



No Longer Just a Humanitarian Crisis

The Politicization of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

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As the Syrian civil war continues into its eighth bloody year, the situation for Syrian refugees living in neighboring countries has grown increasingly severe. Many face not only poor living conditionsⁱ, but also daily racismⁱⁱ and scapegoating from host communities and governmentsⁱⁱⁱ. In a 2017 speech in Beirut, UN refugee chief Filippo Grandi warned against the politicization of the plight of refugees, noting, “These are people that flee from danger, they’re not dangerous themselves”^{iv}, and yet, Syrians living in nearby countries have seen increasing acts of violence, anti-refugee political rhetoric, and pressure to return home to Syria^v. This study examines one such host country, Lebanon, and the gradual politicization of Syrian refugees that live there. ‘Politicization’ is here defined as the process by which an issue that was previously apolitical or politically non-concerning becomes contentious and controversial in policymaking and public discourse. In Lebanon, the presence of refugees has become highly politicized in recent years as Lebanon’s economic and security situation has worsened. Lebanon currently contains the highest refugee per capita ratio in the world, with roughly one third of Lebanon’s total population being of Syrian or Palestinian origin.^{vi} Moreover, it has been two weeks since a popular revolution first challenged the established political elites in Lebanon, although it is too early to tell how the situation will affect the lives of Syrians. While recent protests have made significant demands for greater equality and leadership in Lebanon, the political instability and aggravated economic crisis may worsen the situation for refugees further.

Conditions for Syrians living abroad in Lebanon have been quite poor since the initial phases of the crisis, as many lack access even to basic services and face a residency regime that restricts the majority of displaced Syrians into illegality and informality^{vii}. Moreover, negative rhetoric against Syrians in public and among government officials has increased^{viii} over time, to the point that it plays a major role in Lebanon’s daily political life. Questions have risen to the political forefront since 2015 regarding whether refugees should be returned home by force. The pro-Syrian-regime May 8th parliamentary alliance is now essentially championing mandatory refugee returns to Syria, with party leader Gebran Bassil going as far to state that the Syrian refugee crisis “threatens Lebanese identity”^{ix}. The opposing anti-Syrian-regime March 14th parliamentary alliance led by now-resigned Prime Minister Saad Hariri had previously stated that the time is not yet right for returns and that the international community must manifest a political solution in Syria before refugees can be returned home *en masse*^x. However, statements by Hariri in March show that his coalition is moving closer to supporting internationally brokered return initiatives that are not predicated on a political solution in Syria^{xi}. With shelter demolitions, evictions, and deportations already beginning^{xii}, human rights workers, politicians, analysts, and observers should be on the lookout for large scale political impacts in Lebanon as refugees grow increasingly fearful that their stay in the country may be coming to an abrupt and premature close.

Noting that the effect of politicization on refugees’ lives is actualizing quite rapidly in Lebanon, the aim of this report is threefold. The first, detailed in section one, is to chronologize and analyze Lebanon’s response to the Syrian refugee crisis, specifically regarding policies, rhetoric, and public opinion towards displaced Syrians over time. Section two will dig more deeply into the securitization of refugees, demonstrating that Syrians refugees have become closely tied to narratives of invasion and insecurity that in fact predate their presence in Lebanon, while the actual effect of Syrian refugees on Lebanon’s internal security is miniscule

compared to the threat posed to Lebanon by the civil war in Syria. The third section of this report profiles the current atmosphere of forced returns, arguing that those seeking a mass return of Syrians are willfully ignoring on-the-ground realities in Lebanon *and* Syria to the detriment of the safety and lives of Syrians. Furthermore, such harsh discrimination against Syrian refugees threatens Lebanon's security and pushes both Lebanese and Syrians further towards radicalization while Lebanon's structural issues continue to go unaddressed.

Finally, this report is being published at a critical time. Recent months have seen the advancement of an uncoordinated, legally unsound, and generally decentralized plan to evict refugees from their current places of residence in the hopes that this will encourage an immediate return to Syria^{xiii}. This new and unprecedented pressure is the most aggressive action taken so far against the wellbeing, housing, and employment of Syrians who buy and large have no safety net should they lose their current home or source of livelihood. A mass eviction of Syrians from informal refugee settlements, homes, and workplaces is unlikely to result in a mass return to Syria, as many refugees still believe it is not yet safe to go back^{xiv}. However, the question of forced re-displacement weighs heavily on the minds of Syrians in this difficult time^{xv}. Furthermore, local and international NGO's have emphasized that the Lebanese Directorate of General Security has begun as of April 2019 to engage in active deportations to Syria in clear violation of Lebanese and international law^{xvi}. While coordinated evictions and deportations may pause or change in frequency as the revolution continues to demand massive structural change in the Lebanese political system, the international community should carefully monitor how Syrian refugee families are affected by these rapidly changing conditions.

How Lebanon has responded to the Syrian refugee crisis, 2011 to April 2019

Syrian refugees first began to trek across the border into Lebanon in 2011, soon after the start of the Syrian uprising. The first few years of the crisis alone saw thousands of Syrian families cross the border into Lebanon following clashes and shelling in Syrian cities and towns near the Lebanon-Syria border^{xvii}. As of 7 May 2015, the UNHCR recorded 1,184,427 registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon^{xviii}. While the actual number has risen significantly as a result of additional waves of displacement in Syria, the exact numbers are unknown, as the Lebanese government officially requested in May 2015 that the UNHCR stop registering refugees^{xix}. Thus, while unregistered refugee arrivals have climbed since that cutoff, the UNHCR's most recent official count (30 June 2019) notes only 929,624 *registered* Syrians residing in Lebanon. The discrepancy between April 2015 and June 2019 accounts for roughly a quarter of a million registered refugees who have left Lebanon for any reason, including transit to a third country (legally or illegally), return to Syria, or death while in Lebanon^{xx}. According to the Lebanese Crisis Response Plan, the total number of Syrians including unregistered arrivals is 1.5 million^{xxi}, although no exact independent figure exists.

Regarding the question of voluntary refugee returns to Syria over this period, few clear answers exist. This is largely because the amount of verified returns from Lebanon to Syria

depends on which government or institution you ask. As of its most recently published count (31 May 2019), the UNHCR reported a total of 39,066 registered returns from Lebanon to Syria^{xxii}, although this excludes individuals who returned through non-UNHCR-recorded paths such as Hezbollah or tribal actors (although the voluntariness of such returns is unknown)^{xxiii}. Meanwhile, the Lebanese Directorate of General Security, which is responsible for handling issues of refugee return on behalf of the Lebanese government, reported in March 2019 that 172,046 refugees have returned to Syria since December 2017^{xxiv}. Regardless, figures on all accounts show that a mass voluntary return to Syria is not yet occurring. A recent World Bank report noted that generally speaking, only about 2 percent of the total global Syrian refugee population has returned to Syria^{xxv}, and among those who have gone back voluntarily, their decision rested on any number of factors^{xxvi}, including but not limited to security and governance at the intended point of return, access to basic services and employment, likelihood of conscription, access to housing land and property, level of education, and desire to reunite with family. Some refugees have also reported being denied entrance to Syria upon attempting to return^{xxvii}, as well as threats of repression and violence by the regime or other actors should they go back to Syria. Thus, while we can draw few distinct conclusions regarding *who* is likely to return and in what capacity, it is quite clear that refugees are currently unwilling to return *en masse* due to a large variety of competing and concurrent factors.

Increasing regulations, little coordination

Lebanon's response to this crisis has evolved along a complex and often mercurial trajectory since the issue first began to materialize in 2013. Analysts noted an initial 'policy of no policy'^{xxviii}: a process by which, through both intentional and unintentional inaction, a concrete response to the refugee crisis in Lebanon did not appear for several years. Policies remained opaque, decentralized, and unequally applied throughout the country. On the ground, there remains little knowledge even among civil servants regarding matters of legality and residency, let alone among Syrians themselves, who are subjected to an often-changing legal regime surrounding residency, status, and employment access^{xxix}. There appears to be little political will to define the system; however, recent months in 2019 have seen a marked increase in political will to force the refugees to return home to Syria involuntarily, despite the fact that conditions in Syria are not yet conducive to mass return of refugees according to the UNHCR^{xxx}. In order to understand how Lebanon arrived at this critical phase in the refugee crisis, it is necessary to outline the few identifiable trends that can be noted in Lebanon's (lack of) response to the crisis generally since its inception.

Lebanon's initial response to the Syrian civil war sought dissociation from the conflict and did not proclaim clear support for either side. In the 2012 Baabda Declaration^{xxxi}, Lebanon refrained from voicing support or rejection of the overthrow of the Assad regime, but instead emphasized that Lebanon should not be a staging ground for any aspect of the Syrian war. It

did, however, express that “the right to humanitarian solidarity and political and media expression is guaranteed under the Constitution and the law.” This recognition of the need for humanitarian support for Syrians demonstrated an initial sympathy and common solidarity that pervaded the crisis. At that stage, Hezbollah had not yet broken the agreement by sending fighters into Syria as they did in 2013 and there was little public recognition that the refugees would stay in Lebanon for an extended period, and certainly not indefinitely. Pending any legislation to the contrary, the Syrian border remained open to the crossflow of refugees, and the UNHCR was present and active in the registration and documentation of displaced Syrians seeking safety in neighboring countries.

The only other affirmative action that arrived out of this initial phase was the policy of non-encampment, under which refugees were permitted to live in host communities and informal settlements rather than formal state and UNHCR-administered refugee camps^{xxxii}. This decision was born of several factors. First, some Lebanese feared a repeat of the Palestinian experience in which refugee camps in Lebanon became autonomous zones distinct from Lebanese jurisdiction as per the 1969 Cairo Accords^{xxxiii}. While the Lebanese government later abrogated the Cairo Accords in 1987^{xxxiv}, many Lebanese feared that Syrian refugee camps would lead to the development of independent autonomous zones from which Syrians would coordinate violence in Syria or Lebanon^{xxxv}. However, it is also important to note that Hezbollah feared that the establishment of camps would be seen as an attempt to blame Assad for forcing Syrians into exile, thus adding a sectarian political element to the decision not to construct camps^{xxxvi}. Finally, the non-encampment policy was a large boon to wealthy Lebanese employers and large businesses, which benefited from the downward wage pressure brought on by the large influx of Syrian workers to all parts of Lebanon^{xxxvii}. Lebanese political parties never agreed upon formal refugee camps for Syrians in Lebanon, and to this day Syrians remain only in informal settlements and rented housing throughout the country.

Notably, Lebanese communities that took in Syrians fleeing violence from Syria did not do so blindly, especially given Syria and Lebanon’s long and complex relationship. Syria maintained a strong military presence in Lebanon from 1976 to 2005, and while many Lebanese people still carry resentment for this, personal and intercommunal ties such as the cross-border travel of trade, family members, and labor have led to many informal Lebanese-Syrian relationships that long predate the Syrian civil war. In fact, between 400,000 and 600,000 Syrian laborers resided in Lebanon prior to the Syrian war, many of whom simply brought their families with them when violence broke out at home^{xxxviii}. Thus, many Lebanese communities accepted Syrians based on preexisting ties, including families taking in cousins, friends taking in friends, religious communities taking in refugees of the same faith, border towns taking in residents of neighboring communities, and individuals taking in refugees of the same political persuasion vis a vis the Syrian regime^{xxxix}. While it is important not to romanticize this period of the crisis since it still lacked clear policy or sufficient government support, the presence of a communal will among many regular Lebanese people to take in Syrians should not be overlooked.

Lebanon first showed signs of buckling under the weight of crisis in 2013. In May of that year, International Crisis Group published a report noting that the effects of Syria conflict risked “tearing apart [Lebanon’s] economic, social and political fabric, igniting a new domestic conflict that a weak Lebanese state and volatile region can ill afford.”^{xi} Indeed, Lebanon’s national fabric was beginning to stretch thin as Lebanese society split over the ramifications of Syria’s war. On the one hand, Hezbollah was heavily involved militarily in saving the Syrian regime from near-complete annihilation in 2013 and 2014^{xii}. On the other hand, Christian political communities in Lebanon feared a long-term influx of mostly Sunni Syrian refugees would further upset Lebanon’s demographic balance, thus manufacturing a deeply existential threat to the religious character that many Christian elites believe Lebanon to possess^{xiii}. Furthermore, given that significant support from the international community had yet to arrive, Lebanon was simply running out of resources to sustain the crisis.

As the situation grew increasingly urgent, Lebanon introduced several relevant measures to respond to the crisis. First, in May 2014, Palestinians were barred from crossing into Lebanon from Syria, and about three dozen were even forcibly deported.^{xiii} Then, in October of that year, the government of Lebanon introduced two major steps in its broader response to the crisis. The first was to launch the Lebanese Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) in coordination with the UN, which sought to identify the most vulnerable sectors of Lebanese society and coordinate an influx of aid to support them. The first LCRP was released in December of 2014 (targeting 2015/16)^{xiv}, and has since been updated annually to its current 2019 iteration. Alongside the development of the LCRP, the Lebanese government also released a new package of residency restrictions applicable to Syrians crossing the Lebanese border which went into effect December 31, 2014^{xiv}. This new residency regime was highly discriminatory and sought to drastically curtail the number of Syrians seeking asylum in Lebanon.

Broadly speaking, the new residency laws brought the previous era of open, visa-free border policy for which Lebanon had previously been internationally praised to a close. Syrians would now have to obtain a visa and receiving one would require that the refugee fit into one of eleven pre-determined categories^{xvi}. Fleeing violence in Syria was not a listed category. While most of the categories offer time-limited stays, such as shopping (24 hours) and transit to a third country (24-48 hours), two categories stood out as offering long-term stays. The first is category 8, which grants ‘entries for those who have been displaced’. This category is deceptive however, as those receiving a category 8 visa must also fulfil the requirements for a ‘humanitarian exception’^{xvii}. This restricts category 8 visas to extreme cases such as unaccompanied minors and people with disabilities who have a family member already residing in Lebanon and excludes the general mass of Syrians.

Thus, most Syrians seeking long-term stay in Lebanon turned to category 11 visas, which are granted based on a *kafeel* (sponsor) in Lebanon. Under this visa system, which is common in Arab countries, the applicant’s employer becomes the legal guarantor of their stay in Lebanon,

and should a refugee become unemployed, their residency ceases to be valid. While most Syrians sought *kafeels* in Lebanon after the 2015 cutoff, being unable to leave your legal employer encourages widespread labor abuse. Refugees complain of inadequate pay, bad working conditions, long hours, increasing rates of child labor, and abuse from employers, but have little power to act without threatening their residency status. A 2015 report from the International Labor Organization^{xlviii} noted that 92 percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon had no formal labor contract with their employer, with an average income of LBP 418,000 (USD \$278) per month – 20 percent below the minimum wage. Finally, the imposition of a \$200 annual fee to renew any form of legal long-term residency in Lebanon has stretched many refugees to the limits of their financial means, forcing even more impoverished Syrians into illegality because they lack the money to renew^{xlix}.

While the legal regime introduced on paper in 2014 is already discriminatory towards refugees on its own, it is important to note the divide between its legal boundaries and its application in practice. While a legal regime technically exists, there is little centralized administration and visa practices are applied differently between municipalities, offices, and even individuals signing the paperwork. In numerous studies, refugees complained that even when they go to renew their paperwork, they are turned away arbitrarily. In a study by Lebanon Support, a refugee recounted:

“I tried to renew two times with a *kafeel*, but it didn’t work. For some people this works, for others it doesn’t. The third time, I tried to renew with a renting contract. That also didn’t work. I remember that the first time I wanted residency on the basis of a *kafeel*, I went to the General Security six times, and every time they told me to get different papers. They said that they couldn’t have told me I needed these papers before, because they ‘didn’t know’. In the end, I was so frustrated that I started shouting at them. Then, a general came and gave me a copy of my *kafeel’s* pledge. I took it and went to the notary, but that didn’t work either. So I went back to the General Security. Then they told me to come at 8 a.m. When I did, they told me to come at 12 p.m. In the end, I just gave up, just like the others.”^l

The informality and general lack of efficiency of the system is highly manufactured by a state seeking to limit access to residency and legality as much as possible^{li}. Simply put, if officials do not even know how to issue legal residency to someone, then that person is unlikely to ever get residency. The intentional gaps in clarity and regulation manufacture the failure of the system to secure residency and basic needs even for those who are eligible.

Finally, the residency laws show clear discrimination between Syrians based on income^{lii}. Other visas are still accessible to Syrians of significant financial means. For example, a professional or tourist visa is available to Syrians who can prove possession of both a hotel reservation for the duration of their stay in Lebanon and a sum of two thousand dollars cash, which is clearly unavailable to most in today’s Syria where over 83 percent of the population live below the poverty line^{liii}.

While the LCRP and the border restrictions established a policy response to the cross-border flow between Lebanon and Syria, neither offered much policy structure regarding Syrians who had already crossed. Central administration of how refugees were to be treated by the state was left vague. In fact, Lebanon's official stance technically does not even consider the Syrians to be refugees, and instead opts for the term "displaced people", because, as Filippo Dionigi notes, the government "fear[s] to undertake the obligations such a status can demand"^{liv}. Thus, aside from a few overarching regulations such as restricting labor access to Syrians to a few low wage sectors (namely construction, agriculture, and environment)^{lv}, much of the decision-making was left to Lebanon's local municipal governments.

A fractured municipal response

In the absence of strict state policies, municipalities have broad range and leeway to control Syrian refugees' residency, freedom of movement, and standards of living^{lvi}. On the one hand, despite a lacuna of resources, some municipalities have done their best to respond to the crisis, and many have been essential in the provision and distribution of services to local and refugee populations^{lvii}. As such, Wave V of the Regular Perception Surveys on Social Tensions Throughout Lebanon noted that "a persistent trend... has been the documentation of greater confidence in the ability of local and municipal authorities to respond to the challenges of managing Lebanese host community and Syrian refugee relations, relative to national-level governance institutions, like the Cabinet or Parliament."^{lviii}

However, many municipalities across Lebanon have increasingly adopted restrictive, punitive, and discriminatory measures against Syrian residents in an effort to either force them to leave the area or to curtail their access to employment and quality living^{lix}. Municipalities most commonly place curfews on Syrian residents which prevent them from moving around the community, often from sundown to sunrise^{lx}. However, municipalities have also passed laws de-licensing Syrians' access to motor vehicles, setting a quota on the amount of refugees allowed to live in a rented room, barring refugees from having guests over after a certain hour, and forbidding access to public recreational spaces^{lxi}. These restrictions are often championed by populist mayors and local political heavyweights who feel demographically separate from the refugees and overwhelmed by the compounding economic difficulties that Lebanese communities have faced in recent years. Anti-Syrian municipal policies have become increasingly widespread as the crisis continues, with refugees now facing restrictions ranging from strict curfews to forced evictions^{lxii} and home demolitions^{lxiii}.

Perhaps the only consistency in municipal responses across Lebanon is a lack of consistency. While refugees may fare better in some regions than others, the relationship between refugees and their host municipalities depends on a massive and unpredictable set of factors, including but not limited to the character of the host community, the resource capacity of the local economy, the pre-existing presence of civil society and aid organizations, external aid, and the ability and will of the municipal government to respond proactively. The support

that many have provided to Syrians throughout the crisis should not be overlooked, but municipalities are as prone to xenophobia as the national government, particularly as they undergo political shocks and changes in local attitudes. Some choose to act against their Syrian residents regardless of the real impact of the crisis on the community, while others quietly integrate their new residents with varying degrees of success.

Public attitudes amid harsh economic conditions

As access to the labor and sustainable living conditions has become increasingly restrictive, the daily quality of life among refugees in Lebanon has grown very dire. In 2018, only 18 percent of Syrian refugee households in Lebanon reported that all family members ages 15 and above had legal residency^{lxiv}. This has further exacerbated the poverty and economic hardship experienced by Syrians living in Lebanon, with little hope for reprieve. The most recent UN Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (2018)^{lxv} noted that 69 percent of refugee families live below the poverty line and 51 percent of individual refugees are below the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket. Suffering and grievances among refugees are compounding as a result, with little hope looking forward as international funding remains inadequate and continues to decline. The LCRP 2018 End Year Funding Update^{lxvi} reported that only 40 percent of requested aid was received in 2018 for 2018 projects, in comparison 45 percent received in 2017^{lxvii}.

Vulnerable Lebanese populations are also suffering from the crisis, although this varies along the Lebanese income spectrum. Many large employers and business owners have benefitted from the arrival of refugees, who work in less desirable sectors such as agriculture and construction for comparatively low wages. However, those low-wage Syrian workers compete with low-wage Lebanese workers and other non-Syrian foreign workers, creating downward wage pressure and exacerbating issues of unemployment in Lebanon^{lxviii}. While refugees, low-income Lebanese, and non-Syrian foreign workers are all victims of a restrictive and exploitative labor market, the refugees increasingly become scapegoated for Lebanon's declining economy. Anti-refugee political groups and parties, primarily the pro-Syrian regime Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), have sought to shift blame for economic issues away from the Lebanon's structural and confessional problems and towards the Syrian refugees. In June 2019, the FPM distributed flyers in Beirut encouraging Lebanese people to shut down businesses that employ Syrian workers, with papers reading "Protect Lebanese workers and file a complaint about violators. Syria is safe for return and Lebanon can no longer take it"^{lxix}. While demands among low-wage Lebanese for greater employment opportunities are by no means illegitimate^{lxx}, blaming Syrians for the lack of jobs is largely a tactic employed by populist politicians to manufacture an existential 'Us versus Them' threat that only xenophobic nationalism can solve. In reality, the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon has largely been a bulwark against economic decline as their presence as consumers and the aid funding that has followed their arrival has helped to stave off some of the worst of the economic crisis^{lxxi}.

Despite the humanitarian aid and capital that Syrians brought to Lebanon, Lebanon's economy has continued to decline as the Syrian civil war drags on, and intercommunal relations between Syrians and Lebanese have declined with it. In Wave V of the Regular Perception Surveys on Social Tension Throughout Lebanon^{lxxii}, all surveyed localities reported that the most-cited source of tension between the two communities was 'competition over lower-skilled jobs', with many also reporting controversy over the establishment of Syrian-owned businesses. Other concerns range far and vary between regions, including child marriage and pregnancy, demographic and cultural differences, unfair distribution of aid, marriages between Syrians and Lebanese, and competition for services. However, the strong emphasis on both sides on business and employment factors suggests that Lebanon's current economic troubles weigh deeply and heavily on already-distressed populations. While the narrative that Syrians are 'taking over' the job market and intentionally depriving Lebanese has its roots in populism and demagoguery among governing elites, the economic woes that Syrians and Lebanese experience are very real and should not be overlooked. A previous Lebanese Minister of Labor argued,

"The current situation was not created by the arrival of the refugees alone; it was created by three separate shocks. The first was the closure of the border with Syria, the second was the arrival of the refugees, and the third was the influx of aid funding. That said, increasing labor without increased capital brings productivity down. Non-Syrian foreign workers and Lebanese compete with Syrians for low-skilled labor, but Syrians get the aid. The economy is unbalanced."^{lxxiii}

Narratives of securitization and the 'existential threat' of Syrian refugees

Since their arrival in Lebanon, Syrian refugees have been falsely implicated in public rhetoric as the cause for various issues in Lebanon, some economic and others infrastructural. However, two narratives bare special focus – those are, "the Syrian refugee as an existential threat," and "the Syrian refugee as a security threat". Accusations that refugees are terrorists, that they harbor terrorists and militants, or that they threaten to tear down Lebanon's precarious political 'balance' have abounded amid fears among Lebanese that Lebanon could be dragged unwillingly into Syria's conflict. Moreover, talk of refugees as a menace to Lebanon's own internal security is deeply concerning because it implicates refugees in exactly the forms of violence that they fled from. And while Syrian refugees in Lebanon have no documented military presence in Lebanon, they consistently find themselves at the wrong end of narratives of securitization. The Lebanese refugee milieu is already shrouded in historical trauma that amplifies and reanimates older fears. Thus, public concern about the impact of refugees on Lebanon's security and stability must be dissected into its component parts in order to fully understand why many Lebanese view Syrians as an existential threat, as opposed to simply disliking them or competing with them.

The role of a traumatic national history

The Syrian refugee crisis is not the first time that Lebanon has sustained a large influx of refugees; beginning in 1948, Lebanon has hosted Palestinians fleeing the creation of Israel and several generations of their descendants. An important comparison can be made between Syrians and Palestinians regarding the effect that they have on Lebanon's political system. Lebanese citizens vote in elections, but seats and offices in parliament are proportionately reserved for representatives of eighteen ethno-sectarian groups^{lxxiv}. Because the system is designed to ensure representation across a pre-set demographic landscape, the integration of a large new population with a predominantly unified sectarian background would overwhelm the current demographic balance that reigns, albeit precariously, over the country. Since the majority-Sunni Palestinians first arrived in Lebanon, many Lebanese Christians as well as Shi'a and other non-Sunni political groups have felt threatened by the demographic difference that the majority-Sunni Palestinians represent, and thus supported their exclusion from political participation. While Syrian refugees have a country to which they could one day return, whereas Palestinians do not, many Lebanese still believe that permitting Syrians to stay in Lebanon indefinitely will constitute a similar threat to Lebanon's demographic landscape. Like the Palestinians, Syrians who are unable to return to Syria may be resigned to permanent political ostracism between a host nation which cannot integrate them and a home nation to which they cannot return.

Another important historical factor is the 29-year Syrian occupation of Lebanon which lasted from 1976^{lxxv}, when Syria first sent troops into the Lebanese civil war, until 2005, when mass protests in response to the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri successfully pressured Syrian forces to withdraw^{lxxvi}. Today, the history of the occupation and the impact that it had on Lebanese citizens plays an important role in the way that many Lebanese view and treat Syrian refugees, although this impact is felt differently throughout Lebanon based on the experiences of individuals and communities with the Syrian regime and with Syrians generally. Few clear claims can be made about the impact of Syria's long and complex history in Lebanon and its impact on the public perception of refugees, save that amid the increasing politicization of Syrians in Lebanon, it is not uncommon for Syrians to be linked to the history of the occupation, giving rise to the narrative that refugees are a new manifestation of Syria's previous presence in Lebanon, and that permitting them to stay may facilitate the re-expansion of Syria's military and security apparatus into Lebanon once again^{lxxvii}. Lebanon's foreign minister Gebran Bassil made his stance clear, remarking in 2017: "Any foreigner who is in our country, without us agreeing to it, is an occupier, no matter where they come from... Syrian citizens – our brothers and sisters – only have one choice: to return to their country"^{lxxviii}.

Finally, both refugees and Lebanese fear that the presence of the refugees will facilitate the re-expansion of the Syrian regime's security apparatus into Lebanon once again. One of the most common examples cited by both Lebanese and Syrians is the presence of informants -- the

Syrian regime is widely believed to have a network of informants in Lebanon and other nearby countries to monitor refugees' attitudes toward the regime. One Syrian activist commented,

“The Syrian regime is very good at wielding informants. From 2013 to 2017, there was no real sense of victory for the regime so the informants in nearby countries didn't really care that much about reporting non-combatants and regular Syrians who weren't involved with the opposition. Low-key activists and unaffiliated refugees were left alone. But in 2017 and after, the Syrian regime started winning so now the informants have become bolder and more serious about reporting anyone who's against the regime. Some are so bold now that they barely even hide the fact that they're informants. They say, 'Now I have the time for you, so come here', because now that the regime has proven its survival the risk for them is much lower. They've started reporting on more people who speak out against the regime regardless of whether they were active in the opposition.”^{lxxix}

While no specific data exists on the Syrian regime's covert presence in Lebanon beyond anecdotal evidence, the presence of informants galvanizes fears among both communities that Syria and its conflict are active in Lebanon in ways that directly affect Lebanon's sovereignty and security. Because many Lebanese felt oppressed by the Syrian military occupation of Lebanon^{lxxx}, the discreet presence of the Syrian regime reanimates anxiety that Lebanon's dissociation from Syria is precarious and could be undone should the Syrian government decide to exert its power in Lebanon once again.

The securitization of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and 'spillover' from Syria's war

Beyond the impact of historical trauma on the crisis, Syrian refugees today also find themselves caught up in narratives of securitization which implicate them in threats that are not of their own making. This report views securitization as an extreme extension of politicization; the process by which an issue or group of people becomes so overactive in public attitude and government policymaking that it leads to exceptional breaches of rules and rights that would be considered inalienable under normal circumstances. A useful definition is provided by Buzar, Wæver, and Wild:

“If one can argue that something overflows the normal political logic of weighing issues against each other, this must be the case because it can upset the entire process of weighing as such: 'If we do not tackle this problem, everything else will be irrelevant (because we will not be here or will not be free to deal with it in our own way).' Thereby, the actor has claimed a right to handle the issue through extraordinary means, to break the normal political rules of the game... 'Security' is thus a self-referential practice, because it is in this practice that the issue becomes a security issue – not

necessarily because a real existential threat exists but because the issue is presented as such a threat.”^{lxxxix}

Syrian refugees in Lebanon are a powerful example of the manufacturing of an existential threat that extends beyond politicization and into securitization – their presence is viewed by some as so apparent and massive an issue that failing to securitize their presence in Lebanon would threaten Lebanon’s very existence, or at the very least its precarious status quo. This section aims to articulate how that narrative was developed and to argue that such narratives assume falsely that refugees present such an existential threat at all.

It is important to note the separation between two sources of fear among Lebanese; one being refugees themselves, and the other being that the Syrian civil war will spill into, and subsequently overtake Lebanon. To some, these appear one and the same; many anti-refugee Lebanese believe the refugees to be a manifestation of Syrian spillover that threatens to cast Lebanon into the fray. However, fear of Syria’s violence becoming active in Lebanon was prevalent before the Syrian refugee crisis came into full force and should be viewed as a separate. For example, in October 2012, a high-ranking member of Lebanon’s security infrastructure, Wissam al-Hassan, was assassinated in a TNT car bombing in the upscale Achrafieh neighborhood of Beirut, killing him, his driver, and six other civilians^{lxxxii}. While Damascus condemned the attack^{lxxxiii}, it is believed by many among Lebanon’s anti-Syrian political parties that the perpetrator was the Syrian regime in retaliation for al-Hassan’s long-standing, fiercely anti-Syrian political persuasion^{lxxxiv}. The evening of the assassination, protests broke out throughout Lebanon, some of which turned violent as pro and anti-Syrian regime protesters clashed with security forces, which stoked sectarian tensions and increased fears that Syria’s conflict could expand into Lebanon^{lxxxv}. The assassination of Wissam al-Hassan did not implicate Syrian refugees in Lebanon, but it certainly made Lebanese people more fearful that the peace provided by their separation from Syria was precarious at best.

The most significant event that connected refugees directly to spillover from Syria’s war was the Arsal crisis of August 2014. A detailed account and interactive timeline of the crisis is available through the Civil Society Knowledge Center at Lebanon Support^{lxxxvi}, but a summary is necessary here to explain how the crisis impacted perceptions of refugees. On 2 August 2014, the capture of the commander of Liwa Fajr al-Islam (a group that had pledged loyalty to the Islamic State) by the Lebanese Armed Forces precipitated a five-day period of violence along the Lebanon-Syria border in the Lebanese town of Arsal. The al-Nusra Front (now Jabhat Fatah al-Sham) and the Islamic State launched an invasion across the border in what became the most significant spillover event in Lebanon since the start of Syria’s war. While the Lebanese Armed Forces and Hezbollah were able to successfully force the militants back into Syria, 60 militants, 50 civilians, and 19 soldiers were killed. Furthermore, 19-24 Lebanese soldiers and policemen were captured and taken to Syria, precipitating a long-term hostage crisis that lasted until 2017.

The crisis greatly impacted Lebanese-Syrian relations in the area. For one, rumors that al-Nusra fighters were seeking shelter among sympathizers in the refugee settlements

prompted Lebanese security forces to raid the settlements and arrest hundreds in what refugees and human rights groups described as an overaggressive and abusive manner^{lxxxvii}. Previous attempts by militant Syrian groups to posit themselves as speakers for the refugee community^{lxxxviii} in Lebanon combined with presumed and unclear links between Syrian jihadists and refugees initiated a discourse of refugees as an entry point for Syrian militants into Lebanon.

The Arsal clashes also sparked a wave of friction between Lebanese and Syrian communities throughout the country. Violence against Syrians was perpetuated by both Lebanese state security forces and private Lebanese civilians who blamed Syrian refugees for the threat posed by Syrian jihadist organizations along the Arsal border. By the end of September 2014, Human Rights Watch had documented a series of violent attacks against Syrians throughout Lebanon by Lebanese citizens^{lxxxix}, including multiple cases that took place in full view of Lebanese security forces. This included numerous attempts to burn down refugee camps throughout North Lebanon – in one case, Lebanese gunmen set fire to the tents of Syrian refugee Abbas Ali, his two wives, and fifteen children, forcing them to flee and destroying almost everything they owned^{xc}.

The Arsal crisis is certainly not the only security event that implicated Syrian refugees in public discourse, and similar accusations against Syrians can be found surrounding other security incidents over the past seven years in Lebanon. As early as 2013, when Hezbollah first declared openly that it was supporting the Syrian regime militarily in Syria, a string of terrorist attacks launched by anti-Syrian regime jihadist groups in Syria hit Shiite and Hezbollah-affiliated targets in Lebanon. Attacks have also been carried out against other pro-Syrian regime targets, including a 2015 attack^{xcⁱ} in Tripoli. In the wake of the bombings, which were carried out by bombers of various nationalities^{xcⁱⁱ}, public ire in Lebanon regularly turned towards Syrian refugees, even though the refugees had nothing to do with the attacks^{xcⁱⁱⁱ}.

Even in terms of more minor security issues such as crime and public health, Syrian refugees are often cast as existentially threatening. For example, an interlocutor from the Issam Fares Institute at the American University of Beirut noted that while anti-refugee politicians and media point to the fact that crime reports have increased in Lebanon since the arrival of refugees^{xc^{iv}}, these figures are intentionally used to manufacture a false link between refugees and criminality. In reality, while 7,358 refugees were detained in 2016 on criminal charges, only 59 were detained on serious violent charges^{xc^v}, whereas most other detentions of Syrian refugees were for the crime of not having legal papers, which as discussed in the previous section is unavoidable for most. In another example, foreign minister Gebran Bassil was accused of being a racist and eugenicist after posting a tweet claiming that Lebanese people are genetically superior:

“We have established the concept for our Lebanese belonging which is above any other belonging. We said that it was genetic and that is the only explanation for our similarity and distinction, for our ability to sustain and accommodate together, for our flexibility

and strength, our ability to integrate and be integrated, and the refusal to be displaced and seeking refuge together.”^{xcvi}

By treating refugees as non-human, inherently problematic, and genetically inferior, political pundits have used nationalistic and race-based demagoguery to exacerbate preexisting existential and security fears. Despite the obvious bias of such claims, the development of an intentionally racialized divide between Lebanese and Syrians over the course of the refugee crisis has made Syrians ‘guilty of their own existence’, so to speak.

The increasing securitization of the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon suggests that many Lebanese view Syrian refugees as more than a competitor for jobs and livelihood and perceive them as a threat to the security of Lebanon and its people. Lebanon’s response to the refugee crisis has long since surpassed politicization and has morphed into a strategy of securitization in its response to what has now been eight sustained years of refugee settlement^{xcvii}. If Lebanon hopes to pacify public hysteria around the fear that the nation is facing an existential threat, it must work against narratives of securitization and promote more peaceful relationships between Lebanese and Syrians. The alternative, an increasingly hostile environment that fosters extremism, radicalization and violence between the two groups, bodes ill for the future of Lebanon.

Increasing pressure on refugees, but no path forward

Beginning on April 24, 2019, life became much harder for Syrian refugees living in Lebanon due to the implementation of a decision from the Lebanese Higher Defense Council (henceforth HDC), a government body that is meant to convene in times of crisis to quickly pass security decisions. The HDC meeting which drafted the decision on April 15 was reportedly attended by a preset group of ministers considered essential to high level security decision-making, including President Michel Aoun, Prime Minister Saad Hariri, the ministers of defense, justice, interior, finance, economy, and the foreign minister, as well as high ranking members of the Lebanese military and security apparatus^{xcviii}. The new directive has not been seen by any civil society actors in print, but it has been referred to in press reports^{xcix}, and since its implementation on 24 April, its affects have been made clear by a widespread crackdown on refugees in Lebanon.

Broadly speaking, the HDC decision has enacted two important changes. The first has increased pressure on the refugees from all sides, to the significant detriment of their financial, legal, and housing security. It is now harder for Syrians in Lebanon to work and many are being forcibly dismissed by their employers and landlords as workplace raids, evictions, and demolitions occur across the country^c. Second, Lebanon’s chief of General Security confirmed the HDC decision’s stance on the deportation of irregular Syrian entrants to Lebanon, stating, “There is a decision by the Higher Council of Defense in Lebanon on April 24, 2019 to prevent

the illegal entry of any Syrian, and demanding the return to Syria of all those who enter surreptitiously. We are applying this decision no more and no less.”^{ci}. This new crackdown has occurred alongside an uptick in political and social pressure on refugees to return home to Syria^{cii} despite the stance of the UN, which maintains that Syria is not yet safe enough to permit a large-scale return of refugees^{ciii}. The increased pressure has inspired a climate of dread among Syrians in Lebanon, particularly among refugees who have no option to return to Syria because they face consequences ranging from conscription to imprisonment to death should they go back. Fear of potential deportation to Syria was confirmed by multiple refugees interviewed for this paper as well as by numerous^{civ} media^{cv} reports^{vi}. The rest of this section will discuss the recent crackdown and the wider implications of the current state of play for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

The Higher Defense Council decision and its impact: raids and demolitions, deportations, and refugees’ fears in Lebanon

Aside from the directive to deport new Syrian entrants to Syria, The Higher Defense Council calls for a stricter interpretation of laws that had been in place previously. The most notable example is workplace raids – since the issuing of the 2014 residency laws, it has been illegal for Syrians to work in Lebanese businesses without legal residency papers and a *kafeel*, although up until recently, this law was more or less ignored and Syrians sought informal employment all throughout Lebanon^{cvi}. The Higher Defense Council decision ordered a strict and immediate crackdown on the practice of hiring undocumented Syrians. In one raid in the Beirut area, the inspectors closed down 20 businesses, gave violation notices to 129, and warnings to 41 – at a news conference about the shutdowns, Labor Minister Camille Abousleiman stated: “Our goal is to regulate foreign labor and grant work permits”, in addition to “giving priority to Lebanese labor”^{cviii}. Another news report noted that Lebanese business owners must pay a fine of 1.5 million Lebanese pounds (about \$1,600) for each Syrian that they are found to be employing illegally^{cix}, which incentivizes employers to eject Syrians from their work force, leaving many refugees unemployed without recourse.

In a similar fashion, the HDC decision also calls for strict enforcement of the prohibition on construction of refugee structures made of anything other than plastic or wood^{cx}. As a result, refugees living in temporary cement brick shelters in Aarsal were ordered to demolish their own homes with no compensation by 1 July 2019^{cx}. Horrific videos circulated in June and July of refugee families tearing apart the walls and roofs of their own houses^{cxii}, many of whom were forced to move into tents or find accommodation elsewhere. Lebanese authorities claimed that the cement structures violated housing codes that had existed previously, but which had gone unheeded until the Higher Defense Council decision obligated stricter enforcement^{cxiii}. Meanwhile, refugees living in the Aarsal region were already among the most vulnerable in Lebanon and the demolitions are believed to have made 15,000 people previously living in 3,000 shelters homeless^{cxiv}. While the demolitions were carried out under the pretext

that the structures were illegal under building codes, refugees in the area stated that they did not know that the structures were not allowed^{cxv}. As such, the demolitions were widely criticized as an attempt to put additional pressure on the refugees to leave Lebanon^{cxvi}.

The intent of the raids and demolitions is clear – to provoke refugees to take what little they have left and return to Syria. As Bill Frelick of Human Rights Watch noted, “The demolition order is one of many recent actions to crank up pressure on Syrian refugees to go back. They include ramped up arrests and deportations, closing of shops, and confiscation or destruction of unlicensed vehicles, on top of other long-standing restrictions, including curfews and evictions, and barriers to refugee education, legal residency, and work authorization.”^{cxvii} In this context, the Higher Defense Council decision can be seen another part of a long chain of irresponsible policy decisions which increase pressure on refugees and risk Lebanon’s social stability despite the fact that many refugees are unable to return home^{cxviii} regardless of their desire to do so.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, the Higher Defense Council decision has declared crossing the border into Lebanon without a visa illegal after April 24, 2019, and the punishment for such a crime is deportation to Syria. This is an egregious violation of domestic law, as Article 31 of the Law Regulating the Entry and Stay of Foreigners in Lebanon and their Exit from the Country states, “If a decision to expel a political refugee has been made it is not permissible to deport such refugee to the territory of a state where his life or freedom are not secured.”^{cxix} Nevertheless, Lebanon has already begun to summarily deport Syrian nationals across the border into Syria in direct and clear cases of refugee *refoulement*^{cxx}. In a position paper signed by eight Lebanese NGO’s^{cxxi}, civil society organizers condemned actions taken to deport 301 Syrian nationals to Syria, arguing that deporting them without trial is an extralegal decision in clear violation of Lebanese judicial proceedings. Furthermore, the paper also notes that the decision to hand deported nationals directly to the Syrian regime security forces puts the lives and safety of refugees in danger. While Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention on the Rights of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, it is a signatory to the 1987 Convention against Torture, the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and the UN International Convention for the Protection of all Persons from Forced Disappearances, all of which obligate Lebanon to cease *refoulement* of Syrians immediately as they may be tortured, killed, or disappeared once in Syria^{cxxii}. Nevertheless, the Higher Defense Council has made its stance implicitly clear: in matters of refugee returns to Syria, legal proceedings preventing forced refugee returns are no longer applicable and such returns will continue regardless of their clear violation of national and international law. A news report in late August noted that since the HDC decision went into effect, over 2,700 refugees have been deported from Lebanon^{cxxiii}.

The raids, crackdowns, and deportations have been very impactful on refugees’ perceptions of their own security in Lebanon. Beyond their crumbling quality of life, Syrian refugees fear that forced deportations to Syria may be imminent, and for many Syrians in Lebanon who fled actors that are still active in Syria, return could result in conscription, death, imprisonment, or torture. One Syrian interlocutor said,

“We know that some refugees have been imprisoned or killed after returning... There was a case where three people were detained in the Beirut airport and handed back to Syria. Two of them are now in Saydnaya [a torture and execution camp in Syria] and the fate of the third is unknown.”^{cxxiv}

Another Syrian refugee wrote,

“There is great fear among the Syrians here of moving even within the region. Fear of deportation is especially strong because they saw direct cases of deportation.”^{cxxv}

Accounts from all refugees interviewed for this report reject the assertion made often by Lebanese government officials that Syria is safe and suitable for return now that most areas of Syria are once again under government control. For many, it is precisely the return to government control that prevents a safe return, as many Syrian refugees in Lebanon fled either conscription or persecution by the regime and are still listed by the Syrian government as a deserter or member of the opposition^{cxxvi}. In UNHCR surveys^{cxxvii}, most Syrians in Lebanon expressed a strong desire to return to Syria one day, and the fact that they are not doing so now despite how difficult life in Lebanon has become shows clearly that most do not yet consider their intended point of return in Syria secure or livable^{cxxviii}.

Finally, among those who are willing to return, their ability to do so depends largely on whether the Syrian regime will permit them to go back to their place of origin within Syria, or even to enter Syria at all. Initial reports suggest that while the Syrian regime has publicly invited refugees to come home^{cxxix}, many have been and will be *de facto* denied return either through the destruction or restitution of their property or simply by denying them entrance at the border outright. Others still are deterred from returning due to the regime’s record of violent repression, arbitrary detentions, and persecution of anyone deemed a political enemy of the state^{cxxx}. As one expert scholar wrote, “The claims that Syria is safe for returnees willfully ignore a broad range of policies put in place by the Assad regime that effectively blocks their return.”^{cxxxi} This unfortunate reality has powerful implications for Lebanon – if Assad proves unwilling in the long-term to permit refugees to return home, then nearby host countries may have to hold their refugees for an untold and potentially indefinite amount of time. On the ground in Lebanon, making refugees’ lives worse does nothing to improve such conditions in Syria. As one scholar argued, “This all depends on the settlement of the conflict in Syria. Whether refugees go home depends entirely on this.”^{cxxxii}

Lebanon's pressure cooker: no dignity in Lebanon, no return, and no integration

Syrian refugees in Lebanon now find themselves trapped in between three walls which grow tighter by the day. The first is that a dignified and financially stable life in Lebanon has become very difficult for most. While some have been able to find suitable work and construct a new life during their time in Lebanon, many more seek to leave Lebanon through migration to a richer country. As one Syrian refugee told *The Guardian*, "I'm very happy my son is in Europe... Maybe if he gets citizenship he can take us to him. What do we have to keep us here? There are many stories like this. Nobody wants to stay in Lebanon. It's a miserable life."^{cxxxiii} For such refugees, staying in Lebanon is simply the least bad option left on the playing field. While still preferable to life in war-torn and economically destitute regions in Syria, life in Lebanon for Syrians has become fraught with poverty, racism, and barriers to decent living, leaving many feeling as though their lives lack dignity and opportunity.

The second wall is that return to Syria *en masse* is still not possible. Reasons not to return are many – for some, they face persecution, imprisonment, or conscription upon return to Syria^{cxxxiv}. Other have lost access to housing, land, and property that they once held in Syria either through destruction or restitution and simply have nothing left to return to^{cxxxv}. For others still, their intended point of return in Syria lacks basic services and livelihood opportunities^{cxxxvi}, and many are also hesitant to return because Syria's social landscape has changed greatly^{cxxxvii} since their departure and they no longer feel as though they have a space in their home community anymore^{cxxxviii}. There are many in Lebanon who simply cannot and will not go back until a political solution is reached that suits the needs of their return, but given the Assad regime's historic unwillingness^{cxxxix} to compromise for the betterment of the Syrian people, there is little hope that positive conditions for return are imminent.

The third and final wall is that Syrian refugees cannot be integrated as they could be in migrant destination countries such as Germany or Canada. Lebanon's historic resistance to changing the nation's sectarian balance combined with the inability of Lebanon's infrastructure to whether the crisis shows quite clearly that Lebanon cannot and will not permanently settle a population that now constitutes approximately a quarter of the country's total residents. It has been clear since the beginning of the crisis that conditions for the integration of Syrians either by citizenship or long-term residency are not forthcoming, and likewise, according to survey data^{cxli}, most Syrians in nearby host countries hope to return to Syria one day and do not expect to be integrated regardless. For those refugees who cannot return to Assad's Syria in the near or far future and who are unable or unwilling to migrate to a third country, a long-term protracted refugee settlement appears imminent.

Trapped between these three walls, refugees have essentially been forced into a pressure cooker. Lebanese policymakers and the international community must understand that a refugee return to Syria *en masse* is not immediately forthcoming, and that a large overhaul of refugee policy is necessary. The current course of forcing Syrians into deep vulnerability will only manifest negative externalities on both Lebanon's internal security and the freedoms and rights of Syrians and Lebanese.

For one, the dehumanization of refugees pushes both Syrians and Lebanese further towards polarization and radicalization. Examples such as the treatment of refugees by the far right in Europe^{cxli} and increasing gun violence against immigrants in the U.S.^{cxlii} demonstrate that unchecked xenophobia leads to violence and hate crimes which put the security of citizens and immigrants alike at risk. Human rights groups and journalists have already documented a rise in violence against Syrians in Lebanon^{cxliii} – permitting the current atmosphere of racism and bigotry to continue will likely sew further tension and increase violent assaults.

The illegal crackdown on refugees also has grave implications on the rule of law in Lebanon. For example, the decision to summarily deport Syrians guilty of crossing the border irregularly after 24 April 2019 is in clear violation of the Lebanese State Council Ruling No. 421 of 8 February 2018, which maintains that the entry of foreigners into Lebanon is subject to judicial oversight as opposed to the oversight of security institutions, and thus renders the 2014 residency restriction illegal because they were enacted by an incompetent body^{cxliv}. This marks a troubling trend in Lebanon – security institutions such as the Directorate of General Security and the Higher Defense Council are rarely constrained by judicial oversight amid a weakening and disempowered rule of law.

Even before the protest movement challenged the established political Elite in Lebanon and pressured Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri to resign on 29 October 2019, policies towards Syrian refugees by the Lebanese government and the international community were not helpful to stabilize the country. Irresponsible policy decisions which increase the vulnerability of Syrians will not help to improve life for Lebanese people, nor will it result in a mass return of refugees to Syria for the foreseeable future. Lebanese policymakers should accept that for the time being, Syrian refugees are in Lebanon to stay, and until a safer status quo manifests in Syria, Syrians abroad should be guaranteed the right to live comfortably and access equitable and fair employment. Significantly greater support from the international community is also necessary in order to improve Lebanon's economy and manifest a comfortable and sustainable future for Lebanese and Syrian refugees alike. This support must come with conditions. Its use needs to be highly transparent and carefully tailored to achieve its objectives. General support to the Lebanese government may otherwise be prone to corruption and strengthen a system that for the first time is seriously challenged by citizen protests. By filling in the funding gaps in the Lebanese Crisis Response Plan and providing greater support to

civil society development and employment projects, donor countries can help decrease the vulnerability of poor Lebanese and Syrian families. The alternative – greater vulnerability and poverty for Lebanese and Syrian families alike, as well as a weaker and less empowered rule of law – threatens to destabilize Lebanon and cast its people into greater insecurity for years to come.

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