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POLICY BRIEF: AUGUST 2018 Tailored for stability:

Adapting livelihood and protection programmes to strengthen social stability in Lebanon

SUMMARY

This policy brief aims to inform future interventions for vulnerable host communities and Syrian refugees in Lebanon and to suggest integrated approaches that address a combination of protection, livelihood and social stability challenges. The document outlines key lessons learned and recommendations for multi-sector programming, and highlights specific examples of tailoring project activities to strengthen protection outcomes and reduce inter-community tensions. The document draws on the experience of five partner organisations – International Alert (Alert), Arcenciel, the Lebanese Observatory of Workers and Employees' Rights (LOWER), House of Peace (HOPe) and the Human Rights Legal Clinic of La Sagesse University. The partners jointly implemented the 'Protection and Livelihoods for All People' project supported by the European Regional Development and Protection Programme (RDPP) in 2017–2018 in the Bekaa (with a focus on central Bekaa) and Akkar (with a focus on Halba).







Introduction

Protection, livelihood and social stability challenges faced by vulnerable people in Lebanon often share common root causes, and shortcomings in one area often negatively influence another. The siloed design of projects aligned with the sectors of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan¹ can lead to missed opportunities to address broader issues such as community tensions and may fall short in providing an adequate response to community needs.

The Bekaa and Akkar regions, where the project that informed this policy brief was implemented, host a large number of refugees (36% living in the Bekaa and 25.8% in North Lebanon).² Many of these refugees are working in order to pay for rent, healthcare and daily needs.³ The two districts host the highest percentage nationally of refugees with no legal residency: 71% of refugee households in the Bekaa and 61% of households in Akkar have no members with legal residency.⁴ Lack of documents is recognised⁵ as a key vulnerability blocking refugees' access to security and justice institutions, limiting mobility and livelihood opportunities, and heightening the risk of detention.

Social tensions are high across the country, with the primary perceived driver of tension being competition over jobs. In the Bekaa, competition for low-skilled jobs is recognised as the primary source of tension for 92% of the population, the highest in the country.⁶ Interaction between refugees and host communities has decreased over time, contributing to a rise in social tension. In Akkar, 55% of the Lebanese population has never interacted with Syrian refugees (an increase from the 22% found in earlier surveys) and in the Bekaa, 37% had no such contact.⁷ Civil society interventions are creating much needed opportunities for contact and supporting employability for both refugees and host communities as a way to lower tensions and encourage acceptance of the refugees.

The protection-livelihood nexus

Protection and livelihoods are closely interlinked, as recognised by the broader definition of 'human security'⁸. In the context of protracted urban displacement, the dependency of livelihood outcomes on existing basic protection is undeniable. Lack of legal residency for 74% of the Syrians in Lebanon,⁹ movement restrictions imposed through municipal curfews and army checkpoints, and raids of informal tented settlements (ITSs) severely limit the mobility of the refugees, and particularly of men who are more likely to be arrested.¹⁰ Recent visits to ITSs by security agencies are portraited as attempts to encourage return, but are also perceived by the refugees as an additional constraint on free movement. These restrictions have a direct impact on

Figure 1: The intersection of the protection, livelihoods and social stability sectors



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the ability of families to generate income, as well as on men's ability to reach project locations and benefit from training and other support provided by civil society actors. As a coping mechanism, refugee families increasingly rely on women and children to earn a living, as they are less likely to be arrested than adult men. Furthermore, Syrian workers without legal stay documents are unable to approach the authorities due to fear of arrest and avoid reporting violations of their rights, including abuse in the workplace, to the authorities.

Security restrictions are more common in the Bekaa, where the number of ITSs is larger and checkpoints are more common due to the strategic roads. Child labour also appears to be more common in the Bekaa due to a combination of security restrictions limiting mobility of men without proper documentation and availability of seasonal employment for children in the agriculture sector.

In the precarious legal situation refugees often find themselves in, many rely on their employers to secure work and residency permits. Employers are often fully aware of their workers' vulnerability and collect fees for the 'favour' of applying for permits. Discriminatory attitudes and feelings of superiority may also lead to exploitative practices, both in terms of working hours and withdrawal of payments. 18% of Syrian men report incidents of abuse or exploitation, and over half of those incidents are related to work.¹¹ Employment in the informal sector also strips workers of social protection provided by the Lebanese Labour Law.

Livelihood projects targeted at Lebanese and Syrian women and men have an opportunity to address specific protection challenges through the selection of adequate space and time for activities, referral of protection cases, advocacy and employer engagement. The section below covers key lessons learnt on how protection and livelihoods programmes can address the intersecting threats to vulnerable people's rights and wellbeing.

To avoid security risks to Syrian participants without legal documents, civil society actors should hold activities near the areas where refugees live, which are easily accessible on foot or are a short drive away. Project staff should remain up to date about temporary checkpoints and warn beneficiaries in due time to help them minimise risk.

- NGO staff working on livelihood initiatives need to have the capacity to identify and refer protection cases to ensure the safety and integrity of refugees and vulnerable individuals. Referral to specialised medical, psycho-social or legal aid – for example in cases of sexual and genderbased violence, or to mechanisms for dispute resolution and legal counselling in cases of dispute between employers and employees – can be built into livelihood activities by sensitising staff on case identification and keeping them up to date on available support in the area. A trickle-down effect of supporting access to protection is the retention of vulnerable individuals in training and internship programmes.
- NGOs should also address risks of exposing women to pressure or even violence in the family related to their absence from the house and participation in activities their husbands do not fully understand or approve of, such as soft skills training and discussions on social issues. For example, staff should routinely engage relatives and employers of project beneficiaries by inviting them to activities and demonstrating how the programme is supporting women and men of different backgrounds. Activities engaging men to increase their acceptance of increased women's participation and mobility can further complement such efforts.

Box 1: Case study - HOPe's tented community centre

During a social peace workshop held by HOPe in Bar Elias, participants highlighted that they have no place to meet or to welcome guests. The lack of space also posed a challenge to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) interested in conducting activities with the community. The workshop participants decided to set up a tent as a community centre that would host events and activities, and provide a safe space for them to meet. To ensure best outcomes, the use of the space is facilitated by the NGO in charge of the camp. During opening day, the participants thanked and honoured all their Lebanese neighbours who helped them when they first moved to the camp after being evicted from Dalhamieh. The tented community centre provides an alternative for those who want to participate in activities, but are not able to leave the camp due to a lack of residency documents. The tent brought activities to the camp and mitigated the risk of dealing with checkpoints for some of its residents.

Box 2: Case study - LOWER's awareness sessions with employers

Employers from Minieh in North Lebanon were invited by facilitators to attend awareness sessions on workers' rights conducted by LOWER. After the awareness sessions, two employers working in the food and beverage sector contacted LOWER to inquire how to register their Lebanese and Syrian employees, approx. 20 individuals. Before the awareness session, the employers had no knowledge of the benefits of registering their employees and were not aware that the NSSF required retroactive payment of social security contributions from companies that did not register their staff at the time of their employment. The two businessmen were keen to avoid the risk of having to pay large sums retroactively and needed information on the steps for registering their employees with the social security fund.

- Employers need to recognise the economic benefit of protecting the rights of their employees. Registering employees with the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) should be seen as a measure that protects employers from possibly large retroactive payments to the NSSF at a later stage. Implementers of livelihood initiatives are uniquely positioned to build relations with potential employers of the beneficiaries of their training programmes. They should seek to stimulate interest among employers in registering with the NSSF and provide them with guidance on how to do it.
- Organisations working on protection and livelihood projects can support employees in conflict with their employer. The Ministry of Labour's Mediation and Arbitration Department has a mandate to mediate between conflicting parties and workers have the right to contact the department for assistance. Employees working without a written contract or foreign workers without work permits are also eligible to seek mediation and arbitration in accordance with the Lebanese Labour Code. The decisions of the Mediation and Arbitration Department are not legally binding and employees have the option to also approach the Labour Arbitration Board, which reviews disputes within a month of their occurrence. Workers do not bear any costs for appearing before the Labour Arbitration Board and do not need legal representation. Informal dispute resolution support is also available through trained community mediators, local NGOs and key figures in the community (see the section on protection and social stability below).
- Municipalities in several locations have taken steps against unregistered Syrian businesses on their territory and have thus positioned themselves as important actors with the ability to impact the livelihoods of refugees. While municipalities are legally not vested with powers to regulate the labour market,¹² cases of inspecting and closing down shops owned by Syrians have been reported in Zahlé, as

well as several municipalities in Mount Lebanon. Civil society actors can advocate with the local authorities to consider alternative measures to closing down unregistered enterprises. Municipalities can provide guidance on registering existing businesses and clarify requirements for applying for work permits for non-Lebanese employees, which will both generate income from taxation and protect the rights of workers.

• Lastly, special efforts are needed to target men, who are more restricted in movement and less available due to their jobs. Providing training and support after regular working hours, setting up social spaces for men to meet and interact in the evenings, or providing mobile services in areas with mobility restrictions can be among the options for engaging men and young adults in particular.

The livelihood-social stability nexus

The primary driver of social tensions is the perceived competition over jobs and in some cases, such as the food and beverage sector,¹³ real competition for low-skilled jobs. In the early years of the Syrian war, "economic growth slowed, private investments reduced, the trade deficit expanded, and real estate and tourism – the two most important sectors – declined".¹⁴ Although the Lebanese economy has seen some recovery since 2017, host communities in impoverished areas continue to be disproportionately affected, as many Syrians settled there due to lower prices.

While the Lebanese government has been trying to address the economic downturn by restricting employment of non-Lebanese, the international agenda for hosting refugees has shifted towards 'self-reliance' of the refugees. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) argues that "employment is core at all stages of disaster management and response; it is an immediate as well as a development need, thus requiring that job creation be an integral part of both humanitarian and reconstruction response".¹⁵ These principles, however, are not reflected in the government response in Lebanon, despite commitments made by the national authorities to international donors to ease the access of Syrian refugees to the job market.¹⁶

The employment of Syrian workers remains largely in the informal sector. Many are pressured to work under less favourable conditions than the Lebanese, and employers have used the opportunity to replace Lebanese workers with Syrians who accept lower wages and work longer hours. Such practices feed into hostility towards the refugees in many areas, especially where jobs in construction and agriculture are scarce, and Syrians seek work outside of the sectors in which they have historically been employed.¹⁷ Different conditions for Lebanese and Syrian workers in the workplace can also feed into tension at work, as well as broader tensions between families and communities.

Limited livelihood opportunities for Syrian refugees have also led to the use of harmful coping strategies, such as child labour, begging and early marriage. Lebanese community members often blame such practices on stereotypical cultural differences, which further alienate refugees from their host communities.

Livelihood interventions funded as part of the Syrian crisis response aim to target both vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugees, with agencies often planning for 50%/50% or 60%/40% split of beneficiaries. In practice, groups are rarely as balanced as planned due to difficulties with recruiting Lebanese participants - lack of interest in offered training, small size of start-up grants or even rejection of attending activities with peers from other nationalities are among the reasons for low participation. The perception that aid, including projects supporting livelihoods, is only benefiting refugees continues to dominate the Lebanese public opinion, despite NGO attempts to include Lebanese in training, internships and small business start-up. Furthermore, the practice of providing financial incentives to participants in training - either directly or disguised as unreasonably high transportation costs - has attracted beneficiaries more interested in the remuneration than the skill learning. NGOs have reported that young people become professional trainees and move from one course to another instead of trying to find work and apply skills they have learned.

The below lessons learnt highlight examples of addressing shared livelihoods and social stability concerns through adjusting project activities.

• Despite difficulties in recruiting Lebanese participants, NGOs implementing livelihood initiatives need to prioritise the inclusion of Lebanese and respond to their specific concerns. Individual resistance to participation in mixed training, for example, can be addressed with confidence-building activities, including starting with activities in single nationality groups before gradually introducing participants to joint activities. Interest in employability training can be further generated by sharing stories of successful employment after participants how the programme responds to specific needs of the labour market.

Box 3: Case study – HOPe's outreach to potential participants

HOPe promoted social peace via social media, highlighting the topics of their workshops, not the fact that they were conducted in mixed groups of Lebanese and Syrians. This attracted people without alienating those who would be reluctant to work with peers from other nationalities.

• Social stability initiatives can address misperceptions of the actual competition in the job market by facilitating dialogues on sources of tension and inviting local experts and business people to explain the causes of unemployment, the livelihood opportunities available to refugees, the actual levels of aid provided to refugees, and the positive aspects of the presence of Syrian refugees in the labour market.

Box 4: Case study – Alert's roundtables on jobs and social stability

Alert held roundtables on the role of the business sector in promoting job creation and social stability and brought together local employers and organisations implementing livelihoods projects and supporting refugees. The multi-stakeholder dialogues highlighted a range of perspectives on existing business challenges as well as the need to protect employees' rights.

The social stabilityprotection nexus

Social tensions and protection concerns are closely related and naturally reinforce each other. Areas where security measures are in place, such as military checkpoints, operations by security forces and curfews, tend to also score higher in terms of levels of social tension.¹⁸ Such measures sow fear among refugees and host communities alike, as perceptions that refugees pose a security threat are justified with the measures and lead to further alienation of the refugees.

The lack of legal documents, a problem faced by many refugees, prevents them from reporting any violations to the security and justice institutions. In fact, both Lebanese and Syrians prefer to seek help from family, friends and neighbours in case of disputes (55.3%).¹⁹ Access to friends and neighbours, however, is dependent on the social networks of the affected person or family. For Syrian refugees, social tensions and limited contact with the host community restrict access to channels for addressing protection issues. Informal mechanisms identified by Syrian refugees include the *moukhtar*,²⁰ elders, contractors, school principals, religious leaders, *shawish*²¹ and various committees that assist in conflict resolution,²² but also personal contacts who have social capital and can use their own networks to reach a solution.

The lessons learnt below illustrate activities that simultaneously support social stability and protection outcomes.

 Protection and social stability interventions should strengthen the existing informal mechanisms of dispute resolution and protection in order to improve the access of vulnerable people to security and justice. An overreliance on informal mechanisms, however, such as shawish, influential employers, religious leaders and local dignitaries, risks further undermining state institutions. Informal actors therefore need to be informed of available legal aid and specific steps for reporting cases to the police or filing a case in court, and encouraged to support parties to conflict or victims of violations in accessing the formal system in serious cases or when local informal mediation and arbitration efforts do not yield results.

• To address fear of and mistrust in security institutions, NGOs working on protection and social stability can facilitate contact between vulnerable individuals and the police (municipal police and Internal Security Forces), army or General Security; create space for clarifying the role of the institutions and the rights of individuals; and engage security actors in community initiatives. Such activities may need a staged approach starting with building trust with the local police and General Security branches, and ensuring that meetings between refugees and the authorities will not put vulnerable individuals at risk of arrest. Initiatives that allow refugees and local Lebanese to meet with the authorities, ask questions and discuss existing security concerns can encourage Syrians as well as Lebanese to seek formal protection when their rights are violated. Currently, Syrians are far less likely to resort to the national police or the army than the Lebanese, while they are more likely to contact the municipal police.²³ Lack of legal documents can be a leading reason for avoiding state authorities, but reluctance to seek help from authorities can also be due to low trust resulting from historical weaknesses of some institutions, a legacy of fear of security institutions experienced by some Syrians, as well as examples of human rights violations by Lebanese security actors.24

Recommendations for civil society actors working on protection, livelihoods and social stability

• Organise activities near the place of residence of project beneficiaries to reduce risk of detention and harassment at security checkpoints, especially in areas such as central Bekaa where security measures are more common. Create and rehabilitate spaces for social interaction and help manage the use of these spaces.

Box 5: Case study - Alert's support to community mediators

Alert trained local leaders in mediation skills, human rights and refugee rights and referral to legal aid. One of the trained mediators successfully intervened in a dispute between Syrian refugees over the use of water tanks. He helped resolve a misunderstanding over the use of a malfunctioning water tank that was causing water shortages in an informal refugee settlement and contacted a humanitarian organisation to request installation of additional tanks.

Box 6: Case study - HOPe's engagement of security agencies

As part of a social peace initiative by HoPe, a group of social peace workshop participants developed an initiative called '*Mounet el Salam*' or 'Peace Food'. They prepared jars of olives and distributed them to their neighbours from the refugee and host communities. One of the Lebanese participants had a connection with the General Security Office in the area and decided to visit the head of the office there. The visit was very positive and that personal relationship was invested to build trust, especially between refugees and the General Security Office. The group also visited four *moukhtars*, one of whom later helped one participant to finalise her residency documents for free.

- As part of livelihood and protection programmes, engage employers and raise their awareness of the economic benefits of employee protection, including the provision of social security. Link employability programme beneficiaries with employers that commit to fair recruitment and fair treatment of employees.
- Support employees in claiming their rights in cases of exploitation, abuse or payment withholding. Refer cases to available dispute resolution mechanisms, including community mediators and services provided by NGOs such as the Norwegian Refugee Council's information, counselling and legal assistance.
- Include modules on decent work and the Lebanese Labour Law in training modules for entrepreneurs and programmes supporting business expansion.
- Advocate with the Ministry of Labour to provide a 'tax break' to nascent businesses if they register all employees. Advocate with municipalities to regularly share information with local entrepreneurs on the procedures for employee registration, and refer employees who have experienced exploitation and abuse to NGOs providing legal counselling or support with dispute resolution.
- Double efforts to tailor livelihood programmes to the needs of the labour market, and promote opportunities to Lebanese to ensure they also benefit from such interventions. Use Lebanese staff and volunteers to outreach to Lebanese participants and promote success stories of employment and business start-up.
- Combine economic empowerment of women with engaging and sensitising their families. Communicate the purpose and benefit of livelihood programmes to all family members and engage them in local initiatives to highlight the added value of participation.
- Stop giving financial incentives for participation in training. Offer equipment to start businesses based on competence.

- Support social networking and address misperceptions as part of any programme. Awareness-raising of the rights of refugees, facilitated contact and dialogues on the sources of social tensions create more acceptance of refugees and understanding of ways to help. Train people who can reinforce relationships in the community. Build strong relations to link refugees with key figures in the community, especially representatives of security agencies.
- Support existing local mechanisms for mediation-type dispute resolution, while also ensuring community mediators know how to refer cases to the formal system. Understanding the informal ways of resolving conflict is essential for supporting the right actors, with existing resources²⁵ providing relevant guidance to NGOs. Active community members with knowledge, commitment and social capital need to be carefully selected and provided with training and guidance on mediation, arbitration and referral to legal aid, third-party arbitration and key services.
- Strengthen efforts to include men in protection, livelihood and social stability programmes, as they are more restricted in movement and less available due to jobs. Organise activities outside regular working hours in close vicinity to their places of residence and identify entertainment entry points, such as backgammon tournaments, to attract interest and build trust.
- Acknowledge that men are also vulnerable and affected by the protracted crisis and have limited opportunities to express their sorrows, difficulties, and fears. Create safe spaces for men to discuss their frustrations, and if needed, offer life skills and communication training to men and women. Move away from dominant notions that men are all perpetrators of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) – particularly in protection and livelihood programmes that mostly cater to women, and offer/ refer to services to men and boys as well as women and girls who are victims of SGBV.

• Share success stories of job creation and positive contribution of refugees in the community to both help recruitment for activities and to address prejudice towards refugees.

Endnotes

- 1 The response plan includes ten sector chapters: basic assistance, education, energy, food security & agriculture, health, livelihoods, protection, shelter, social stability, and water. See Government of Lebanon and the United Nations, Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017–2020 (2018 update), Beirut: Government of Lebanon, 2018, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/ files/resources/LCRP2018_EN_Full_180122.pdf
- 2 Operations portal: Refugee situations, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/ location/71, accessed 30 June 2018
- 3 The percentages of those working in 2017 were as follows: 47.9% of Syrian men in the Bekaa and 43.4% in Akkar, as well as 10.3% of Syrian women in the Bekaa and 8.4% in Akkar. See United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNHCR and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), Vulnerability assessment of Syrian refugees in Lebanon 2017 (VASyR-2017), Beirut: UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP, 2017, p.120, https://reliefweb.int/sites/ reliefweb.int/files/resources/VASyR%202017.compressed.pdf
- 4 VASyR-2017, p.112.
- 5 I. Slavova, Justice for stability: Addressing the impact of mass displacement on Lebanon's justice system, London: International Alert, 2017, https://www. international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Lebanon_JusticeForStability_ EN_2017.pdf
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- 7 ARK survey, Wave 2 compared with Wave 1. ARK Group DMCC, UNDP Lebanon, Regular Perception Survey on Social Tensions throughout Lebanon, Wave I: Narrative Report, August 2017 - https://data2.unhcr.org/ en/documents/download/60272
- 8 United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, https://www.un.org/ humansecurity/what-is-human-security/
- 9 UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP, 2017, Op. cit., p.13
- 10 The VASyR-2017 found that of the male-headed households experiencing insecurity in the previous three months, 13% reported being arrested, compared to 1% of the female-headed households. See: Ibid, p.15
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- 12 See L. Ayoub, Lebanese municipalities: Regulating refugee presence is "our jurisdiction", The Legal Agenda, 29 May 2017, http://www.legal-agenda.com/ en/article.php?id=3689
- 13 K. El Mufti, Working conditions and minimum standards of Lebanese and non-Lebanese workers in the informal workforce of the food and beverage service sector in Central Bekaa, Akkar and Minyeh: International Alert, August 2018

- 14 S. Masri and I. Srour, Assessment of the impact of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and their employment profile, Beirut: International Labour Organization (ILO) Regional Office for Arab States, 2014, p.9, https://www.ilo.org/ wcmsp5/groups/public/---arabstates/---ro-beirut/documents/publication/ wcms_240134.pdf
- 15 Ibid, p.43
- 16 At a London conference in 2016, the Lebanese government committed to "eas[ing] the access of Syrians to the job market in certain sectors where they are not in direct competition with Lebanese". See Lebanon's statement presented at the Supporting Syria and the Region conference, London, 4 February 2016, http://www.oecd.org/ officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=DCD/DAC/RD(2016)7/ RD2&docLanguage=En
- 17 Syrian nationals have traditionally worked in the construction and agriculture sectors in Lebanon. These two sectors, alongside cleaning services, remain the only ones recognised by the government as sectors where foreign workers are not in direct competition with Lebanese. See: Ibid.
- 18 ARK survey: Regular survey on Social Tensions throughout Lebanon Wave 3, February 2018, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/64953
- 19 ARK survey, Wave 2.
- 20 A moukhtar is an elected local official responsible for issuing documents required for IDs and passports, while also performing a range of informal roles including mediation.
- 21 A shawish is a local leader in the Syrian refugee community, often an informal head of a tented settlement, who coordinates with humanitarian actors and authorities. For a critical discussion of the role of the shawish, see M. Abu Kheir, The Syrian camps shawish: A man of power and the one controlling the conditions of refugees, The Peace Building in Lebanon, Issue 12, June 2016, http://www.lb.undp.org/content/dam/lebanon/docs/Governance/ Publications/PEACE%20BUILDING%2012th%20web%20p12.pdf.
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- 24 ARK, Regular perception surveys on social tensions throughout Lebanon, Wave 1, ARK, August 2017, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/ download/60272
- 25 See Just In-between: Informal justice on the intersection of mediation, arbitration and referral, London: International Alert, 2018; and E. Sadkni and N. Azar, Op. cit., 2018.

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