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Bring the Planners Back! Displacement-Triggered Patterns of Urbanization and City Responses

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Executive Summary

About 1.5 million Syrian refugees have settled in Lebanon since 2012. Although the UNHCR estimates that more than two-thirds of these refugees live in rented units within cities, it is often assumed that refugees settle in makeshift housing arrangements such as camps or slums, and enter pre-existing urban environments. However, forms of urbanization are in fact varied and shaped by the new refugee populations. This brief maps patterns of city settlement in three mid-size localities in Lebanon: Zahle, Saida, and Halba. Three types of urban geometries that exist in each city in varying degrees are identified: Neighborhood densification, housing compounds, and tented settlements. These patterns of urbanization have predominantly been created through ad-hoc, fragmented measures adopted by an array of actors such as international organizations, municipal councils, informal service providers, and local organizations. To accommodate refugee populations in urban environments in a more efficient and effective way, urban planning is necessary to improve living conditions and mitigate the negative impacts of the influx of refugee populations on host communities. The brief concludes with recommendations on how this urban planning could take shape.

1
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. 2010. '2009 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum-Seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons.' UNHCR; Landau, L. B. 2014. 'Urban Refugees and IDPs.' *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies,* (1); and Fábos, A. and G. Kibreab. 2007. 'Urban Refugees: Introduction,' *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees,* 3-10.

2
On 31 January, 2020, UNHCR estimates placed Syrian refugees in Lebanon at 910,256 individuals. This figure is however widely recognized as below the actual number, particularly because the Lebanese policy of restricting registration has meant that many more refugees live in the country but are not officially registered. Other researchers have placed this figure at 1.5 million.

3
ReliefWeb. 2019. 'VASYR 2019 - Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon - Lebanon.'

4
Our findings are based on surveys, as well as qualitative and quantitative studies conducted during 2018-19 in each of Zahle, Saida, and Halba, three mid-size Lebanese cities that have received a large number of refugees since the beginning of the war in Syria in 2011. The research is part of a joint collaborative research project funded by the IDRC, including LCPS, the Beirut Urban Lab at AUB, and the Syrian Center for Policy Research.

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By consolidation, we mean the level of physical completion, be it in terms of the building conditions (e.g., quality of roof, plastering, or paint) or level of services (e.g., toilet or water hookup).

Introduction

It is widely accepted that refugee settlement globally is urbanizing.[1] What form does this urbanization take? What processes of urban production does it trigger? Who sustains them and how? The policy literature on the subject assumes a somewhat uniform model of urbanization in which refugees arrive in pre-existing urban environments and settle in makeshift housing arrangements, camps, or slums. In reality, the size and extended duration of forced population flows challenge this assumption. In Lebanon, where about 1.5 million Syrian refugees have settled since 2012, UNHCR estimates that more than two-thirds of these refugees live in rented units within cities,[2] forming about 20% of Lebanon's urban population.[3]

Given the scale of this urbanization, we argue that it is imperative to introduce spatial planning in the formulation of refugee responses. The pressing need for planning stems from the fact that many refugees settle in cities where service infrastructures are already dysfunctional and planning mechanisms weak. In these contexts, the settlement of refugees translates into additional strain on environmental and spatial conditions. By delegating urban responses to relief agencies, solidarity movements, and landlords interested in renting out homes or land, municipal authorities and planning agencies lose the capacity to direct urban growth and to channel its expansion in ways that could improve social integration and service provision while containing urban sprawl and environmental damage.

This policy brief builds on research conducted in three mid-size cities in Lebanon[4] where we mapped the various forms of urban expansion through which refugee settlement has occurred. Our mapping initially showed that the term 'urbanization' masks distinctive modalities of settlement with variable levels of physical consolidation.[5] The brief documents three modalities of urban refugee settlement, each produced through a distinctive assemblage of public, non-profit, and private actors and institutions. By analyzing the unique geometry of each of these assemblages—as well as the opportunities and challenges each generates in the locality where they were set in place—we derive critical insights toward the formulation of longer term planning strategies that could mitigate the negative impacts of settlement for refugees, host communities, and the natural and built environments they share. We conclude the policy brief by recommending three sets of strategies that can be adopted by international agencies, public actors, and city officials who choose to activate planning as a strategy to mitigate the environmental and spatial costs of forced population displacement and develop more inclusive cities.

Geometries of Urbanization

Most surveys of refugee settlement focus on shelter modalities. Taking the UNHCR classifications of shelter types as a benchmark, these studies classify refugee residences by quality—such as apartment, makeshift garage, or tent. While these studies elucidate aspects of shelter conditions, they fail to inform us about the types of urbanization that are produced, and do not recognize that refugee settlement is increasingly happening in cities. Indeed, these studies limit their analysis to 'shelter forms,' looking only at individual units, without accounting for how these units are incorporated in the urban fabrics where refugees settle.

In order to analyze refugee urban settlement, we mapped patterns of city-settlement in three mid-size localities in Lebanon: Zahle, Saida, and Halba. We identified three distinct geometries of urbanization: Neighborhood densi-fication, housing compounds, and tented settlements.[6] In each of these geometries of settlement, we looked at the ways in which building additions or new developments were being integrated in existing fabrics and linked to service infrastructure. Below, we present the three typologies:

■ **Neighborhood Densification:** In deteriorated old city centers (e.g. Saida) or existing urban 'slums' (e.g. refugee camps in Saida and Tyre, informal settlements in Saida or Beirut), rent is a valuable source of income for impoverished landlords who strive to expand the stock of housing that they command. With or without the support of slumlords,[7] these landlords have taken the lead in the production of additional housing units, often by subdividing existing apartments or by adding rooms and floors. They thus densify the urban fabric to respond to the increase in housing demand. They rent out these units to refugees (informally), sometimes in exchange for labor, but more often for desperately needed cash. In districts where political control is an conside-ration, these extensions and the settlement of refugees are negotiated through the pres-ence of strongmen who may (dis)approve of the presence of specific families. Many of the additions are poorly built, with makeshift additions that weather poorly and provide inadequate living conditions to their occupants (e.g. water leaks, over-crowding, lack of heating/cooling, and damp walls). Building such expansions is often supported by local and international non-profit organizations, and is made possible by bribes to secure the blind eye of city authorities or the local police force who frequently profit from these informal transactions.

> In districts where political control is an important consideration, these extensions and the settlement of refugees are negotiated through the presence of strongmen who may (dis)approve of the presence of specific families

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In some contexts, abandoned structures have been appro-priated by local or international organizations that have refur-bished them and re-organized their spaces into collective shelters. These, however, are not a distinct form of urbaniza-tion. One of the most well-known collective shelter is Ouzai in Saida. In collective shelters, international organi-zations act as mediators: They rent the premise and secure its immediate physical transfor-mation. The management of the shelter life and its services is the direct responsibility of the residents who are more-or-less self-organized, while the provision of other services and aid (such as education or health) is operated through international and local NGOs who establish their offices on site. In a number of cities (e.g., Saida, Halba, or Barr Elias), religious organizations play a major role in the delivery of social services to these shelters. Refugees living in collective shelters have reported suffering from severe overcrowding as well as continuously deterio-rating spatial conditions such as damp walls, leakage of the surface and the roof, and insufficient and hazardous services, such as occasional fires caused by insecure electrical connections. Rehabilitation initiatives are rare and highly dependent on aid.

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By slumlords, we mean individuals who, on behalf of landlords, manage the stock of dilapidated housing particu-larly by doing the necessary modifications to increase density and renting it out.

As for services, they are typically obtained either through illegal connections or secured through informal providers who also service other vulnerable populations living in the neighborhood (e.g. migrant workers). The quality of services is often dismal, and further aggravated by high densities: Electricity and water outages are frequent and waste rarely flows through adequate pipes.

- **Housing Compounds:** Labeled as *mujamma'at al-Suriyyeen* (Syrian compounds), large-scale housing compounds are a unique geometry of rapid refugee urbanization in several cities of North Lebanon. Such compounds are usually built on large agricultural lands, along main roads. In Halba, each of these compounds includes around 300 apartments, most of which are rented out to refugees by individual Lebanese landlords. Given that the ownership of these units is distributed across many actors, profits from rent are distributed among the members of the Lebanese communities.[8]

Our study of Halba showed that the city witnessed a construction boom of such compounds since 2011, facilitated by alliances between developers, landowners, public agencies, and municipalities. Some of these compounds were partially financed by the supply of state-subsidized bank loans targeting Lebanese army soldiers as well as Lebanese expatriates. The arrival of refugees provided an opportunity for landlords to rent out more units and an incentive for developers to build denser compounds. As development proceeded with the direct involvement of local, low-level public agents, building quality deteriorated. Thus, building facades are left unfinished, unpainted, and only plastered. Inside the apartments, roofs are leaking, walls are damp, units are overcrowded, electric cables are left hanging, heating is inadequate, and doors and windows are unsealed. The compounds suffer from a very poor level of services, heavily relying on illegal hook-ups to electricity networks, while connections to sewage networks are non-existent, causing foul odors from nearby overflowing septic tanks.

The arrival of refugees provided an opportunity for landlords to rent out more units and an incentive for developers to build denser compounds

- **Tented Settlements:** Many refugees rent out individual tents within a collective settlement spatially akin to a camp and typically referred to as an 'informal tented settlement' (ITS).[9] In several urban peripheries, particularly when refugee presence is deemed undesirable as is the case in Zahle, urbanization has taken the form of vast tented settlements/camps, within or at the edge of cities. Given the dwindling value of agricultural land, landowners find lucrative opportunities in renting out their lots to refugees. To take advantage of this opportunity, landowners transform large

8
This LCPS/SCPR survey showed that each landlord owns only one or two properties at most.

9
Although the terminology of informal tented settlement (ITS) has been widely adopted, it should be clearly distinguished from informal settlements, which a large planning literature uses to refer to self-help neighborhoods where city dwellers access shelter in poorer urban conditions, often in violation of property rights and/or urban and building regulations. See: Edésio, F. and A. Varley. 1998. *Illegal Cities: Law and Urban Change in Developing Countries.* (London: Zed Books).

agricultural tracts into ITSs, which are in turn subdivided into smaller lots, each occupied by an individual household who builds its tent. Many of these lands are located in the immediate vicinity of roads and infrastructure, suggesting that the rupture of old agricultural landscapes by the development of modern road infrastructure may well have precipitated the transformation of agricultural land into residential tracts. Landlords typically rent out access to land through the mediation of a Syrian strongman, otherwise known as *shaweesh*.[10] The latter may manage the camp alone—or with his wife—and often also organizes access to labor and secures profit from the mediation with a Lebanese landlord and an array of service providers who service the camp (UN agencies, local and international NGOs, as well as religious organizations).

Living conditions in ITSs are consistently reported as the worst among all refugee settlements, with conditions including: Overcrowding, leaking, lack of heating, lack of proper lighting, and small size of dwelling.[11] Rehabilitation projects, when they happen, occur with the support of INGOs and the UNHCR, and usually rely on self-help interventions. Refugees typically access electricity through informal measures that depend on the context where they are located. In Zahle, for example, electricity wires are hooked to the public electricity meters (Electricité de Zahle, EDZ) while in numerous other areas access to electricity is bought from informal suppliers. Other services such as sewage pits are usually provided and serviced by aid agencies, generating hybrid systems of service provision that cause severe environmental harm.[12]

These three patterns of urbanization often co-exist within the same city, although one or the other is often dominant

These three patterns of urbanization often co-exist within the same city, although one or the other is often dominant. At the time of the survey, about a quarter of refugee households in Halba lived in compounds, while 5% lived in tents and the rest were scattered between individual buildings and densifying old neighborhoods. Conversely, Saida's refugee population was almost exclusively housed in densifying neighborhoods. However, one should distinguish the conditions of those residing in the old city (7%), its modern extension (53%), and the poorer peripheral areas where patterns of neighborhood densification are more intensive. While Saida has no tented settlements and Halba has kept their numbers very low, about 85% of Zahle's refugees have been relegated to them. Each of these geometries reflect, in turn, levels of poverty and types of social interactions with the host communities that indicate the importance of the form and mode of settlement at the urban scale, beyond generic shelter types.

10
The *shaweesh* is usually hired by the landlord to live on site and manage the land. This practice predates the refugee crisis. Refugees tend to select a particular tented settlement based on kin relations or social ties to the *shaweesh* in charge.

11
ReliefWeb. 'VASYR 2019 - Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon - Lebanon.'

12
Makki, D. M. 2018. 'Actors, Governance and Modalities of Sanitation Services: Informal Tented Settlements in Zahleh.'

Forms of Urbanization and Socio-Spatial Conditions

Unraveling the patterns of urbanization allows us to improve our understanding of refugee settlement and its conditions. Indeed, the academic literature on forced population displacement has widely celebrated urbanization, correlating a move to cities with better integration and lower levels of poverty. While the space allocated to this policy brief does not allow us to expand on the topic, we offer below a few findings of the quantitative surveys conducted in the two cities of Halba and Saida to demonstrate the importance of unpacking the forms that urbanization can take.

Figure 1

Socio-spatial conditions in 'compound' urbanization in Halba

In compounds   Other dwellings: Informal tented settlements + neighborhood densification
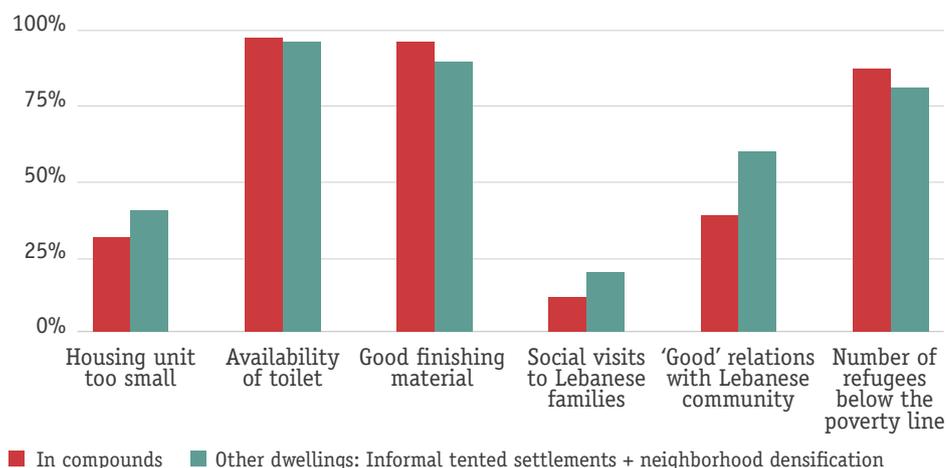
    To illustrate the diversity of the social conditions that accompany these patterns of urbanization, and how they help us understand livelihoods beyond shelter type, figure 1 shows some of the conditions of compound urbanization in relation to other forms of settlement in Halba. The figure refutes assumptions about the benefits of refugee urbanization, such as increased income or better integration, showing that only certain forms of urbanization generate these benefits. Figure 1 compares refugees in compounds in Halba to all other refugees, whether they live in tents or neighborhood densification. We find that although their 'shelter conditions'—as measured by our survey—are slightly better than all other refugees, particularly in terms of size (hence less crowding) and materials (better finishing material), the compounds' residents are slightly more represented among the extremely poor (88%, 6% more than the 82% in the rest of the city). In addition, they are substantially more isolated from Lebanese families than other refugees: Only 12.5% of compound residents visit Lebanese families, while 21% of other refugees do so, and 39.4% stated having good relations with their neighbors, while 60.3% of other refugees reported so.

Figure 2

Conditions across types of neighborhood densification in Old, Central, and Haret Saida
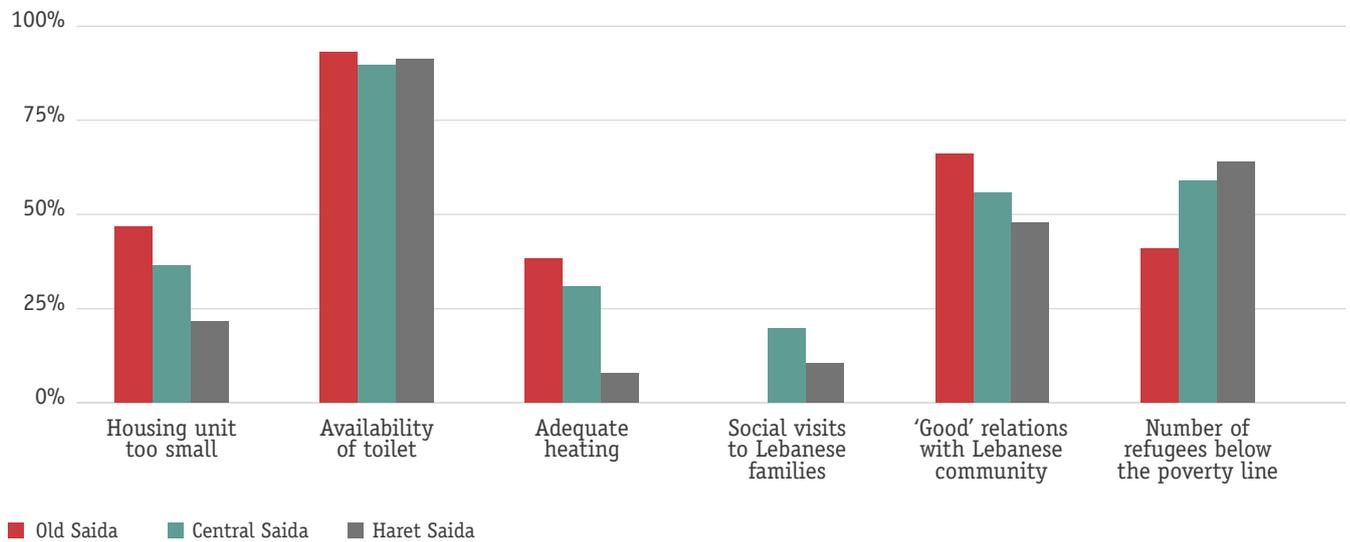

Figure 2 further shows clear distinctions within types of 'neighborhood densification,' across three districts of Saida: (i) The old historical core (Old Saida), incrementally built and largely abandoned by its well-off population; (ii) the central section of the city (Central Saida), characterized by modern developments with numerous commercial venues including offices and garages, repurposed for housing; and (iii) the peripheral area (Haret Saida), which is a lower income extension of the city that houses mostly rural migrants and other vulnerable groups. The figure shows that despite a description of 'good relations' among neighbors reaching more than 50% in the old city, social visits between refugees and Lebanese families are extremely low in all city districts, irrespective of distinctions in housing quality and levels of poverty.

A Role for Planning

The multiple forms of urbanization generated by forced displacement—or what has been termed 'refugee urbanization'—each occur through an assemblage of institutional and social structures that deeply influences their production. Indeed, public authorities such as municipalities, local planning agencies, and public utilities (such as Electricité du Liban), as well as individual developers, landlords, and brokers, shape the expansion of cities, creating opportunities while foreclosing others. In addition, the large number of local and foreign relief agencies, including the array of religious organizations, play a critical role in these processes of spatial production, either in directly supporting refugee settlement or in securing the materials for the physical consolidation

of their dwellings (e.g. waterproofing materials) and their access to urban and social services.

Although variable in their composition and organization, these assemblages of actors and institutions present important commonalities, particularly in how they operate informally, through ad hoc individual decisions rather than concerted planning. Thus, most of the housing stock available for rent in all three studied cities was provided by individuals who found in rent an immediate opportunity to earn a desperately needed income. This includes apartment owners, whether in slums, inner city districts, or large-scale compounds of urban peripheries. It also includes landowners allowing for the establishment of tents on their agricultural lands. In the process, the practice of urban and regional planning—which implies designing an urban settlement, allocating specific zones for building expansion, and connecting homes to urban services and/or needed infrastructure—is severely lacking. Rather than a preemptive process, planning becomes limited to a series of after-the-fact, fragmented measures adopted by an array of actors such as international organizations engaged in relief efforts, municipal councils trying to police their territory, informal service providers seeking riches, and local organizations in acts of—often religious—solidarity.

Rather than a preemptive process, planning becomes limited to a series of after-the-fact, fragmented measures adopted by an array of actors

We are not claiming here that planning was flourishing in Lebanon before the arrival of refugees. It is well established that planning agencies in the country are vulnerable to private interests and political interferences.[13] Still, the sidelining of active planning agencies from the settlement of refugees, including the Public Housing Corporation, the Directorate General of Urbanism (DGU), the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR), as well as line ministries, service agencies, and municipalities, undermines their ability to regulate and manage the territories they have jurisdiction over. This falls well in line with Lebanon's general response to the Syrian refugee crisis which, from the outset, delegated authority over the humanitarian response to international organizations. When the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MoI) and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) eventually became involved months into the crisis, their roles remained limited. Mandated to pilot a development response, the MoSA was constrained by numerous impediments, including a lack of funds and poor management. As for the MoI, its main task was to police refugees, a task carried out essentially by municipalities whose role has mostly been reduced to counting and controlling refugees, while their localization is driven by the market. As such, while an increasing number of

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displaced Syrians were entering Lebanon seeking housing, no public response was being elaborated to channel the production of space that responded to the new urgent demand. The CDR which had overseen the adoption of a national master plan to guide development, define high-risk zones, and protect ecologically sensitive areas in 2009—three years before the arrival of refugees—remained completely absent from those localization decisions. Tasked with the development of land use and strategic plans, the DGU was equally silent. Consequently, refugees' housing needs were met by an assemblage of actors operating outside the control of planning institutions.

Yet, local and national authorities are integral elements of this assemblage of actors contributing to the production of space. However, their involvement is indirect and mostly informal. Indeed, some of the urban expansions we documented are enabled by political calculations through which local and national authorities either turn a blind eye to building additions or pass temporary exemptions, because they are aware that their constituencies benefit financially from 'refugees resources'.[14,15] These same political calculations, when driven by a response to intensive construction, may even lead to changes in the master plans, as was the case in Halba in 2012.[16]

The absence of planning in Lebanon's refugee response is well in line with the practices of numerous other cities around the world. Documenting refugee settlement in cities such as Rome, Brussels, and Berlin, scholars have also established that planners were consistently missing in refugee response strategies. Instead, refugee settlement happened through spontaneous measures, typically enacted by political

Consequently, refugees' housing needs were met by an assemblage of actors operating outside the control of planning institutions

authorities and administrative personnel, without including trained urban planners.[17] As a result, much of the accumulated knowledge of the profession— particularly in relation to correlations between spatial integration, economic success, and social mobility—were ignored and replaced by 'dispersal strategies' that were grounded in the apprehension of local governments and communities and their cultural biases rather than urban sociology. Worse, when cities (such as Leipzig, Essen, and Wolfhagen in Germany) called on planners to join decision makers in developing the response to the Syrian refugee crisis, they looked to them for strategies to organize and aestheticize refugee camps, instead of integrating refugees in the urban fabric.[18]

14
A notable example is the allowance extended before national elections by the then Minister of Interior for people to build up to 150m^2 without official permits. Many of these additions were ad-hoc, allowing families to benefit from renting out apartments to refugees.

15
Jacobsen, K. 2006. 'Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Urban Areas: A Livelihoods Perspective.' *Journal of Refugee Studies* 19, (3): 273-286.

16
The city of Halba saw the approval of its master plan accelerated to increase exploitation ratios in 2012.

17
D'auria, V., R. Daher, and K. Rohde. 2018. 'From Integration to Solidarity: Insights from Civil Society Organisations in Three European Cities.' *Urban Planning,* 3(4): 79–90.

18
Dalal, A. et al. 2018. 'Planning the Ideal Refugee Camp? A Critical Interrogation of Recent Planning Innovations in Jordan and Germany.' *Urban Planning,* 3(4): 64-78.

How Should Cities Respond to these Varying Patterns of Urbanization Generated by Forced Displacement?

In order to respond to refugee urbanization, cities need to acknowledge the reality of this form of urban expansion and integrate it within a renewed, inclusive planning practice. It is indeed imperative for international agencies, public agencies, and local governments to recognize the transformative impacts of the refugee settlement on their cities and infrastructures, the sprawling expansions of their peripheries, and the rising demand for more services. It is further urgent that these stakeholders initiate the necessary planning processes to integrate these settlements within their territories. Here we propose three types of planning interventions, all borrowing from traditional and widespread planning approaches that aim to include refugee populations as integral components of communities in urban areas:

- **Strategic Spatial Planning:** The practice of articulating flexible, performative planning frameworks to guide urban development, is a widely used planning tool particularly in European countries. Departing from the rigid land use plans that require frequent revisions and dictate constraining options, strategic plans can be developed in participatory forms involving various groups of stakeholders who share the same urban or regional spaces. Participants articulate shared visions of the long-term development of the town in which trade-offs are defined and concerted decisions are taken. These shared visions can then translate into actual project interventions that are endorsed and applied with the input of stakeholders.[19]

Strategic plans can be developed in participatory forms involving various groups of stakeholders who share the same urban or regional spaces

Given the diversity of actors involved in the ongoing urbanization of refugee responses in Lebanon's cities, the high level of informality in which the production of space is happening, and its individual form, it seems imperative for local governments to identify the current patterns of growth and to initiate planning initiatives that mitigate their impacts and control future expansion. Furthermore, given that much of the above-described urban changes reflect pre-existing patterns of urban growth in which the most vulnerable population already dwells, local governments in particular should initiate consultation processes that bring together members of these vulnerable communities (i.e., host and refugees) to discuss the organization and management of shared spaces, the connection to urban infrastructures, the expansion of settlements, the sharing of costs, and the respective burdens each is bringing. Urban planners and designers favoring participatory area-based approaches and place-making interventions can be key actors leading such processes. International agencies should

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In Lebanon, strategic spatial planning came in vogue in 2007-2015, during which several international organizations supported the development of such interventions in Lebanon's regions.

thus consider supporting local governments to engage in such a practice, placing the urban at the heart of the refugee policy response. Accordingly, the role of local governments would be up-scaled from coordinating policing and humanitarian responses to managing development and planning. Then, local governments will play a leading role in allowing for an integrated management of territories and all the populations dwelling in them, irrespective of their nationalities or voters' status.

■ **Land Use Planning at Multiple Scales:** The development of informal settlements as a form of urban expansion associated with the individual decisions of landowners to sacrifice the agricultural value of their land has demonstrated sizable long-term negative effects in terms of loss of food security and ecological degradation. Years after settlement, the interruption of natural waterways, the pollution of underground water tables, the erratic accumulation of solid waste, and the disruption of fragile ecosystems generate irrecoverable costs.[20] Studies overlapping current ITSs with flood plains and water resources have shown that settlements have neither accounted for precious agricultural land, nor have they respected waterways and protected resources. ITSs in the periphery of the city of Zahle extend within flood plains, exposing refugees to severe threats, as happened in the fall of 2019 when heavy rainfall damaged some settlements in the peripheries of the Bekaa valley.[21]

> **The role of local governments would be up-scaled from coordinating policing and humanitarian responses to managing development and planning**

To respond to such challenges, land use planning should be adopted at multiple scales. On the one hand, national authorities should reactivate the national land use plan adopted in 2009 (SDATL), where water resources, forests, and agricultural fertile zones are delineated, as are areas of severe seismic risk and flood plains. Indeed, given that planning agencies have failed to translate the directives of the national land use plan in mandatory planning documents, the general vision of the national master plan is still not translated into actual planning directives. Such directives should include guidelines for relocating refugee settlements currently built within the SDATL's protected zones, while paying special attention to the needs of their dwellers.

On the other hand, cities and their peripheries need to reevaluate their land use plans, to earmark areas of urban expansion where housing compounds or temporary settlements can be developed and serviced without extensive costs. In Zahle, for example, Makki (2018) showed that a large number of informal tented settlements followed existing road and sewer networks'

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Ministry of Environment. 2014. 'Lebanon Environmental Assessment of the Syrian Conflict and Priority Interventions.'

21
Makki. 2018. 'Actors, Governance and Modalities of Sanitation Services: Informal Tented Settlements in Zahleh.'

lines, making it possible to develop connections to the city's infrastructural system and consequently improve the livelihoods of refugees, while planning for environmental protection.[22] In Halba, Merhebi (2018) showed how the sprawl of complexes pushed urbanization to urban peripheries, triggering additional building development.[23] Such land use plans can translate into locally-adapted planning regulations, allowing local governments more flexibility—such as canceling ad hoc additions—prompted by the 2017 decision by the Ministry of Interior which permits the building of 150m^2 of construction without the legally mandated building permit.

- ■ **On-Site Settlement Upgrading** (or area-based interventions, as referred to by humanitarian agencies): These are interventions targeting low-income, dilapidated neighborhoods where authorities approach specific zones in an integrated form, irrespective of the legal or national status of their populations. Building on discourses of urban justice, the right to housing, or simply health imperatives (as heard recently with the COVID-19 pandemic), authorities intervene in neighborhoods developed in violation of urban and building regulations (e.g. squatters or self-help) where they extend services and expand the shared infrastructures. They may also provide loans and direct material help to upgrade houses and introduce regulatory mechanisms to support existing rental markets. These interventions build on decades of 'informal settlement upgrading' approaches of the type advocated by UN-Habitat, the World Bank, and other agencies in the late 1970s.[24] By prioritizing the right-to-housing over the exchange value of land, such interventions have come a long way in unbundling property ownership from shelter acquisition. In Brazil, for example, neighborhoods with contested property rights and high density of precarious populations can be earmarked as zones of special social interest where property rights are suspended and the right to shelter is decoupled from the right to sell or bequeath a piece of land.[25] Public authorities consequently develop land reserves for affordable housing where they can provide services without seeing housing prices increase, gentrification take over, and their attempts to build affordable housing reserves undermined by market forces. More recent interventions have further integrated principles of place-making in the upgrading of shared spaces—interventions that are sorely needed in Lebanon's cities, particularly in inner neighborhoods and dense slums.[26]

> **Such land use plans can translate into locally-adapted planning regulations, allowing local governments more flexibility**

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Ibid.

23
Merhebi, S. G. 2018. 'Actors, Governance and Modalities of Electricity Supply: The Case of Low-Income Neighborhoods and Refugee Compounds in Halba.'

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Conclusion

The 'urban' dimension of forced population displacement creates an opportunity for rethinking the organization of our cities and refugee responses in more integrated forms, overcoming some of the severe drawbacks associated with immediate relief and targeted responses. Indeed, it could allows us to start reverting decades of poor urban planning where city development has been largely left to individual initiatives, creating exclusive and dysfunctional living areas, gravely marred with injustice. As we look forward, it is urgent for local governments and planning agencies to reposition themselves as development planning actors, and reliable counterparts guiding refugee response strategy through visions of shared livable spaces and adequate shelter. Similarly, international agencies should reconsider interventions to ground them in this urban understanding, shifting consequently humanitarian/relief responses toward the recognition of the protracted nature of refugee displacement and their deeply transformative impacts on cities.

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