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Law and Politics of "Safe Zones" and Forced Return to Syria: Refugee Politics in Lebanon

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Executive Summary

Amid the protracted Syrian crisis, Lebanon currently hosts 1,011,366 UNHCR registered Syrian refugees,[1] making the country home to the highest number of refugees per capita in the world. Since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011, the Lebanese government has failed to develop a coherent framework which both recognizes the presence of Syrian refugees and identifies local governments' responsibilities or develops a legal framework for refugees' residency and labor statuses. The state's inaction in the early days of the crisis ensured that existing border and labor policies were maintained from the start of the refugee influx through 2014, when regulatory border and labor policies were adopted by the government. This shift is linked to a variation in the Lebanese state's perception of the Syrian conflict from temporary to protracted. Although the 2016 government made policy changes relevant to the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, such as assigning a State Ministry for Refugee Affairs and partially repealing strict registration and labor policies in 2017, the new government has yet to develop a framework of action related to recognizing the Syrian refugee population's status in the country. This paper aims to understand the positions of political actors including the state, political parties, and local governments regarding the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, as well as examine how they are addressing matters and administering policies related to refugees in practice. Moreover, the research objective of this paper is to assess and determine how political developments in Lebanon could amplify calls for the forced return of Syrian refugees to Syria or the establishment of "safe zones" by Lebanese actors.

Based on interviews with key stakeholders such as government officials, political party members, and humanitarian actors, as well as a review of news reports, this report features three main arguments. First, as the crisis has entered its seventh year, the Lebanese state does not intend to formalize a national response on the refugee presence and subsequent humanitarian crisis unless it is focused on the repatriation of Syrian refugees to Syria. Although state actors have vocally expressed urgency in planning the return of refugees to Syria, such a plan has not been formalized, and the Lebanese government does not have the capacity to establish "safe zones" in Syria. In addition, the Lebanese government believes that the policy of non-refoulement is formally respected, although Syrian refugees face difficulties at the border. National-level decision-making is driven by international support or pressure on the one side, which is perceived as being tied to the government's dependence on foreign aid in light of the crisis, and the local political will to limit the size of the humanitarian crisis in terms of the number of Syrian refugees residing and working in Lebanon on the other.

Second, Lebanese political discord has paved the way for non-state actors, particularly Hezbollah, to take the lead in the promotion of safe areas in Syria and negotiate the repatriation of Syrian refugees. In the absence of dialogue between the Lebanese and Syrian governments, Hezbollah's initiative has the potential to spur other political parties to action, namely by reinforcing the declaration of safe areas and consequently delegitimizing Syrian refugees' presence in Lebanon. There is consensus across Lebanon's main political parties that refugees should return to Syria, which is driven by a fear related to the Syrian refugees' presence and the spillover of the conflict, including economic, security, and infrastructural concerns. Furthermore, the Lebanese government's unwillingness to jeopardize the international community's support by undertaking such an unfavorable initiative and apparent willingness to "pass the buck" led to the tacit approval of Hezbollah being made a negotiating actor and the designation of the UN and other international actors as responsible for establishing "safe zones" in Syria and coordinating the repatriation of Syrian refugees to Syria. Foreign aid allocated to addressing these factors is perceived as having the potential to ease tensions among Syrian refugees and host communities.

Third, in the absence of a national framework, refugee policies are de facto dictated by municipalities and security agencies. These actors implement existing harsh border, registration, and labor policies, as well as formulate and adopt ad hoc policies. As municipalities are overburdened, overstretched, and under-resourced, the existing dynamics provided leeway for initiatives outside the scope of municipalities' legal authority. Discriminatory policies adopted by some municipalities, such as evictions and curfews, have reignited tensions among Syrian refugees and host communities, as well as increased anti-Syrian sentiment at the local level.

This report presents a set of recommendations, including for the Lebanese state, political actors, and local governance of Syrian refugees, which can foster an environment in which refugees are protected under the law and are extended basic rights:

1. Adopting a legal framework of action for Syrian refugees that addresses their economic, social, and security status as refugees, including rights and responsibilities. This national strategy is required to outline the Lebanese state's national legislation toward Syrian refugees by defining the legal framework and jurisdiction of various actors responding to the crisis.

2. Developing a structured national response plan targeting Syrian refugees that clearly lays out universal policies at the national level which also addresses micro policies, as well as identifies the roles of various actors with respect to Syrian refugees, including

ministries, security sector institutions, and municipalities. It is recommended that this response plan include the execution of national registration procedures for accurate data collection on Syrian refugees.

3. Disseminating accurate information on the number of Syrian refugees present in Lebanon and foreign aid allocated to Syrian refugees, in order to form a clearer picture of the nature and extent of the Syrian refugee presence at the national and local levels.

4. Ensuring that all relevant actors conform to applicable policies within Lebanese law while still respecting the refugees' status and repealing harsh refugee-related policies.

5. Reinforcing accountability within Lebanese political culture through the adoption of clear accountability mechanisms disseminated to political actors in general and those actors engaging with Syrian refugees in particular.

6. Establishing a national policy addressing an agreement on the benchmarks and correct methods to use when discussing the repatriation of Syrian refugees, as well as carrying out such steps while respecting refugees' human rights and the Lebanese state's obligations toward Syrian refugees under international law.

Introduction

The Syrian crisis has entered its seventh year and led to the mass displacement of the war-ravaged country's population. Lebanon hosts more than 1 million Syrian refugees, which accounts for one of the highest number of refugees per capita in the world. Syrian refugees and host communities alike are severely affected by the humanitarian crisis on account of increased competition for resources. In 2011, the Syrian crisis was perceived as short-term in nature. However, as the crisis entered its seventh year, political attitudes toward hosting Syrian refugees changed. Uncertainty regarding the length of the conflict led to a significant uptick in rhetoric about Lebanon being unable to host more refugees and the repatriation of Syrian refugees to Syria.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this project is to understand the positions of political actors including the state, political parties, and local governments on the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, as well as examine how they are dealing with refugees in practice. Moreover, the research objective is to assess how political developments in Lebanon could amplify calls for the forced return of Syrian refugees to Syria or the establishment of "safe zones" by Lebanese actors. This research entails the following three sub-objectives:

- Examining key drivers of political decision-making regarding Syrian refugees at a national level and assessing how these drivers have shaped the national legal framework in Lebanon.
- Assessing the seven main political parties' attitudes toward hosting Syrian refugees from a political, sectarian, social, and economic perspective.
- Identifying local government policies adopted toward Syrian refugees.

Research Questions

1. How has refugee politics evolved throughout the Syrian crisis?
2. What factors could drive an increase in forced returns to Syria or the establishment of a "safe zone" by Lebanese actors?
3. What are the key drivers of decision-making regarding Syrian refugees in Lebanon at the national, political party, and local levels?
4. What are the conditions under which political parties would favor keeping refugees in Lebanon or vice versa?

Methodology

This study resorted to two methods by which primary and secondary data was collected, in addition to data analysis.

Desk Review

The review of newspaper outlets, public statements, and reports, including the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) was necessary to examine the national response to the Syrian refugee crisis, political party policy perspectives, where registered Syrian refugees reside, municipal policies on refugees, and deportation and refoulement cases. Research also entailed reviewing legal documents and secondary sources associated with legal texts and international conventions to which Lebanon is a signatory.

Qualitative Stakeholder Interviews

Ten qualitative stakeholder interviews were held with key stakeholders, such as government officials, political party members, international organizations, and security sector experts, in order to frame their perspectives on the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, relevant concerns, the return of Syrian refugees to Syria, national and local policies, decision-making processes, policy gaps, as well as projected future policies.

Data Analysis

The desk review and interview findings were assessed to outline pre-existing Lebanese perceptions toward Syria, the national response and local-level policies targeting the Syrian refugee crisis, concerns accompanied with hosting Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the dynamics of prospective return of Syrian refugees to Syria, key drivers of potential change, policy gaps related to the Syrian refugee crisis, and policy recommendations.

Key Arguments

Based on interviews with key stakeholders such as government officials, political party members, security sector experts, and humanitarian actors, as well as a review of media reports, this paper features three main arguments. First, as the crisis has entered its seventh year, the Lebanese state does not intend to formalize a national response toward the humanitarian crisis unless it is focused on the repatriation of Syrian refugees to Syria, has not formalized a repatriation plan, and does not have the capacity to execute such a plan. Second, Lebanese political discord has paved the way for non-state actors, particularly Hezbollah, to take the lead in the

promotion of safe areas in Syria and negotiate the repatriation of Syrian refugees to Syria. The Lebanese government's unwillingness to jeopardize the international community's support by undertaking such an unfavorable initiative and apparent willingness to "pass the buck" led to the tacit approval of Hezbollah as a negotiating actor and designation of UN and other international actors as responsible for establishing "safe zones" in Syria and coordinating the repatriation of Syrian refugees. Third, in the absence of a national framework, refugee policies are de facto dictated by municipalities and security agencies, which has provided leeway for initiatives outside the scope of the municipalities' legal authority. Discriminatory policies, such as evictions and curfews adopted by some municipalities, have reinforced tensions among Syrian refugees and host communities, as well as increased anti-Syrian sentiment at the local level.

Report Plan

This report has four sections examining the evolution of refugee politics in Lebanon. The first section introduces contemporary Lebanese-Syrian relations, maps the current locations of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and presents perceptions and concerns of hosting Syrian refugees. The second section contextualizes the research's main arguments related to national-level policy evasion in response to the Syrian refugee crisis, prospects related to the return of Syrian refugees to Syria, and municipal policies addressing Syrian refugees. The third section conceptualizes potential drivers for change, as well as identifies policy gaps in dealing with the Syrian refugee crisis, and provides key recommendations.

Section I: Framing the Context

This section presents an overview of key facts regarding Lebanese-Syrian relations and the historical context that has shaped modern Lebanese perceptions and views on the Syrian crisis and Syrian refugees. The Lebanese perception is shaped in part by the seven main political parties represented in the Lebanese government, including the Free Patriotic Movement, Hezbollah, the Amal Movement, the Progressive Socialist Party, the Kataeb Movement, the Lebanese Forces, and the Future Movement. These parties have seventy-five Members of Parliament and hold 58% of the seats in the Lebanese Parliament. This section also offers a general overview of the distribution of Syrian refugees across Lebanon in order to identify where refugees currently reside, and contextualizes their presence in Lebanon. Furthermore, this section examines Lebanese national, political party, and municipal perceptions and concerns toward hosting Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

Overview of Lebanese-Syrian Relations

Table 1: **Timeline of Lebanese-Syrian Relations**

1516-1916		Lebanon and Syria as "Greater Syria" under Ottoman Rule
1916		Sykes-Picot Agreement dividing Lebanese and Syrian Territory
1923-1946		French Mandate over Lebanon and Syria
	1943	Lebanese National Pact and independence from the French Mandate
	1946	French withdrawal
1975-1990		Lebanese Civil War
1976-2005		Syrian military presence in Lebanon
	1976	Syrian military intervention in the Lebanese Civil War
	1989	Taif Accord marking the end of the Lebanese Civil War
	1991	Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination signed between Syria and Lebanon
	2004	UNSC Resolution 1559 calling for Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon
	2005	Cedar Revolution and Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon
2011-Present		Syrian Crisis and the influx of Syrian refugees to neighboring countries, including Lebanon

Lebanese-Syrian relations are deeply rooted. The modern Lebanese and Syrian states were unified under Greater Syria, a region established under Ottoman rule in 1516 which remained constituted until its division according to the Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916 (Pipes 1990). The French Mandate over Lebanon and Syria was marked in the 1920s with the use of a common currency and customs (Salloukh 2005). The Lebanese constitution adopted in 1926 promoted the recognition of Lebanon as a republic, and Lebanon's independence from the French Mandate in 1943 was marked with the National Pact (Collelo 1989). The core of Lebanese-Syrian relations is based on historic unity that translated into strong ties on political, economic, and social levels. Hence, the Syrian perspective clings to Lebanon as an area historically part of their territory and a

territory of the greater Arab homeland. As such, Syrian influence and interference in Lebanese affairs is interpreted as distinctive to the bond and special relations shared between both states (Salloukh 2005).

The Lebanese Civil War broke out in 1975 as a consequence of escalating domestic tensions (Collelo 1989). Syria's initial military intervention was launched "to rescue Christian militias from defeat at the hands of the Muslim National Movement and their Palestinian allies" (Salloukh 2005). This was followed by the establishment of the Arab Deterrent Force (ADF) by the Arab League in 1976, which gave cover to the presence of 27,000 Syrian military men in Lebanon out of 30,000 ADF soldiers (Collelo 1989). The ADF fought against several actors during the Lebanese Civil War including Palestinian and Christian militias, and the Lebanese Army (Collelo 1989).

In the course of the civil war, there were approximately 144,000 deaths, 184,000 injured, 100,000 displaced, 17,000 missing, and 800,000 persons who fled the country (Volk 2010). The 1989 Taef Agreement that ended the war called for Lebanon's independence, the abolition of confessionalism, the demobilization of all militias, and the spread of Lebanese authority throughout all Lebanese territories using assistance provided by Syrian forces to the Internal Security Forces (ISF) in order to reestablish legitimacy over the course of two years. After that had been achieved, both governments' would then agree, according under the deal, to redeploy Syrian forces in the Bekaa region (The National Accord Document – The Taef Agreement 1989). The Taef Agreement recognizes the distinct "fraternal" relationship between the two states as follows:

> *Between Lebanon and Syria there is a special relationship that derives its strength from the roots of blood ties, history, and joint brotherly interests. This is the concept on which the two countries' coordination and cooperation are founded, and which will be embodied by the agreements between them in all areas, in a manner that accomplishes the interests of the two brotherly countries within the framework of the sovereignty and independence of each of them. Therefore, and because strengthening the bases of security creates the climate needed to develop these privileged bonds, Lebanon should not be allowed to constitute a source of threat to Syria's security, and Syria should not be allowed to constitute a source of threat to Lebanon's security under any circumstances. Consequently, Lebanon should not allow itself to become a pathway or a base for any force, State, or organization seeking to undermine its security or Syria's security. Syria, which is keen on Lebanon's security, independence, unity and accord among its citizens, should not permit any act that poses a threat to Lebanon's security, independence, and sovereignty."*
> **- The Taef Agreement, 1989**

2

Hezbollah is founded in 1983 as a Shia group branched out of the Amal movement in resistance to Israeli occupation (Hezbollah 2017). Led by Hezbollah's Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, the Iran-backed group has a military wing actively engaged in the Syrian crisis since 2013 (Hezbollah 2017).

3

The Lebanese Forces was founded during the Lebanese Civil War calling for independence (Lebanese Forces Party Timeline). The party's supporters are predominantly Christian and the leader Samir Geagea was imprisoned during the Syrian occupation (Salloukh 2005).

4

Established in 1936, the Kataeb Party calling for Lebanese independence from the French Mandate. "The Kataeb Party also believes in a free and active Christian presence in Lebanon and sees an organic relation between the idea of freedom and the Christians" (History of the Lebanese Phalanges).

5

The Future Movement was officially declared a political party in 2007 calling for the truth behind the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri (Khaled 2016). With a predominantly Sunni support base, the Future Movement is led by Saad Hariri.

6

The PSP is led by Taymur Jumblatt, and the party is predominantly Druze. Although the party had was an ally to the Syrian regime during the occupation, it played a key role during the 2005 Cedar revolution (Ignatius 2005). The party is known to shifting allegiances among Lebanese political parties, however the PSP greatly opposes the Assad regime today as Walid Jumblatt accuses the regime of plotting his assassination (Jumblatt accuses Syria of plotting his assassination 2016).

In practice, however, all militias excluding Hezbollah[2] were officially demobilized, the constitutional political reforms were adopted, and the rest of the Taef Agreements provisions, including Syria's withdrawal were put aside. Syria's hegemony over Lebanon remained until 2005 (Salloukh 2005). Lebanese political parties opposing the Syrian occupation were subjugated. For instance, the Lebanese Forces[3] party was banned and their leader Samir Geagea was imprisoned, Michel Aoun's supporters were oppressed during his exile, and the Kataeb Party[4] was 'infiltrated' by supporters of the Syrian regime (Salloukh 2005). Syria's hegemony over Lebanon extended throughout Lebanese domestic and foreign politics, as the political sphere was penetrated by Syrian intelligence (Salloukh 2005).

Similarly, the Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination signed between Syria and Lebanon in Damascus in 1991 stressed "the basis of the distinctive fraternal ties that link them and that draw their strength from their roots of kinship, history, common affiliation, joint destiny, and shared interests" (Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation and Coordination between the Syria Arab Republic and the Lebanese Republic 1991). This agreement institutionalized cooperation between the two states on political, economic, security, cultural, and scientific bases. This treaty also ensured mutual security interdependence, as neither state was to threaten or undermine the security of the other. In practice, however, it is argued that Lebanon's security was in the hands of the Syrian regime and Lebanese nationals were detained and interrogated by the Syrian security apparatus for their opposition or suspected opposition to the Syrian occupation through violent or vocal means (Gambill 2001). According to an Amnesty International Report on Lebanon covering Human Rights Developments and Violations published in 1997, the Lebanese and Syrian authorities failed to acknowledge the arrests of Lebanese nationals by Syrian military personnel in Lebanon, although at least 200 Lebanese nationals were reported to have been detained in Syria after having either been arrested by Syrian military personnel, Lebanese militias, or Lebanese security forces in Lebanon (1997).

In 2004, U.N. Security Council Resolution 1559 called for Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, under the context of the UNSC's "support for a free and fair presidential election in Lebanon conducted according to Lebanese constitutional rules devised without foreign interference or influence" (Resolution 1559, 2004). The lack of response on Resolution 1559 by the Syrian front led to the 2005 Cedar Revolution, which erupted with massive rallies calling for Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and a series of attacks on politicians and journalists (Salloukh 2005). Opposition to the Syrian occupation was led by the March 14 coalition, including the Future Movement,[5] the Progressive Socialist Party,[6]

Free Patriotic Movement (FPM),[7] Lebanese Forces, and Kataeb Party. The Future Movement is led by Rafiq Hariri's son Saad Hariri, and the movement's motive for leading the Cedar Revolution was in no small part due to the Lebanese security apparatus being under Syrian control at the time (Young 2010). The Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) led by Druze leader Walid Jumblatt was a leader of the Cedar Revolution in response to the extension of former President Emile Lahoud's term, which was an act violating the Lebanese Constitution (Ignatius 2005). The series of peaceful protests featuring chants of "Syria Out" led to the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon in April 2005 after twenty-nine years of military presence, and put an end to what was perceived as "years of humiliating Syrian rule" (Ciezadlo 2011). The strength of Syrian influence in domestic affairs and Syrian intelligence in Lebanon post 2005 remained subject to speculation by Lebanese and international observers, however the incremental penetration of the Lebanese security sector ceased (Salloukh 2005).

Although Syria's military presence ended in 2005, the presence of Syrian migrant workers in Lebanon was prominent in the construction and agriculture sectors (Syrian Workers in Lebanon 2013). The number of Syrian migrant workers who regularly travelled between Lebanon and Syria before the 2011 Syrian crisis was estimated between 300,000 and 400,000 (Medjad and Chaar 2017).

Though the 1951 Geneva Convention recognizes and legitimizes refugees' fear of persecution and right to protection, the Lebanese Government, having not been a signatory of this convention, fails to recognize refugees' status and refers to refugees as "displaced persons", as a divergence from the possibility of permanent residence (Medjad and Chaar 2017). In addition, authorities have avoided using the term "refugees" in order to relieve themselves of having to extend legal and political rights owed to Syrian refugees (Al-Saadi 2015). At the peak of Syrian refugee influx to Lebanon, there was a ratio of twenty-seven refugees for every 100 nationals, which is the highest ratio globally (Medjad and Chaar 2017).

Since the start of the Syrian crisis, Lebanese-Syrian relations have changed, as the former PM Najib Mikati and former President Michel Sleiman adopted the dissociation policy to establish Lebanon's neutrality toward the conflict (Barnes-Dacey 2013). Hezbollah's military intervention supporting the Assad regime since 2013 is a matter of controversy as their involvement in the war is argued to have negatively affected Lebanon's stability and the outcome of the crisis is expected to have a significant impact on domestic Lebanese politics (Barnes-Dacey 2013). In late 2016, the two-year presidential vacuum ended with the election of President Michel Aoun, which was followed by the appointment of Prime Minister Saad Hariri. The current political consensus is precarious on account of the controversial matter of

[7] Declared an official Lebanese political party in 2005, the FPM was founded by former army commander Michel Aoun calling for Lebanon's sovereignty from Syrian occupation (The Free Patriotic Movement 2017). Aoun and his supporters fought the war of liberation in 1989 against the Syrian front (Salloukh, 2005). With predominantly Christian supporters, The FPM signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Hezbollah in 2006 covering their alliance and agreement on fundamental factors of governance (Paper of Common Understanding between Hezbollah and the Free Patriotic Movement 2006).

initiating dialogue with the Syrian regime. Although the governments of Lebanon and Syria have established diplomatic relations since 2008, state-level policy coordination and dialogue is lacking between the Hariri government and Assad regime, as PM Hariri refuses to engage in dialogue with the Assad regime due to the former's support of the international condemnation of the Assad regime (Dakroub "Hariri: Calls for Talks" 2017). Current political dynamics are divided between the Hariri-led position against dialogue with the Syrian regime and the Hezbollah-led position supporting dialogue on the premise that it is necessary for refugee-related policy-making (Sayyed Nasrallah Hails 'Historical' Mosul Victory 2017). Dialogue with the Syrian regime remains a matter of controversy, as Aoun has not formally declared his position on the matter (Akil 2017).

Mapping Syrian refugees' location

At the end of 2016, 1,011,366 registered refugees[8] were living in Lebanon as reported by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). However, an unofficial figure circulated by the media states that there are 1.5 million Syrian refugees hosted in Lebanon (Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020). According to the partners involved in the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, the demographic distribution of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is 51% female, 49% male and 53% children (2017 January Statistical Dashboard).

Map 1: **Concentration of Syrian Refugees per Governorate**
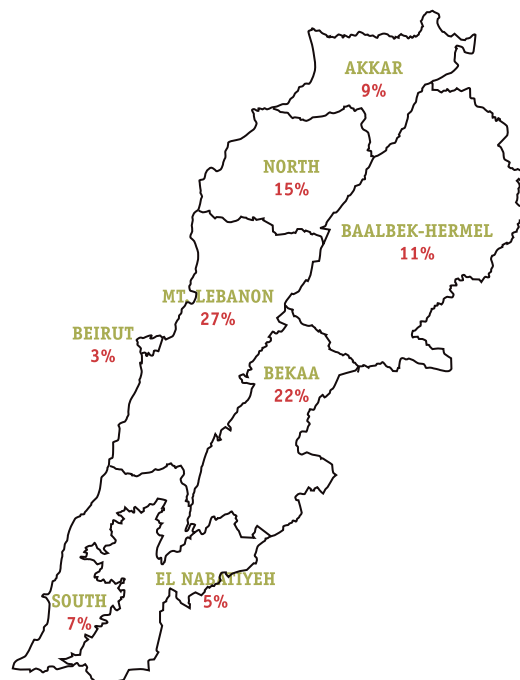
Source: 2017 January Statistical Dashboard – Inter-Agency Coordination based on UNHCR data reported on December 2016

Map 1 frames the distribution of Syrian refugees along Lebanon's nine governorates with the highest concentrations in Mount Lebanon and the Bekaa hosting 27% and 22% of Syrian refugees respectively.

Map 2: **Vulnerable Cadasters in Lebanon**
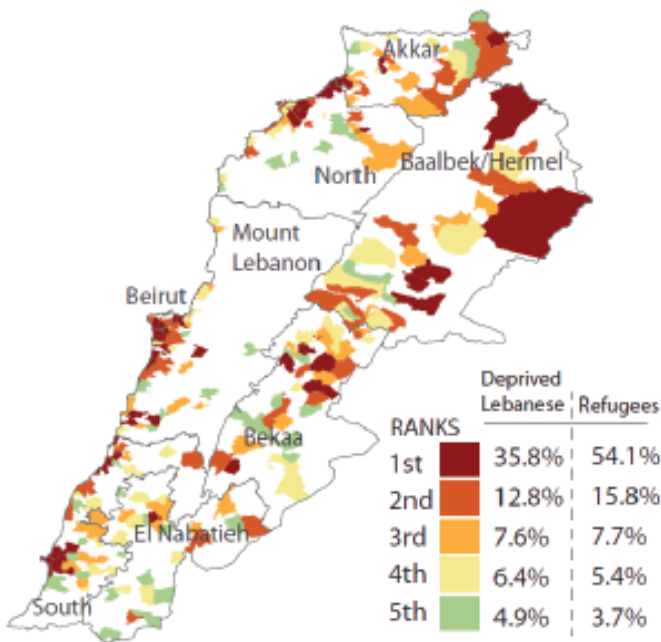
Source: Most Vulnerable Localities in Lebanon – Inter-Agency Coordination based on the 2004 Multi-Deprivation Index from CAS, UNDP and MoSA, 2002 CDR data on the Lebanese population, and UNHCR and UNRWA figures on Syrian refugees (2014), Palestinian refugees from Lebanon (2011), and Palestinian refugees from Syria (2014).

Map 2 presents five ranks of the most vulnerable localities in Lebanon based on the Multi-Deprivation Index (MDI), and datasets on deprived Lebanese and refugee populations. The MDI is based on a 2004 assessment of households' deprivation scoring on access to health, education, water and sanitation services, income levels, and housing conditions. Lebanon has 251 most vulnerable cadastres[9] that host 87% of Syrian and Palestinian refugees from Lebanon and Syria, as well as 67% of deprived Lebanese households (Most Vulnerable Localities in Lebanon 2015). The fifty most vulnerable localities presented in red in the figure above host 54% of refugees and 36% of deprived Lebanese, which constitutes the cadastres with the highest concentration of both communities coupled with pressure on services and resources as well.

9
Cadastres have the geographic classification below the district or qada level, and may enclose more than one adjacent village or neighborhood. Cadastres are categorized as most vulnerable based on datasets on deprived Lebanese and refugee populations, and the Multi-Deprivation Index from a 2004 assessment of households' deprivation scoring on access to health, education, water and sanitation services, income levels, and housing conditions."

Lebanese Perceptions of Hosting Syrian Refugees

Table 2: **Classifying Political Parties**

Kataeb	Predominantly Christian	Founded in 1936
Future Movement	Predominantly Sunni	Established in 2005 after the assassination of Former PM Rafic Al Hariri
Lebanese Forces	Predominantly Christian	Established in 1976 during the Lebanese Civil War
Progressive Socialist Party	Predominantly Druze	Founded in 1949 calling for social reform and progressive change by various sects
Free Patriotic Movement	Predominantly Christian	Officially declared in 2005 calling for the abolition of foreign influence in domestic affairs
Hezbollah	Predominantly Shiite	Branched out of the Amal Movement in 1983 in resistance to Israeli occupation
Amal Movement	Predominantly Shiite	Founded in 1974 by the Cleric Imam Musa Sadr

Lebanese rhetoric on the presence of Syrian refugees reflects a common sentiment that refugees are a burden on Lebanon's economy and infrastructure and that Lebanon has exceeded its capacity to host them. This view is shared by the country's seven main political parties, although they ostensibly espouse a range of positions based on confessional and political concerns. Most of the interviews conducted to compile this report demonstrated that Lebanese communities blame most of their problems on Syrian refugees and that they believe the solution to the current crisis is the refugees' return to Syria. During the 2017 Brussels Conference "Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region", Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri announced that Lebanon was nearing a breaking point and called for the support of the international community to stabilize the situation and foster economic growth in Lebanon (Perry 2017). In light of the global refugee crisis, there is a common perception among Lebanese political actors that it is in the international community's interest to maintain stability and good living conditions for the Syrian refugees in Lebanon to avoid more refugees fleeing to Europe.[10] At the national, political party, and municipal levels, rhetoric toward hosting refugees is subject to the fear of the long-term nature of the protracted Syrian crisis. According to the UNHCR Global Trends report of 2015, protracted refugees are reported to remain in their country of asylum for an average of twenty-six years, while around 30% remain in their country of asylum post-conflict (Medjad and Chaar 2017). Naturalization is a key concern associated with the long-term presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.[11]

Throughout interviews conducted with members of political parties and an advisor to the prime minister,[12] Syrian refugees were categorized into three categories: Refugees who are "genuinely" displaced, transients, and economic refugees. The first category consists of people that may require political asylum, protection,

and refugees coming from occupied and unstable regions in Syria. Transients, Syrian refugees occasionally entering Syria and returning to Lebanon, are not generally perceived as refugees in need and are often believed to have the choice to return to Syria under relatively safe conditions. Economic refugees are perceived as refugees taking advantage of the current situation through informal employment without paying taxes. "Genuine" refugees are perceived as most deserving of foreign aid, assistance, and the right to be hosted in Lebanon. Lebanese political actors argue that the latter two categories require a revocation of their refugee status. Economic refugees are also perceived to have an advantage over their Lebanese counterparts, as they are accepting lower wages, and receiving foreign aid. In a recent television interview, Lebanese Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil proposed a response to the current situation that would include strict border policies and seizing the UNHCR identity documents of transients and economic refugees (Ghanem 2017). Moreover, he proposed that transients and economic refugees who choose to remain in Lebanon should be treated as foreign migrants and conform to the conditions that apply. This perception feeds into how Syrian refugees are viewed by the general public, as individuals who are taking advantage of their presence in Lebanon while simultaneously receiving foreign aid and working for lower wages.

The view that Syrian refugees are entitled to basic rights is recognized by some Lebanese political actors in theory, however the government's response or lack thereof is viewed as a key factor leading to the current demeaning conditions refugees are exposed to in practice. The presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is argued to have the potential of otherwise being used as an opportunity for growth and development.[13] Shared concerns regarding the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon refer to economic, security, infrastructural, and social issues. Syrian refugees are perceived as having exacerbated pre-existing shortfalls in the aforementioned sectors. Past resentment between Lebanese communities and the pre-2011 Syrian presence is a factor affecting Lebanese perceptions of Syrians, however it is area-specific in light of historic events in particular locations and past experiences between both communities.[14] Hence, it is not possible to generalize about existing grievances and identifying these areas is outside the scope of this research. Furthermore, a common opinion of Syrian refugees among the Lebanese public is that the refugee community is infiltrated by terrorist groups.[15] Some political parties view Syrian refugees as a dormant army based on the Syrian regime's forced conscription policy, and the assumption that a significant portion of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon have previously received military training, which in total may outnumber active LAF soldiers.[16]

While the LAF was conducting raids in Syrian refugee camps in the outskirts of Arsal in June 2017, four suicide bombers targeted patrol

13
Interview conducted with a Kataeb Party Member, 24 April 2017

14
Interview conducted with a representative of UNDP, 26 April 2017

15
Interview conducted with a representative of IRC, 31 April 2017

16
Interview conducted with a Kataeb Party Member, 24 April 2017

officers in the Al Nour camp, while a militant attacked LAF soldiers with a hand grenade around Al Qaria camp (Rajeh 2017). In total, at least seven LAF soldiers were injured, and a Syrian girl was killed as a result of the attacks (Rajeh 2017). In the aftermath, more than 350 Syrian refugees were reported to have been detained under the suspicion of being linked to terror groups such as ISIS, four of which died while in LAF custody (Rejeh 2017). An Amnesty International Press Release titled "Lebanon: Further Investigation Needed into Deaths of Syrian Refugees in Military Custody" highlights the need for full disclosure of the investigation and forensic report findings on the death of the four men (Maalouf 2017). Various announcements by the LAF have publicized different findings, including the cause of death being due to chronic diseases, climate conditions, or natural causes, while eyewitnesses and independent forensic analysis conducted on photographs of the victims suggest that the cause of death may be due to trauma and potential torture (Maalouf 2017). In light of this, a Facebook page named "Union of Syria People in Lebanon" requested that a demonstration take place on 18 July 2017, in Downtown Beirut in response to the alleged mistreatment of Syrian refugees (Darwish and Yeretzian 2017). Although the Facebook page is claimed to support Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the page was not known to have been started by refugee solidarity campaigners who feared that the page could be fake (McLoughlin 2017). Furthermore, the founder of the page was a Syrian national, who was detained in the Ain El Helweh camp by the LAF (McLoughlin 2017). The call for protest was faced with backlash by Lebanese politicians and the public as counter demonstrations were called for by LAF martyrs' families. As a consequence, tensions toward the Syrian presence in Lebanon increased (McLoughlin 2017). Interior Minister Nouhad Machnouk banned the protest to prevent the risk of destabilization (Darwish and Yeretzian 2017).

Strict local policies are justified by authorities with the argument that Syrian refugees are an existential threat to security. Syrian refugees have accepted humiliation and overlooked their loss of dignity through this treatment,[17] as they do not have a say in the local governance of the communities they live in.[18] A key element missing in the current policymaking framework is the lack of agency of refugees and absence of consultation on their fears, needs and perceptions on matters of their concern (Al-Saadi 2015).

Xenophobic tendencies are perceived to be on the rise, as discrimination is increasing among Lebanese communities and Syrian refugees. Classism is expressed as a determining factor toward the treatment of Syrian refugees. Upper-class Syrian property-owners are dissociated from the poor and helpless refugees,[19] since they are viewed as economy boosters.

Interviews indicated that discriminatory attitudes toward Syrian refugees reinforce "fascist" policies at the local level.[20] In 2014, about 90% of Lebanese in the Wadi Khaled, Sahel Akkar, and the Bekaa Valley supported the enforcement of curfews in order to contain the movement and political freedoms of refugees, and support for violence targeting refugees was high in Akkar and the Bekaa Valley as well (Harb and Saab 2014). Syrian refugees and Lebanese communities generally perceive one another as symbolic and economic threats relating to social practices and unfair competition respectively, while Lebanese communities also perceive Syrian refugees as a threat associated with criminality (Harb and Saab 2014). Generally, areas with low refugee population density and low hosting population density, or seasonal residence, contain less motivation for restrictive policies.[21]

During an interview, the current situation was described as stable due to the Syrian refugees' conscious decision to maintain a low profile, by conforming to state policies on refugees and evading conflict. In terms of local community dialogue, interviewees stated that Lebanese authorities are wary of negotiating and empowering refugees by having dialogue with Syrian representatives at the same table, while Syrian refugees have not appointed local leaders or representatives to negotiate on their behalf.[22]

21
Interview conducted with a representative of IRC, 31 April 2017

22
Based on an interview (Anonymous)

Section II: Exploring Policies Toward Syrian Refugees

This section entails three subsections. The first subsection covers the Lebanese government's national response to the Syrian refugee crisis since the beginning of the Syrian crisis in 2011, in terms of hosting refugees and maintaining security, including national policies on the settlement, residence, refoulement, and deportation of refugees. The first section argues that the Lebanese state does not intend to formalize a national response toward the humanitarian crisis unless it is focused on the repatriation of Syrian refugees to Syria. The second subsection assesses various attitudes on the return of Syrian refugees to Syria, as well as how this return is envisioned, and views on refoulement and deportation policies. This subsection argues that non-state actors have taken the lead in advocating for safe areas in Syria and negotiating returns, in the absence of a national initiative. The third subsection covers local-level policies that illustrate how municipalities are dealing with refugees vis-a-vis their settlement and residence, including policies that outline whether refugees have freedom of movement or whether they face restrictions and curfews. This subsection explains how leeway for initiatives outside the scope of municipalities' legal authority has emerged.

National-Level Evasion of Responsibility

Not a Signatory

1951	Refugee Convention
1967	Protocols

Signatory

1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights Resolution
1949	Geneva Convention
1966	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
1984	UN Convention Against Torture (CAT)

Although Lebanon is not a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocols, Syrian refugees in Lebanon are protected by the provisions of other international treaties (States Parties to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol). The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights Resolution voted by the General Assembly, recognizes freedom, equality, dignity and worth of the human person as fundamental elements of human rights. Article 6 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone has the right to recognition everywhere before the law" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948). The 1949 fourth Geneva Convention concerns the protection of people particularly civilians against consequences of non-international armed conflict by honoring their convictions and religious practices and ensuring humane treatment (The Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols 2010). The 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) concerns human dignity, as well as social, cultural and economic rights, including the right to work as per Article 6 (International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966). The 1984 United Nations Convention Against Torture protects refugees against torture and refoulement as Article 3 states "no state party shall expel, return ("refouler") or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture" (Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment 1984). Moreover, the domestic law "Regulating the Entry and Stay of Foreigners in Lebanon and their Exit from the Country" adopted in 1962 states that foreigners have the right to request asylum in Lebanon under the condition of political persecution (Trapped in Lebanon 2016).

Since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011, Lebanese authorities' reaction to the humanitarian crisis consisted of a "no policy context", since a national response to such a crisis would require political will and extensive data gathering (El Mufti 2014). Political actors perceived the Syrian crisis as a short-term matter, and it is argued that the Lebanese government prioritized securing foreign financing over strategic planning for a national response to the humanitarian crisis (El Mufti 2014). This gap led to international and local actors establishing parallel responses (Mourad 2017). In 2011, a humanitarian response was drawn up by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) and High Relief Committee were tasked with carrying out the response (Dionigi 2016). Moreover, the government's laissez-faire approach throughout the crisis

effectively placed local and security institutions at the forefront of the response. The state's passive approach has been in place since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011, and current political dynamics are pushing for the return of Syrian refugees to Syria. Hence, national political motive is allocated toward advocating and lobbying for the repatriation of Syrian refugees to Syria.

The lack of a national response to the Syrian crisis influenced a series of political developments. Under PM Mikati's government in 2012, two clear policies related to Syrian refugees were adopted: The dissociation policy and the non-encampment policy. The dissociation policy announced in the 2012 Baabda Declaration called for upholding a position of political neutrality toward the Syrian conflict as a precaution against Lebanon being used as a "buffer zone" or "corridor" to smuggle weapons, while respecting "the right to humanitarian solidarity" (Baabda Declaration Issued by the National Dialogue Committee 2012). The no-camp policy emerged out of fear of having the same experience as that of the Palestinian case, however by the time this decision was made, Syrian refugees had already moved into informal settlements (El Mufti 2014). As a consequence of the lack of policies to regulate settlements, there were 2,274 informal settlements with more than four tents in Lebanon in 2016 (2017 January Statistical Dashboard). Furthermore, upon insistence from the UNHCR, the Lebanese government established an Inter-Ministerial Committee in 2012, comprised of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MOIM), and the Ministry of Defense, as well as the High Relief Commission[23] to coordinate the government's response to the Syrian humanitarian crisis (UN Inter-Agency Response for Syrian Refugees 2012). In parallel, the UNHCR responded to the crisis according to the Regional Response Plan (Dionigi 2016).

2014 was a turning point in the refugee response as the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon hit 1 million. At this point, the Syrian crisis was acknowledged as long-term and regulatory policies were introduced. With the establishment of a new government and a crisis cell to respond to the humanitarian crisis, the Lebanese government announced several border policy regulations, such as denying entry to Syrian refugees who do not come from areas along the Lebanese border with Syria, reassessing the status of Syrian refugees who occasionally return to Syria and are economically benefitting from living in Lebanon, and calling for the establishment of camps either in Syria or along the no-man's land between Lebanon and Syria (Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2015). Additional policies adopted in 2014 aimed to limit and decrease the amount of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, through the adoption of security measures and development of a census of refugees on the municipal level to regulate their movement,[24] and prevent

23
A Lebanese governmental agency with the objective of providing food, health and registration services to Syrian refugees in North Lebanon, Syria Regional Refugee Response, Accessed 15 June 2017, http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/partner.php?OrgId=13

24
Former Senior Advisor to the Prime Minister during a LCPS closed workshop held in August 2016, Launching a Homegrown Development Agenda to Address the Syrian Refugee Crisis

Syrian refugees from working informally or outside a legal framework (Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2015). Entry restrictions at the Lebanese-Syrian border included stating and presenting proof of the visit's purpose, and shortening the legal stay period, while some exceptions were adopted for children, persons with disabilities or medical conditions, and persons seeking resettlement to a third country (Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2015).

Security incidents involving terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State (IS) and the Fatah Al Sham Front (FSF) led to increased security checkpoints and raids. For instance, the al-Qaa bombings of 2016 were countered with security raids that led to the arrest of about 700 Syrian refugees mostly for not having legal residency, as well as the confiscation of unlicensed belongings such as motorbikes (Davidson 2016).

Table 3: **Timeline of Key Security Incidents**

2012	Assassination of Former Brigadier General of the ISF Wissam al-Hassan
2013	Tripoli Bombings and Iranian Embassy Bombings
2014	Arsal clashes and abduction of Soldiers
2015	Jabal Mohsen and Burj al Barajneh Bombings
2016	Al-Qaa and Zahle bombings
2017	Hezbollah and LAF offensives against militant groups on Lebanese-Syrian border

Map 3: **Incidents of conflict**
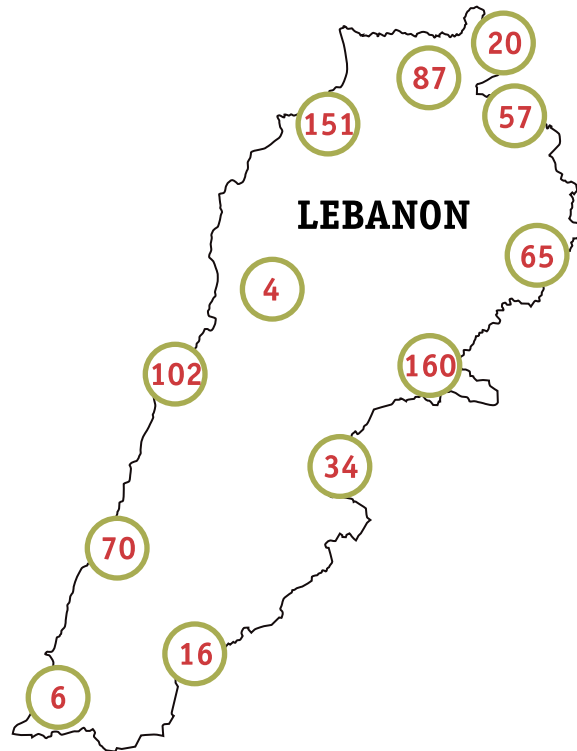
Source: Lebanon Support – Geo-Located Mapping of Conflicts in Lebanon covering June 2014 to June 2017, produced on 11 July 2017

Map 3 presents the number of raids conducted by the Lebanese security apparatus since 2014 toward Syrians as well as Lebanese. From a legal perspective, the unnecessary use of force during raids may be considered a violation of human rights, if detention and torture are practiced in a manner disregarding respect to human life.[25]

The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) was adopted in 2015 as a joint plan between the Lebanese government and international and local partners in response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon by accommodating various sectors through foreign assistance, including basic assistance, education, energy, food security, health, livelihoods, protection, shelter, social stability and water (Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020).

In parallel and alongside the presidential vacuum, PM Tammam Salam's government formally asked UNHCR to stop registering refugees in 2015 and imposed border restrictions (Diogini 2016). Since that period, it has been difficult to obtain accurate statistics on the number of refugees in Lebanon. In 2015, UNHCR-registered Syrian refugees were permitted to renew their residency permits at the cost of $200, requiring a signed housing agreement with signatures of the landlord

and the local Mukhtar, as well as a signed and authenticated pledge stating that the refugee in question will not work in Lebanon, and "in some cases, including a pledge to leave the country upon expiry of their residence permit or when requested to do so by the [Government of Lebanon]" (Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2015). Syrians entering Lebanon were offered various types of visa categories requiring specified documents and proof of the purpose of their visit, including medical, tourism, education, and business visas (Lebanon: New Entry Requirements for Syrians Likely to Block Would-Be Refugees 2015). Moreover, Syrian refugees have been subjected to further vulnerability and exploitation as a result of the enforcement of the "kafala" sponsorship system in 2015, whereby Syrian refugees were granted the right to work under the condition of having a Lebanese sponsor without ensuring the provision of labor rights (Geagea 2015). The strict residency policies and high fees imposed on Syrian refugees were reported to have been waived in early 2017, however this waiver excludes Syrian refugees not registered with UNHCR and Syrian refugees who previously had a Lebanese sponsor to be able to work legally (Khawaja 2017).

As the Lebanese government set harsh policies toward Syrian refugees and placed excessive conditions for maintaining a legal status, the percentage of Syrian refugees with all household members owning residency permits decreased from 58% to 28% to 21% in 2014, 2015, and 2016 respectively (Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2016). The lack of a residency permit constitutes an illegal status and vulnerability to arbitrary arrest and deportation, although deportation orders are currently not executed.[26] Early on in the crisis, prolonged arbitrary detention of refugees emerged as a means of coercing them to leave the country (Frangieh 2014). The international community's outcry against the deportation and refoulement of refugees in 2012, including the International Committee of the Red Cross, Human Rights Watch, and the EU, led the Lebanese authorities to commit to the principle of non-refoulement early in 2012 (El Mufti 2014). However, the risk of refoulement due to rejection at the border concerns the international community (Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2015). A striking case of deportation took place in January 2016, when a minimum of 200 Syrians travelling on a connecting flight to Turkey through Beirut were sent back to Syria without taking into consideration security and persecution risks (Lebanon: Stop Forcible Returns to Syria 2016).

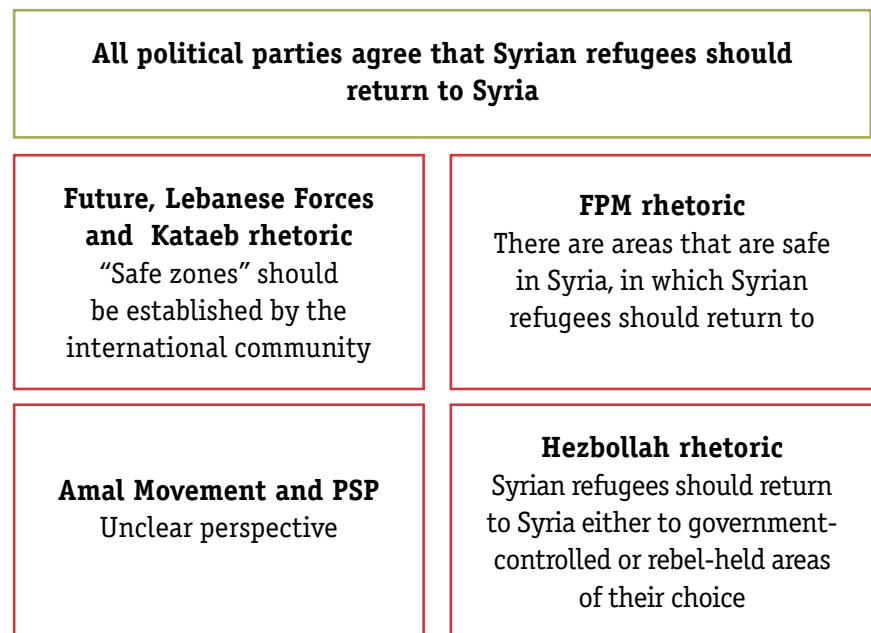The aforementioned national strategy is perceived as aimed at making the refugees' stay as administratively difficult as possible, and as discriminatory as possible.[27] With the aim of limiting refugee influx and promoting the refugees' return to Syria or seeking refuge in other countries, the state's responsibility toward Syrian refugees has been skirted. This strategy supports the argument that political actors do

not have the political will to formalize Syrian refugees' presence and status in Lebanon. On the contrary, the current political debate on the return of Syrian refugees to Syria has emulated the national consensus regarding the required and anticipated repatriation of Syrian refugees, however agreement on the dynamics of such a return remains unclear, as addressed in the following sub-section.

Prospects for the Repatriation of Syrian Refugees

All political parties agree that Syrian refugees should return to Syria

Future, Lebanese Forces and Kataeb rhetoric "Safe zones" should be established by the international community	FPM rhetoric There are areas that are safe in Syria, in which Syrian refugees should return to
Amal Movement and PSP Unclear perspective	Hezbollah rhetoric Syrian refugees should return to Syria either to government-controlled or rebel-held areas of their choice

There is a political consensus that the key solution to the humanitarian crisis is the refugees' return to Syria, as expressed throughout interviews conducted with members of political parties and an advisor to the prime minister.[28] Similarly, with Lebanon's weak infrastructure, slow economy, and weak service provision, Syrian refugees are reported to perceive Lebanon's living conditions as unfavorable, and that resorting to resettlement or returning to Syria to restore their honor and dignity is preferential.[29] While various parties call for Syrian refugees' return to Syria, none of the interviews suggested that practical plans are being laid out for the repatriation of Syrian refugees to Syria. Although none of the parties expressed the political will to enforce coercive repatriation measures, the risk of pressure and intimidation pushing for their return breaches the definition of the refugees' freedom of choice. The repatriation of Syrian refugees is subject to several variables that are commonly debated in the political sphere, such as the means of planning and implementation for refugees' return. Meanwhile, non-state actors, particularly Hezbollah, have emerged as key actors in the repatriation of Syrian refugees. Discussion of repatriating Syrian refugees has grown in light of a UNHCR report stating that approximately 500,000

28
Interviews conducted on 24 April 2017, and 5, 6 and 20 June 2017

29
Interview conducted with a human rights and humanitarian law expert, 6 June 2017

internally displaced Syrians returned to their homes and more than 30,000 Syrian refugees returned to Syria from neighboring countries in 2017 (UNHCR Seeing Significant Returns 2017). This spontaneous trend was reported as being linked to visiting family or relatives, inspecting properties, and perceptions of increased security (UNHCR Seeing Significant Returns 2017).

During mid-2017, a debate over the particulars of the repatriation plan was playing out among Lebanon's top politicians. Prime Minister Saad Hariri and members of his government were opposed to Hezbollah political figures on the issue of dialogue with the Syrian government. The former believes that dialogue between the two states legitimizes the Syrian regime, while the latter presents dialogue and coordination as prerequisites for the refugees' repatriation. Maintaining stability and agreement among Lebanese political actors remains a crucial priority in domestic policies. To evade conflict, it has been recommended, primarily by Hezbollah, that the two states communicate to facilitate and coordinate the return of Syrian refugees through the intervention of security level agencies, although the two states have maintained diplomatic ties throughout the crisis.[30] Early in 2017, the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs announced that Syria was ready for the return of Syrian refugees from neighboring countries. However, in mid-2017, the Syrian Ambassador to Lebanon Ali Abdel-Karim Ali clarified that dialogue between the two states is necessary for the coordination of the return of Syrian refugees (Syrian Ambassador to Lebanon Calls for Direct Talks 2017).

Under the prospects of return, there is a distinction between safe areas and "safe zones". Safe areas or "de-escalation areas"[31] are defined as areas inside Syria where fighting has ceased. Such areas are meant to be safe for the return of refugees. Media reports present the FPM as the most vocal party promoting the return of refugees, as its leader and current Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil has regularly called for the deportation of Syrian refugees since 2013 (Bassil Calls for Deporting Syrian Refugees 2013). The FPM argues that the longer Syrian refugees live in Lebanon, the harder it will be for them to return to Syria, as their presence in Lebanon has enabled them to establish a particular lifestyle, education, and employment.[32] In 2017, Bassil restated the call for refugees' return to areas projected as safe in Syria (Bassil Renews Calls for Return of Refugees to Syria 2017). Moreover, Hezbollah's Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah called for dialogue with the Syrian regime to coordinate the repatriation of Syrian refugees to regime-held Syria, specifically those declared safe following military victories (Hezbollah Urges Lebanon Plan for Syria Refugee Return 2017). Hezbollah took the initiative of returning fifty Syrian families from Arsal to their villages in the Qalamoun region after negotiations between Hezbollah and other parties. Although it was clarified that the Lebanese government was not involved in the negotiation process,

30
Interview conducted with a member of the Development and Liberation Parliamentary Bloc, 4 July 2017. This bloc includes Amal Movement, a Shia movement that was founded in 1970s by the Cleric Imam Musa Sadr in response to Shia marginalization (Amal Movement 2017). The contemporary movement is an ally of Hezbollah and the Syrian regime (Amal Movement, 2017).

31
"De-escalation areas" have been established under the agreement of the Russian, Turkish and Iranian governments, as areas in Syria with reduced violence among the Syrian regime and armed groups, as well as improved access of humanitarian assistance along four areas in Syria (Memorandum on the Creation of De-escalation Areas in the Syrian Arab Republic 2017).

32
Interview conducted with a FPM Member of Parliament, 20 June 2017

the families were accompanied by the LAF to the border checkpoints (Syrian Refugee Families Leave Lebanon for '"safe zones"' 2017). Moreover, around 300 Syrian refugees returned from Arsal to several towns including Assal Al Ward, Yabrud, Al Marah, Flita, and Al Sehel on the outskirts of Damascus on 12 July 2017, constituting the second wave of refugees escorted by the LAF to the Lebanese-Syrian border (Al Hayat 2017). It was reported that repatriating families included elderly and children, and excluded youth that feared military service duties (Al Hayat 2017). This wave was also led by Hezbollah and facilitated by the LAF. However, a significant factor is the examination of UNHCR representatives who attended the site where refugees gathered before their departure and inquired about the extent to which the nature of their return was voluntary and whether they felt safe (Al Hayat 2017). Hezbollah intends to facilitate Syrian refugees' return to Syria among all the areas within its reach in Lebanon and Syria.[33] In light of this, the party views that "de-escalation areas" delegitimize the presence Syrian refugees in Lebanon and allow refugees to return to regime or rebel-held areas. Other political actors have neither condemned nor promoted this initiative.

In light of the presence of militants in the outskirts of Arsal, Hezbollah launched an offensive against the FSF in the outskirts of Arsal with the objective of driving FSF's militants out of Lebanese soil (Moughnieh 2017). The week-long offensive was contained by LAF forces surrounding the town of Arsal and forbidding access of militants to the town, while Hezbollah forces attacked FSF forces (Osseiran "Hezbollah Eyes Daesh" 2017). FSF militants surrendered as they were surrounded by Hezbollah forces, the LAF and IS militants (Osseiran "Hezbollah Eyes Daesh" 2017). A ceasefire agreement brokered by Major General Abbas Ibrahim between Hezbollah and FSF ended the offensive with consensus to secure the militants' passage from the outskirts of Arsal to the FSF-stronghold Idlib, along with the exchange of each group's fallen soldiers (Osseiran "Thousands to Return to Syria" 2017). Although villages in the Bekaa including villages known to support the Future Movement haven't condemned Hezbollah's offensive, it is argued that support would have been more evident by these villages if the mission was carried out by another actor (Al Qadri 2017). PM Hariri condemned the support toward Hezbollah's offensive and emphasized that this offensive does not legitimize Hezbollah's participation in the Syrian conflict ("Arsal Offensive" 2017). Over 7,000 refugees including militants and their families relocated to leave to Idlib ("Hezbollah, Nusrah Deal" 2017).

The remaining IS held area along the border in the Bekaa Valley, particularly Ras Baalbek and Al Qaa, was liberated by the Lebanese Army during a ten-day offensive that ended on August 28, 2017, while Hezbollah and Syrian army forces launched an offensive from the Syrian side of the border in parallel (Dakroub "Lebanese Army Clears Border" 2017). With the aim of terminating the presence of IS militants along approximately 300 square kilometers of the Lebanese-Syrian border and unravelling the fate of the abducted LAF soldiers, the offensives ended with a ceasefire agreement brokered by Hezbollah and the return of around 300 IS militants and their families to Syria (Dakroub "Lebanese Army Clears Border" 2017).

The Lebanese government, as well as the LF and Kataeb parties have called for the establishment of "safe zones" along the border in Syria under the control of the international community and the United Nations.[34] In interviews, officials affirmed that the Lebanese government is respecting the principle of non-refoulement,[35] while refoulement is perceived as an act that may have internal security repercussions and result in resistance from refugees, particularly refugees fearing persecution in their home country of Syria.[36] Lebanese President Aoun and State Minister for Refugee Affairs Mueen Merhebi addressed the need for the international community to take the initiative in establishing "safe zones" in Syria (Francis 2017). PM Hariri confirmed his support for "safe zones" in Syria under the United Nations' protection (Dakroub "Hariri Hardens Refugee Stance" 2017). As early as 2013, LF leader Samir Geagea initiated calls for Syrian refugees' repatriation and the creation of "safe zones" under the international community's protection ("Geagea Calls for 'Safe Areas' in Syria for Refugees" 2013). Kataeb leader Sami Gemayel confirmed his support of the establishment of "safe zones" in Syria during a meeting with former French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen (Gemayel Welcomes Le Pen 2017). Furthermore, "safe zones" require particular conditions for their adoption, such as the declaration of no-fly zones, a ceasefire, mutual guarantees by various parties to the conflict, and ensuring safety. However, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi stated "let's not waste time planning "safe zones" that will not be safe enough for people to go back" (Khawaja 2017).

The research findings of a recent study conducted by Rim El Gantry and Karim El Mufti based on thirty-seven qualitative interviews revealed that Syrian refugees prioritize a durable solution to the conflict that ensures safety and security, and the dissemination of reliable information on the situation in Syria as conditions for the return to Syria (2017). Additional expectations include the provision of shelter, livelihoods and social services, psychological and psychosocial support,

34
Interview conducted on 24 April 2017 and 5 and 6 June 2017

35
Interview conducted with an advisor to the Prime Minister, 5 June 2017

36
Interview conducted with a human rights and humanitarian law expert, 6 June 2017

family reunification, as well as measures ensuring coexistence, and social cohesion. Survey findings have shown controversial perceptions among Syrian refugees on anticipated justice and accountability practices (El Gantry and El Mufti 2017). A key finding of this research indicates that Syrian refugees would like to return to those regions and towns where they had lived prior to the crisis (El Gantry and El Mufti 2017). This observation has the potential to be a destabilizing factor when calling for the repatriation of Syrian refugees to Syria, as statistical data collection by the state is required in order to identify the regions that Syrian refugees come from.[37] Moreover, the declaration of a waiting period is necessary in order to determine the accuracy of information on the situation in Syria and to provide the Syrian refugees with the choice of returning to other areas in Syria or Lebanon if the safe areas are not fit to reside in.[38]

Responses to the Refugee Crisis at the Municipal Level

Since the central government adopted a laissez-faire approach toward the Syrian humanitarian crisis and there are no written policies on micro issues facing refugees,[39] crisis management fell into the hands of local level institutions, such as security sector institutions, municipalities, and in some instances religious courts.[40] Municipalities have adopted various policies to track refugees' presence and regulate their movement. However, a key limitation is the lack of quantitative data on the adoption of local level policies geographically. There are more than 1,000 municipalities in Lebanon with less than 4,000 registered people per municipality and low revenue flow (Atallah 2016). Many municipalities have weak, understaffed administrations that lack the capacity to provide developmental services (Atallah 2016). As municipalities are placed as an intermediary between Syrian refugees and the central government, the absence of a proactive central framework led local administrations to adopt policies independently (Atallah 2016). Furthermore, municipalities are faced with funding shortages and weak infrastructure, a state of affairs that predates the crisis. The refugee burden on municipalities is an additional factor that requires further support by the state and international community. However, the inability to seriously change that situation stems from a lack of leverage on the part of municipalities, specifically on matters concerning the presence of Syrian refugees.[41] Interviews with political party members indicated that political parties, such as the FPM, LF and Kataeb, do not intervene in local politics, as they do not have solutions to the local tensions that fuel strict policies.[42]

Curfews are the most normalized policy adopted by municipalities,[43] as they have been imposed on foreigners at times and targeted Syrian refugees in particular throughout the crisis. The nature of the curfews are ad hoc and the implementing actors differ between municipal

37
Interview conducted with a human rights and humanitarian law expert, 6 June 2017

38
Interview conducted with a human rights and humanitarian law expert, 6 June 2017

39
Interview conducted with an advisor to the Prime Minister, 5 June 2017

40
Interview conducted with a representative of IRC, 31 April 2017

41
Based on an interview (Anonymous)

42
Interviews conducted on 24 April 2017, and 6 and 20 June 2017

43
Interviews conducted with representatives of UNDP, UNHCR and IRC, 26, 30 and 31 April 2017

police and vigilante groups consisting of ordinary citizens.[44] The legal framework of the municipal police is unclear as the municipal police's code of conduct is not dictated by specific bylaws.[45] Under the supervision of the MOIM and ISF and in coordination with UNHCR and UNDP, the present municipal police capacity development program aims to identify and establish guidelines outlining municipal police's authority and mandate, as well as develop accountability mechanisms among the ISF and municipal police[46] (Establishing the Primacy of Human Rights in Security Sector Reform in Lebanon 2017). In cases where local municipal councils are not present, curfew restrictions are being adopted by locals such as the reported case of Ebrine, where flyers were hung and civilians implemented this measure (El Helou 2014). Although the imposition of several policies, including curfews, by municipalities is considered outside municipalities' legal authority, the central government is aware that municipalities are surpassing their legal jurisdiction, and local level policies have been tolerated by the Lebanese government[47] (Rahim 2016). Municipalities' jurisdiction is outlined under the provisions of the Municipal Act, decree no. 118/1977, and states under Article 74 that the role of municipalities includes "ensuring security though the municipal police in its capacity … in the event of any crime or any disturbance of the public security" (The Municipal Act 1977).

Ironically, the enforcement of curfews dates back to the French Mandate when French authorities resorted to curfews as precautionary measures against Lebanese empowerment and rebellion (Al-Saadi "Examining Curfews against Syrians in Lebanon" 2014). In theory, curfews imposed by municipalities are illegal as only the Council of Ministers may declare curfews under a state of emergency, which would be implemented by the High Military Command, according to Article 4 of Decree No.52, 1968 (Al-Saadi "Examining Curfews against Syrians in Lebanon" 2014). Moreover, curfews conflict with Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that stresses the right to freedom of movement (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948). Interviews conducted with representatives of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), UNHCR, and International Rescue Committee (IRC) confirmed that the legal authority of municipalities is subject to expansive interpretation, and the lack of political will to intervene or oppose local institutions paved the way for municipalities to make decisions outside the realm of authorities and the political decision-making process.[48] A ripple effect has emerged as municipalities are pushing policies from one municipality to another.[49] For instance, curfews spread from twenty-five municipalities at the beginning of 2014, to forty-five municipalities at the end of 2014 according to Human Rights Watch, and are now reported as the status quo in 2017[50] (El Mufti 2014).

44
Interview conducted with a representative of IRC, 31 April 2017

45
Interview conducted with a representative of UNDP, 26 April 2017

46
Interview conducted with a representative of UNDP, 26 April 2017

47
Interview conducted with a representative of UNDP, 26 April 2017

48
Interviews conducted on 26, 30, and 31 April 2017

49
Interview conducted with a representative of UNHCR, 30 April 2017

50
Interview conducted with a representative of IRC, 31 April 2017

Curfews emerged early on in the crisis as a result of two attitudes or trends. The first of such attitude or trend leading up to the enforcement of curfews is associated with a sense of a protective, paternalistic attitude that aims to dissociate refugees from being generally blamed for the country's economic, infrastructure, and security issues. In this case, curfews were reported to have been used as a precautionary measure and with the purpose of ensuring that Syrian refugees remain "out of trouble". The second attitude has merged as a result of hostile attitudes, competition, discrimination, tension, and security measures.[51] Municipalities argue that curfews are used as tools to counter the increasing state of insecurity caused by the presence of Syrian refugees (Al-Saadi "Examining Curfews against Syrians in Lebanon" 2014). Xenophobia is perceived as having increased toward low-class Syrians as a consequence of increasing discriminatory policies (Al-Saadi "Examining Curfews against Syrians in Lebanon" 2014). In practice, curfews target people based on their dress code and method of transportation (Al-Saadi "Examining Curfews against Syrians in Lebanon" 2014). Furthermore, in some cases, curfews targeted men, while women were permitted freedom of movement at night (Taslakian 2016). Curfews are reported as more likely to be adopted in rural areas, as they are more applicable and effective, while urban areas are more lenient toward the adoption of curfews (Taslakian 2016). Violating curfews has led to cases of informal arrests, detentions, the confiscation of identification documents, in addition to unjustifiable fines, which are measures undertaken outside the legal framework as the curfew itself is not a law, hence it is unpunishable, as there is no penalty without a law "Nulla Poena Sine Lege".[52]

Map 4: **Curfews**

Map 5: **Disputes and Armed Conflicts**
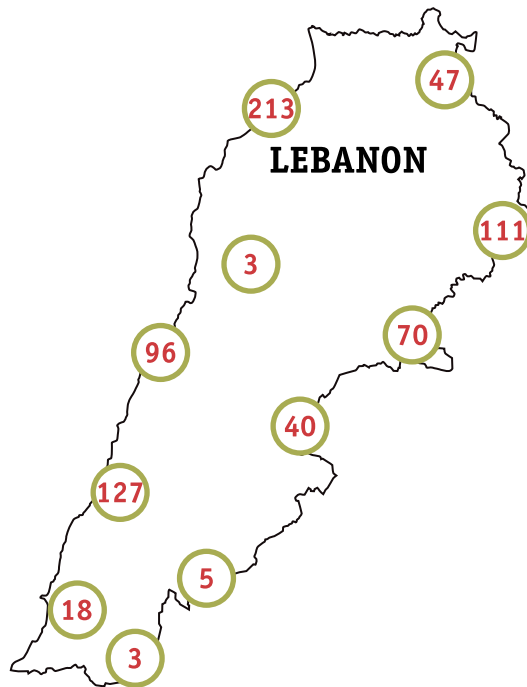
Source: Lebanon Support – Geo-Located Mapping of Conflicts in Lebanon covering June 2014 to June 2017, produced on July 11, 2017

Map 4 presents incidents of curfews since 2014. Despite this policy being presented as normalized, incidents of curfews across the country may be underreported. Map 5 presents disputes and armed conflicts that have taken place between 2014 and 2017. Note that the parties in conflicts depicted in the map may be Lebanese or of different nationalities.

The security services took on several responsibilities relevant to the Syrian crisis. General Security and the ISF assumed their role in border control and immigration-related policy enforcement, while the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) pursued its role as the enforcer of national security and counterterrorism.[53] Undeclared security policies adopted toward Syrian refugees include respecting refugees' freedom to express political views pertaining to the Syrian conflict but that confrontations between pro- and anti-Assad regime forces, and rallies calling for confrontation among Syrian refugees will not be tolerated.[54] In addition, funding terrorist organizations[55] in Syria is considered unacceptable.

Evictions are either conducted by the LAF or at the municipal level. Although both types of evictions are not within a legal framework,[56] it was evident during interviews that legal frameworks are neither useful nor relevant in Lebanon. LAF evictions are enforced on grounds of security concerns, such as the security of supply routes. Security concerns often lead to the declaration of "safe zones" within a

53
Interview conducted with an expert on the security sector, 24 April 2017

54
Based on an interview (Anonymous)

55
Terrorist organizations are politically driven armed groups that promote violence and the threat of violence with the aim of "affecting a larger audience than immediate targets" (Toros 2012). In Syria, such groups predominantly include ISIS and Fatah Al Sham Front, formerly known as the Al Nusra Front

56
Interview conducted with a representative of UNHCR, 30 April 2017

57
Interview conducted with a representative of UNHCR, 30 April 2017

58
Interview conducted with a representative of UNHCR, 30 April 2017

59
Based on an interview (Anonymous)

60
Interview conducted with a representative of UNDP, 26 April 2017

61
Interview conducted with a human rights and humanitarian law expert, 6 June 2017

62
Interview conducted with a representative of UNHCR, 30 April 2017

particular radius to a security institution or securitized area, however these zones should be declared by the Ministry of Defense.[57] For instance, the evacuation order of approximately ninety-two informal settlements in close perimeter of the Riyak Airbase on security grounds was estimated to affect about 11,000 people (Limoges 2017). Municipal evictions emerged in 2014-2015, affecting more than 20,000 refugees.[58] In 2016, 3% of UNHCR registered Syrian refugees moved because of evictions (2017 January Statistical Dashboard). The eviction notice declared by the municipality of Zahle in 2017 represents a case whereby refugees were residing in privately rented properties and the decision to impose the evictions was politically driven.[59] Some municipalities set quotas on the number of refugees they are willing host by announcing that they are not able to host additional refugees.[60]

Socio-economic constraints enforced on the local levels were framed by national policies impeding Syrian refugees' legal employment, particularly in 2015, which led to a high number of Syrian refugees working illegally.[61] Prior to the crisis, Syrians had the right to work and reside in Lebanon freely since the 1993 bilateral agreement addressing Economic and Social Cooperation (Errighi and Griesse 2016). Furthermore, municipalities imposed policies whereby Syrian refugees were not allowed to own shops and in some cases were prohibited from working outside the legal framework of the sponsorship system. It is common in Lebanese public discourse to hear rhetoric which is fearful of granting refugees a permanent status or encouraging them to remain in Lebanon (Overview of Right to Work for Refugees 2016). Furthermore, economic competition is highlighted as a core concern of host communities, as Syrian refugees accept lower wages and could replace the Lebanese workforce, as well as decrease wages (Overview of Right to Work for Refugees 2016). Moreover, 90% of Syrian refugee households were in debt in 2016 with an average debt of $857, a significant increase from 2014 when 81% of the households were indebted by an average amount of $674 (2017 January Statistical Dashboard). In terms of socio-economic conditions, municipalities adopted national policies on labor and residence on their own terms, as some municipalities set maximum wages for Syrian refugees, and in some instances for men higher than women.[62]

Additional policies adopted by municipalities include collecting information on refugees through screening and filing, and in some instances, such as the case of Jeita, requiring refugees to pay a monthly fee for renewable identification cards as well as to register their motorcycles (Barjas 2016). Some municipalities actively require Syrian refugees to register their rental contracts and share the contact information of their sponsors and landlords, which led to the emergence of these two actors as effective regulatory figures, both able to exert pressure or control over refugees (Barjas 2016). Moreover,

some municipalities set a quota to the number of refugees residing in a single room, or forbid refugees from hosting guests after a particular hour, such as the cases of Kfardebian and Kfaremane (Barjas 2016). Moreover, instances of extremely strict policies justified as security measures are observed in Kfaremane, for example, where refugees are only allowed to park their cars or motorcycles in the courtyards of their rented apartments, not in public areas, and Syrian refugees are not permitted to access public parks (Barjas 2016).

While strict policies have been adopted by several municipalities, there are cases where municipalities have adopted a positive approach toward supporting Syrian refugees as well as working toward local development. This includes the municipality of Bar Elias, which hosts a large number of refugees as well as informal settlement camps.[63]

63
Interview conducted with a representative of UNDP, 26 April 2017

Section III: Concluding Remarks

A number of measures have the potential to change the ways in which Syrian refugees are dealt with in Lebanon. These are outlined in this section. Additionally, policy gaps in the Lebanese government's response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon are highlighted.

Refugee politics in Lebanon have regressed and resulted in increased discrimination, while lobbying for the repatriation of refugees has become more prominent. Political actors are in agreement regarding the necessary return of Syrian refugees to their home country. Given that the crisis has been in place for the past six years, fear of the permanent presence of Syrian refugees is evident. Local attitudes on hosting Syrian refugees are linked to preexisting grievances with past Lebanese-Syrian relations, economic competition and infrastructural concerns, security fears, dissemination of inaccurate information, as well as increasing tensions.

The government's passive stance toward the crisis and the public's support for strict regulatory policies placed municipalities at the forefront of the crisis and the regulation of refugees. Various actors are working outside their jurisdiction and accountability mechanisms are not enforced. Hence, the crisis response currently has a disorganized dynamic. Moreover, increases in the calls for the repatriation of Syrian refugees, have not been met with practical policies and strategies of implementation. In response to some political actors advocating for the international community to take the initiative in Syrian refugees' return, representatives of UNHCR agreed that the current situation is unfavorable for the establishment of "safe zones", although several western countries including Germany, Russia, and the USA are in favor of the establishment of "safe zones" in Syria. On the other hand, other Lebanese parties promote the return of Syrians to government-held areas and are informally taking the initiative in negotiations regarding the return of refugees and migrants from Syria, while the nature of such returns remains unclear.

Evident policy gaps highlight the government's conscious decision against policy adoption and the recognition of the status of Syrian refugees, in fear of their long-term presence. Turning points are expected to change the current dynamics either for better or worse, although Lebanese officials have been vocal about Lebanon reaching a "breaking point" since 2014.

Future Policies and Eventualities

Among those that LCPS spoke with on the matter, Lebanon is currently perceived as stable, Lebanon's resilience throughout the crisis "a miracle",[64] and the status quo has the potential of changing only under

certain conditions. "A race between containment and anti-Syrian sentiment will be evident in the coming two years".[65]

The containment policy has the potential of driving progressive change through economic growth. The positive rhetoric presented in the Brussels conference sought to create a better environment for Lebanese communities as well as Syrian refugees through the injection of foreign aid and support of massive infrastructure programs with the objective of fostering economic growth and employment opportunities for both communities.[66] With an average GDP growth rate of 1.6%[67] since 2011, economic growth, with the support of the international community, is perceived as the only visible solution to Lebanon's fragile economy. A recent Mercy Corps study on violence prevention in the North and Bekaa revealed that livelihood, i.e. employment, is a key driver of violence (From Tension to Violence 2017).

However, a rise in anti-Syrian sentiment has the potential of pushing toward negative future dynamics. Tensions may rise as a result of rapid change in the Lebanese government's policies, potential backlash to xenophobic attitudes, instability in the form of terror attacks or a rapid increase in clashes between Lebanese community and Syrian refugees, mass municipal evictions, and refoulement.

Pressure for the return of Syrian refugees to Syria is a direct consequence of an increase in anti-Syrian sentiment. Strict enforcement of harsh policies toward refugees has the potential of exacerbating local tensions and motivating refugees to respond to xenophobic attitudes. For instance, in the case of multiple municipal evictions taking place in the form of a domino effect, refugees would have nowhere to go and hostility among the communities would increase.[68] Another example is the possibility of Lebanese political actors officially adopting the policy of refoulement, which is an act that would be denounced by the international community. These two examples may trigger a reaction among the Syrian refugee community and consequently a change in the current dynamics.[69] Moreover, concerns that a credible political figure may legitimize the return of Syrian refugees to Syria would create an aggressive push toward repatriation as well as delegitimize the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

There is a fear that tension between host communities and Syrian refugees could increase in the event violent acts are committed by Syrian refugees or terrorist attacks are committed by militant groups active in the Syria.[70] However, research findings demonstrate that the possibility of Syrian refugees committing acts of violence are not as likely as other types of legal infractions. A review of 807 lawsuits related to Syrian defendants found that 41.1% of the cases were based on residency and counterfeiting charges, while violent crimes constituted 6.3% of the charges (El Mufti 2015).

65
Interview conducted with an advisor to the Prime Minister, 5 June 2017

66
Interview conducted with an advisor to the Prime Minister, 5 June 2017

67
According to the World Bank, Annual Percentage of the GDP growth rate

68
Interview conducted with a representative of IRC, 31 April 2017

69
Based on an interview (Anonymous)

70
Interview conducted with an expert on the security sector, 24 April 2017

Policy Gaps and Recommendations

Policy gaps and recommendations related to responding to the presence of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon include the following.

The absence of a rights-based national legal framework for refugees is a core policy gap that has led to administrative disarray. From a humanitarian perspective, the current residency and labor policies governing refugees in Lebanon are applicable to foreign migrants and foreign workers, however these policies do not recognize their status as refugees fleeing conflict or persecution. The status of Syrian refugees as illegal aliens has negative implications on their access to basic human rights and deems refugees vulnerable to exploitation. Barriers to legal residence, as well as registering births increases the risk of children being born stateless, as 70% of newborns in 2014 did not have birth certificates (Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2015). According the Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil, there are approximately 111,000 unregistered childbirths that are at risk of being rejected entry into Syria in the future due to lack of documentation (Ghanem 2017). Moreover, the security apparatus and judicial system are overburdened with dealing with residency issues. Hence, a legislative framework of action for Syrian refugees identifying their legal, economic, social, and security status is required to protect their rights, as well as formalize the Lebanese government's position and responsibilities toward Syrian refugees. This recommendation would in turn decrease and limit illegal residency and informal labor rates, as well as protect Syrian refugees.

The lack of political will and administrative capacity to respond to the crisis led to the absence of a national legal and policy framework for the refugee response. Micro-level policies are not part of a national framework, and local communities have the discretion to govern refugees as they see fit. Although the Lebanese Crisis Response Plan frames the international response to the Syrian humanitarian crisis by sector, a national strategy is required to outline the Lebanese state's national legislation toward Syrian refugees by defining the legal framework and jurisdiction of various actors responding to the crisis. This recommendation would decrease the fragmentation in municipal policies and contagious practices that are forming a domino effect.

The authority of municipalities and municipal policy is vague and misinterpreted. Developing bylaws that outline the authority of municipalities and municipal police in light of Syrian refugee crisis is essential to the adoption and implementation of local policies. Local policies would hence be adopted as part of a legal framework, and accountability mechanisms would enforce the adoption of policies that are within the national legal framework of governing refugees. Moreover, the provision of adequate resources to municipalities is necessary for local development, and a progressive refugee response.

The lack of solid information on Syrian refugees inhibits proper analysis for future guidelines and the adoption of a national response toward the crisis. The government's collection and dissemination of accurate information on refugees is necessary to inform progressive policies. Misinformation instills fear as well as inhibits strategic planning. For instance, there is a common misperception or lack of accurate figures on the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, the number of Syrian childbirths, and the amount of foreign aid allocated to Syrian refugees. The dissemination of accurate information on aid flows directed to Syrian refugees is also necessary to ease tensions at the local level.

Legal frameworks are deemed ineffective in the case of Lebanon. Hence, the adoption of accountability mechanisms is significant among various parties, such as between municipalities and the government, as well as the municipal police and LAF. Accountability mechanisms require different parties to respect the law, as well as develop a mechanism of coordination and decision-making in response to the crisis. According to the Municipal Act, violations of the act or offenses are case-specific and either subject to a warning or reprimand issued by the interior minister, or to a suspension of work for a period less than one year or dismissal issued by the Special Disciplinary Commission.[71] The accused is consequently relieved of his duties by the Muhafez (governor). Hence, the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities shall act as a reference to the 1,000 plus municipalities registered in Lebanon, as well as monitor, approve and recommend municipal policies relevant to the Syrian refugees. Moreover, since the responsibilities, legal authorities, and status of the municipal police has not been clearly identified, the municipal police's role should be clearly framed and a cooperation mechanism between municipal police and LAF should be established in order to address the accountability gap between municipal police and the LAF.

A key policy gap is the absence of a national policy identifying benchmarks for the safe and voluntary repatriation of Syrian refugees to Syria, when the context in Syria permits. Lebanese authorities are recommended to coordinate and facilitate repatriation-related steps alongside their relevant counterpart, as well as ensure that the implementation plan is in line with Syrian refugees' right to the freedom of choice and asylum, and within Lebanon's obligations under international humanitarian laws and conventions, including protection, non-refoulement, and political agency.

71
The Special Disciplinary Commission consists of the president of the General Disciplinary of civil servants, a civil servant from the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, a president of the Municipality, and Government Commissioner (Article 106 of the Municipal Act)

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