weather conditions have caused several deaths among refugees, as was the case in the border towns of Shebaa and Aarsal where a number of them froze to death. In spite of the support provided from UNHCR, serious gaps in needs remain, made evident when refugees are forced to burn their clothes and shoes for warmth.³⁴ Another health hazard that culminates from the cold weather and lack of proper living conditions is the increased risk of catching frostbite, cases of which were detected among several children in Zahle and Wadi Khaled. There is also a serious risk of tents catching fire, particularly since they are mostly built from plastic or cloths, which are highly flammable.³⁵ This has caused an outburst of complaints by refugees in the Bekaa town of Labwe, which led to a protest in front of the Head of the Municipality's home and threatening to cut off the road if they do not receive the same amount of aid as refugees residing in Aarsal.³⁶

"We have gone from *injustice* in Raqqa to *injustice* here"

31 Knutsen, E. (2015) WFP Cuts Food Aid to Syrian Refugees in Half, The Daily Star, Retrieved from <http://dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Jul-02/304734-wfp-cuts-food-aid-to-syrian-refugees-in-half.ashx>; A WFP report in 2015 stated, "Food operations are severely underfunded, meaning that WFP has been forced to reduce the level of assistance it provides to refugees across the region... assistance was cut down to 50 percent on average during the previous months due to a severe lack of funding", Retrieved from: <http://www.wfp.org/emergencies/syria>

32 Knutsen, E. (2015) Resentment Toward Aid Agencies Growing Among Refugees, The Daily Star, Retrieved from <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Feb-16/287532-resentment-toward-aid-agencies-growing-among-refugees.ashx>

33 Hallak, M. (2015) Tragic Conditions for the Refugees in Tents in Akkar: We Live the Horror of the Storm, Annahar, Retrieved from <http://www.annahar.com/article/203298>

34 AFP and Al Akhbar (2015) Three Syrian Refugees Freeze to Death as Brutal Storm Hits Lebanon, Al Akhbar, Retrieved from <http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/three-syrian-refugees-freeze-death-brutal-storm-hits-lebanon>

35 Hallak, M. (2015) Cold Weather Worsens Refugee Situation with Frostbite Injuries, Annahar, Retrieved from <http://newspaper.annahar.com/article/211894>

36 Annahar (2015) Syrian Refugees in North Bekaa Demand Equal Help as the Refugees in Aarsal and Fakiha, Annahar, Retrieved from <http://www.annahar.com/article/205865>; The Daily Star (2015) Army Seizes Warheads Arrests 24 Syrians, Daily Star, Retrieved from <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Jan-26/285401-army-seizes-warheads-arrests-24-syrians.ashx>

Relations Between Local Security Forces and Syrian Refugees

Several reports in 2014 and 2015 have covered the ongoing arrests of Syrians made by Lebanese security forces across different parts of the country. The Lebanese Army has raided and arrested numerous refugees inside the settlements in the Bekaa and in villages in Baalbek mainly due to the absence of legal papers. Syrians in Zgharta have also been arrested for possession of weapons and explosives,³⁷ and due to alleged affiliations with the Islamic State (ISIS) and other jihadist groups, as was the case in Nabatieh in 2015.³⁸ A Syrian was arrested in 2015 based on charges of planning attacks against Lebanese soldiers³⁹, and three in Barr Elias on suspicion of being linked to terrorist groups⁴⁰. There have also been reports that General Security arrested two Syrian nationals, deported them back to Syria and into the custody of the Syrian government, and then refused to disclose their whereabouts despite requests for information from their relatives and Human Rights Watch. This contradicts the Lebanese authorities' assertion that no Syrian shall be deported back to Syria.⁴¹

This incident was also coupled with an order issued by the Lebanese Army in 2015 that called on approximately 17,000 refugees in the Bekaa Valley to vacate the informal settlements in the areas of Majdal Anjar, Kfar Zabad, and Barr Elias in an attempt to limit cross-border infiltration by militants.⁴² This has happened on other occasions, as seen with another circular issued by the Army asking close to 2,500 refugees to vacate their settlement, which lay on the side of the Akkar coastal road, due to its close proximity to a military airport in Kleiaat⁴³. Refugees held a protest that led to a scuffle with the Army during the implementation of the circular and the dismantling of the tents in Balanet El Hisa⁴⁴. Earlier during 2015, Knutsen reported on the possibility of relocating some Syrian refugees from Aarsal to another area in the Bekaa, due exclusively to security concerns and not as part of a shift in government policy; however, this was not followed up on, possibly due to the lack of political consensus and logistical planning.⁴⁵

37 OLJ (2015) Series of Arrests of Syrians in the North and the Bekaa, L'Orient Le Jour, Retrieved from <http://www.lorientlejour.com/article/908134/arrestations-en-serie-de-syriens-au-nord-et-dans-la-bekaa.html>; Solh, N. (2015) Nearly Two Dozen Apprehended in Fresh Bekaa Valley Raids, The Daily Star, Retrieved from <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/feb-18/287863-authorities-raid-bedouin-syrian-refugee-camps-in-bekaa.ashx>

38 The Daily Star (2015) Two Suspected ISIS Fighters Arrested in South Lebanon, The Daily Star, Retrieved from <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/feb-28/289129-two-suspects-isis-fighters-arrested-in-south-lebanon.ashx>

39 The Daily Star (2015) Lebanon Indicts Suspects Behind Foiled Army Attack, The Daily Star, Retrieved from <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/mar-05/289718-lebanon-indicts-suspects-behind-foiled-army-attack.ashx>

40 The Daily Star (2015) 53 Syrians Arrested in Zahle: Army, The Daily Star, Retrieved from <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/may-17/298264-53-syrians-arrested-in-zahle-army.ashx>

41 HRW (2015) Lebanon: 2 Syrians Disappear Feared Deported, Human Rights Watch, Retrieved from <http://www.hrw.org/news/2015/02/17/lebanon-2-syrians-disappear-feared-deported>

42 Rainey, V. (2015) 17,000 Refugees Risk Eviction from Homes, The Daily Star, Retrieved from <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/feb-07/286722-17000-refugees-risk- eviction-from-homes.ashx>

43 Hallak, M. (2015) Removal of Tents from the Sides of the International Coastal Road in Akkar, Annahar, Retrieved from <http://www.annahar.com/article/248615>

44 Annahar (2015) Syrian Refugees Refuse to Vacate their Tents in Balanet El Hisa, Annahar, Retrieved from <http://www.annahar.com/article/251522>

45 Knutsen, E. (2015) Dialogue Pitches Moving Aarsal Refugees, The Daily Star, Retrieved from <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/mar-10/290209-dialogue-pitches-moving-aarsal-refugees.ashx>

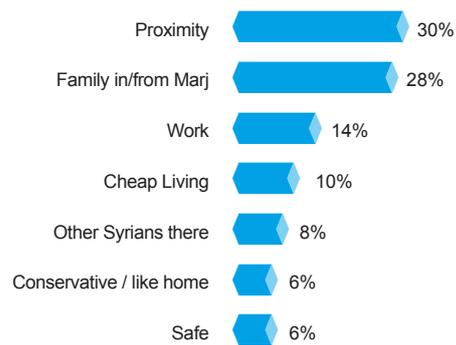
Marj Situational Analysis

Marj is 48 kilometers from Beirut and less than 10 kilometers from the Lebanese-Syrian border, which means it is easily accessible to Syrian refugees, notably those who fled at the beginning of the conflict and who were hoping to return within a few days or months. Its population is estimated at 15,000 people, most of whom are Sunni Muslims, an additional advantage for mainly Sunni Muslim refugees fleeing the fighting around Rural Damascus (86%).

Marj's Lebanese inhabitants have also been sympathetic to the Syrian revolution both on religious and political grounds, which has allowed refugees to feel comfortable and welcomed. There are also familial ties between the two that pre-date the Syrian conflict.

The number of refugees in Marj today is estimated at 20,000, outnumbering the Lebanese population, many of whom had already left the town in search of better opportunities in the capital or abroad. Geographically, Marj lies in the heart of the Bekaa Valley at 800 meters above sea level, which means it snows infrequently, thus making living in poor conditions slightly easier. Its economy relies mainly on agriculture and furniture-manufacturing, as well as a few other trades and industries. The town had been hosting a few thousand seasonal agricultural workers prior to the Syrian conflict, most of whom have now brought their families from Syria, and are now counted as being part of the refugee population in Marj.

Reason for choosing Marj as a primary destination

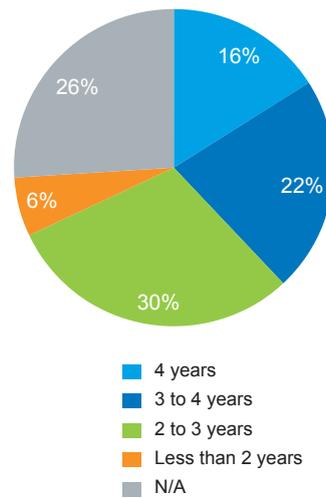


The number of **refugees** in Marj today is estimated at 20 000, **outnumbering the Lebanese population**, many of whom had already left the town in **search of better opportunities** in the capital or abroad.

Syrian refugees are currently distributed across 24 'official' settlements in the town, with an average of 500 to 750 individuals in each settlement. Others stay in either unofficial settlements or rented apartments. Syrians staying in tents and caravans pay an average rent cost of \$100 to \$150 a month, which most families are unable to afford, notably those who do not have a stable income and who largely depend on the aid they receive.

Most of the refugees residing in Marj have been in Lebanon for more than two years, with only 6% stating they had entered in the past two years, and none in the past year. However, 26% of the refugees surveyed did not wish to answer this particular question perhaps for fear of arrest over the absence of legal registration documents, or recent illegal entries into the country that defy the Lebanese Government's October 2014 decision to close the borders. The largest numbers seem to have entered Lebanon sometime between November 2012 and November 2013, dates which coincide with the fighting that erupted in both Rural Damascus and areas close to the Lebanese border, including the July 2013 battle over the border city of Qusayr.

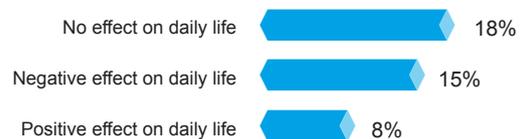
Length of presence in Lebanon



Marj's municipality, headed by Nazem Yousef (2013-2016) and formerly Imad Shmoury (2010-2013), has taken the lead on managing the presence of refugees and the aid received. All aid management is centralized in the municipality, and any organization entering the settlements or organizing any activities requires authorization. The aim of this centralization, according to Yousef, is to make sure the municipality has control over the situation through properly and transparently distributing aid and guiding concerned organizations towards the biggest needs.

However, most refugees surveyed and authorities interviewed agreed that the number of refugees has increased significantly but the amount of aid received has decreased and become insufficient. Yousef stressed that one major downfall is the town's infrastructure both from a physical perspective in terms of roads, sewage, water, and electricity, and non-physical, human resources-based needs, namely security, waste, health, and education.

Perception of Lebanese residents of the effects of Syrian refugee presence

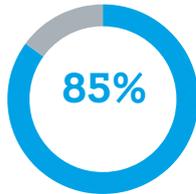


The majority of the Lebanese residents surveyed stated that the presence of Syrian refugees in the town has a "direct effect on daily life"^{46 47}, while 18% said there was none. 15% said the impact

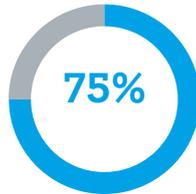
46 This term was a common response to an open-ended question that was kept and used as is, knowing that it expresses a vague concept of being annoyed and negatively affected without being able to specify the aspects of this effect.

47 Gender in this response, and very few others, showed significant difference between male and female respondents with Lebanese women giving a much larger percentage of their daily life being affected (72%) while Lebanese men gave only (42%).

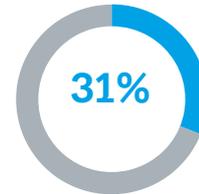
was a negative one, and 8% said it was positive. However, when specifically asked about the refugee crisis' effect on employment opportunities, 85% clearly confirmed there was an effect of some kind. When asked about available alternatives if their work has been jeopardized, 41% had no answer, while 31% identified emigration as their only viable option.



Lebanese confirm their work opportunities are affected by the Syrian refugee presence



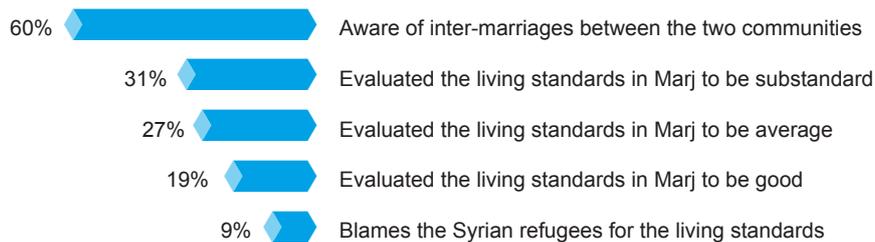
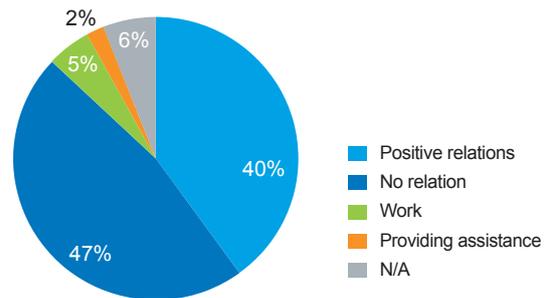
Lebanese say that the presence of Syrian refugees has a direct effect on their daily life



Lebanese see emigration as the only option when they lose their job

Moreover, in spite of the positive relations between the two communities, segregation still permeates the town, with most of the Lebanese surveyed stating they have no relation whatsoever with the refugees, only a few Lebanese stated that the living standard in Marj is negatively affected by the presence of Syrian refugees, which confirms that even though locals are generally dissatisfied with their living conditions, only a very small percentage blames the refugees for it.

Lebanese relations to refugees

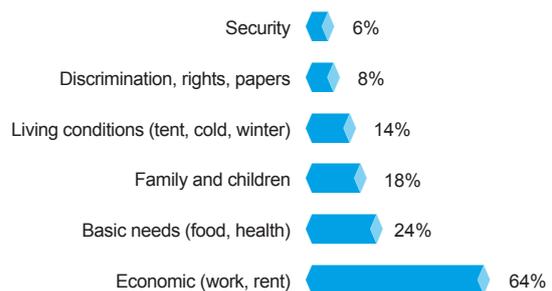


While Marj has imposed curfews on refugees to limit their movement, medical and emergency matters are taken into consideration, and if a Syrian national works during those hours, they are granted a municipal identification card, which allows them to move freely during the curfew. In case the curfew is violated, the refugee is either asked to return to their residence or is detained at the police station until the end of the curfew. Even though the municipal police did not use violence to enforce the curfew, there have been reports of Lebanese civilians using violence against refugees who break the curfew, with some even forming groups that patrol the town in the evening.

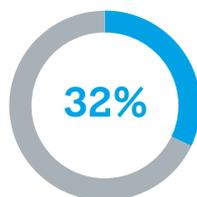
Main Threats and Problems

When asked about their main concerns, most of the answers provided by refugees revolved around economic needs, including employment and rent⁴⁸. Basic livelihood concerns, including food and health, ranked second, and living conditions remain an important concern with 14% of the surveyed chiefly concerned with the winter season, the cold, and the state of their tents. Some refugees even considered these detrimental living conditions to be life-threatening. Only 26% of the refugees believe they are prepared for the winter cold, and 32% said they were waiting for UN and organization assistance. 42% consider themselves unprepared and/or unsure if they will receive the necessary assistance.

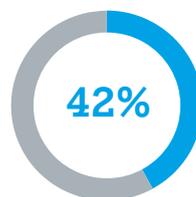
What do Syrian refugees mostly worry about?



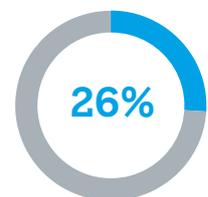
Considers their living conditions to be life threatening



Waiting for the assistance of the UN or other organizations



Not prepared for cold / unsure whether they will get assistance

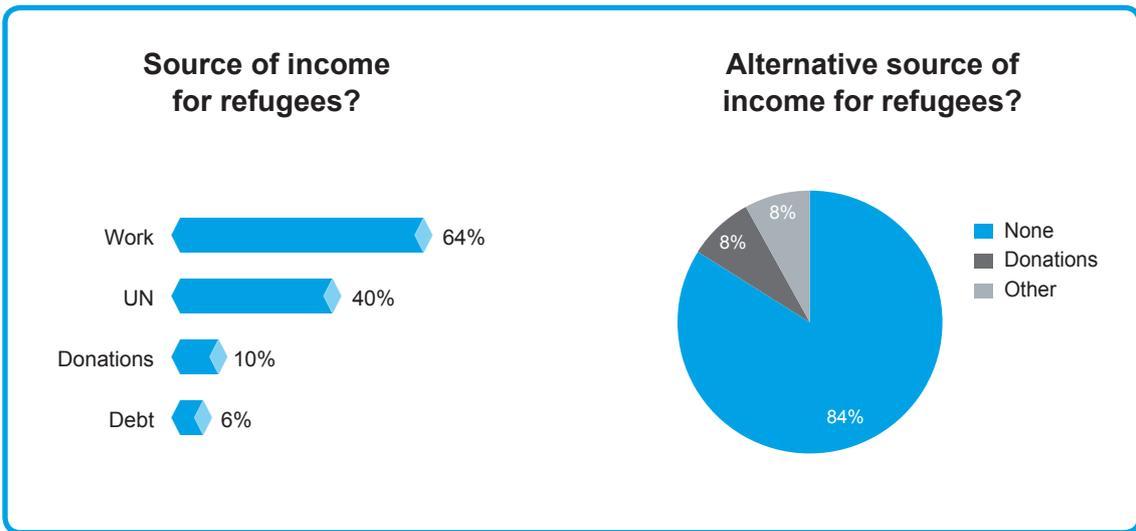


Prepared for the winter cold

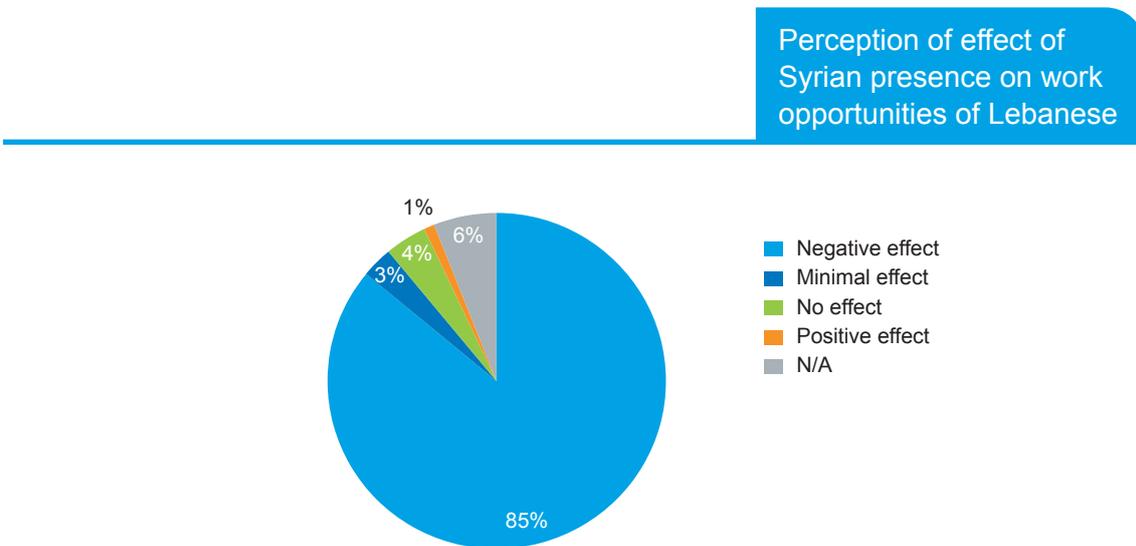
⁴⁸ An expected difference in the responses identifying main concerns was visible among genders, with more men claiming economic and basic needs (70% and 35% respectively among male respondents and 60% and 17% respectively among female respondents) and more women claiming family and children, and living conditions (20% and 23% respectively among women respondents while 15% and 0% respectively among male respondents).

In parallel, a quarter of Marj's Lebanese residents say that refugees are their main concern, and 12% said that their main worries are economic.

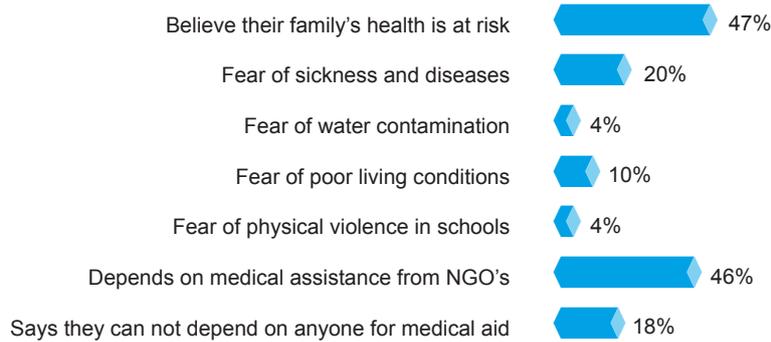
Yousef noted that the municipality allows refugees to work and move freely to facilitate their living conditions. 64% of refugees are fully dependent on their own income to provide for their families, with 48% having only one member of the family working. 40% said they depended on UN assistance, 10% on other donations, and 6% on loans. A large majority of these stated that they have no alternative source of income.



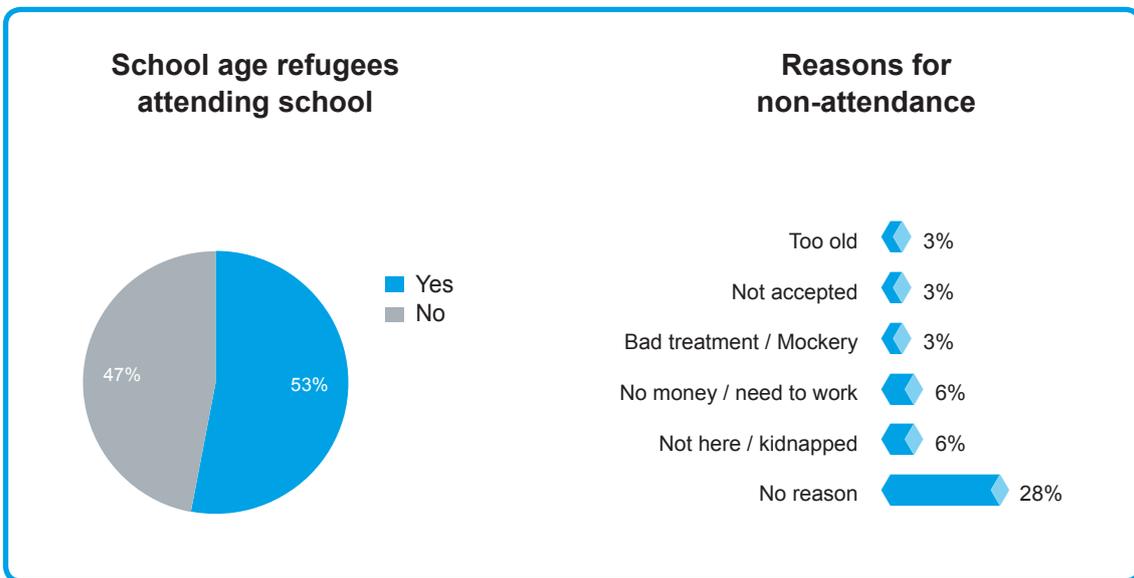
Flexibility in refugee movement and employment is perceived by the Lebanese as a negative influence on their own work opportunities.



Almost half of the refugees stated that they believe their family's health is at risk⁴⁹. Significant reasons as to why they believe this included sickness and diseases, water contamination, as well as the cold and poor living conditions. 4% said their children were beaten at school. Around half of the refugees surveyed depend on medical assistance provided by non-governmental organizations and clinics (*mustawsaf*), 16% on the UN, 10% on hospitals and 18% answered that they could not depend on any group or institution.



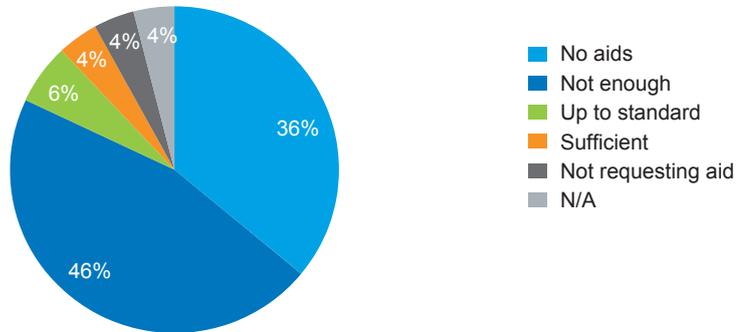
With regards to education, answers were just as alarming, with 47% of those who have school-aged children saying they do not send them to school.



When asked about their overall evaluation of the quantity and quality of aid received, more than 80% of the responses were negative, with many considering that no aid or not enough aid is received. With regards to the local population, only 20% were receiving some form of aid, while 73% said they were not, and 45% expressed their wish to be treated equally to Syrians in terms of the aid distribution.

49 A majority of women (57%) but only 35% of men stated that they believe their family's health is at risk.

Refugees perception of aid sufficiency

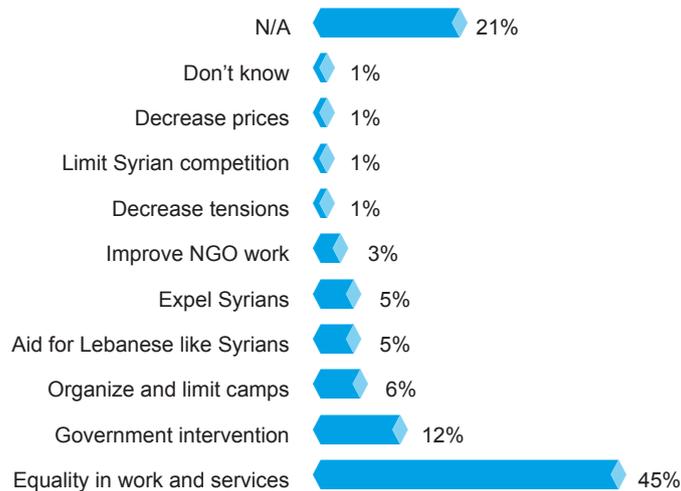


Lebanese receiving aid?

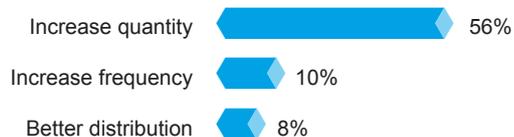


When asked how aid could be improved, 56% of Syrians answered that the quantity given should be increased, 10% asked for more periodic aid, and 8% asked for the aid provided to better target the needs and be better distributed.

Lebanese suggestions for improving aid provision



Refugees suggestions for improving aid provision



Security Perceptions

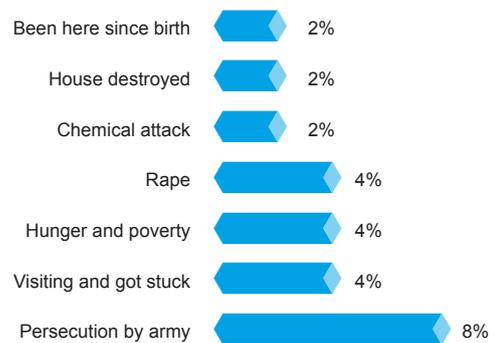
The main reason given by refugees as to why they left Syria was war and military operations, but other notable answers included persecution by the Syrian Army; visiting Lebanon and unable to cross back into Syria; hunger and poverty; and cases of rape.

In addition to economic, health and living conditions, personal security, threat of armed groups and kidnapping represented 20% of the answers given by refugees when asked about threats to livelihood. A worrying 12% consider the Lebanese community and the general instability in Lebanon as a threat to their lives⁵⁰.

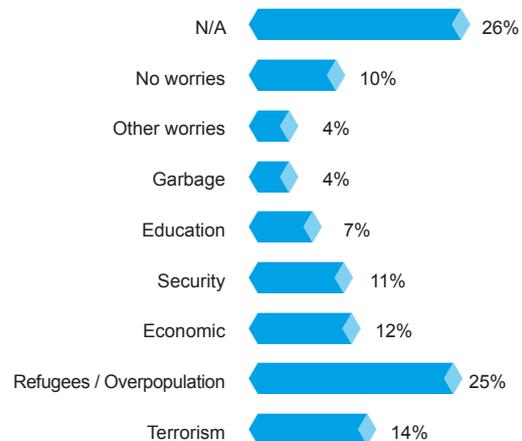
In return, when asked about their main concern, 11% of Lebanese residents consider security to only be their third main concern, preceded by the economy, and the refugee crisis as a primary concern. Almost half (46%) of the Lebanese believe there is a direct threat to their lives, with 14% specifically identifying terrorism and 4% claiming security threats.

When asked if they believe the presence of Syrian refugees has increased security problems in Marj, 75% gave different affirmative answers: 58% said yes, 8% said slightly, 5% said it did in great amounts, and 4% cited theft as a main security issue. Only 18% said no.

Reasons for leaving Syria



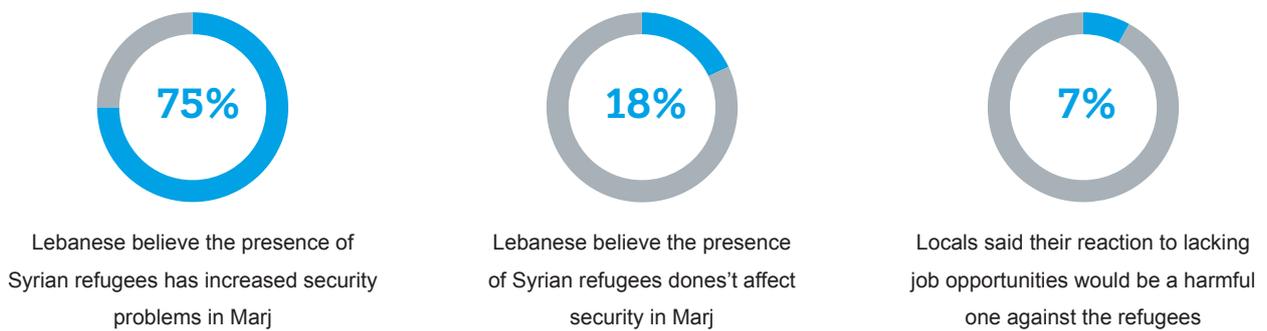
Main concerns of Lebanese?



⁵⁰ It can be noted that there is no significant difference between men and women refugees, although the way of expression or the point of focus may differ slightly.

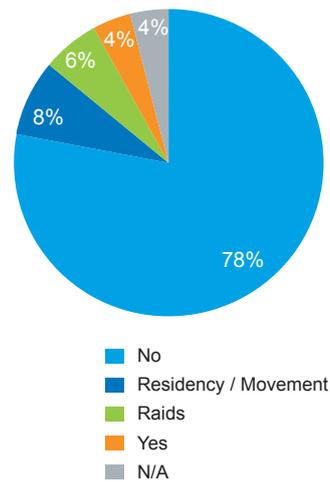
This large percentage shows a clear belief among Lebanese that there is a correlation between the presence of Syrian refugees and declining security.

Other survey questions also revealed important information: 7% of locals said their reaction to lacking job opportunities would be a harmful one against the refugees. Expelling Syrians from the town was also a viable solution for 5% when asked how they feel they could increase aid, and another 6% said the number of Syrians in the town should be limited. Furthermore, 74% of Lebanese concurred when asked if there are problems among the refugees themselves.



As for the role of and the relation with security forces, it is important to note that all of the groups approached for the purpose of this research, including refugees, Lebanese, and their respective community leaders, expressed a very high satisfaction with their role, and cited a very positive connection with the different security branches, namely the Lebanese Army and military, General Security and the Intelligence Branch of the Internal Security Forces. Practically all Lebanese community leaders interviewed, with the exception of the local school director, had direct and frequent contact with security officers and stated they were satisfied with the security measures taken, including the network of informants and frequent raids on settlements and homes. A high percentage of Syrian refugees, also cited having no problems with the security forces, as opposed to others who stated that their main concerns were due to their lack of residency⁵¹, 6% stating they were unhappy with the raids practice, and 4% declining to answer.

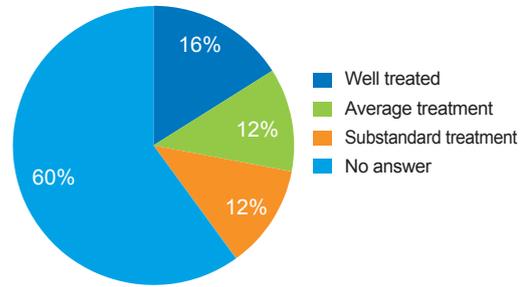
Problems with security forces



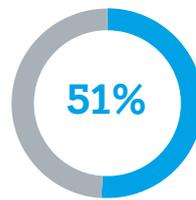
⁵¹ The percentage of people experiencing problems with security forces relating to residency papers increases to 15% among male refugees surveyed.

It should be noted, however, that 60% of refugees did not answer the question posed in parallel on treatment at the hands of the security forces. This could be understood to reflect the 78% stating they had no problems, but it also underlines some serious reluctance to answer in detail perhaps for fear of persecution. Out of those that did answer the question, 16% said they were treated well, 12% said it was an average treatment, and only 12% said it was substandard.

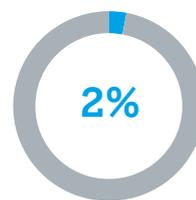
Treatment of refugees at the hands of security forces



51% of the Lebanese surveyed showed a strong satisfaction with the way security forces are handling the refugee crisis, and even those expressing dissatisfaction clarified that their feeling comes from the security forces' mistreatment and abuse of refugees. Only 2% claimed negligence or inefficiency regarding security measures.

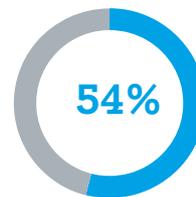


Lebanese satisfied with the handling of the refugee crisis



Lebanese claiming inefficiency regarding security measures

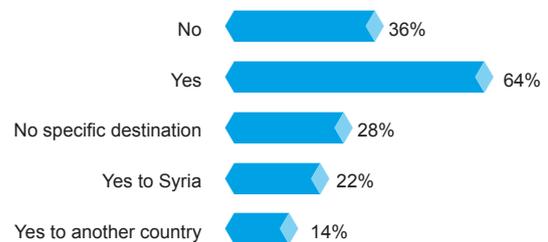
Based on the above results, it is clear why 54% of the refugees residing in Marj fled to the town directly and 46% settled in that area after having unfavorable experiences elsewhere in Lebanon.



Refugees residing in Marj fled to the town directly

However, according to the survey, the level of acceptance among the Lebanese in Marj lies at approximately 44%, with an average general acceptance rate of 26% with some problems mentioned such as irritation, social-related issues, and political and religious concerns, and a 24% rate of non-acceptance. The refugees themselves, influenced not only by the acceptance of the Lebanese community but also by financial and therefore survival challenges, expressed regret over coming to Lebanon altogether (40%), with 64% of them planning to leave as soon as they are able to⁵². 22% aim to go back to Syria, 14% wish to travel to a third country, mainly to Europe, and 28% are unsure and simply want to leave.

Refugees planning to leave Lebanon, and alternative destinations.



⁵² The percentage of women who do not regret coming to Lebanon is almost double the percentage of those who do. Moreover, the percentage of women who are not planning to leave is 47%, much higher than 20% among men. These differences show that women refugees in general are more satisfied with their stay in Lebanon than men, while men are more likely to be regretful of coming and more open to the possibility of leaving as soon as they can.

Analytical Findings

The welcoming nature of the Marj society, the Syrian agricultural workers who were present pre-crisis, the familial links and inter-marriages, and the absence of restrictions or curfews imposed by the municipality, are all variables that have made the Syrians' stay more bearable, but the aforementioned results still illustrate the high level of desperation amid the refugee community, one that is experienced even in the most socio-politically favorable environments.

Marj's infrastructure is debilitated, its health and education services are weak, and its economic situation is largely dependent on agriculture and some basic industries, which limit employment opportunities particularly among youth. Its problems have been exacerbated and its capacities stretched to the limit with the hosting of a large number of refugees, standing at approximately 20,000 people.

However, the general acceptance of refugees among the Marj population does remain considerably high, and the potential of antagonism is low as well as the threat of any large-scale conflict. To quantify this, it can be said that less than a quarter of the Lebanese population has an adverse attitude towards refugees, and approximately 15% perceive their presence in a positive light. A majority is irritated and feels a certain strain that's been exerted as a result of the crisis, but they do not seem to have the intention or the readiness to initiate conflict. Most do not blame their economic and/or financial hardships on refugees, although their presence is clearly a contributing factor to that destitution.

A majority is irritated and feels a certain strain that's been exerted as a result of the crisis, but they do not seem to have the intention or the readiness to initiate conflict.

Most of the conflicts that were registered during the data collection seem to be, to a large extent, affiliated with personal frustrations that develop into small-scale disputes at most, and though they are difficult to resolve, no clear xenophobic actions were registered as being the main motive. Individual cases of abuse or exploitation have been noted, such as a land owner who was accustomed to using his land for agricultural purposes and did not make enough profit, but who is now renting out his land to refugees at the rate of \$100 to \$150 a month per tent. Regarding aid and its distribution, it has become clear from the data collected that the general perception among refugees is that it is very little in comparison to the needs. It is also believed that aid is subject to various forms of corruption, lack of planning, and unfair distribution. Examples of this inefficiency that were mentioned by the interviewees and surveyed population are employees hired to operate a school in the settlement that is itself not functioning, a fresh water project that was costly to establish but was discontinued, and some settlements receiving monthly visits by NGOs while others receiving one or two visits a year, among others.

From the Lebanese perspective, distributed aid is looked at very suspiciously with the concern that the Lebanese community, notably the more deprived families, is not receiving aid similar to the refugee community, and has begun requesting equal treatment. The most requested aspect of aid among Lebanese community leaders and other surveyed Lebanese is that it should focus on service provision and basic provisions like food, clothes, and shelter and move into a longer term, more sustainable project that includes production, small industries, development and others. Aid agencies in collaboration with local authorities could look into ways to make the selection of vulnerable Lebanese more transparent. While 20% of the Lebanese respondents said they do receive aid, the general perception is that it is still insufficient and unfairly distributed, which could be partially due to beneficiaries not being consulted and/or involved in the decision-making process.

With respect to security, it is clear that both Lebanese and Syrian communities perceive security forces as having a positive role. No major problems have arisen, despite some deviation from this opinion in both communities. The key difficulty reported by refugees continues to be their legal stay, as many fail to renew their residencies, which in turn puts them in a vulnerable position both in terms of being arrested by the security forces and at risk of not receiving aid. It was evident from in-depth interviews with Lebanese and Syrian community leaders that security forces have built a network of contacts and informants within both communities so as to maintain a level of control and an ability to quickly respond to conflict.

In terms of local threat, both the Lebanese and Syrian communities believe the other to be a threat, though not through specific activities. Less than 15% of the Lebanese believe terrorism to be a security threat but have not specified Syrians as being a reason, although a majority perceives their presence as a factor that has increased security threats in Marj in general. Reciprocally, 12% of Syrian refugees consider the Lebanese community and the local instability as being a direct threat to their lives. The number of refugees who expressed regret at coming to Lebanon and whose wish is to leave as soon as they are able to may help decrease the general perception among the Lebanese that Syrians are looking to stay in the country long-term.

Additionally, looking at the survey from a gender-based perspective, no significant or unexpected differences between male and female interviewees appeared. The main differences continue to be in relaying concerns and personal feelings, and in setting priorities, not in security perceptions. It is clear that the problems reflected in this case study emanate much less from political, religious or clandestine military/security factors, but rather from factors related to daily life and survival needs. While the outcome may ease concerns of a large scale security breach, it does shed light on a possible long-term threat that is as dangerous, particularly due to tension build-up, poor economic conditions and more refugees falling off the legal radar over registration-related difficulties.

Mitigation of clashes could be made easier if the authorities and donors are aware of them and if enough effort is properly re-directed. The re-directing of both the forms and targets of distributed aid should be supplemented with a multi-layered structure of conflict resolution beginning with youth groups, community leaders, local authorities, security forces and eventually at the regional and national level. This significant shift in approaching the refugee crisis needs a high level of understanding and a strong political will that unfortunately seem to still be lacking in Lebanon, but that are necessary for the preservation of the country and preventing it from getting involved in an extra-national conflict rather than assisting in alleviating the suffering of refugees.

The **re-directing** of both the forms and targets of **distributed aid** should be supplemented with a multi-layered structure of **conflict resolution** beginning with youth groups, community leaders, **local** authorities, security forces and eventually at the regional and **national** level.

Recommendations

To the Lebanese Government

- Ensure that security measures implemented at the local and national level respond to the safety needs of the communities;
- Ensure livelihood and resilience initiatives as strong elements in security and stabilization plans;
- Elaborate a long-term development strategy based on transparent needs, poverty and resilience assessments allowing state institutions to better implement and design interventions;
- Ensure that labor regulations are reflective of market needs and designed in a way to sustainably protect Lebanese and other labor forces;
- Design long term strategies that would allow host and refugee communities to be less dependent on aid;
- Promote an impartial aid strategy to be respected by national and international stakeholders;
- Provide stronger commitments to make access available to humanitarian organizations and allow them to have more independence and impartiality in aid delivery;
- Establish stronger oversight mechanisms over aid organizations to ensure better adherence to accepted principles;
- Adopt rights-based humanitarian principles as part of the government's humanitarian policies and regulations;
- Refrain from adopting policies that further aggravate the tension between Lebanese and Syrians;
- Recognize the temporary asylum of Syrian refugees awaiting durable solutions;
- Promote border management regulations facilitating access to asylum, accompanied by rigid screening processes that allow to better identify refugees in need of international protection.

To the International Community

- Promote tailored assistance to Lebanese state institutions based on community needs and causes of tension among inhabitants;
- Ensure that support and assistance to security agencies in Lebanon are accompanied by strong human rights criteria and efficient due diligence;
- Provide support to state institutions, such as border access and screening methods, to enhance stability and ensure better protection for asylum seekers in need of international protection;
- Recognize the impact of the crisis on Lebanese host communities with the need to design better mechanisms to enforce durable solutions;
- Support Lebanese state authorities with rights-based border management facilitating the screening of refugees;
- Ensure that support to Lebanese state authorities is accompanied by due diligence mechanisms ensuring greater rights protection.

To Humanitarian Organizations

- Ensure that aid delivery is received positively by the different communities through proper visibility and transparency;
- Review the vulnerability criteria as an imperative for aid delivery through comprehensive assessment methods, allowing aid to be delivered in a more impartial matter.

