



RUNNING OUT OF TIME

Survival of Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon

January 2014



About the FXB Center at Harvard

The FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University is an interdisciplinary center that works to protect and promote the rights and wellbeing of children, adolescents, youth and their families trapped in extreme circumstances throughout the world. The Center pursues this goal by conducting and supporting research, advocacy, and targeted action.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	iv
I. Executive Summary	2
II. Introduction.....	4
Objective	4
Syrian Conflict.....	5
Syrian Refugees in Lebanon	7
Child Protection in Conflict and Emergencies.....	9
III. Methods	11
IV. Findings and Analysis.....	15
General Life Conditions for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon	15
Living Quarters	16
Sense of Safety	17
Provision of Basic Needs.....	18
Protection From Cold Temperatures	19
Food Security.....	21
Health Care	22
Social Isolation	25
Leaving Home	25
Lebanese Hosts	26
Absence of Community	26
Education	28
Educational Settings	31
Constraints	31
No School	32
Child Labor	33
Working Children	35
Rural Agricultural Work	36
Urban Commercial or Service Work	37

Parental Resistance	37
Risks and Exploitation	38
Early Marriage.....	38
Safety and Protection	39
Foreign Suitors	40
Defiant Parents	40
Vulnerability to Trafficking	41
Sexual Exploitation.....	42
Sex Rings	42
Solicitation	42
Economic Need	43
Vulnerability and Exploitation	44
Lebanese Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis	45
Community-level Responses	45
Lebanese Government Response	46
Lebanese Aversion to Formal Camps or Permanent Shelters	46
Health Care	48
International Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis.....	49
Sudden Influx	49
Humanitarian Strain and Short-Term Relief	49
Responders and Response Plans	50
Funding Shortfalls	51
VI. Conclusions	53
VII. Recommendations	54
Basic Needs	55
Social Isolation	56
Access to Education	56
Child Labor	57
Early Marriage	58
Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking	58
International Response to the Crisis	59
Acronyms	60

Acknowledgments

This report was written by Susan Bartels, MD, MPH (Fellow and Visiting Scientist, FXB Center for Health and Human Rights; Faculty, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center), and Kathleen Hamill, JD, MALD (Fellow, FXB Center for Health and Human Rights; Adjunct Faculty, Tufts University). We are grateful for the support and guidance of our FXB colleagues, especially FXB Center Director Jennifer Leaning, MD, SMH; Anne Stetson, JD, MA; Angela Duger, JD; Hanni Stoklosa, MD; and Bonnie Shnayerson.

We are grateful to a number of organizations and their staff for their gracious assistance in facilitating our interviews with Syrian refugee families and for generously sharing their expert opinions and relevant experiences. Without their input and assistance, this assessment would not have been possible.

The photographs included in this report were taken with the permission of subjects and, in the case of children, with the permission of their parents. Placement of the photos does not link the individuals depicted with specific quotations or findings.

We are deeply indebted to the Syrian families who were willing to share their stories and their concerns. This report is dedicated to them. They have experienced great losses and their struggle to survive continues. We hope that this report will raise awareness about the plight of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and that ultimately it will rectify some of the risks and vulnerabilities they confront daily, which not only violate the rights of Syrian children but also threaten their safety, health and wellbeing.

I. Executive Summary

Close to one million Syrians – over half of them children – have sought refuge in Lebanon since hostilities broke out in their home country in March 2011, and the influx of refugees shows no signs of abating. At the current pace, the UNHCR expects the number of refugees in Lebanon to increase to 1.5 million in 2014. Even if a negotiated peace is achieved in Syria in the near future, many refugees may choose not to return out of fear for their personal safety. As we approach a fourth year of civil conflict in Syria, it is clear that the refugee crisis will not resolve or diminish in the near future. Lebanon has its own internal challenges and cannot sustain a generous and open-border response without the strategic planning and collaboration of donors and the international community. Meanwhile, the humanitarian response continues to struggle to meet certain basic refugee needs. It is now imperative that the humanitarian response transition to a long-term, coordinated approach in order to avert an outright humanitarian calamity.

This report documents the findings of a rapid assessment of the needs of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon undertaken over 10 days in November 2013. A two-person team interviewed Syrian refugee families in Beirut, Tripoli, and the Bekaa, as well as a broad spectrum of informed staff at local and international NGOs and agencies. The report considers and addresses issues that refugee families face: stressful living conditions, deprivation of basic needs, social isolation, limited access to education, child labor, and sexual exploitation. The report also reflects on the response of the Lebanese government and international actors to the growing humanitarian crisis.

The onset of winter has imbued the crisis with a heightened sense of urgency. The refugee population is unprepared for the harsh conditions of winter, especially at higher elevations. Housed haphazardly with no winter clothes, insufficient footwear, and limited food, they face grave risk of illness. The most vulnerable – the elderly and children – risk hypothermia and even death.

The pervasive lack of employment among refugees and the dire financial straits impinging on so many present additional priority concerns. Compelled to choose between sending their children to work in potentially dangerous environments or foregoing basic needs, many families rely on child labor. Even when families can afford for their children to spend precious working hours in school, refugee children have limited, if any, access to education. These constraints deprive children of sufficient food, education, health care, and play, and in doing so they hamper children's short- and long-term physical and psychosocial development. From both a humanitarian and a human rights perspective, the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon is intolerable. From the public health standpoint, the survival needs of the population are approaching catastrophe.

With this report, we seek to underscore the particular vulnerabilities of children among the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon. The scale of the humanitarian response must expand to meet both the urgent and immediate, as well as the long-term needs of Syrian refugee children and their families. In addition, the international humanitarian, donor, and political communities must work with the Lebanese government to craft an adequate, durable, and humane strategic response to the plight of Syrian children and families who had no choice but to flee their homes, and for whom time is running out.

II. Introduction

Objective

Now in its third year and with no resolution in sight, the growing population of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and the duration of the crisis pose particularly difficult challenges and complications to the humanitarian response and to the Lebanese government. Dedicated responders continue to struggle to meet the survival needs of Syrian families, who are interspersed throughout the country and who arrive in large numbers daily. The prospect of a protracted crisis has emerged as a reality, and the response now must shift accordingly. Given the situation, we have grave concerns that Syrian children in Lebanon are extremely vulnerable to a number of threats to their basic survival and wellbeing, including child labor, child marriage, commercial sexual exploitation, and human trafficking. If the humanitarian response continues to function in a coping capacity rather than transitioning to a longer-term, strategic response, Syrian refugee children will face even greater risks over the coming months and years.

This report seeks to amplify the international community's knowledge and understanding of the pressing needs for the protection of Syrian refugee children in Lebanon. In November 2013, the FXB Center for Health and Human Rights conducted a 10-day rapid field assessment to investigate the day-to-day lives of Syrian children and their families with a particular focus on child labor, child marriage and child sexual exploitation. The rapid assessment provides a snapshot of the situation of Syrian children in Lebanon. Our goal was to document the vulnerability of these children in order to raise awareness about the deprivations they experience daily, and, as needed, advocate for their rights. While a number of children's needs assessments have already been conducted in Lebanon and in other neighboring countries hosting Syrian refugees, data on vulnerability to child labor, early marriage and sexual exploitation remain scant. With the aim of highlighting the specific challenges facing refugee children, this report documents the experiences of families in three geographic locations of Lebanon, which in turn form the basis of a set of urgent

recommendations. The team believes their adoption will lead to improved wellbeing for Syrian refugee children and their communities as well as for host Lebanese communities.

Syrian Conflict

In March 2011, Syrian government forces responded to peaceful civilian protests with acts of repression and violence. In subsequent months, these protests were largely eclipsed by an armed rebellion that also gave way to proxy battles backed by foreign militants. Now for almost three years, Syria has been engulfed in a violent conflict that has claimed at least 93,000 lives,¹ caused the internal displacement of over six and a half million people,² and prompted another two million people to cross international borders.³

Reports of the Syrian conflict describe widespread use of torture and other severe human rights abuses by both government and oppositional forces.^{4,5,6} In addition to these atrocities, the combatant parties have intentionally restricted humanitarian access within Syria and deliberately and systematically deprived civilians of food and basic services.⁷ Syrians able to

¹ Violations Documentation Center in Syria. Retrieved Dec 19 2013. Available from: <http://www.vdc-sy.info/index.php/en/>. This Center estimates that there have been 93,462 fatalities. A study commissioned by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, conducted by the Human Rights Data Analysis Group in June 2013, estimated that 92,901 deaths had already occurred. See, UN OHCHR. June 13 2013. Updated Statistical Analysis of Documentation of Killings in the Syrian Arab Republic. Retrieved Dec 19 2013. Available from: <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/SY/HRDAG-Updated-SY-report.pdf>.

² Internal Displacement Monitoring Center. Sept 2013. Syria: A Full Scale Displacement and Humanitarian Crisis With No Solutions in Sight. Retrieved Dec 10 2013. Available from: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/syria>.

³ UNHCR. Nov 2013. Syria Regional Refugee Response. Retrieved Nov 27 2013. Available from: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

⁴ UN Human Rights Council. June 4 2013. Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic. Retrieved Dec 20 2013. Available from: http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/CoISyria/A-HRC-23-58_en.pdf.

⁵ Amnesty International. 2013. Annual Report 2013: The state of the world's human rights: Syria. Retrieved Dec 20 2013. Available from: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/syria/report-2013>.

⁶ Roth K. Nov 21 2013. Syria: What Chance to Stop the Slaughter? Retrieved Dec 20 2013. Available from: <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2013/nov/21/syria-what-chance-stop-slaughter/>.

⁷ International Crisis Group. Nov 1 2013. UN Should Mandate Unhindered Humanitarian Access To and Within Syria. Retrieved Dec 10 2013. Available from: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/media-releases/2013/mena/un-should-mandate-unhindered-humanitarian-access-to-and-within-syria.aspx>.

escape from the dire living circumstances in besieged areas face further danger as they travel and attempt to cross landmine-laden borders into Lebanon and Jordan.⁸

From the beginning, the Syrian civil war has disproportionately affected children.⁹ The conflict started with the detention of youth by the Syrian authorities and the assault and killing of student demonstrators. The full-fledged war now includes indiscriminate attacks on Syrian children carried out by both government forces and armed opposition groups, such as the shelling of schools while children are in class^{10, 11} and almost daily air bombardments and artillery strikes on heavily populated civilian areas where children are known to be living and playing.¹² Furthermore, combatant parties are using landmines to deter people from fleeing across international borders; landmines are known to injure children disproportionately¹³ and cause childhood casualties.¹⁴ Within Syria, over four million children are currently displaced, living in poverty and caught in the lines of fire.¹⁵

In the near term, the armed conflict in Syria may unfold in several different ways. One possibility is that the entrenched divisions fueling this civil war will deepen even further, and the conflict will extend indefinitely into the future. Other conceivable possibilities include: a negotiated peace settlement reached in Geneva as early as January 2014, a national election process in Syria, the forcible ouster of the Assad government, the forcible routing of armed militants by the Syrian government, and the overwhelming and prevailing use of force by one armed extremist group or another.

⁸ Human Rights Watch. March 13 2012. Syria: Army Planting Banned Landmines. Retrieved Dec 10 2013. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2012/03/13/syria-army-planting-banned-landmines>.

⁹ War Child. July 22 2012. Syria: A War on Childhood. Retrieved Dec 10 2013. Available from: <http://www.warchild.org.uk/about/publications/syria-war-childhood>.

¹⁰ I Am Syria. Oct 20 2013. Syria: When the Students and Teacher Killed Together in Class. Retrieved Dec 10 2013. Available from: <http://www.iamsyria.org/syria-when-the-students-and-teacher-killed-together-in-the-class.html>.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch. June 6 2013. Syria: Attacks on Schools Endanger Students. Retrieved Dec 10 2013. Available from: <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/06/05/syria-attacks-schools-endanger-students>.

¹² Amnesty International. Sept 19 2012. Syria: New Evidence – High Civilian Death Toll From Campaign of Indiscriminate Attacks. Retrieved Dec 10 2013. Available from: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/syria-new-evidence-high-civilian-death-toll-campaign-indiscriminate-attacks-2012-09-19>.

¹³ War Child. Effects on Children of Landmines. Retrieved Dec 10 2013. Available from: http://www.warchild.org/Interactive_Galleries/Landmines/Effects/effects.html.

¹⁴ Ibid 8.

¹⁵ UNICEF. Nov 2013. Children of Syria – The Crisis in Numbers. Retrieved Dec 10 2013. Available from: <http://childrenofsyria.info>.

But even if hostilities do taper in Syria in the short term, it is unlikely that the majority of Syrian refugees in Lebanon will be able or willing to return due to fear of reprisal, violent attacks, or inevitable hardship for their families. The security situation in many parts of Syria will remain uncertain and precarious for the foreseeable future. Regardless, the Syrian refugee crisis will extend long beyond the cessation of hostilities and it is essential that the Lebanese government and the international community craft an adequate response strategy designed to extend far beyond the humanitarian horizon.

Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

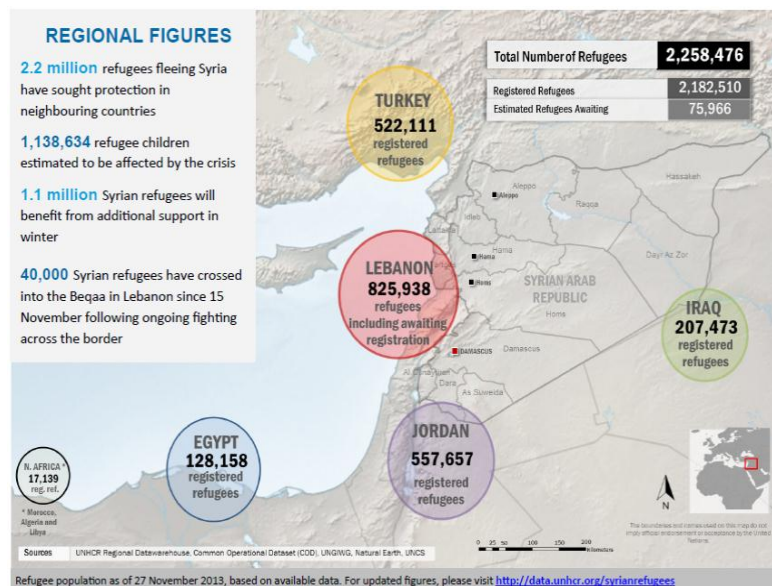


Figure 1. Regional map illustrating locations of Syrian refugees.¹⁶

Over one million Syrian children now live as refugees in neighboring countries.¹⁷ Lebanon has the largest refugee influx of all the host countries; the UN currently estimates that over 825,000 Syrians have crossed the border.¹⁸ However, this number may not reflect the full Syrian refugee population in the country. The Lebanese government estimates that one

¹⁶ UNHCR Inter-Agency Regional Response. Nov 27 2013. Retrieved Dec 5 2013. Available from: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

¹⁷ Ibid 8.

¹⁸ UNHCR. Nov 25 2013. Syrian Regional Refugee Response. Retrieved Nov 26 2013. Available from: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>.

million Syrian refugees currently live in the country.¹⁹ With a population of approximately 4.2 million, roughly one in four people currently residing in Lebanon is a refugee. Hosting such a large number of refugees would strain the infrastructure and resources of most countries. For a small country like Lebanon, the strain is unsustainable. Lebanese infrastructure prior to the onset of the inflow of refugees already faced considerable challenges in providing adequate public services such as education and health care. Lebanon's ongoing capacity to accommodate and integrate such a large and ever-increasing number of refugees is precarious at best.

At the beginning of the crisis, the Lebanese government decided not to establish formal camps for Syrian refugees.²⁰ Lebanon has hosted Palestinian refugee camps since 1948 and this, in addition to concerns about the militarization of camps and future repatriation, likely contributed to the decision to avoid establishing formal Syrian camps. Consequently, Syrian refugees in Lebanon live among Lebanese communities and in informal tent settlements that often lack proper infrastructure and forward planning. The lack of organized shelter complicates the humanitarian response as refugees are dispersed in over 1,500 locations throughout the country,²¹ making it logistically challenging to identify and locate them, and thus to deliver aid and services.

¹⁹ UNDP. March 4 2013. Launching of the "Lebanese Host Communities Support Program." Retrieved Dec 6 2013. Available from: <http://www.undp.org/content/rbas/en/home/presscenter/articles/2013/03/04/launching-of-the-lebanese-host-communities-support-programme-/>.

²⁰ International Crisis Group. May 2013. Too Close for Comfort: Syrians in Lebanon. Retrieved Nov 26 2013. Available from: [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Lebanon/141-too-close-for-comfort-syria](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Lebanon/141-too-close-for-comfort-syria).

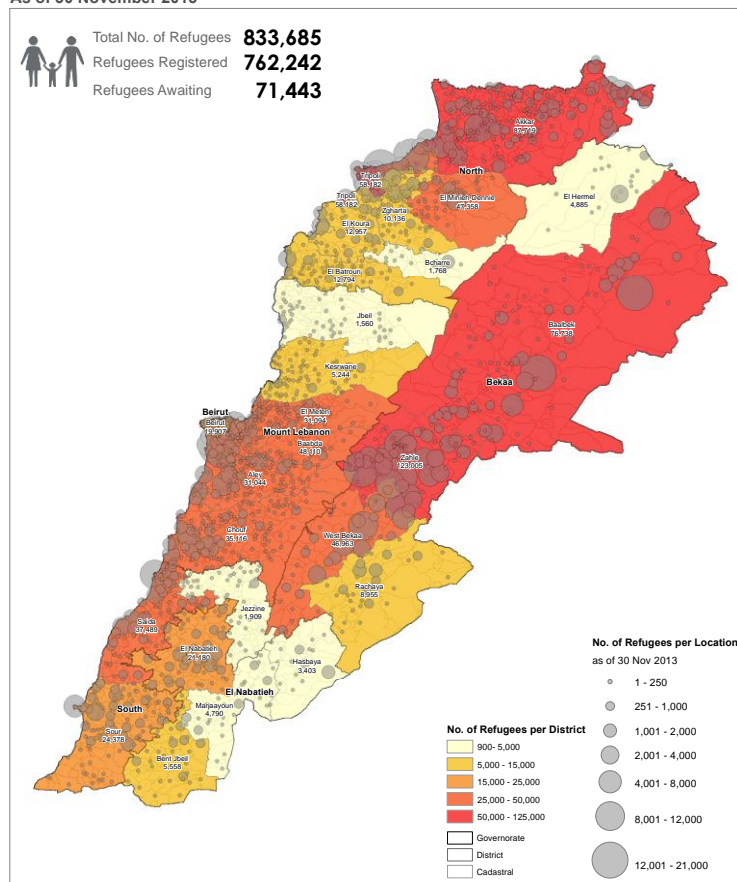
²¹ UNHCR. Dec 17 2013. 2014 Syria Regional Response Plan: Strategic Overview. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/syriarrp6/>.

Figure 2. Map indicating the locations of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.²²

SYRIA REFUGEE RESPONSE

LEBANON Syrian Refugees Registered

As of 30 November 2013



The boundaries, names, and designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement of the United Nations or UNHCR. All data used were the best available at the time of map production.

Data Sources:

- Refugee population and location data by UNHCR as of 30 November 2013. For more information on refugee data, contact Rana G. Kasli at rkasli@unhcr.org
- GIS and Mapping by UNHCR Lebanon. For further information on map, contact Jaid Ghosn at jghosn@unhcr.org

Child Protection in Conflict and Emergencies

For a range of reasons, children often comprise a significant proportion of the affected population in conflict and humanitarian crises. Many countries struggling with conflict have predominately young and fast-growing populations,²³ which increases the pool of at-risk children and youth. Furthermore, children are often less able to flee and defend themselves from the physical threats inherent to wars and humanitarian crises, which leads to a higher incidence of maiming, injuries, long-term disabilities and deaths among children. During war and displacement, children are at high risk

of being separated from their families, of being kidnapped, of sexual abuse and of being recruited into armed hostilities.²⁴ Displacement from home, lack of education, and poor health care carry significant long-term repercussions that extend past childhood.²⁵ Given their anatomic and physiologic differences, children are also more likely to suffer from

²² UNCHR. Dec 2013. Syria Regional Refugee Response. Retrieved Dec 6 2013. Available from: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/documents.php?page=1&view=grid&Language%5B%5D=1&Country%5B%5D=122&Type%5B%5D=1>.

²³ Population Action International. 2012. Security and Governance. Retrieved Dec 10 2013. Available from: <http://populationaction.org/topics/security-and-governance/>.

²⁴ Machel G for UNICEF. 2001. The Impact of War on Children. Retrieved Dec 10 2013. Available from: <http://www.un.org/rights/introduc.htm#contents>.

²⁵ Ibid 24.

dehydration, malnutrition, hypothermia and infectious diseases than are adults. And finally, the long-term impact of war and violence on the mental health and psychological wellbeing of children is profound and has been well documented over the years.^{26,27,28}

Reports published to date on the Syrian conflict indicate that children have a deep sense of instability and are experiencing a deterioration in their psychosocial wellbeing.^{29,30,31} The reports also reveal that many children are being deprived of an education and must work to support their families' economic needs.^{32,33,34,35} Further reports highlight cases of Syrian children who have been separated from their families³⁶ and children who have suffered physical and sexual violence as well as emotional abuse.^{37,38,39} Assessments also indicate that girls may be pressured into earlier marriage and that adolescent boys may be engaging in armed hostilities in Syria.⁴⁰

In 2012, the Child Protection Working Group (CPWG) published the Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action.⁴¹ These guidelines are based on treaties from international human rights law, humanitarian law and refugee law, and take into account

²⁶ Barenbaum J, Ruchkin V and Schwab-Stone M. 2004. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 45:1, pp 41-62.

²⁷ Ibid 24.

²⁸ Betancourt TS, Speelman L, Onyango G, Bolton P. A qualitative study of psychosocial problems of war-affected youth in northern Uganda. *Journal of Transcultural Psychiatry* 2009; 46(2):238-256.

²⁹ Child Protection Working Group. Sept 2013. Syria Child Protection Assessment 2013. Retrieved Nov 27 2013. Available from: <http://cpwg.net/new-assessment-child-protection-needs-syria-cpwg-september-2013/>

³⁰ World Vision. Dec 2012. Robbed of Childhood, Running From War. Retrieved Nov 27 2013. Available from: <http://www.wvi.org/advocacy-and-justice-children/publication/robbed-childhood-running-war-report>.

³¹ UNHCR. Nov 2013. The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis. Retrieved Dec 5 2013. Available from: <http://unhcr.org/FutureOfSyria/>.

³² Ibid 29.

³³ World Vision. Dec 2012. Robbed of Childhood, Running From War. Available from: <http://www.wvi.org/advocacy-and-justice-children/publication/robbed-childhood-running-war-report>.

³⁴ Lebanon Child Protection in Emergencies Working Group. Jan – Feb 2013. Child Protection in Emergencies – Rapid Needs Assessment Lebanon. Retrieved Nov 27 2013. Available from: https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/working_group.php?Page=Country&LocationId=122&Id=41.

³⁵ Ibid 31.

³⁶ Ibid 29.

³⁷ Ibid 30.

³⁸ Ibid 34.

³⁹ Ibid 31.

⁴⁰ Ibid 30.

⁴¹ Child Protection Working Group. 2012. Minimum Standards for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action. Retrieved Nov 27 2013. Available from: <http://cpwg.net/minimum-standards/>.

the four key principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC):⁴² survival and development, non-discrimination, child participation, and the best interest of the child. The CRC has been almost universally ratified – including by Lebanon and Syria – and all ratifying parties are bound to the convention by law. The CRC has made great strides in raising worldwide awareness about the rights of children, and several nations have developed National Plans of Action to implement the convention. However, obstacles to domestic implementation and enforcement of the convention continue to restrict the actual impact of the CRC on the everyday lives of children, including children in Lebanon.

III. Methods

Over a 10-day period from November 17 to November 27, 2013, FXB team members Susan Bartels and Kathleen Hamill conducted a field assessment of the needs of Syrian refugee children living in Lebanon. The rapid assessment provided the team with a snapshot of the refugee crisis in Lebanon based upon interviews with stakeholders and refugees as well as observation of multiple refugee encampment sites. This report is not a quantitative assessment, but rather one that examined trends and indicators of the situation of Syrian children in Lebanon.

Throughout the team’s assessment and throughout this report, “children” are defined as all human beings under the age of 18 years. The team chose three geographic locations with large numbers of refugees for evaluation: the greater Beirut area (Lebanese population of almost two million⁴³ hosting 217,170 Syrian refugees⁴⁴), the Bekaa Valley (Lebanese

⁴² UNHCR. 1989. Convention of the Rights of the Child. Retrieved Nov 27 2013. Available from: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

⁴³ Nations Online. Dec 2013. Beirut. Retrieved Dec 10 2013. Available from: http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/google_map_Beirut.htm.

⁴⁴ UNHCR. Dec 6 2013. Syria Regional Refugee Response. Retrieved Dec 10 2013. Available from: <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>.

population of 470,000⁴⁵ hosting 274,235 Syrian refugees⁴⁶), and the greater Tripoli area (Lebanese population of approximately 500,000 hosting 242,753 Syrian refugees⁴⁷). One member of the team (Bartels) speaks French and has deep experience conducting assessments in the context of humanitarian crises and human rights violations; the other (Hamill) speaks Arabic, previously lived in Lebanon for six years, and is a human rights lawyer.

The FXB Center developed an open-ended questionnaire based on prior field experience. A Lebanese social worker, fluent in both English and Arabic, translated the questionnaire into Arabic. The Human Research Protection Program at the Harvard School of Public Health approved the project. Although the team was careful not to uncover specific information about individuals, the research protocol, as approved by the Human Research Protection Program, provided a procedure to make a referral to local partners should they identify an individual at risk of harm.

⁴⁵ Civilian Military Fusion Centre. March 2013. Lebanon at Risk: Conflict in Bekaa Valley. Retrieved Dec 10 2013. Available from:
https://www.cimicweb.org/cmo/ComplexCoverage/Documents/Reports/20130221_BekaaValley_Final.pdf.

⁴⁶ Ibid 44.

⁴⁷ Ibid 44.



Figure 3. Map of Lebanon indicating sites of assessment.

With the assistance of local facilitators in each region, the team employed purposive sampling to choose participants. The facilitators selected participants based on their knowledge of the population and their understanding of the assessment's purpose. In each of the three locations, the facilitator worked for a local NGO and was actively engaged in responding to the crisis. The team conducted interviews primarily with Syrian refugee women but also with a few Syrian refugee men. Although children were sometimes present with their adult family members, the team did not interview them. The team attempted to interview refugee families from a variety of settings (those living in rented apartments, tented settlements, or staying with family or friends) and refugee families who had been in Lebanon for at least a few months.

The local facilitator initially approached prospective families to inquire whether an adult member of the household would be willing to speak to the investigating team. If the team confirmed that an adult member was interested in speaking with them, they obtained verbal informed consent and used the open-ended questionnaire to interview adult family members

privately and in their homes when possible. The team conducted interviews in Arabic with the assistance of two local university-trained female translators. The team handwrote all responses in paper notebooks in English and did not collect any identifying information. Where possible, both team members were present in the same interview to enhance accurate recording of the discussion as well as a nuanced understanding of responses. The team did not provide any compensation to interviewees in exchange for participation.

Location	Syrian Families	Lebanese Host Families	NGOs & Other Stakeholders	Other Community Members
Bekaa Valley	11	2	2	3
Tripoli	13	2	1	3
Beirut	10	2	11	5
Total	34	8	14	11

Table 1. Number of interviews conducted in each site according to type of participants.

The team also interviewed key stakeholders including representatives from both local and international organizations who are actively engaged in child protection as well as community members (e.g. municipal leaders, health care providers, religious leaders, university faculty members, teachers and administrators). The team maintained strict confidentiality of all stakeholder information and took care not to quote stakeholders who had been previously interviewed. Additionally, during on-site visits, the team members made and recorded their own observations with regard to adequacy of accommodations, clothing, food security, evidence of child labor, obvious physical risks, and evidence of child maltreatment.

IV. Findings and Analysis

General Life Conditions for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

After experiencing extreme violence and human rights violations in their native country, Syrian refugees now face new vulnerabilities, risks, and challenges in Lebanon. Upon arrival in Lebanon, all refugee families are entitled to assistance packages and families with vulnerabilities are fast-tracked for registration. Yet Syrians can still experience frustrating long delays in registering for refugee status. In the past year, the average waiting period has reportedly decreased from 90 days to 30 days in line with international standards. UNHCR registers an average of 13,000 refugees per week. However, after receiving their initial assistance package, refugees may receive aid and services haphazardly, if at all.



Photo 1. Wool from a recent sheep shearing will be used to make mattresses to help protect children from the cold ground while they sleep.

For many, the economic struggle to survive permeates their daily lives and is a constant source of stress. Although many Syrian families are grateful for the safety and security offered to them by their Lebanese hosts, they express outrage deriving from a profound sense of having been abandoned. This outrage contributes to an atmosphere of discontent and distrust and leads to an unsettled, almost volatile mood in some Syrian refugee communities.

Living Quarters

Living circumstances varied considerably among the 34 Syrian families the team interviewed in Lebanon. Some lived in multi-roomed Lebanese homes with furniture, a heating source and amenities such as televisions and mobile phones. Others lived in small tents without proper doors to protect them against harsh weather or a source of heat, and slept on thin mattresses on the ground. Most homes did have electricity although most experienced periodic power outages. Refugee families living in tents were frequently located in informal settlements ranging in size from about 30 to 1,500 tents. The team heard reports of several people crowding into tight living quarters, such as a family of twenty (16 adults and four children) who lived in a single room for seven months. A mother of six living near Tripoli said, *“We are three families living here under this one tent. My advice to another family coming to Lebanon from Syria would be to rent an apartment if you can afford it. It rained last week, and everything got all wet. Just look at how we are living here in these circumstances.”*

In Beirut and Tripoli, almost all families talked about the high cost of rent and living in Lebanon compared to Syria. Paying rent constitutes a financial hardship for the vast majority of families and presents an almost universal source of stress. In the absence of employment or with only sporadic employment, some people were forced to sell aid vouchers or other personal items to pay their rent. As one mother living near Tripoli in a tented settlement lamented, *“We do anything we can to pay the rent here. We try to economize and save as much money as possible. Sometimes we don’t buy food or drinking water just so we can pay the rent at the end of the month. They say they will kick us out of the tent if we do not pay the rent on time.”* Living in the basement of an unfinished building outside of Beirut, a father of five uprooted from rural Damascus said, *“We have nothing here for our children – no clean water, no latrine, harsh temperatures, insects, including spiders and snakes, and no medical or healthcare. The owner of this building lets us stay here for now, but he has already arranged to sell it and we have a maximum of two months left. Then what? Where will we go and how will we find shelter?”*

Informal tent settlements are materializing across Lebanon out of an urgent need to shelter refugees. However, these settlements are being built without proper planning, resources or infrastructure, thereby generating a number of predictable problems. For instance, tents are

often situated in close proximity to each other, which creates a fire hazard and relinquishes any sense of privacy. Living in overcrowded conditions generates risk for infectious disease outbreaks, and the risks are even higher considering that many of these informal settlements lack adequate water sources and sufficient sanitation. Furthermore, some informal settlements are located next to high voltage power lines, busy roads with heavy traffic, or gutters and sewage ravines that are known to overflow and cause flooding in the winter months, all of which pose risks to children and adults alike. Unless swiftly addressed, these risks will only be exacerbated as settlements and populations grow.

Sense of Safety

Some families conveyed their gratitude for the relative security of life in Lebanon compared to Syria. However, many other families expressed frustration with their living situations in Lebanon and articulated feelings of abandonment. In reflecting on events leading up to their displacement, one Syrian woman said, *“If our voices had been heard in the first place [two years ago], we wouldn’t be here now,”* and another Syrian mother reported, *“This is really bad [life in Lebanon] but we fled death so what is the alternative.”* Although many refugee families expressed concern about their safety in Lebanon, most spoke in general terms without identifying specific risks. With the violence and suffering of the Syrian conflict still fresh in the memories of most Syrian refugees, the perception that the international community has failed to respond adequately to the crisis likely contributes to this sense of vulnerability.

Refugees living within informal tent settlements spoke of additional security concerns that result from the lack of protective security barriers surrounding the settlements and/or from the lack of security and entry/exit checkpoints. Certain settlements are highly visible to outsiders (pitched in the middle of flat, open fields, for example) which leaves families feeling exposed. These safety concerns would be ameliorated by properly constructed refugee camps that offer protection and security. The lack of such camps throughout Lebanon may be partially responsible for individuals feeling unsafe.

The unusually high economic burden shouldered by Syrian families also contributes to their sense of insecurity. Many refugees are so financially vulnerable that they resort to engaging in types of work that they otherwise would not engage in, and to sending their children to

work in unfamiliar and potentially dangerous environments. Furthermore, the entrepreneurial endeavors undertaken by some Syrians in order to make ends meet sometimes compel them to venture out into the community and interact with Lebanese hosts who can be unwelcoming or even hostile. As Lebanese communities and infrastructure become even more saturated with refugees, tensions between Syrian and Lebanese communities are likely to rise which could exacerbate the sense of insecurity already experienced by Syrian families.



Photo 2. In Beirut, refugee "shelters" sometimes consisted of curtains hung around a porch.

Provision of Basic Needs

Given the under-funded humanitarian response and the logistical challenges of providing aid to a large refugee population dispersed throughout the country, the needs of Syrian refugees remain extensive and unmet. However, many refugees the team spoke with

repeatedly voiced several urgent needs that call for prioritization, including protection from the cold, food security and the provision of health care.

Protection From Cold Temperatures

The predominant concern for families in the Bekaa Valley was the impending cold temperatures and wet winter weather. Many of the refugees live in accommodations that are not properly sealed off from the elements, including informal tented settlements, unfinished buildings, garages, worksites and warehouses. The team observed more families living in tents in the Bekaa than in Beirut or Tripoli, and a majority of the tents were neither built for all weather nor equipped with a heating source. Furthermore, the clothing of most families was inappropriate for cold temperatures and wet weather since many left home with only the clothes they were wearing. Almost all parents in the Bekaa Valley worried about the lack of warm clothing for their children. Notably, a number of children in the Bekaa Valley did not have footwear or, if they did, it consisted of open sandals that would provide little protection from the winter weather.

The highest plateaus in the Bekaa Valley rise approximately 1,000 meters above sea level, which means that temperatures often drop to below freezing during the winter months. The risk of hypothermia is further augmented by winter's torrential rains and snowfalls, and by wind, both of which cause one's body to lose heat more rapidly. These environmental hypothermia risk factors are further compounded by human risk factors such as young age (very young children tend to lose body heat faster than adults) and malnutrition (malnourished individuals may lack sufficient body fat to insulate vital organs).

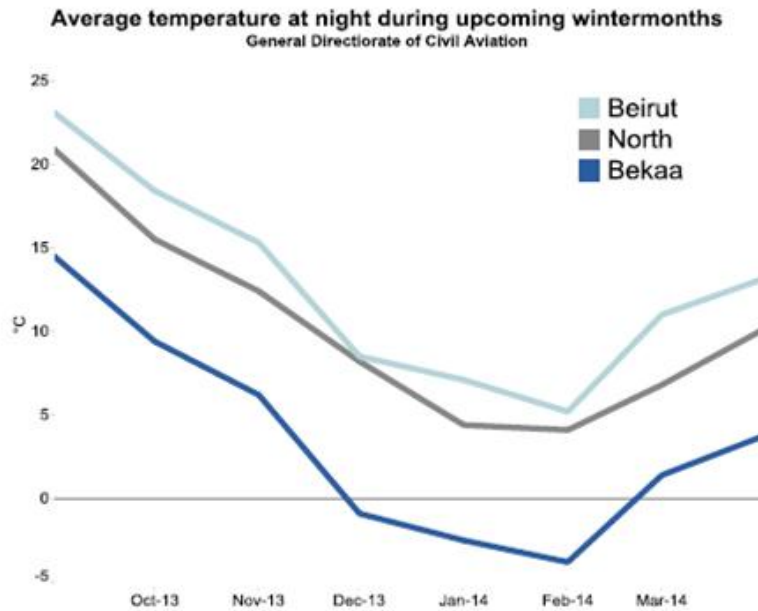


Figure 4. Average winter temperatures in the three areas of Lebanon included in the assessment.⁴⁸

The childhood risk of death from hypothermia is real and has been documented in similar contexts. For instance, at least 22 displaced Afghan children in Kabul died from hypothermia two years ago, most of them infants under the age of one.⁴⁹ In 1999 when Kosovar refugees fled into Macedonia, high caseloads of hypothermia arose among displaced families.⁵⁰ Furthermore, with the Syrian conflict concluding its third year in March, this is not the first winter that Syrian refugee children have endured freezing temperatures. Last year, there were reports of Syrian refugee children requiring hospitalization to treat life-threatening hypothermia.^{51,52}

⁴⁸ Assessment Capacities Project. Sept 26 2013. Regional Analysis Syria. Retrieved Nov 30 2013. Available from: <http://www.acaps.org/reports>.

⁴⁹ The New York Times. Feb 3 2012. Driven Away by a War, Now Stalked by Winter's Cold. Retrieved Dec 11 2013. Available from: http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/04/world/asia/cold-weather-kills-children-in-afghan-refugee-camps.html?_r=0.

⁵⁰ Boston Globe. April 18 1999. For Kosovo's Children of War, Traumatic Wounds Run Deep. Retrieved Dec 11 2013. Available from: <http://www.boston.com/news/packages/kosovo/stories/globe041899.htm>.

⁵¹ UNICEF. Jan 20 2013. Children of Syria: Hassam's Story. Retrieved Dec 11 2013. Available from: <http://blogs.unicef.org.uk/2013/01/20/children-of-syria-hassams-story/>.

⁵² UNICEF. Oct 2013. Hungry, Displaced, Killed: No End to Suffering for Children of Syria. Retrieved Dec 11 2013. Available from: <http://www.unicef.ie/NewsMedia/Hungry-Displaced-Killed-No-End-to-Suffering-for-Children-of-Syria--72-434.asp>.

This winter, cold winter temperatures and rain will again put the lives of many Syrian children at risk unless an immediate and effective response to provide necessary shelter, warm clothing, footwear, blankets and stoves is undertaken. Since last winter, the refugee population has increased by 700,000, which creates challenging logistics for humanitarian workers seeking to accommodate the massive increase. UNHCR has targeted families unprepared for winter by providing winter relief items such as heating stoves, fuel and sealing off substandard housing.⁵³ As of December 30, 2013, 250,000 refugees had received winter relief items and 74,500 had been assisted by the shelter winterization program.⁵⁴ While these efforts have been extensive, the scope of the problem is immense and many refugees remain exposed to the elements this winter. The mere fact that Syrian families face hypothermia and possible death despite this being the third winter of the crisis reflects the lack of sufficient long-term and forward-thinking planning.

Setting aside the financial and logistical challenges of distributing winter aid to Syrian families in Lebanon, the question remains as to whether local markets have the capacity to provide necessary supplies.⁵⁵ Some NGOs and humanitarian responders are concerned about the ability of local markets to draw on adequate supplies to appropriately winterize refugee communities, which raises the question as to whether the importation of necessary supplies would be possible (see below at the section on [Lebanese Aversion to Formal Camps or Permanent Shelters](#) for a related discussion).⁵⁶

Food Security

Food security posed another major concern for several Syrian families in Lebanon. Many participants were dependent on food vouchers and other food aid but reported that the amount they received was not enough to feed the whole family. One single mother of five

⁵³ UNHCR. 2013. Regional Winterization Programme 2013: Inter-Agency Regional Response for Syrian Refugees. Retrieved Jan 9 2014. Available from: <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=3835>.

⁵⁴ UNHCR. Jan 6 2013. Syria Situation: Regional Winterization Programme: 23 – 30 December 2013. Retrieved Jan 9 2014. Available from: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/documents.php>.

⁵⁵ ACAPS. Sep 2013. Syria Needs Assessment. Retrieved Dec 20 2013. Available from: <http://geo.acaps.org/docs/491>. Questioning the capacity of the local market to provide commodities and winterization items like stoves, blankets and winter clothes at pages 6 and 9.

⁵⁶ Assessment Capacities Project. Sept 26 2013. Regional Analysis Syria. Retrieved Nov 30 2013. Available from: <http://www.acaps.org/reports>.

recently received written notification from the UN that food aid would be discontinued for her entire family. As she understood it, this was because her oldest child had just turned 18 years old. Other families reported that they have been forced to sell their food vouchers to pay rent. Some interviewees reported that life in Syria was better despite the violence because they could access food more easily there. One Syrian woman said, *“What we are experiencing here is worse than what we experienced in Syria because at least in Syria we had food and other basic necessities. That would be preferred even if it means death.”* While many families reported having insufficient food supplies, most children did not appear obviously malnourished. However, many families explained that their economic situation was gradually declining over time as they depleted their cash reserves, leaving them with less disposable income for food supplies.

Health Care

When Syrian refugees first arrived in Lebanon, medical providers reported that the most urgent health concerns were traumatic injuries resulting from violence in Syria. One Syrian mother living in Tripoli reported, *“My daughter’s school in Syria was struck by a missile killing six children and my daughter’s leg was seriously injured in the attack. She was hospitalized in Syria for a while but when she was released from hospital, I brought her here to Lebanon where the leg injury required further medical treatment.”*

However, the medical issues of Syrians expanded as the war continued. Displaced Syrians had been living in overcrowded conditions for longer periods of time and the Syrian health care infrastructure had deteriorated to the point that routine vaccinations were no longer being provided. As a result, communicable disease outbreaks among Syrian refugees began to emerge. In Lebanon 1,748 cases of measles were reported in 2013.⁵⁷ Although the associated mortality rates were relatively low, even a small number of measles cases is concerning because it is a highly contagious infection and can be lethal in young children, particularly among the malnourished. In response to the measles outbreaks, the UN and

⁵⁷ Republic of Lebanon, Ministry of Public Health. Jan 3 2014. Notifiable Communicable Diseases. Retrieved Jan 9 2014. Available from: <http://www.moph.gov.lb/Prevention/Surveillance/documents/measles2013.htm>.

NGOs started mass vaccination campaigns and the outbreak appears to be under control.^{58,59} Additionally, cases of acute flaccid paralysis in Syria were confirmed to be polio, an infectious disease that had not been seen in Syria since 1999.⁶⁰ Although only 10 cases have been confirmed, concerns are mounting that a much larger number of asymptomatic individuals could be carrying and transmitting the virus without their knowledge.⁶¹ Thus, these polio cases prompted mass vaccination campaigns in the region.

Syrian refugees have started to display signs of mental health problems and psychological distress more deeply as a result of their traumatic experiences and losses. This is the case both for adults and children. Several Syrian parents told us that their children were easily startled by loud noises such as fireworks, which are routinely set off to celebrate marriages in Lebanon. Other families reported that young children were overly fearful of seemingly trivial threats and that they had difficulty sleeping at night.

Syrian refugees have begun to seek medical care for chronic, pre-existing conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, thyroid disorders and cancers. A Syrian mother in Tripoli reported that the family was currently accessing medical care for her epileptic son and her asthmatic daughter but that the out-of-pocket expense to purchase medications posed a huge financial burden for the household. A Syrian mother in the Bekaa Valley recounted, *“One of my daughters has a brain tumor and hydrocephalus. In Syria she received treatment for this every month but when we sought treatment for her here in Lebanon, we found that we could not afford to pay for it.”*

Now that many families have been deprived of adequate nutrition for a substantial amount of time, cases of malnutrition are starting to be identified. During the fall of 2013, health care providers in Syria reported a definite increase in the number of malnutrition cases (currently averaging 30-35 per day) and a WHO team that visited Syria in September noted

⁵⁸ WHO. Dec 6 2012. Measles and polio vaccination campaign targets 2.5 million children in the Syrian Arab Republic. Retrieved Dec 20 2013. Available from: <http://www.emro.who.int/media/news/vaccination-campaign-syria.html>.

⁵⁹ UNICEF. Apr 30 2013. Mass vaccination campaigns in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey amid measles outbreak. Retrieved Dec 20 2013. Available from: http://www.unicef.org/media/media_68943.html.

⁶⁰ WHO. Polio Eradication Program – Syrian Arab Republic. Retrieved Dec 11 2013. Available from: <http://www.emro.who.int/polio/countries/syrian-arab-republic.html>.

⁶¹ Healthline News. Nov 11 2013. Syrian Crisis Sounds Alarm on Potential Global Polio Outbreak. Retrieved Dec 11 2013. Available from: <http://www.healthline.com/health-news/children-polio-outbreak-in-syria-threatens-europe-111113>.

alarming levels of malnutrition.⁶² Increasing rates of malnutrition in Lebanon are also being reported with more than 100 Syrian refugee children identified as suffering from malnutrition during a recent WHO screening in the Bekaa Valley (see above at the section on [Food Security](#) for a related discussion).⁶³

Prior to the civil war, the majority of Syrian children enjoyed reasonably good health, thanks in part to a relatively high-functioning Syrian health care system. For instance, prior to 2011, Syrian neonatal and child mortality rates were fairly low: 88% of women received antenatal care while pregnant, 96% babies were delivered by a skilled birth attendant, and more than 80% of children were immunized against measles and polio.⁶⁴ Most Syrian refugee families reported that they had routine health care in Syria before the conflict and that health services were much more accessible in Syria than they are currently in Lebanon.

Many Syrian refugees expressed concern about the prohibitive costs of health care in Lebanon. Almost everyone noted that health care and medications were more expensive in Lebanon than they had been in Syria, with one Syrian man saying, “*Medical care that would have cost about \$10 in Syria, costs \$50 here in Lebanon.*” Other families reported that they no longer take their children to the doctor as often because they do not have the financial means to pay for the visits. Several refugees said they were in debt to a third party because they had borrowed money to cover medical expenses. In expressing his frustration about the medical care in Lebanon, one male Syrian refugee concluded, “*There is no medical assistance here – we could die here and no one would notice.*”

Some Syrian refugees said that when they first arrived in Lebanon, they were expected to pay only 15% of the medical costs but that they are now expected to pay 25% of the costs.⁶⁵ As a result of a huge funding shortfall, UNCHR cut its primary health care subsidies to

⁶² WHO. Sept 26 2013. WHO Mission to Hama Reveals Alarming Health Situation. Retrieved Dec 11 2013. Available from: <http://www.emro.who.int/syr/syria-news/who-mission-to-hama-reveals-alarming-health-situation.html>.

⁶³ ReliefWeb. Dec 6 2013. Syria's Refugee Children Face Rising Risk of Malnutrition. Retrieved Dec 11 2013. Available from: <http://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/syrias-refugee-children-face-rising-risk-malnutrition>.

⁶⁴ Médecins Sans Frontières. Nov 22 2013. Polio in Syria: An Opportunity to Save Lives? Retrieved Dec 11 2013. Available from: <http://www.msf-crash.org/en/sur-le-vif/2013/11/22/7252/polio-in-syria-an-opportunity-to-save-lives/>.

⁶⁵ UNHCR. July 2013. UNHCR Monthly Update: Health. Retrieved Jan 9 2014. Available from: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/documents.php>.

75%⁶⁶ and limited its financing of secondary and tertiary health care services including chemotherapy, dialysis and non-emergent blood transfusions.⁶⁷ UNHCR reported, “Contributory payment is required for all health care services in the public health care system. While the same fees apply to refugees as locals, the fees may be prohibitive for many refugees. Refugees must pay the costs for care/tests not covered by UNHCR (25%). Additionally, some providers require upfront payment of these uncovered costs. Medications and diagnostic tests are frequently overprescribed, increasing costs for refugees and UNHCR.”⁶⁸ However, UNHCR or other NGOs cover the health care costs of refugees considered to be vulnerable and financially challenged.⁶⁹

Social Isolation

In Beirut, Tripoli and the Bekaa Valley most refugee families articulated a deep sense of social isolation, which appears to be multi-layered.

Leaving Home

Leaving home and living in an unfamiliar environment understandably contributes to the first layer of isolation. Referring to life with her family in Lebanon, one Syrian woman said, “*The most challenging thing about being in Lebanon is living in a country that is not your own.*” Many Syrian families reported that they have little to no contact with loved ones still in Syria



Photo 3. A bus arriving from Syria carries families and their belongings.

⁶⁶ Ahram Online. Sept 5 2013. UN to Cut Refugee Aid in Lebanon Amid Funding Gaps. Retrieved Dec 2 2013. Available from: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/80863/World/Region/UN-to-cut-refugee-aid-in-Lebanon-ami>.

⁶⁷ UNHCR. May 2013. Health Operational Guidance. Retrieved Jan 9 2014. Available from: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/documents.php>; UNHCR. July 2013. UNHCR Monthly Update: Health. Retrieved Jan 9 2014. Available from: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/documents.php>.

⁶⁸ Ibid 65.

⁶⁹ Ibid 67.

and no news of their whereabouts or wellbeing. In fact, several refugee families pleaded with the team to help locate loved ones who had disappeared in Syria. The displacement to an unfamiliar country was also reported to be difficult for children. The uncle of a five-year-old Syrian girl reported, “*On her way home from school, she stops in front of a statue of the Virgin Mary and prays to be able to go home to Syria.*”

Lebanese Hosts

The Lebanese host community contributes to the second layer of social isolation. A majority of Syrian families reported that they did not go out nor did they socialize with Lebanese neighbors or community members. Some indicated that they felt discriminated against by the Lebanese host community and that this contributed to their decision to stay home. Other refugees talked about their lack of financial resources to visit places, purchase items or engage in recreational activities, and how this was a disincentive to leave home. Some spoke specifically about how emotionally difficult it was to be out in the community with their families and to continually have to say no when the children asked for a treat or a small toy. These situations, characterized by profound feelings of inadequacy and stress, were reason enough for some Syrian parents to stay home.

Absence of Community

Lack of contact with other Syrian families contributes to a third layer of isolation. A large number of refugees reported that they did not talk to or socialize with other Syrians beyond their immediate families or households. As one female head of household remarked, “*I don’t let my children go out or socialize much because I want to protect them. I also want to minimize their exposure to contagious diseases like polio or hepatitis from other refugee children.*” Many other interviewees also reported that they were not aware of happenings in their own communities or in other communities, and in many areas a sense of camaraderie seemed to be lacking.

This profound social isolation carries over to children, as many parents reported that the children stay inside most of the day. Mothers reported that they were fearful for their children, and talked about general safety and lack of familiarity with the area, sometimes citing specific risks. Additionally, some families reported that their children were subjected

to discrimination and bullying by Lebanese children and in an attempt to protect them, they tended to keep the children home. As the mother of three young boys aged five, eight, and nine years noted, *“I do not let my boys go outside even though that means they don’t get any sunlight. We don’t have any windows inside here. But I am afraid and don’t want them to go outside. They might get beaten up or cause problems.”* Another mother whose two children were not in school reported, *“If I take my children outside and they see other kids going to school, it saddens them a lot.”* Some parents allowed children to play just outside the tent or home, but many mothers reported that they kept the children inside as much as possible. When the team inquired how children pass their time, they were told that children play amongst themselves, do chores, fight with each other and watch television if one is available. The mother of a 10-year-old boy reported that she and her son primarily stay in their tent. When the team asked her how she spent her time, she relayed, *“I spend my day crying.”*

The social isolation that comes from having been forced to flee one’s own country and tensions with one’s host community may be endemic to the life of a refugee; clearly a sense of social isolation is not unique to Syrian refugees in Lebanon. By contrast, the absence of community among Syrian refugees seems unusual and most refugees stressed that their social exclusion was linked to their living situation in Lebanon. Perhaps the absence of camaraderie stems from the lack of formal, organized refugee settlements and from the sometimes-haphazard manner in which refugees have settled in Lebanon. Regardless of its origin, this lack of community among many Syrian refugees is unlikely to be psychologically or socially healthy, particularly for children, and it may well pose further health and security issues in the longer term.

The deep sense of isolation among Syrian refugees, which was also well documented in UNHCR’s recent report,⁷⁰ has several important repercussions. First, it deprives children of social interaction and the formation of friendships, a sense of community, and an opportunity to play in a variety of environments – all of which contribute to their psycho-

⁷⁰ UNHCR. Nov 2013. The Future of Syria: Refugee Children in Crisis. Retrieved Dec 5 2013. Available from: <http://unhcr.org/FutureOfSyria/>.

social development.^{71,72} Further, the boredom and idleness experienced by adolescent males kept at home or close to home could prompt them to engage in destructive behavior or even to return to Syria as armed combatants. And finally, children may be exposed to unhealthy behaviors if they spend all day indoors with adult family members. For instance, this is likely the case with the 8-year-old boy who spent most of his time alone in the tent with his distressed and crying mother. It is also likely to be the case among multiple families who have access to television and who reported that children were exposed to images of the violence in Syria on a continual basis through news coverage of the Syrian conflict, which often includes graphic pictures and descriptions. To mitigate some of these negative impacts on Syrian children, international and local organizations as well as Syrian communities should strive to provide further age-appropriate safe spaces that offer recreational and educational activities as well as an opportunity to socialize with peers in protected environments.

Education

Roughly 300,000 Syrian children aged 3-18 were registered with UNHCR in Lebanon as of the end of 2013. Combined with the number of unregistered Syrian refugee children, the number of school-aged Syrian refugees in Lebanon exceeds the total number of Lebanese students (approximately 300,000) that attended Lebanese public schools before the refugee crisis began in 2011.

In order to accommodate the significant increase in school-aged children seeking to enroll in school, the Lebanese public school system would have to double its capacity. The government has taken some nominal steps toward expansion. During the 2012-13 academic year, the Lebanese Ministry of Education permitted 33,000 Syrian refugee children to attend

⁷¹ UNICEF. Why Early Childhood Development. Retrieved Dec 20 2013. Available from: http://www.unicef.org/earlychildhood/index_40748.html.

⁷² Irwin L et al. Mar 2007. Early Childhood Development: A Powerful Equalizer. Available from: <http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2007/a91213.pdf>.

public schools.⁷³ UNHCR has also enrolled 79,360 children in informal education and provided basic school supplies to 400 schools, supporting 134,560 children.⁷⁴ As a measure of progress, The Inter-Agency Working Group on Education reported in October 2013 that 52,761 registered refugee children were enrolled in formal education – either in public or private schools.⁷⁵ Yet in the team’s interviews with refugee families and stakeholders in November 2013, there were indications that current enrollment numbers may be overstated and that school attendance often comes at a high price. Unsurprisingly, concerns about education – along with the prospect of economic insolvency – preoccupy the thoughts of virtually every Syrian refugee family.

Formal schooling is not affordable or accessible to the vast majority of Syrian refugees. Enrollment and transportation fees are prohibitively expensive, especially in rural regions of the country where many refugees live. Security concerns and fears of discrimination or bullying pose another obstacle. For these reasons and others, even with accommodations, only one in five Syrian refugee children are currently enrolled in formal education programs, and there are no guarantees that enrolled students will maintain their eligibility for the next year or even complete the current session. In other words, only 20% of Syrian refugee children are enrolled in formal school programs in Lebanon. These numbers are in sharp contrast to the 93% primary and 67% secondary school enrollment rates in Syria prior

⁷³ In the 2012-2013 school year, 33,000 Syrian refugees were enrolled in school. The Lebanese Ministry for Education and Higher Education has agreed to re-enroll the 33,000 Syrian refugees for the 2013-2014 school year and also to add a ‘second shift’ of afternoon school programs to accommodate an additional 70,000 Syrian refugees. From January to October during the 2012-2013 school year, UNHCR supported 20,460 Syrian refugee children for primary education. UNHCR has promised to support 25,000 of the 70,000 spots for Syrian refugees in the ‘second shift’ educational programs. However, ‘second shift’ or afternoon classes will cost significantly more to run per student. UNHCR Education Working Group Lebanon. Oct 2013. UNHCR Monthly Update: Education. Retrieved Dec 16 2013. Available from: <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/documents.php?page=1&view=grid&WG%5B%5D=21>.

⁷⁴ Ibid 73.

⁷⁵ Enrollment closed on October 11th for the 2013-2014 school year. This number includes all refugees within Lebanon. Inter-Agency Working Group on Education in Lebanon. October 2013. Lebanon: RRP5 Update – October 2013. Retrieved Dec 16 2013. Available from: <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/documents.php?page=1&view=grid&WG%5B%5D=21>.

to 2011,⁷⁶ where literacy rates averaged around 90.2% for youth (15-24 years) and 73.6% for adults (15 years and older).⁷⁷



Photo 4. A school set up for Syrian children in an informal refugee settlement.

Ongoing interruptions, distress, and displacement mean that refugee children in Lebanon have not maintained the educational continuity or progress that many enjoyed in Syria. Not only does this stunt the development of individual students' numeracy and literacy skills, but it also impedes the collective wellbeing of refugee communities, stifles long-term prospects for family earnings and livelihoods, and diminishes refugees' hopes and opportunities for the future. In the team's interviews with Syrian refugee parents, they expressed bitter frustration at this situation, especially knowing that their children were not attending school but rather were idling away their days in the encampments largely without structured learning activities, often just playing in the dirt.

⁷⁶ UNESCO Institute for Statistics. 2013. Data Center: Syrian Arab Republic. Retrieved Dec 16 2013. Available from: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/country-profile.aspx?code=SYR®ioncode=40525>. Primary and secondary school enrollment rates are from the net enrollment rates of 2010. Net enrollment rates are the "total number of pupils or students in the theoretical age group for a given level of education enrolled in that level, expressed as a percentage of the total population in that age group."

⁷⁷ Ibid 76. Literacy rates are from the most recent data collection in 2004.

Educational Settings

A few Syrian parents reported that their children were in school and that they were satisfied with the education being provided. In some instances, the Syrian students had been integrated into classes with Lebanese children, while in other cases, the schools had created shifts in which the Lebanese children attended school in the morning and the Syrian children attended school in the afternoon. One private school in the Bekaa Valley had increased its enrollment to accept 250 Syrian students, many of whom had seen their school fees waived by the school and some of whom had received scholarships from an external donor. In some informal tented settlements, schools had been set up specifically for Syrian refugee children. In one settlement, the school was run by a Syrian teacher; in another, it was run by an NGO.

Constraints

Other Syrian families reported that their children had enrolled in school but that the families had decided to stop sending them. In some cases, financial constraints prevented the children from continuing their education and in other cases the families were discouraged by the quality of education provided. One despondent mother said, *“My son should be in grade three this year. But he is only enrolled in grade one now. We registered him for school two months ago for the first time in Lebanon, and he is two years behind. So far all he has learned at school is how to write the letter B and the number one. It’s a shame.”* There were reports that some schools had no textbooks, copy books or educational materials, and one Syrian mother stated, *“One of my daughters went to school for a few hours but when she came home she said that she did not like it because they had not done anything.”*

Some Syrian mothers voiced concerns about discrimination against their children by Lebanese schoolmates; these concerns were echoed by the employee of an international NGO working in Lebanon. There were also reports of Syrian children bullying their Syrian classmates. One Syrian family reported that their children had been in school briefly but that other Syrian children had physically bullied them and so they were no longer attending classes. A mother in this extended family recounted, *“The children came home from school crying because they had been kicked and had had their hair pulled.”* It was unclear if the bullying

among Syrian children resulted from perceived differences, overcrowding in the school that might cast newcomers as competition, or some other unidentified reason. For all of these reasons, some parents felt that they could not justify spending the money to send their children to schools, particularly when the family had so many other pressing material needs such as food and clothing.

No School

There were many other Syrian families who had not been able to send their children to school in Lebanon at all. While lack of financial means was the most commonly cited reason, it was one among many. One Syrian Kurdish mother reported that there simply was not enough money to pay rent and to send her two children to school, saying, “*This is our choice – live on the streets but send our children to school or have somewhere to live but the children do not go to school.*” The family was renting an apartment in Beirut, but their two children had not been in school for nearly two years.

Another Syrian mother who expressed concerns about the schools in Lebanon had been paying for a private tutor for her daughter. She talked at length about how important education was, especially for girls, but said that the family no longer had enough money to pay for the girl’s tutor. Other children had not attended school simply because there were no accessible schools for them to attend, either due to a lack of space or schools in the vicinity.

The team observed several Syrian parents encouraging their children to practice writing and math in notebooks at home, but their frustration was palpable. As one mother lamented, “*What can I do? We do not have any books here at home, and I am not a teacher. It is difficult for me to accept that my children might grow up illiterate.*” There were reports that unoccupied children and youth may turn to unproductive, if not destructive, activities in their communities and host country, and may even return to Syria to find work as occupation fighters.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ IRIN News. Aug 8 2012. Lebanon-Syria: No school today – Why Syrian refugee children miss out on education. Retrieved Dec 20 2013. Available from: <http://www.irinnews.org/report/96053/lebanon-syria-no-school-today-why-syrian-refugee-children-miss-out-on-education>. Stating that while reports of recruitment are scarce, many male adolescents say their host communities expect them to go back and fight.

Since it is likely that the Syrian refugee crisis will not be resolved in the near future, children unable to access education in Lebanon stand to fall behind not months, but years, in their educational development. Of course, this is also true of Lebanese students who lack such access in their home country, which underscores the need for a holistic approach to education in Lebanon. As noted in the 2014 Syria Regional Response Plan for Lebanon, “A recent World Bank assessment estimates that an additional 170,000 Lebanese (70,000 children) will be pushed below the poverty line in 2014. These children will be at risk of dropping out of school as families struggle to cope with the financial situation.”⁷⁹

The barrier of entry that school fees and materials represent for many refugee families can readily be mitigated through targeted funding. In the case of overcrowding, government and humanitarian agencies can adopt creative solutions, as some have in holding staggered school days or setting up temporary schools in order to accommodate children in underserved areas. An alternative proposal would be to employ technology (e.g. television, the internet.) to reach school-age children and provide a wider number of children with access to quality education.

Child Labor

Human rights principles seek to protect children from economic exploitation, to ensure their access to education, and to prevent them from engaging in work that could harm their health, safety, or morals. Lebanon has ratified relevant legal standards set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Arts. 22 and 32), the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), and the Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, 1999 (No. 182).⁸⁰ As articulated in the ILO’s Declaration on the Fundamental Principles and Rights at

⁷⁹ UNHCR. Dec 17 2013. 2014 Syria Regional Response Plan: Lebanon. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/syriarrp6/>.

⁸⁰ 15 years is the minimum age for work recommended in ILO Convention No. 138, but Lebanese law sets this minimum age at 14 (e.g. upon completion of a child's 13th year) with slight variations depending on the hazard or risk involved. See, Lebanon Labor Code of 1946, as amended, art. 22. Proposed legislation in Lebanon would raise the minimum working age in Lebanon to 15.

Work (2001), these standards aim for the effective abolition of child labor, especially for children under the age of 15.

Many Syrian children in Lebanon are working to support themselves and their families out of economic need. They are working on the streets, in the fields, at construction sites, or in commercial locations cleaning floors, carrying grocery bags, shining shoes, selling chewing gum, hawking flowers, and collecting scraps of garbage. These circumstances often endanger children's wellbeing and jeopardize their rights. In other refugee settings outside of Lebanon, such as the Zaatari camp in Jordan, for example, Syrian children are more likely to work in shops where they have a modicum of separation from the hardscrabble reality of the streets. In urban areas of Lebanon by contrast, Syrian children are often more vulnerable to the worst forms of child labor especially since they are not concentrated in official refugee camps. (See discussion below at [Urban Commercial or Service Work](#) for details.)

The Lebanese government has declared that the most pernicious forms of child labor are activities involving physical, psychological or moral hazards and activities limiting education.⁸¹ A large number of children in Lebanon are engaging in auto repair, construction and metal working (welding), carpentry, filling cylinders with gas, agriculture, and work on the street.⁸²

Child labor was present in Lebanon before the refugee crisis began, but the situation has deteriorated significantly in the past two years. According to one stakeholder, *"Lebanon's Ministry of Labor just recently announced the national action plan to eliminate the worst kinds of child labor. The momentum to formulate this action plan began before the refugee crisis even started. But now the number of working Syrian kids dwarfs the number of Lebanese kids that are working."*

⁸¹ Decree No. 8987 of 2012 concerning the prohibition of employment of minors under the age of 18 in work that may harm their health, safety or morals [Unofficial English translation]. Al-Jarida Al-Rasmiya, 2012-10-04, No. 42, P. 4367 - P. 4371. Retrieved Dec 16 2013. Available from: http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex_browse.details?p_lang=en&p_country=LBN&p_classification=04&p_origin=COUNTRY&p_sortby=SORTBY_COUNTRY.

⁸² Republic of Lebanon, Ministry of Labor. Nov 2013. National Action Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labour in Lebanon by 2016. Retrieved Dec 16 2013. Available from: http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/wcms_229103.pdf. See also, United States Department of Labor. 2012. Lebanon: 2012 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. Retrieved Dec 16 2013. Available from: <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/reports/child-labor/lebanon.htm>.

Working Children

Many Syrian families with children aged 10 years or older reported that either their children were currently working or that they had been working intermittently since arriving in Lebanon. Furthermore, almost all families including those without children, reported being aware of refugee children being sent to work. The reason behind the child labor was unanimous – children must work to bring in money so that the family can eat, pay rent, buy clothes and pay for other basic necessities. Most families reported having no choice but to send their children to work. Some families also noted that since there was no available school, at least work provided the children with an opportunity to do something productive. Practically all NGO stakeholders interviewed reported that child labor is widespread among Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

In Tripoli, one mother explained that her son had to work in construction to support the family, including his four younger siblings. *“My son is 17, almost 18 years old. But I see other kids working at a much younger age – selling things in streets or working in garages or carpenter shops.”* Another Syrian mother commented on the plight of working refugee children in her



Photo 5. Syrian children work alongside the adults to harvest potatoes in the Bekaa Valley.

neighborhood, saying, *“Sometimes it can be dangerous and difficult work. It’s common to see 14-16 year olds working in construction, carpentry, plumbing, or cleaning. My 15-year-old nephew works to support his family by sweeping floors at a hairdresser shop, and my neighbor’s 14 and 15-year-old kids do plumbing and sewage work.”*

Rural Agricultural Work

In the Bekaa Valley, the primary source of employment the team saw among children was in the agriculture sector, with potatoes being the most common crop. The children are typically hired to collect and bag potatoes. Some farmers also employed children to pick up rocks and clean up the fields in preparation for the next growing season. Although the conditions are harsh for child workers, many people in the Bekaa Valley expressed concern over the fact that there would be fewer employment opportunities when the major fall harvest was over. The team also heard reports of children engaging in agricultural labor in the Tripoli area, working on crops such as oranges, cucumbers, or zucchini.

Several families reported that they were renting land from local farmers to establish their tented homes. There was reportedly an expectation on the part of some landowners, farmers, or middlemen that members of the renting families would work to harvest their fields. Referring to her family, one young Syrian woman reported that she and her family *“were forced to work by the landowner.”* She went on to say that adults were forced to work (unless they were disabled) and that children were expected to work if they were over the ages of 10 or 12 years. Although children were not forced to work by the landowner, the woman reported that they usually want to work in order to help alleviate the family’s economic needs. Children and adults are paid approximately \$4 USD per day in return for working in the fields.

Although the team did not document any work-related injuries from the farms, families whose children were involved in harvesting crops identified several significant hazards, such as exposure to cold temperatures. One family described their concern about having to send the children out to the fields at six in the morning to toil for hours in cold weather without proper clothing or footwear. Another hazard was verbal and physical abuse from the farms’ overseers who were responsible for supervising the refugees’ work. One family reported that

the children were sometimes told that they “*were no good,*” “*did not know how to do anything properly,*” and that they “*were nothing.*” There were also several reports of children being whipped with wooden sticks if they were not behaving properly or if they were perceived to require discipline. One Syrian mother with several children working in the fields said, “*My children come home from working in the fields and they cry because they have been yelled at and beaten. I try to comfort them but it is hard knowing that we have no choice but to send them back there to work the next morning.*”

Urban Commercial or Service Work

In Beirut and in Tripoli, children were much more likely to be employed selling small items on the street or in markets, working in garages, painting, cleaning or doing maintenance work. Additionally, many families reported that children collected plastic and other recyclables to sell and that they earned money by cleaning sewage.

Stakeholders also identified construction as a source of employment, especially for adolescent boys in the Tripoli area. One Syrian man discussed the prevalence of working children in Beirut, noting: “*There are always kids working on the streets, and some are as young as seven or eight years old. They are selling things, carrying grocery bags, working in parking lots, shining shoes, and asking for money. Of course this exposes them to exploitation. They might earn less than LL 5000 (\$3-4 USD) a day for working 10 hours on end. There are the physical dangers involved in work on the street and of course there is the stress.*” A few people reported that Syrian children working in the streets (for instance, selling small items, transporting goods or shining shoes) are yelled at, pushed or slapped because they are being overly aggressive in approaching people for money or employment. For most families, work for both children and adults was sporadic; few people seemed to have steady work.

Parental Resistance

A small number of Syrian families refused to have their children work despite the gravity of their economic situation. The first family the team interviewed had two daughters, 15 and 14 years old, as well as an 8-year-old son, and the mother reported that she and her husband were working as much as possible so that their children did not have to work. These parents felt it was unsafe to send their children to work due to the unfamiliar environment and

potentially unidentified risks. A widow with an 8-year-old son felt that her son was too young to work and that she had to protect him at all costs, even if it meant living off handouts from others. Another mother with young children said, “*Personally I would rather go hungry before sending my kids to work.*” A Syrian Armenian refugee reported that the Armenian population does not condone child labor. And finally, one Syrian mother said that she specifically would not send her girls out to work because girls were less resilient to bullying, discrimination, and aggressive behavior.

Risks and Exploitation

Child labor incurs numerous opportunity costs. These costs include the possibility of depriving a child of an education – a life-long disadvantage likely to limit a child’s capacity to fulfill his or her potential. Opportunity costs also involve risk of exploitation and exposure to labor risks, including social, psychological, and physical dangers, which may impose a severe burden on a child ranging from trauma to bodily injury. These costs extend from the individual child to the family and, ultimately, to the community. In Lebanon it is not clear how Syrian refugees will manage to earn livelihoods while safeguarding their children from often exploitative and harsh working conditions.

Reflecting on the situation in Lebanon, one stakeholder said, “*It is amazing that more exploitation and child labor is not happening in Lebanon already. Once the rain starts in winter people will become even more desperate. There is a policy vacuum here. Despite the recently released national action plan on the worst forms of child labor, we see very little government uptake or ownership over the problems related to child labor among Syrian refugees.*”

Early Marriage

Early marriage is a significant issue and it raises concerns about increased maternal mortality, imbalance of power in marital relations, and increased risk of physical or sexual abuse. While there is no universally accepted definition of early marriage, it is generally

accepted that a child marriage is “a formal marriage or informal union before age 18.”⁸³ While it is traditional for marriage to occur at early ages throughout rural areas of Syria, some refugee communities in Lebanon reported even earlier marriages than those in their home communities.⁸⁴ This is likely due to security threats and economic drivers, as families believe that their young girls are safer if married than on their own.

Some Syrian families did report that early marriage was taking place among refugee communities in Lebanon. There were some inconsistencies in the reporting of early marriages among Syrian refugees, which seemed to have stemmed at least partially from how people defined early marriage. Interviewees reported that in urban areas of Syria, girls generally tend to marry between the ages of 18-20 years. In contrast, they said that girls in rural areas of Syria tend to marry at younger ages, often when they are 13-14 years old. These cultural norms around marriage practices seem to have continued in Lebanon with families originating from urban Syria typically waiting until girls were 18 years of age before they were married and families originating from rural Syria marrying girls as young as 13 years of age. As an example of varying perceptions of early marriage, one Syrian mother reported that within the seven months that her family had been in Lebanon, both her 15-year-old daughter as well as her 14-year-old daughter had married. However, she presented their marriages as appropriate and provided them as examples that early marriage was not happening among Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Safety and Protection

The most common reason offered for early marriage was that it would provide the girl protection and safety. There were references to the fact that the girl would then become the responsibility of her husband rather than the responsibility of her father and biological family. One mother of three from Homs said, “*I know of young girls getting married at the age 14. Parents try to marry their daughters to protect them because of the security situation.*” The other

⁸³ UNICEF. Dec 21 2012. Child protection from violence, exploitation and abuse: Child marriage. Retrieved Jan 9 2014. Available from: http://www.unicef.org/protection/57929_58008.html.

⁸⁴ A 2005 study by UNIFEM found that “6.6% of heads of families got married before the age of 15; 6% in urban areas and 7% in rural areas. 38% of women were married between 15 and 19 years of age.” UNIFEM. 2005. Violence against women study: Syria 2005. Available from: http://www.unifem.org/attachments/stories/currents_200606_SyriaVAWstudyKeyFindings.pdf.

reason offered for marrying girls at a young age was economic need. Marrying girls meant that there was one less person to feed and clothe. For example, a woman in Tripoli reported that she used to live next to a Syrian family with four daughters, the oldest of whom was 16 years of age. She said that the family was struggling financially and that all four of the girls had been married as a result. Several people expressed their belief that the incidence of marriage among the refugee Syrian population in Lebanon, regardless of the age of the bride, was higher than the marriage rate among the general population in Syria.

Foreign Suitors

While most Syrian girls were marrying Syrian men, the team also heard anecdotal reports of Syrian girls marrying Lebanese men. Furthermore, numerous people mentioned stories of men coming to Lebanon from the Gulf States in search of a bride. One Syrian woman in the Bekaa Valley explained that in these cases there was sometimes an exchange of money for the bride, and a figure of \$150–\$200 USD was quoted as a typical amount for a man to pay for a Syrian bride. The same woman said that she personally had heard of nine or 10 girls who had been married to foreign men in this manner over a period of a year and a half. Another Syrian woman living in Lebanon for almost two years recounted, *“I know at least six Syrian girls who married older, foreign men either by contract or sometimes over the phone.”* One family reported that there was an office in Tripoli that helped facilitate the marriages of Syrian girls and women to foreign men. Although they had never seen the office, it was said that after arriving in Lebanon, a foreign man would come to this office where he would be presented with several Syrian girls and women from which he could choose a bride. Once he had made his choice and the arrangements were made, he would travel back to his home country with his bride. A Syrian stakeholder further described his concern that these marriages may in some cases be a guise for human trafficking and that the girls and women would then be expected to engage in commercial sex work once they arrived in the destination country.

Defiant Parents

There were examples, however, of Syrian families who refused to marry their daughters. One mother of two teenage girls she said that under no circumstances would she have them

marry while the family lived Lebanon. She reported, *“My daughters are not yet ready for marriage, they are still children who need to be educated and who need to play as children do.”* The same Syrian woman went on to say that her husband had been approached several times with marriage proposals for their daughters which they had refused to accept. She concluded by saying, *“We would be in a much better situation right now if we had agreed to marry our daughters but we do not think this is right and so we prefer to live the way we do.”* Furthermore, several organizations are working to protect girls from early marriage and are coordinating prevention and response actions through a Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Inter-Agency Coordination led by UNHCR.⁸⁵ The coordinated effort has established emergency housing for women and girls at risk of abuse and violence, conducted family mediation to prevent early marriage, and engaged with women and girls in discussion on reproductive health and rights. The work of these organizations has reportedly had some impact. For instance, a Lebanese woman employed by an international NGO reported that she had personally provided counseling to a family who was going to marry their 14-year-old daughter. In the days following counseling, the family decided not to proceed with the marriage. The NGO employee recounted that the girl later came back to thank her for counseling against the proposed marriage.

Vulnerability to Trafficking

Reports of early marriage and the intimations of the lure of marriages that may camouflage sex trafficking raise concerns about the vulnerability of Syrian refugee children to being trafficked. Refugee girls and young women are highly vulnerable, given the financial desperation of their families and the social deprivation of their lives. As the Syrian refugee crisis continues, this trend only promises to worsen. Without intervention, more families may be compelled to resort to child marriage in response to economic need. Once married (or removed from her family), a girl leaves the protection of her biological family and may forfeit her autonomy to a marriage of unequals (at best) or to criminal activity (at worst). It is urgent that refugee families are alerted to the potential risks of child marriage, and that the

⁸⁵ SGBV Task Force - Lebanon. Retrieved Jan 9 2014. Available from: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/working_group.php?Page=Country&LocationId=122&Id=47.

allegations of trafficking activity among Syrian refugee communities are further investigated.

Sexual Exploitation

The stigma attaching to sexual exploitation and the reluctance to discuss it makes it difficult to assess its prevalence in any context; nonetheless the team's research generated evidence of its occurrence as some families were identified who, left with few options to earn money in support of their basic needs, had turned to survival sex. In the case of children, survival sex by definition represents abuse and exploitation.

Sex Rings

In the Bekaa Valley, the police had broken up a “sex ring”, and a municipal authority reported that this network had involved Syrian girls and women and primarily Lebanese men. Although this particular ring had been disrupted by authorities, there were reportedly several others still in existence. A man employed by a local NGO further described these networks saying that, “*At certain times of the day, in certain parts of town, you see these Syrian ladies hanging around. If a Lebanese man walks by, a woman might approach him asking him if he needs anything or if she can help him in anyway.*” Although he had no evidence, this local NGO employee was confident that some of these women were under 18 years of age. Allegedly, there are also a few phone numbers in circulation and if a man wants sex, he can call one of these phone numbers and make arrangements to meet a Syrian woman.

Solicitation

In the Bekaa Valley, one Syrian woman reported that on several occasions, two Lebanese men had entered the informal settlement where she lived and offered “jobs” to girls and women. The informant was concerned that these Lebanese men intended to sexually exploit the females in the settlement because when Syrian refugee men inquired about employment, the Lebanese men told them the jobs were only open to girls and women. They informed the families that the jobs were “secretarial” and that the girls and women would be paid

\$500 USD per month, but provided few other details. The refugees were suspicious and, at the time of the team's visit, no one in the settlement had taken the job offers. Furthermore, a municipal employee in the Bekaa Valley reported that the authorities had discovered several Syrian girls being forced into survival sex by their families and that these cases had been referred to social services.



Photo 6. An informal tented refugee settlement similar to the one visited by two Lebanese men offering jobs to Syrian women and girls.

There was reportedly also a “sex network” involving Syrian and Lebanese girls and women on the outskirts of Beirut that was shut down by police in the summer of 2013. Similar to the report of the NGO employee in the Bekaa Valley, a Syrian refugee reported that he had heard of 14 and 15-year-old girls propositioning men on the streets of Beirut, saying, “*Do you need something from me?*” In the Tripoli area, a Syrian refugee acknowledged that he had heard about Syrian girls engaging in survival sex although he had never personally seen it.

Economic Need

In both the Bekaa Valley and Tripoli, people speculated that some of the Syrian girls and women engaging in survival sex had also been driven by economic need to engage in

survival sex in Syria. One stakeholder suspected, however, that these Syrian girls and women were engaging in survival sex more frequently in Lebanon than they had in Syria because their financial needs were greater.

And finally, there were several reports of girls and women potentially being sexually exploited for direct aid or services. For instance, one woman described an incident where another Syrian mother who had just arrived from Syria was pleading with the chief of the informal tent settlement to allow her to set up a tent. In trying to convince him, she was overheard saying, *“I have a beautiful daughter.”* The woman interpreted this statement as a tacit offer for the settlement leader to have sex with the daughter in exchange for a tent space. There was also a report of sexual exploitation involving a Syrian woman who was having sexual relations with an NGO employee in exchange for additional aid vouchers. While the UN and other agencies have mechanisms and procedures to protect beneficiaries of assistance from sexual exploitation and to investigate allegations of sexual exploitation, given a refugee’s vulnerable position, neither knowledge of nor willingness to pursue such protection should be assumed.

Vulnerability and Exploitation

Several stakeholders and local NGOs identified survival sex as a distinct problem and vulnerability facing Syrian refugees in Lebanon. *“We have seen an increase in STDs and HIV because of survival sex,”* said one rights activist. Another said, *“Despite the sensational media coverage, survival sex definitely exists. I think we are likely to see an increase in this type of coping mechanisms over time as the situation becomes even more dire.”*

Trafficking of children and the recruitment of children for the purpose of sexual exploitation are also threats to child refugees.⁸⁶ Commercial sexual exploitation of children constitutes child abuse and is often defined as trafficking. It results in psychological trauma, social ostracization, and disease – among other costs – that affect the individual, the family, and the community, and sets in motion a cycle of trauma that is difficult to break from one generation to the next. Anything and everything that can be done to prevent setting such a

⁸⁶ Lebanon recently passed an anti-trafficking law in 2011 criminalizing trafficking in persons. See, Law 164 of 24 Aug. 2011 (Punishment of Crimes of Trafficking in Persons).

cycle in motion will avoid the violation of children's rights and the higher cost of intervention in the future.

Lebanese Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

By all accounts, the Syrian conflict has had a significant impact on Lebanon and on Lebanese host communities. The refugee crisis has exacerbated the fragile political atmosphere and the precarious security situation that already existed in Lebanon prior to the influx of refugees that began in 2011. In addition, the lack of adequate infrastructure, public services, and funding has compounded the government's inability to meet many of the basic needs of refugees and their families. Since the outset of the Syrian conflict, Beirut has had an official policy of "dissociation," a policy presumably intended to distance the country from the conflict and to demonstrate Lebanon's neutrality. In addition, Lebanon's current caretaker government has maintained the country's weak governance system since the resignation of previous Prime Minister, Najib Mikati, in early 2013. Collectively, these factors are significantly impairing Lebanon's capacity to respond to the Syrian refugee crisis. The government's marginal response has had an impact not only on Syrian refugees but also on Lebanese communities and families.

Community-level Responses

While some Lebanese host communities have opened their doors to Syrian refugees, others have already closed them. Several interviews reflected underlying tensions between refugees and local host communities on an individual level. Some refugees were quick to note the hostility that they felt from their Lebanese hosts. As one Syrian mother living in Tripoli described, *"Our Lebanese neighbors never want to come close to us. They never let their kids play with ours. They are afraid that since I am poor I will try to take money from them. Some Lebanese in this neighborhood ask, 'What are you even doing here?' When we tell them it's because of the fighting in Syria, they say, 'Why don't you go back and defend your country?' They say that they cannot help us and have nothing to offer us. They think we are deceitful beggars."*

A Lebanese woman living in Beirut gave her own perspective on the refugees' situation. *"There are so many Syrian refugee children on the street asking for money these days,"* she said. *"Can you believe their parents let them do this? It's so sad and depressing. Children should be in school or playing. Not living like this on the streets. But what can we do? By giving them money every day, we won't solve the problem. This will just encourage more begging, and they are becoming so aggressive that it's frightening."* The varying degrees of acceptance on the part of some Lebanese and animosity of others is reflected in the response of local Lebanese communities to the refugee crisis. For example, a group of enraged host community members who accused a Syrian refugee of rape set ablaze a nearby tent settlement. Burning the tents to the ground forced the surviving refugee families to rebuild their homes all over again. Such collective animosity towards Syrian refugees is growing in some areas of Lebanon as tensions spike. One stakeholder reported, *"A coalition of 27 municipalities in the northern region of Wadi Khaled have declared that they want a 'refugee free' zone."*

Lebanese Government Response

The Lebanese government has maintained an open border with Syria. Nonetheless, refugees are still officially required to meet standard residency requirements, although the government of Lebanon has not made it a policy to search out and expel refugees whose permission to reside in the country has expired. During interviews in the Beirut area, several Syrian refugees expressed concern that they could not afford the annual \$200 USD residency fee that the Lebanese government charges. Likewise, refugees reported that they could not afford the risk of returning to Syria where their names were presumably on the government's blacklist and where they feared detention by Syrian border officials. As one refugee said, *"Either I leave now for Syria to renew my residency status and face the possibility of getting caught at the border. Or I have to pay the \$200 renewal fee to the Lebanese government which I cannot afford."*

Lebanese Aversion to Formal Camps or Permanent Shelters

Several key decisions by the Lebanese authorities profoundly impede the humanitarian response. Perhaps the foremost of these is the decision to forego building formal refugee settlements. Refugee camps are a sensitive issue in Lebanon. The country currently hosts

longstanding Palestinian camps and, based upon the experience with Palestinian refugees, concerns are prevalent that building camps for Syrian refugees may discourage future repatriation and increase the risk of camps becoming militarized. Initially, the dispersion of Syrian exiles into Lebanese communities was manageable because the first wave of arriving refugees typically had the financial reserves to rent apartments or houses and provide for themselves. The second wave of Syrian refugees was characterized by Syrians who moved in with family or friends, rented storefronts or other spaces and lived in abandoned buildings. The third and ongoing wave of Syrian refugees is characterized by economically disadvantaged Syrians who are forced to live in tents and who are largely dependent on humanitarian aid.

The lack of formal refugee settlements in Lebanon causes many negative consequences for Syrian refugees. First, many Syrian families are now interspersed among Lebanese communities which makes them difficult to identify and locate, and compromises the ability of the UN and other aid organizations to provide life-saving services to those most in need. As the financial reserves of the first and second waves of arriving refugees are depleted and as employment becomes increasingly scarce, families who were once relatively self-sufficient are becoming increasingly dependent on humanitarian aid to provide them with food, clothing, and the like. Second, informal tented settlements are now arising across the Bekaa Valley and the greater Tripoli area. However, these informal settlements are sometimes in unsafe and unsustainable locations. Most families living in informal settlements lack proper all-weather shelter, as well as basic infrastructure for potable water, sanitation, security, health care and electricity.

NGO's have provided shelter support – including rehabilitation of houses, renovation of collective centers, temporary shelters, financial assistance or weatherproofed accommodation – to an estimated 236,000 beneficiaries in 2013. Despite efforts by NGOs, the government has restricted humanitarian agencies from assembling or importing of any type of durable shelters for refugees. *“There were hundreds of shelters in box kits just sitting for weeks in the Beirut port. But we couldn't get government approval to let them in.”* The government's reluctance seemed to arise from the apprehension that any sort of shelters other than tents

might become lasting fixtures on the Lebanese landscape inviting permanent or long-term residency in the country.

Health Care

Health care is another important component of the humanitarian response that has been sub-optimal in Lebanon. Due to a major funding shortfall,⁸⁷ UNHCR reportedly cut its health care subsidies from 85% to 75% earlier this year and limited secondary and tertiary health care services such as chemotherapy, dialysis and non-emergent blood transfusions.^{88,89} In Lebanon, medications and health services are relatively expensive and some providers require upfront payment of uncovered costs, thus rendering medical care unaffordable to many of Syrian refugees. Furthermore, the already stretched Lebanese health care system is trying to absorb the additional caseload, which is creating frustrating waits both for Syrian and Lebanese individuals.

One medical doctor at a public hospital in Beirut described the constant stream of refugees seeking emergency medical care. *“We see so many Syrian refugees who cannot afford to pay for entry into the hospital – even when they are in difficult conditions. Often a family member will come begging us to assess and help these refugees outside of the waiting room or beyond the hospital doors on a voluntary basis.”*

A pharmacist working in Northern Lebanon also spoke to the healthcare challenges she has encountered in her own individual response to the Syrian refugee crisis. *“I have owned this pharmacy for the past 18 years, but this year there has been a noticeable influx of refugees into the region and into my store as well. Now I see up to 50-60 Syrian refugees a day coming into my pharmacy. A few years ago there were none. There are so many young refugee children coming into the store – sometimes with their parents but many times alone. They come even as young as four or five years old – looking for medicine for a younger brother or sister, or for a mother, father, uncle, aunt or a*

⁸⁷ Ahram Online. Sept 5 2013. UN to Cut Refugee Aid in Lebanon Amid Funding Gaps. Retrieved on Dec 2 2013. Available from: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/80863/World/Region/UN-to-cut-refugee-aid-in-Lebanon-ami>.

⁸⁸ Coutts A et al. April 20 2013. Assessing the Syrian health crisis: the case of Lebanon. The Lancet 381(9875). Available from: [http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(13\)60863-6/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(13)60863-6/fulltext).

⁸⁹ UNHCR. Sept 26 2013. Regional Analysis of Syria - Lebanon. Retrieved Nov. 27 2013. Available from: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php>.

friend. I am a pharmacist, and it is my job to help people. So I try to do what I can to help them. But of course there are limits, and many of the Syrian refugees need more serious treatment for chronic health issues. What I provide is short-term treatment only. They really need longer-term solutions to help resolve bigger health care problems. Unfortunately, I am sure they cannot afford it.”

During interviews, many refugees highlighted that the Lebanese government has not developed comprehensive policies that offer refugees adequate support for shelter, healthcare, livelihoods, or education. One humanitarian worker with several years’ experience in Lebanon, Afghanistan, and other emergency regions explained his perspective on the situation: “*There is growing concern that vulnerable children are falling through the cracks in the current humanitarian response.*”

International Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis

The international response to the Syrian refugee crisis to date has focused largely on providing humanitarian assistance.

Sudden Influx

As in other neighboring countries, Lebanon has absorbed a sudden influx of refugees, the majority of them women and children. The number of refugees seeking safe haven in Lebanon has escalated significantly in the past year. UNHCR reports indicate that an average of 57,969 Syrian refugees entered the country per month during 2013. This means that Lebanon’s refugee population more than quintupled during the 12-month period between January 2013 and December 2013. Punctuating this, a wave of 20,000 refugees flooded across Lebanon’s eastern border in late November 2013. These refugees came through unofficial crossings within a short period of time, bringing with them renewed concerns about cross-border hostilities encroaching from Syria into Lebanon.

Humanitarian Strain and Short-Term Relief

Meanwhile, the growing humanitarian strain of the refugee influx continues to mount in Lebanon. This strain surfaced during interviews with community members, humanitarian

workers, and government officials. Discussing the impact of the crisis, for example, the head of the refugee portfolio in a local municipality in the Bekaa Valley explained the situation in his area: *“During the past year or two roughly 20,000 Syrian refugees have come to settle here in this municipality. Of these, we know that approximately 60% are living in tents while 40% are renting rooms, apartments, or space in unfinished buildings. These refugees face many problems, and often they do not enjoy their rights in terms of education, healthcare, and other basic necessities. Of course we are hosting them here, and it costs us money. So this can cause friction especially because we see a significant drain on our infrastructure – water, electricity, garbage, and sewage. Just imagine how that adds up when each person produces half a kilo of solid waste per day, and then you multiply that by 20,000 people.”*

Holding a handwritten registry of Syrian family names and family members, the municipal employee added, *“Despite the urgent situation, there is no clear and coordinated plan among aid organizations or donors. This could cause the situation to deteriorate even further. We notice that many international aid agencies are providing only short-term relief for refugees just to meet their immediate needs. But who thinks beyond that? Local host communities and municipalities like ours need assistance in addition to the refugee communities.”*

Responders and Response Plans

Many organizations continue to respond to the expanding humanitarian needs of the Syrian refugee influx. In addition to Lebanese government entities and local aid groups, responders also include UN agencies, foreign governments, and international aid, relief, and development organizations. The humanitarian response in Lebanon is multifaceted and encompasses numerous policies, action plans, programs, and services. The UN agencies have concentrated their work plans and operations under the Inter-agency Information Sharing Portal (<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>) where the efforts of various sectoral working groups and humanitarian initiatives can be followed. Yet during meetings and interviews in Lebanon, stakeholders often noted that the response to the refugee crisis on the ground was decentralized and insufficient. One local NGO activist pointed out, *“UNHCR and UNICEF are the lead agencies for refugee children, but there are serious weaknesses in coordination including gaps and duplication of efforts across and within regions.*

Sometimes inaccurate primary assessments lead to problems. Donor-driven, short-sighted projects are not creating long-term solutions or solving the refugee crisis.” Coordination efforts are underway, but in the field reportedly remain insufficient. UNHCR and UNICEF, together with the Ministry of Social Affairs, co-lead the Child Protection in Emergencies Working Group (CPiEWG) at the national level. CPiEWG seeks to convene all responders as well as to develop a post-crisis response and long-term solutions for refugees.

The Syrian Regional Response Plan or “RRP” has been composed by UNHCR, UNICEF, and partner organizations in conjunction with the Lebanese government as well as refugee, donor, and host communities. The RRP comprises the primary humanitarian response plan for refugees in the country. RRP provides a regional and country specific outline of priority response objectives, vulnerability assessments, and resource requirements. The 2014 RRP (called RRP6) was issued publicly in December 2013 and includes a response plan for Lebanon that emphasizes several points. These include targeted assistance, particular needs of women and children, and cash distributions among others. RRP6 also seeks to reinforce the Lebanese Government’s National Stabilization Roadmap. With a call to raise \$1.7 billion to fund the humanitarian response in Lebanon, RRP6 outlines the dire needs and circumstance of the current refugee crisis.

Funding Shortfalls

Of course, adequate funding is needed to support relief efforts and to overcome operational constraints. In large part, the feasibility of ongoing humanitarian response plans in Lebanon hinges on funding from the international donor community. For all UNHCR’s planning efforts, the international response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon has been marked by a shortfall in funding. For example, only 51% of the \$1.2 billion funding goal for RRP5 (which runs from January through December 2013) was met by Oct. 31, 2013, leaving a gap of \$590 million.⁹⁰ As of November 2013, UNHCR in Lebanon received \$240 million and NGOs in Lebanon received \$626 million to fund their work. But virtually none of the \$450

⁹⁰ UNHCR. Syrian Regional Refugee Response. Retrieved Dec 20 2013. Available at: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>.

million earmarked for the Lebanese government in the RRP5 appeal was raised at all.⁹¹ As a result, Lebanese government spending for refugee relief was hampered and came largely from pre-existing public service budgets. In late 2013, the World Bank established a Multi Donor Trust Fund to circumvent this obstacle and to provide a financing vehicle for urgent needs and development projects in Lebanon. The fundraising goal for this Fund is \$300–400 million to be raised within a matter of months and to be allocated for priority spending on education and poverty reduction initiatives. Such measures will seek to alleviate the costs related to hosting Syrian refugees in Lebanon and to offset the \$2.6 billion in lost revenue and added expenses already incurred by the Lebanese government. The World Bank will oversee this trust fund and has repeatedly assured donors that their money will be well spent. This comes at a time when Lebanon's caretaker government continues to garner donor skepticism for several reasons including its political composition and allegations of corruption.

The United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, has called on Kuwait to host a second meeting of an international donors' committee to provide financing to support the humanitarian response to the Syrian refugee crisis throughout the region. This meeting is scheduled for January 15, 2014. Any decisions flowing from the Kuwait donor conference will take weeks if not months to implement in Lebanon. Therefore, the critical concern now is to support the refugees through the cold of winter. Winterization efforts are underway with targeted assistance being delivered on a priority basis to refugee populations living at an altitude of 500 meters above sea level or more. This includes provisions for winter clothing, blankets, extra fuel, wood and other reinforcements for shelter.

With limited resources available, care must be taken to make equitable allocations to the Syrian refugee population within Lebanon. In the face of funding shortfalls, the UN has already scaled back on some distributions and provisions to refugees. The equity of spending on refugee needs is at issue when it comes to the allocation of resources. Yet it is vital to ensure that vulnerability indexes and formulas do not preclude assistance from reaching those refugees most in need.

⁹¹ IRIN News. Oct 31 2013. Syrian crisis pushing Lebanese into poverty. Retrieved Dec 20 2013. Available at: <http://www.irinnews.org/report/99036/syrian-crisis-pushing-lebanese-into-poverty>.

VI. Conclusions

As this report goes to press, the international donor community prepares to gather in mid-January 2014 to consider whether and how to close the funding shortfall to meet the needs of Syrian refugees throughout the region. UNHCR has called for \$4.2 billion in fresh funding for the region for 2014,⁹² \$1.7 billion of which is targeted specifically for Lebanon.⁹³

In Lebanon, humanitarian responders continue to work diligently to provide most basic needs including food, clean water, sanitation, shelter, security, and health care. However, the scope, complexity, and duration of the refugee crisis has rapidly outpaced their capacity to respond. The Lebanese government has been slow to recognize the magnitude and gravity of the situation and has not yet adopted policies that would facilitate the efficient provision of humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees. Nor has the government adopted laws that would enable Syrian refugees to sustain themselves over time.

Overall, a coordinated and strategic response has been extremely challenging. The humanitarian response currently neglects to address concerns specific to refugee children adequately, such as social isolation, education, health care, and protection against child labor, early marriage, and commercial sexual exploitation. The onset of winter compounds these difficulties as refugee children and their families now face plummeting temperatures, dwindling resources, and an increasing risk of disease. Sheer survival is at stake for many families in the months ahead.

The path forward requires coordination, collaboration, ingenuity, and generosity on the part of the Lebanese government, UN agencies, national governments, and non-governmental organizations. The international donor community must provide the necessary capital to mount an adequate humanitarian response. It must also compel stakeholders to collaborate

⁹² UNHCR. Dec 17 2013. 2014 Syria Regional Response Plan: Strategic Overview. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/syriarrp6/>.

⁹³ UNHCR. Dec 17 2013. 2014 Syria Regional Response Plan: Lebanon. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/syriarrp6/>.

in devising a strategic plan to meet the urgent and longer-term needs of the almost one million Syrian refugees now living in Lebanon.

The following set of recommendations provides high-level priorities for such a strategy, and concrete steps for its implementation.

VII. Recommendations

As the conflict in Syria persists and peace eludes the country, Syrians continue to flee to Lebanon, as well as to other neighboring countries. Even if a negotiated peace evolves, it is likely that Syrian refugees will confront the difficult decision of either returning to Syria and possibly facing reprisals, or staying in their host country and continuing to navigate deprivation. In short, the refugee crisis continues with no end in sight and worsens daily. In response, the Lebanese government, humanitarian responders, and the international donor community can and must take immediate measures to address the needs of the Syrian refugee population, while shifting rapidly to devise and implement a strategy of forward planning that will be proportionate to the scope, complexity, and anticipated duration of the urgent and ongoing needs of refugees.

In brief, we urge all parties to collaborate to

- Ensure that the **basic needs** of all Syrian refugee children and families are met so that they have adequate all-weather shelter as well as sufficient access to food, water, sanitation, and healthcare;
- Mitigate the **social isolation** of children by taking comprehensive measures to promote the psychological and social well-being of children;
- Ensure that formal **education** is free, accessible, and available to all Syrian refugees at primary and secondary school levels;

- Increase measures to protect children from economic exploitation and from hazardous or unhealthy **labor**;
- Discourage **early marriage** among girls;
- Prevent **sexual exploitation** and protect against **human trafficking**;
- Fulfill urgent funding appeals and provide adequate **financial support** from the international donor community for humanitarian responses to the refugee crisis throughout Lebanon.

In order to implement these broad recommendations, we urge that the following specific actions be prioritized and taken as soon as is practicable:

Basic Needs

The Government of Lebanon has the power and authority to transform the adequacy of the humanitarian response to the Syrian refugee crisis by establishing formal refugee camps in which Syrian children and families can seek increased security and protection from further displacement, and to which UN agencies and NGOs can distribute support more efficiently and effectively.

Humanitarian responders can take immediate and urgent action as the winter sets in, including

- Providing durable materials such as wood and tarps to reinforce shelters and insulate them to protect children and families against harsh winter temperatures and precipitation;
- Accelerating plans to protect children and families against weather-related water surges into tented encampments from contiguous ravines, streams, and sewage canals;
- Extending shelter assistance beyond what was anticipated at the onset of the crisis to be necessary for children and families in order to prevent them from being evicted by landlords or landowners and to ensure their security of tenure;
- Adopting measures to assure that registered and non-registered refugees alike receive vital assistance to meet their basic needs for shelter, food, water/sanitation, and health care among other urgent needs; and

- Providing access for refugees to appeal procedures particularly in cases in which their service or aid are denied or discontinued in error.

Social Isolation

The Lebanese government and humanitarian responders can mitigate social isolation most effectively by

- Collaborating to provide meaningful access to formal education for Syrian refugee children (see next section);
- Further developing programs and activities within the Ministry of Social Affairs Development Centers that will provide opportunities for social interaction among children within refugee communities in Lebanon; and
- Enhancing the Higher Council of Childhood's capacity to work directly with Syrian refugee children and to foster opportunities for their development, growth, and wellbeing.

Humanitarian responders can

- Build upon their existing humanitarian outreach efforts to amplify constructive outlets and opportunities for children who are socially isolated;
- Undergird these efforts by addressing and mitigating neighborhood safety concerns among Syrian refugee families and children; and
- Accelerate efforts to build social cohesion in and among Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugee communities to diminish the motivation to isolate children within their family environment.

Access to Education

The Lebanese government can act to improve access to education by

- Removing the financial barriers of access to education: educational expenses for enrollment, transportation, materials, and parent committee fees for Syrian refugee children in formal education programs;

- Addressing a potential shortage of teachers by leveraging the expertise of Syrian refugee teachers and educational professionals in the development and delivery of formal and remedial education programs for Syrian children;
- Continuing to extend remedial classes and programs to Syrian refugee students so that these children can compensate for cumulative months – or years – of schoolwork missed to date;
- Expanding efforts to increase retention rates of Syrian refugee students currently enrolled in formal education programs by using social support networks and other channels to reinforce attendance; and
- Increasing availability of examination and accreditation for home-schooling or other formal education packages delivered in non-formal settings.

Humanitarian responders can support these efforts by

- Building the capacity of those individuals and organizations that operate schools located within informal settlements and other refugee communities; and
- Increasing access by continuing to refurbish and expand existing school buildings and properties to accommodate more students.

Child Labor

The Lebanese government can readily reduce child labor by

- Raising the minimum legal age for full- time work in Lebanon to at least 15 years old;
- Accelerating the implementation of Lebanon’s National Action Plan for the Worst Forms of Child Labor, announced in November of 2013;
- Broadening the scope of Lebanon’s Ministry of Labor inspectors so that they can investigate reports of violations of minimum working age more actively;
- Conducting investigations into the informal sector wherever children are employed; and
- Amending the Lebanese Penal Code, which currently criminalizes activities associated with street begging, to ensure that children living and/or begging on the street will not be prosecuted as young offenders under the law.

Improving economic opportunities for adults will alleviate the need for refugee children to work to support their families. To this end, the Lebanese government can take action to

- Provide jobs and vocational training for Syrian refugee adults by lifting employment restrictions against Syrian nationals that prohibit them from working in specific jobs or sectors;
- Doing away with relevant regulations requiring Syrian nationals to have work permits in order to be legally employed in Lebanon; and
- Providing cash incentives and other benefits to families with working children to encourage them to enroll their children in school.

Early Marriage

The Lebanese government can discourage early marriage by

- Setting a national minimum legal age for marriage consistent with rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Increasing access to formal education to offset the inclination toward early marriage; and
- Encouraging school attendance by providing incentives to individual children and families that will accrue upon graduation from secondary school.

Humanitarian responders can support these efforts by

- Implementing community based initiatives to raise awareness about the health risks and human rights implications of early marriage, particularly for girls; and
- Developing social programs to empower girls during the course of their education.

Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking

Action steps for the Lebanese government to address the risks of child sexual exploitation and human trafficking that will protect both Syrian and Lebanese children include

- Implementing and enforcing domestic legislation outlawing sexual exploitation and human trafficking, particularly through the provision training for law enforcement officials and the judiciary;
- Adopting and implementing a national action plan to monitor trafficking;
- Ensuring that victims of child trafficking are not criminalized and that special measures are taken in relation to child trafficking; and
- Prosecuting all perpetrators of unlawful sex with a minor.

Humanitarian responders can bolster these governmental actions within the Syrian refugee population by

- Providing awareness training to families regarding the patterns of child sexual exploitation and human trafficking so they can recognize predators and better protect their children from falling prey to them; and
- Providing more extensive outreach to refugees regarding the availability of individual counseling and recourse for victims of sexual exploitation.

International Response to the Crisis

We urge the international community to provide the financial resources required to deliver life-saving care and services to all Syrian refugees, while recognizing that a long-term response is crucial. Individual donors and the international community must work together to

- Galvanize financial support for the 2014 Syria Regional Response Plan for Lebanon, most urgently at the upcoming meeting of donors to be hosted by Kuwait in mid-January of this year;
- Increase the number of refugees who can seek safe haven outside of Syria by offering temporary settlement beyond Lebanon and especially in the United States, Europe, and the Gulf countries; and
- Encourage and support a political resolution to the conflict in Syria within the framework of a multiparty system of government.

Acronyms

CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CPWG	Child Protection Working Group
FXB	François-Xavier Bagnoud
ILO	International Labor Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RRP	Regional Response Plan
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USD	United States Dollars
WFP	World Food Program