



**SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON
EIGHT YEARS ON:
WHAT WORKS AND
WHY THAT MATTERS FOR THE FUTURE**



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lebanon remains the country which hosts the largest number of refugees relative to its national population. In a country of just four million people, one in five people is a Syrian refugee, one in four people if you take into account the long standing Palestinian refugee population. **The perception of Syrian refugees by the Lebanese population is influenced to a large extent by the country's history.** Many Palestinians fled to Lebanon during the 1948 war and settled down in different parts of the country.

Today, many Lebanese worry that the Syrian refugees might follow suit and never leave.

For a variety of reasons, **none of the durable solutions are currently in sight for the majority of Syrian refugees in Lebanon**, whether that is return, integration or resettlement. In the interim period, **it is in everyone's interest to seek to reduce tensions and improve livelihoods of both Lebanese and refugee communities**, thereby contributing to the economic development and stability of Lebanon.

Through a field research and desk study conducted in May and June of 2018, CARE International explored specific vulnerabilities of Syrian refugees in Lebanon as well as concrete ways of improving their lives in the short and medium term. This publication includes quotes from various respondents interviewed in Tripoli, Akkar and Beirut. We focused on three main questions: **How are the relations between refugees and Lebanese? How are refugees faring in the job market? Which concrete initiatives have already demonstrated positive impact in terms of increasing their financial and/or social well-being?** The combination of those factors are key to understanding refugees' livelihoods and coping strategies and reflect on what more can be done by local and international actors to increase social stability in Lebanon on a temporary basis, pending durable solutions.

CARE INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

TO THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON:

- The principle of **non-refoulement** of refugees should be respected by all relevant parties.
- A fair and transparent system should be adopted in order to allow all refugees to obtain and maintain **legal residency** without fees or sponsorship in order to substantially improve refugees' protection, access to services and decent work.
- A **national development plan** should be developed, in cooperation with UN agencies and local and international civil society. It should focus on poverty reduction and reducing inequality in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. This would ensure a transparent framework that encompasses commitments from national and international stakeholders, in which donors could invest in a coordinated way.

TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, DONORS AND NGOS:

- Donors should require that the Government of Lebanon continues to uphold the principle of **non-refoulement in order for non-humanitarian donor engagement and funding to be maintained.**
- A **holistic approach to economic empowerment should be adopted.** This approach should combine a skills sharing approach (in kind economy), connect employers to graduates from skills building training, improve businesses' capacity, and increase options for small businesses to access pro-poor savings schemes and loans, such as Village Savings and Loan Associations or existing financial institutions. Real economic empowerment also entails seeking to change the power relations between men and women, leading to gender transformation at both household and societal levels.



TO LEBANESE AUTHORITIES, INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY, DONORS AND NGOS:

- **Municipalities should be better supported to identify practical solutions to the challenges they face on a daily basis.** Municipalities must be integrated as full partners in the planning, implementation and evaluation of emergency, recovery and development initiatives, and should receive a higher level of funding to set up rights-based Local Economic Development Plans. The One-Neighborhood Approach could be a perfect fit as it responds to both the individual needs of the most vulnerable refugee and host community households. As such, it would address the needs of the wider community, enhance capabilities and dignity, and reduce tensions.
- **More emphasis should be placed on promoting what Syrian refugees and Lebanese hosts have in common (rather than focusing on nationality), to reduce tensions.** By doing so, more role models and champions could emerge in civil society. to challenge the narrative refugees are a burden on Lebanese society.

DURABLE SOLUTIONS AROUND THE CORNER?¹

Lebanon is a middle income country which has a **long tradition of hosting refugees** on its soil, even if it has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention. It remains the country which hosts the largest number of refugees relative to its national population, in the world. In a country of just four million people, one in five people is a Syrian refugee. If you take into account the long standing Palestinian refugee population, one in four people in Lebanon is a refugee.

In Lebanon, **Syrian refugees entered a hugely complex political context**, where the stability of the country is fragile. To avoid a potential spill-over of Syria's conflict, initially there was broad agreement that Lebanon should be neutral. Refugees were seen more as victims forced to flee across a border, rather than being seen as a threat or serious burden upon the State. But eight years have passed and, as the number of Syrian refugees increased dramatically, fears grew that the presence of a large number of mostly Sunni Syrian refugees could be permanent, and that this will alter the demographic balance against the interests of Christian and Shia political groups in Lebanon and challenge the existing political order².

On the one hand there is the wish to decrease Syrian influence in Lebanon³, while on the other hand the Hezbollah, who increased their influence with their allies in the May 2018 elections are an important political and military ally of the Syrian regime. For its part, the Syria government is keen to be seen as legitimate in the eyes of the international community. Refugees returning to their country of origin is seen as a key step in normalising their international relations and bolstering claims of being a government for all of the people. As a result, the **debate is getting more and more political and rhetoric in favour of compelling the return of refugees is increasing**, most notably by the caretaker Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil, who has spoken out on a number of occasions that return needs to start happening in a larger way and soon.

¹ This publication stems from ten days of field research in May and June of 2018, combined with a desk study. A total of 68 people were interviewed, individually, in pairs or in focus group discussions. The women and men interviewed came from a variety of backgrounds, including Syrian refugees, Lebanese host communities, mayors, local and international NGOs, businesses, donors and UN agencies. Interviews were conducted in a variety of locations in Tripoli region, Akkar and Beirut. The locations in the North - where CARE and partners have their largest operations - did have an impact on the results, as these are mostly Sunni areas with a long history of circular migration between Syria and Lebanon, and as such they are more tolerant of Syrian refugee presence.

² Betts, A., Ali, A., Memişoğlu, F. (2017) 'Local Politics and the Syrian Refugee Crisis Exploring Responses in Turkey, Lebanon, and Jordan', *Refugee studies centre*, p.17.

³ The Cedar Revolution was a chain of demonstrations in Lebanon triggered by the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafik Hariri, calling for an independent investigation, the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon and the replacement of a government heavily influenced by Syrian interests. The March 14 Alliance was named after the date of the Cedar Revolution, and is a coalition of political parties and independents formed in 2005 that are united by their anti-Syrian regime stance.

“I don’t have anything left in Syria. I lost my money, house, seven brothers and sisters. There is only me and one brother left. Still, I would prefer going back but the situation remains unclear so for now would rather stay in Lebanon even if it is hard. Resettlement is not a solution.”⁵”

While an overwhelming majority of refugees (amounting to 98% in Lebanon) want to return to Syria, **the dangerous question is the timeframe**. Refugees we interviewed cited safety and security as a chief prerequisite for return, and most do not believe that these security conditions will be met any time soon without some form of political change and demilitarisation, in line with Carnegie’s 2018 study⁴.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, has been very clear: *“It is very premature to talk about returning refugees to Syria because the situation there remains insecure and dangerous”*, which is in line with the UNHCR’s ‘protection thresholds’ for refugee return in Syria⁶. If refugees would be forcibly returned now, they would be exposed to violence, mines, detention, forced conscription, further displacement (transforming them into Internally Displaced People) and potentially abduction. Despite that knowledge and in parallel to the hot political discussions, **in practice, ‘semi brokered’ returns have been taking place since 2017** and interviewees expect to see this increasingly in the future⁷.

These tensions between the Lebanese authorities and UNHCR and the wider international community are a result of a catch 22. **Addressing refugee needs in a protracted refugee situation requires a discussion on the three different options of ‘Durable Solutions’**: sustainable return to the country of origin, local integration or resettlement in a third country. However, some Lebanese authorities – responding to a negative public opinion of refugees – insist that they will not permit Syrians to remain in Lebanon much longer, and as such, deny a complex reality and **refuse to plan for longer-term solutions**. This, in turn, **exacerbates a cycle of underdevelopment and negative host-community fallout**, which translates into ever greater anti-refugee sentiment.

⁴ Carnegie (2018) *‘What will it take for Syrian refugees to return home?’*.

⁵ Interview with female Syrian refugee, Tripoli, 29 May 2018.

⁶ Reuters (2018) *‘Syria still too insecure for refugee returns: UN Refugee Chief’*, 8 May 2018. [UNHCR Protection thresholds and parameters for refugee return in Syria](#) (2018).

⁷ See for example NRC, Save the Children, ACF, CARE, DRC, IRC, DSP (2018) *‘Dangerous ground’*, p.9. ; Abdallah, I., *Hundreds of refugees return from Syria to Lebanon*, 18 April 2018, Reuters; Alfred, C: *‘Dangerous Exit: Who Controls How Syrians in Lebanon Go Home’*, News Deeply, 8 Aug 2018.

One example can be seen in the allocation of national funding to municipalities. National budgets are designed with a view to demonstrating that the Government is prioritizing the Lebanese people. Funding for municipalities completely disregards all non-Lebanese people residing in those communities. Municipal authorities, however, cannot ignore the refugee presence and needs, as their communities have sometimes doubled in size in a matter of a few years. So local leaders have had to stretch resources in such a way that local Lebanese people, in largely poor communities, feel they have been further disadvantaged by the presence of refugees. While the Lebanese Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) has partly sought to address this with international funding, much more efforts are needed. **Focusing on what works at the level of municipalities is key.**

When it comes to **responsibility sharing by the international community, this is mostly confined to funding.** Large conferences were organised in Kuwait, London, and Brussels since 2013, resulting in billions of funding to Lebanon in return for improving the situation for Syrian refugees. In practice though, progress has been meagre and there is a limit to how much leverage donors have to demand more respect for refugee rights in a context where the European Union and the US are doing everything in their power to stem migration and refugee flows to their territories. Conversely, the lack of any human rights conditionality attached to the 6 billion USD of investments for the Capital Investment Plan discussed at

the CEDRE conference⁸ is a huge missed opportunity to improve the life of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and fight wider poverty and inequality. **Moreover, what unites all conferences is how a commitment to resettlement is notable by its absence.**

That is important as in the absence of possibilities to sustainably return or integrate, the only means by which refugee numbers could go down is via resettlement. A few of the refugees we interviewed, mentioned they hoped to be resettled: *“I would love to move to Europe. I heard from my cousin in Germany that a friend fell sick, and he was taken by a helicopter to get urgent surgery in the hospital. Here in Lebanon, they would leave us to die even on the doorstep of the hospital”.* In practice though, their chance of getting resettled is very small. Only 3% of Syrians in Lebanon (46,153 people) have been selected for resettlement, and figures have been steadily decreasing since the peak in 2016⁹.

In this interim period in which durable solutions at scale are not yet in sight, **it is critical to improve the status quo** for both Syrian and Lebanese communities. **How are the relations between refugees and Lebanese, what is their level of social capital, and how are refugees faring in the job market?** The combination of those factors is key to understanding the livelihoods strategies of refugees themselves. That basis is key to think through **what more can be done by local and international actors to build bridges and increase social stability in Lebanon,** improving the enabling environment for the benefit of both Lebanese and Syrian communities.

⁸ On April 6, France hosted in Paris an international conference in support of Lebanon development and reforms, CEDRE (“Conférence économique pour le développement, par les réformes et avec les entreprises”). The government of Lebanon presented its ambitious Capital Investment Program (CIP), which is mainly focused on infrastructure development and rehabilitation. The total cost of the first phase of the CIP is estimated at US \$10.8 billion. With such huge investments in the Lebanese economy, donors should have asked a substantial improvement of conditions for refugees in return, applying conditionality, but France refused.

⁹ UNHCR data portal, <http://rsq.unhcr.org/en/#1Vjy>, accessed 5 June 2018.

BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Understanding social capital is vital to understanding models for building and stabilizing livelihoods. While social and economic networks and systems change during conflict and after displacement, their importance does not decrease. It is social capital – the ability to engage, get support from and influence the people in your community- which enables people to access resources and make choices they might otherwise not be able to make because they lack the information or the opportunity. **Social capital is an important indicator of refugee well-being; the harder life gets, the more relationships tend to break down. Refugees need support from fellow refugees to find their way in the host country, create some kind of security net and experience emotional support ('bonding social capital').** When it comes to access to housing, land, services and jobs, refugees have to develop social relations with the host community ('bridging social capital'), which is what we are focusing in this paper. These relations can stay at a very basic level of de facto integration, or it can develop into meaningful contact, leading to real friendship, social integration and livelihoods benefits. Through this research, we tried to unpack what shapes Lebanese perceptions of Syrians, highlight the contradictions observed in the relationships between the various (multi-layered) communities and suggest ways to 'build bridges' based on good practices observed in Lebanon and elsewhere.

THE PERCEPTION OF SYRIANS: INFLUENCE OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

The perception of Syrian refugees by the Lebanese population is influenced to a large extent by the country's history. Lebanon has a long tradition of hosting refugees on its soil. Many Palestinians fled to Lebanon during the 1948 war and settled down in different parts of the country. **The experience with Palestinian militias that sprang up in the refugee camps has left a scar on Lebanese opinion. Many Lebanese worry that the Syrian refugees might never leave,** like the 170 000 Palestinians that remain, and this compounds fears – often exaggerated – about the negative impact of refugees on poor Lebanese communities:

“My father is a painter and he simply can't find any paid labour because he's considered too expensive compared to what Syrians accept to work for”¹⁰.

But unlike Palestinians, Syrians were not allowed by the Lebanese government to establish formal camps. As a result, a majority of Syrian refugees live in apartments and houses in the same neighbourhoods as the Lebanese population, creating a feeling that they are 'among us', will blend in and never go back to Syria.

The perception of a biased and unfair support from the international community is also a source of tensions. A recent UNDP survey shows that 85% of Lebanese feel that

¹⁰ Meeting with Lebanese women, Tripoli, 29 May 2018.

vulnerable Lebanese have been overlooked for international assistance. While the international response to the Syrian refugee crisis initially primarily focused on refugees, humanitarian agencies have attempted to correct this oversight and began offering services to both host communities and refugees. However, the idea that the majority of international aid benefits Syrians remains widely spread among Lebanese. For example, a young woman in Tripoli acknowledged that *“Syrians have been abandoned by their government but here in Lebanon they are taking their rights, receiving aid, entering schools and universities”*¹¹.

The protracted presence of Syrians in the country has also contributed to the **re-emergence of painful memories associated with the Syrian occupation in Lebanon**¹². A young woman, who was the only Syrian in her major at university, mentioned an unpleasant moment she experienced in class:



*“One day, my teacher started talking about how Syrians behave badly towards Lebanese and all students looked at me. The teacher realized I was Syrian and apologized. I feel it is my responsibility to explain to Lebanese that Syrian refugees are not like the Syrian army which invaded Lebanon back in 1982. In reality, when I left my country, I fled the same people”*¹³.

LOVE ME, LOVE ME NOT: RELATIONS BETWEEN SYRIANS AND LEBANESE

As a result, tensions between host communities and Syrian refugees are part of Lebanon’s daily life. All Syrian refugees interviewed during the course of this research mentioned that at some point, they experienced some form of harassment or violence, mostly verbal harassment: *“Now I hardly let my children play or walk on the streets because when they do, they are told to go home [back to Syria]. Syrians are accused of stealing jobs and husbands from the Lebanese”*¹⁴. But threats and physical violence are also prevalent. A mayor from a village in Akkar shared a recent incident:

“At the beginning of Ramadan this year, some Lebanese youth threatened Syrian kids with knives, saying they would kill them if they would leave the house.”

Insecurity comes primarily from Lebanese neighbours¹⁵ but police forces have also created an atmosphere of anxiety for both refugees and host communities. Syrians particularly fear arrests at checkpoints while women, whether Syrian or Lebanese, explained that they do not feel comfortable walking on the streets because *“Lebanese Security Forces use their guns unsafely”*¹⁶.

¹¹ Meeting with Lebanese women, Tripoli, 29 May 2018.

¹² Saferworld and Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies (2018) *‘Building Peace into Refugee Responses-Syrian Refugees in Lebanon’*.

¹³ Interview with young Syrian woman currently doing a Masters in Tripoli and volunteering on a CARE International in Lebanon’s education project for adolescent girls, Tripoli, 31 May 2018.

¹⁴ Meeting with Syrian women, Tripoli, 29 May 2018.

¹⁵ 58% of the cases according to VASYR 2017.

¹⁶ Meeting with Lebanese women, Tripoli, 29 May 2018.

This leads many Syrian refugees to refrain from leaving their homes and experience isolation and loneliness.

The absence of proactive initiatives by the Lebanese Government to improve relations between the communities was also mentioned as a key challenge.

A local NGO clearly expressed that the gap is filled by other stakeholders: *“NGOs do the work that the national government should do to create a bridge between people [Syrians and Lebanese] and the municipality in which they live, and to link municipalities with each other”¹⁷*. In fact, the Government is so worried that the international community will start pushing for integration that normal words in refugee response vocabulary such as ‘integration’ or ‘social cohesion’ are off-limits in Lebanon since 2015, as it is immediately associated with refugees staying in the long run. Even donors react awkwardly when asked questions about integration.

However, it is important to highlight that there are also positive interactions between Syrians and host communities. Firstly, **social bonds play a key role in breaking down social barriers**. All Syrian interviewees said that they have Lebanese friends or relatives. **Intermarriages**, which already existed before the crisis, **remain common. Historically, there has been a lot of circular migration between Syria and Lebanon**, with Syrian agricultural labour coming in seasonally, and construction workers regularly contributing much needed labour for Lebanon’s reconstruction. One Syrian interviewee for example explained how he used to study in Tripoli, and how he had Lebanese friends that studied in Homs.



Secondly, cultural differences are less acute in certain parts of Lebanon. In the Akkar Governorate for example, located in the North of the country, Syrian refugees share **common traditions with host communities**. In general there are less tensions in Sunni areas with the predominantly Sunni refugees. A Syrian woman living near Halba said: *“I get along very well with the wife of our landlord. When I needed to go to the hospital, she took me there. But for example, my sister-in-law who lives in another area of Lebanon, simply can’t go outside of her house. She feels threatened at all times”¹⁸*.

Finally, it was also apparent that **Syrians** who are financially better off, were able to maintain a good living standard in Lebanon – some by expanding or developing their businesses. These people tended to be **more easily accepted** by host communities. They have mostly settled in more affluent areas, rather than in poorer areas with lots of Syrians, and, therefore, stand out less from affluent Lebanese.

¹⁷ Meeting with Akkar-based local NGOs, Halba, 30 May 2018.

¹⁸ Meeting with Lebanese women, Tripoli, 29 May 2018.

DISPLACEMENT AS A LITMUS TEST FOR GENDER RELATIONS

Beyond looking at interactions between communities, it is equally important to **explore the impacts of the Syrian crisis on the relationships between refugee women and men**. While traditionally many Syrian women used to stay home, many have taken on the role of breadwinner, in light of the challenges that men have faced accessing jobs. A study exploring Syrian refugee women's experiences in Bekaa showed that **while many view that women refugees work as a form of emancipation, the women themselves see it as exposure to harassment and under-payment**¹⁹. Interviews in Tripoli and Akkar showed mixed results in this regard, with some women indeed considering it as emancipation, while others would much prefer to have a home-based business.

Most refugees interviewed indicated that increased work opportunities and the prospect of a stable source of income as a reason to wake up in the morning.

Syrian women in particular made a plea for increased opportunities for traditional male breadwinners. The inability to meet their family's needs has made Syrian men feel threatened in their own masculinity which has triggered depression and violent behaviours towards women and children. A woman interviewed in Halba said:

*"We have a very small house here in Lebanon and our financial situation is bad. It generates conflict between family members. There are just 2 rooms in our flat so when it becomes tense, I can't isolate myself. Our house in Syria was bigger and could take some time away when I needed"*²⁰.

BUILDING BRIDGES BETWEEN COMMUNITIES

Syrian refugees and host communities interact on a daily basis in shops, at the market or on the streets, but in general the level of **meaningful interaction remains very low**. This has led to further reinforcing stereotypes of the other community and reduced empathy and solidarity. When Syrian refugees and Lebanese have had the **opportunity to get to know each other**, to share their daily struggles and learn together, it has led to a **reduction of tensions**, and has the potential to create more genuine and sustainable bonds. A Lebanese woman interviewed at a local NGO social centre in Tripoli - hosting inter-community activities, including trainings on baking techniques and management of micro and small enterprises - explained how her point of view had shifted:

*"I have Syrian friends among my neighbours but most of them are women I met at the centre. The [Syrian] psychologist who works here and leads workshops has completely changed my perception on Syrians. We have a lot in common"*²¹.

To bring people together, **emphasizing commonalities is a promising strategy**. CARE International in Lebanon has for instance implemented a project with Syrian, Lebanese and Iraqi fathers in Beirut and Tripoli. Through group discussions, four groups of fathers reflected on the definition and role of a family, their role as fathers as well as stress and anger management.

¹⁹ Quist, M. (2016) 'Traumatic Masculinities', Master thesis, Utrecht University.

²⁰ Meeting with Syrian women, Halba, 30 May 2018.

²¹ Meeting with Lebanese women, Tripoli, 29 May 2018.

Building on safe-space dialogues, the fathers have used their own smart phones to document concepts and stories of “positive fatherhood”. The photography part of the project aimed to inform and personalize the discussions among the fathers, but also to share their experiences more widely as the photo exhibition toured the country. Forty-year-old Kamal, a Lebanese father of two daughters, who works as a company driver by day and as a taxi driver by night, expressed that the project led him to question his responsibilities as a father and his approach to his children. He also said that he appreciates how understanding his wife is – and that this contributes to a healthy relationship. Kamal stumbled upon the project’s discussion sessions by accident but is glad that such opportunity came up.

“I heard different people’s points of view. It was a space for me and others to voice our opinions and our struggles. Listening to other people’s stories has given me a coping strategy, so now I know that if I find myself in a similar situation, I can draw on solutions we discussed. Life is one big lesson!”

Working with men to analyse and deconstruct social roles and expectations is key to demonstrating that there are many ways to ‘be a man’ and that a stronger engagement from men to care for their families can benefit everyone in the household. For many of the fathers it was the first time they participated in activities and initiatives where they had to share thoughts, ideas and listen to opinions about fatherhood and gender equality. By creating a space for fathers to share personal stories and reflections, **the project has contributed to break down barriers between nationalities and developed a sense of solidarity among participants.**

To build on this, it is important to reflect and act upon major concerns expressed by both communities. During the course of this research, all women, whether Syrian or Lebanese, shared their serious worries about their children’s well-being and future: *“There are no recreational spaces where children can go and play. When summertime comes, my children either stay home or wander on the streets. And they’re not the only ones. This is not what their childhood should be about”*²². When they reach the teenage years and realize that they have limited job and life opportunities, some young people have adopted very negative coping mechanisms, including drugs or have come under the influence of religiously extreme individuals and groups. Moreover, **women also explained that, compared to men, they have access to a very limited number of physical and social spaces where they can ‘breathe’, socialize, interact with other women and share their frustrations.** Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs, explained in the next chapter), while contributing to women’s economic empowerment, can also play this role and increase solidarity among women. Thus, **improving individual and family well-being while at the same time creating additional opportunities for communities to interact would be a ‘win-win’.** The opportunity warrants further development. **NGOs and UN agencies are playing a particularly important role in keeping tensions at bay,** as over half of the interactions between communities happen at sites or events organised by these actors²³. As part of a wider project with businesses and in line with our Neighbourhood Approach (explained below), CARE for example explicitly included the objective to engage civil society. Some budget was reserved to organise community events, as well as to train grassroots NGOs in finance, procurement, monitoring and evaluation, leadership, etc.

²² Meeting with two Lebanese women, Committee members in Wadi El Nahleh, 30 May 2018.

²³ ARK for UNDP Lebanon (2018), pp.ii-iii.

Another issue which both Lebanese and Syrian female youth have in common is the **lack of access to secondary education**, with only 57% of Lebanese and a mere 3% of Syrians registered. During the transition from intermediate to secondary school, girls tend to drop out, losing vital peer support networks and missing out on key skills development at a critical moment in their lives. By using a **'Positive Deviance Approach'**, CARE aims to understand the factors that enable that small group of girls to continue, to allow other groups of girls to create pathways to secondary education.



“After one year, after having lost all hope of returning to my country, we started looking for schools here. Unfortunately, I wasn’t accepted in any Lebanese public school. I had no choice but to attend an informal school. Four years later, we realized that the informal degree is not accredited in Lebanon, very depressing. But my mother, who believes in the importance of education and especially for girls, was very supportive. She spent 3 months negotiating and fighting with the school to get me in, and finally I was accepted to start in grade nine. The first year was very difficult: the school was far from home, the English classes were very hard, and our home is very small so I couldn’t focus on my studies. I also couldn’t register in afternoon homework support because we cannot afford the cost. But I was determined to achieve my goal. I was memorizing new words every day, I used Google translate, I asked for my teachers’ support during breaks. I studied hard to succeed in the official exam. And I did! One day, I hope to become an English teacher.”

(Bushra, 17-year old Syrian refugee, Tripoli)



In addition to focusing on communalities and creating interaction, it is **critical to ensure aid transparency** and to demonstrate that, whether funds come from the Lebanese Government or international donors, **they aim to benefit both communities, also to ensure social stability.** In this regard, the **“One Neighbourhood approach”** is increasingly recognised as a useful way to work in urban areas during or after a crisis. Bringing together emergency, recovery and longer-term development support, area-based approaches aim to respond to individual critical needs of most vulnerable households among refugees and host communities, and to the needs of the community, while enhancing their capabilities, dignity and safety. Vulnerabilities are assessed based on the socio-economic condition of each family as well as the condition of their homes. Such interventions are geographically targeted, multi-sectoral (shelter, WASH, livelihoods and protection) and embrace a participatory approach.

Using the “One Neighbourhood approach”, CARE has worked in various areas in Tripoli to improve the living conditions of vulnerable individual households by renovating apartments and responding to basic water, sanitation and hygiene needs while rehabilitating communal spaces in residential buildings and some small-scale community infrastructure.

Four years into the project, male and female representatives from both communities and various ages in Community-Based Protection Committees interact and work in a collaborative fashion. These Committee members understand their rights and are in charge of taking decisions regarding the implementation of the programme. Protection sessions conducted as part of the project have not only raised awareness on early marriage, domestic violence, conflict resolution and tenancy rights but also contributed to build trust between refugees and host communities. This has significantly increased the sense of ownership over the project, improved transparency of who benefits from what, and as a result, **41% of community members are reporting reduced community tensions.**

The following feedback from a CARE On Spot Monitoring check depicts what such multi-sectoral support concretely means for a family, and just how much impact this has:

“One household we visited had the father as a committee member, the mother attended positive parenting sessions, the children attended self-improvement sessions and their house received shelter assistance. The father stated how powerful it was, to have his voice heard for the first time, especially in the Municipality, and being able to address and support his community, since he is Syrian and did not feel previously a sense of belonging. The mother has noticed her children are more aware about protection issues and are sharing what they learn with her and applying it with their friends. She also changed her own behaviour with her children, using less violence, and they have become closer. Additionally, the house is safer now, with the toilet being changed; previously, rats and insects would regularly jump out of the toilet.”

(feedback CARE staff, August 2018)

Through longer-term programming, NGOs and UN agencies also **contribute to the capacity-building of important parts of society, both Lebanese and Syrians**, sometimes as project employees, but more often through the provision of targeted training and involvement in committees to guide a particular project or discuss issues with the municipality. In this process, **new leaders emerge.** For example, one of the mayors interviewed in Wadi El Nahleh used to be a focal point for a humanitarian programme, and along the project life, became familiar with management skills and built up a lot of social capital with the community, leading to him being elected as the mayor of the newly established community. The same is true for the Syrians involved in the projects, which is important for whichever durable solution they envision.

Many of the Syrian volunteers started their work with CARE without much experience, usually quite shy and not very comfortable to communicate to others. Even after just one month of trainings and daily follow-up, the difference is noticeable. Israa Badawiye for example, one of CARE's volunteers, mentioned how it led her to change also her own behaviour inside her house. When she has nieces over, she now gives them advice about positive parenting, as the work within the project gave her the confidence and standing to also seek to change her personal environment.

Municipalities are the administrative bodies which are most directly and regularly confronted with the realities of refugees' presence. **It is therefore critical to integrate them in practice as full partners in the planning, implementation and evaluation of emergency, recovery and development initiatives and increase the support they receive.** While in theory this is already the case (e.g. in the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan), interviews made clear in practice this is not always the case, and support is ad hoc. Moreover, they experience a dire lack of support from the central government which does not provide concrete policy guidelines or sufficient financial resources for decent hosting of refugees at the local level. The different municipality representatives interviewed for this research clearly stated that their responsibilities include the well-being of all people living on their territory - no matter their nationality - as well as a responsibility to reduce sources of communal tensions:

*"My role is to treat the entire community equally. I'm also very transparent. If we receive any funds, I put it on Facebook so everyone knows what we get and what we do with the money. So they learn to trust the municipality, and see there is no corruption. In fact, they trust us so much now, they call us for everything, even internal household disputes"*²⁴.

Confronted with social tensions on a daily basis, municipalities take action:

*"Just this week, Syrian and Lebanese children started fighting and it escalated so we had to intervene before the whole neighbourhood got involved"*²⁵.

The local level is also where Lebanese citizens can see concrete differences because of aid coming in:

*"Two years ago it was worse than now, but somehow it improved by putting up the municipality as it is the only legal entity here. People's mentality improved because of that, as they felt they now had a space to come with their problems (for both Lebanese and Syrians), an umbrella for the government. And they saw some concrete changes, with for example some streets that were asphalted with UNDP money"*²⁶.

In order to ensure that municipal action and local services respond to the needs of the populations, it would be particularly relevant to introduce the use of Community Score Cards (CSCs)²⁷. Developed by CARE in Malawi in 2002, CSCs are about bringing together service users to decide what they want to get from a particular service, to 'score' how well that service is being delivered, and to negotiate with service providers to address problems and make improvements, followed by joint monitoring. For example, Lebanese and refugees could rate a local hospital, after which there is a facilitated discussion with staff from that hospital and the municipality. Such approach has the potential to increase both the quality of the service and the trust between users and providers and it leads to more active citizenship and accountability. Local committees, with representatives from different communities and social classes, could provide a very interesting entry point for such CSCs.

²⁴ Meeting with two heads of municipalities, Halba, 30 May 2018.

²⁵ Meeting with two heads of municipalities, Halba, 30 May 2018.

²⁶ Meeting with two heads of municipalities, Wadi El Nahleh, 30 May 2018.

²⁷ [CARE Toolkit Community Score Card](#).

UNLOCKING ACCESS TO JOBS AND FINANCE

Safe, legal access to the labour market is important to allow refugees to continue to be self-reliant, and reduces the vulnerability and feeling of loss of dignity associated with dependence on outside assistance. At the same time, competition over jobs is the number one cause of tensions between refugees and host communities in Lebanon.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES: HOW TO ENHANCE REFUGEES' ACCESS TO WAGE LABOUR

Within this larger picture of the Lebanese economy, refugees are trying to make a living to support themselves and their families, but they hit a number of boundaries in that process.

To be able to safely and legally access employment, they first of all require a stable **legal status** in the country. Legal presence for refugees in Lebanon is possible in two ways:

- **Registration with UNHCR.** This pathway was halted by the government in January 2015, so over one third of refugees are simply 'recorded' rather than registered. From January 2015 until June 2016, refugees 'recorded' by UNHCR were also compelled to sign a 'pledge not to work', which means they could only legally sustain their livelihoods through humanitarian assistance.
- **Find a 'kafeel'** (sponsor), which is possible for those refugees with money or connections: *"Syrians do not need to register to work their way up in Lebanon. Success stories include artists (painter, musician), NGO workers, consultants, trainers... It can work if you have a network and have an own sponsor"*²⁸. For most people, finding a kafeel is very hard though, and puts the refugees at serious risk of exploitation vis-à-vis the sponsor.

Neither of these options offers much legal protection and most refugees in Lebanon have little or no legal means to earn a living. Moreover, some refugees are neither registered nor recorded.

The 2017 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASYR) - survey noted that roughly **74 per cent of surveyed Syrian refugees over the age of 15 did not have legal residency** and that the percentage of refugees with legal residency has been steadily declining over recent years.²⁹ This lack of a legal status makes refugees vulnerable to mistreatment and even incarceration, and has led to severe **restrictions on freedom of movement**: *"They might not deport us, but at the checkpoints, they take people to prison, stick you in an overcrowded cell for one day and then let you go. But they have put a stamp in my passport that I had to leave the country"*³⁰.

As a result, refugees tend to restrict their movement to avoid checkpoints and interactions with authorities. This – in turn – affects their prospects for work, as well as access to health and education services.

If they are legally present, Syrians are **allowed to work in three sectors** where competition with Lebanese people is considered less likely: construction, agriculture and 'environment', which entails garbage collection and cleaning services. **Only 0.5 per cent of refugees of working age in Lebanon have work permits.**

²⁸ Focus group discussion with local NGO partners, Tripoli, 28 May 2018.

²⁹ VASYR (2017). This decrease is due to a substantial portion of the refugees not falling under the waiver to pay 200 USD annually to renew their legal residence, and the four-step procedure to register new borns, which includes having a Syrian marriage certificate, legal presence in Lebanon (until September 2017) and the transfer of the records to the civil registry in Syria- which refugees might want to avoid.

³⁰ Interview with Syrian Refugee, Halba, Akkar, 30 May 2018.

But given the huge prevalence of informal Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Lebanon, the high level of irregular wage employment by Syrians should not come as a surprise. Only 32% of Syrian workers have a permanent job and a stable income. In that respect, the lack of registration of Syrian or Lebanese employees does not necessarily indicate exploitation.

While the official numbers are thus extremely limited, **in practice, Syrians work in all kinds of sectors, seeking to improve their livelihoods.** This is critical to their survival, as even the most vulnerable refugees receive just 27 USD for food assistance, in some cases combined with other forms of protection cash assistance. This is by no means sufficient to cover even basic costs, with rents alone being at least 150 USD per month.

The daily wage for informal workers in Tripoli ranges between 25,000 and 35,000 Lebanese Pounds regardless of years of experience and university degree. When they have a job (whether a daily job, a few weeks, or a longer term job), regardless of the sector, Syrians always earn less than Lebanese workers and hardly ever get managerial jobs, a **significant under-employment of a highly educated work force:**

“Yes we hire Syrians, but only in ‘hidden’ back office. In general, Lebanese look down on Syrians, will never hire them as managers. (second person adds:) And also because it is illegal to make them work in my business, so if there is a problem with authorities, we have to bribe. But we do it, since they are not just cheaper, as we don’t pay social security for them, but they are also more committed”³¹.

So it is common to find engineers working as taxi drivers or doctors and translators working in agriculture, like olive picking.

While there is substantial competition between Syrians and Lebanese in the taxi and restaurant sectors, the significance of these sectors in the Lebanese economy are limited, and in the agriculture and construction sectors, competition is mostly in between migrant workers³². Syrians are often covering jobs considered as ‘Dirty, Dangerous and Difficult’ and therefore undesired by Lebanese citizens. It should thus not come as a surprise that several employers (both Lebanese MSMEs and larger companies), in sectors as varied as printing, sewing and construction, spoke about their fear of having to close their business when Syrians would return. Moreover, there is no control by the Ministry of Labour, and therefore no consequences like fines for the employer. **Trade unions are considered ineffective**, and Syrians are barred from joining them.

Lebanese host communities uniformly blame Syrians for driving down wages, which suggests that Syrian workers are able to negotiate wages, refuse work, or wait for an opportunity with better pay. But this is rarely the case.

“I worked as a nurse in a hospital where the agreement was that I get paid 600,000 Lebanese Pounds as a wage. Few days after I started work, the hospital management informed me that I will be paid only 500,000 Lebanese pounds. When I objected, they told me that I was Syrian and didn’t have a residence permit, so I am not supposed to be working anyway. They told me to consider the 100,000 Lebanese pounds difference as a penalty for not having a work permit”

(Mohammad, health service provider, Tripoli).

³¹Focus group discussion with Lebanese SMEs, Tripoli, 31 May 2018.

This quote came from two employers, one from construction sector and one in agrifood industry.

³²Uzelac, A. and Meester, J. (2018), p.39.

Interestingly, when asked about the **position of women** in the workforce, some of the arguments used by employers were the same as for Syrians:

“We have women in the kitchen but not in the restaurant, only in the back. We recruit women because they stay, get lower wages, are more committed and cause less problems in the workplace. Culturally women are not expected to have the primary breadwinning role, only secondary. So they don’t often get jobs at managerial level”³³.

In order to enhance skills of male and female refugees and host communities, CARE has engaged in **vocational training**, often combined with training in **life skills**, such as the capacity to assert oneself, to set objectives, to make decisions, to communicate or to manage difficult situations, as well as basic career and job placement support. With partners Ruwwad, SHIFT and the Tripoli Entrepreneurs Club for example, over 1000 youth and women in Tripoli are being trained.

Vocational training is important, as the labour market suffers from an **overabundance of workers at the high and low ends of the skills spectrum**. There is a so-called **“missing middle”**, e.g. far fewer semi-skilled people with technical knowledge, like plumbers, AC maintenance technicians, carpenters or middle management staff:

“In my construction business, in theory we have overqualified staff, but in practice they are not qualified. We just have to train our own staff, both on personal soft skills and at practical level, with technical training and coaching. Then we have a pool of people, and we have to hope not to lose them too quickly to Beirut or abroad, where they earn higher salaries”³⁴.

However, there are **far too few jobs available in the labour market to accommodate everyone**:

“Some refugees have become ‘professional students’. They are attracted by the training because of the refreshments and the transport offer, and go from one training to the next (to fill the time)”³⁵.

For skills building training such as vocational training to really lead to jobs, it is crucial to have **up-to-date market studies**, to know where the **sectors with most potential for inclusive growth and job creation** are and what **skills gaps** need to be filled. From extensive research in the LEADERS project, of which CARE is a member, there is considerable potential in the sectors of **agro-food/food processing** (Lebanon’s most productive industrial sector), **construction** (which employs a large number of non-nationals and has traditionally served as a driver of growth), **tourism, jewellery making, and nursing and childcare** services³⁶. The large potential of work in the **recycling sector** should also be mentioned, given the huge waste management problem that exists in Lebanon. The issue was mentioned by officials in every single municipality, as well as by every NGO, UN or donor official we spoke to.

An interesting suggestion, that would **connect available labour - both Lebanese and Syrians - with demand**, is to set up an online platform and an app where employers can post job opportunities, while protecting privacy data (important for all, but even more for Syrians who mostly lack legal papers). Another option, successfully piloted by a local NGO in Akkar is the establishment of a hotline, that employers can call to get connected to recent graduates of vocational training programmes who meet their requirements.

³³ Extract from Focus Group Discussion with 12 SME businessmen, Tripoli, 31 May 2018.

³⁴ Extract from Focus Group Discussion with 12 SME businessmen, Tripoli, 31 May 2018.

³⁵ Meeting with local NGO partners, Tripoli, 28 May 2018.

³⁶ LEADERS- DRC, Save the Children, Oxfam, CARE, ACTED, Makhzoumi Foundation (2017) ‘Skills Gap Analysis For Improved Livelihood Sustainability In Lebanon, Competency Needs And Skills Gap Analysis Of The Private Sector In Mount Lebanon, Tripoli And The Bekaa.’ See also UNDP (2016) ‘Mind the gap: A labour needs assessment for Lebanon. Agrofood-construction-ICT’.

The **in-kind economy** offers additional opportunities. In Jordan, CARE has established a so-called **TIME Bank**, which connects vulnerable people - regardless of nationality - who wish to exchange services. For example, a plumber might offer to resolve a plumbing problem in exchange for a number of teaching hours or medical support for his children. This sort of informal exchange is likely to be much less sensitive than traditional paid employment. In Egypt, Jordan and Turkey, Syrian medical professionals and teachers are also allowed to **provide services to other Syrians**, as an exception to the existing labour market restrictions³⁷, which would allow for less 'de-skilling' of the refugee population.

In general, what stands out in Lebanon is **the lack of Syrian community support groups**. In contrast, in Egypt for example, a Syrian Business Association was set up, enabling Syrians to support each other with employment opportunities, vocational training, information networks

and advocacy on their own behalf³⁸. Our research did not identify any such Syrian-led group in Lebanon, perhaps also because of earlier backlash against protests³⁹, and in general there seems to be little **rights-based advocacy**. This is also confirmed by Clingendael: *"Red lines (around non-refoulement, basic human rights and quality of asylum) are currently not just absent from public discourse, but -more worryingly- also from private conversations among key stakeholders"*⁴⁰. **Specific support should be provided to Syrian self-help groups, so they can advocate for their rights** at various levels. This way Syrians would not just be made aware that they have rights, but also learn the skills to collectively ask for their rights. This does not exclude service provision but combines it with a community building approach and collective capacity building, attenuating the isolation felt by vulnerable groups that is being reinforced by individual service provision.

SUPPORTING SYRIANS TO CREATE THEIR BUSINESSES: THE ROAD TO SUCCESS?

In an **economy dominated by Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)** and where most jobs are in the informal sector, **self-employment is key**⁴¹. Some Syrians have tried to contribute to the economy by opening a business, e.g. a grocery store, a small catering business, oriental sweets, pastries, coffee shop, ice cream parlour, cutting hair or sewing clothes.

At present, Syrian refugees are not legally allowed to be self-employed though, which means that **in order to benefit from any sort of business investment, Syrians must find a Lebanese partner**, who will be the legal owner on paper. Beyond just lending their name, various levels of partnership exist. For example you can find Lebanese shopkeepers who opened up their space to a Syrian skilled refugee to diversify the business in that location. Or in agriculture areas such as Akkar, some landlords had stopped the cultivation of their lands due to the high operation costs, but they have now been able to restart cultivation by giving the land to a Syrian refugee family and giving them a low wage in return for their work. But all these forms of partnership **leave the door open for exploitation of Syrians by their Lebanese counterparts**.

³⁷ *Jobs make the difference* p.58.

³⁸ *Jobs make the difference*, p.60.

³⁹ Hall, R. (2017) *'Lebanon banned all protests after Syrians called for better refugee conditions'*, in: *PRI*, 17 July 2017.

⁴⁰ Uzelac, A. and Meester, J. (2018), p.5.

⁴¹ *The ILO notes there is an usually high rate of self-employment in Lebanon for a middle income country- about three-quarters of those informally employed were self-employed, which corresponds to about 30% of all employed persons. (ILO Regional Office (2015)).*

Discrimination is also a threat, as **arbitrary decisions** are often made:

“There have been cases in 2017 whereby the Ministry of Labour decided to close all Syrian businesses in the area, even those co-owned by Lebanese partners. It can be triggered by filed complaints or electoral campaigns. Some villages decided to impose a curfew”⁴².

These decisions have nothing to do with the law as most businesses are informal. As a result of that **high risk of expropriation**, even those refugees who might have the means to invest will not be inclined to take such risk.

In general, many MSMEs can use **support to grow their business**. CARE therefore decided to work with local partners such as the Tripoli Entrepreneurs Club, to select business owners to get individual support and training to strengthen and expand their businesses, set up standardised business development services training program for over 200 MSMEs and organise bootcamps of intensive business training for yet other MSMEs.

Feedback is overwhelmingly positive:

“The activities learned were an eye opener, gave me a boost of confidence that I can do more in life, shifted my perspective and cleared my vision”

“So many things to do that increase my productivity instead of focusing on one market and keep my income stable”

“I never actually focused on my values or learned before anywhere especially for mentoring and dealing with others”

All small and medium-scale entrepreneurs also face the **common challenge of access to financing**. Even registered businesses do not - in practice - have no access to **bank loans or investments**: *“You need big collateral to get a bank loan, or someone to sponsor you, which then gives that sponsor power over you. Legislation is made for big capital to remain big. Banks in Lebanon take zero risks, they only support the ones who are too big to fail. There are also no venture capitalists, or structural investment schemes. It is all based on connections, on finding rich sponsors”⁴³.*

An additional restriction for Syrians is that they are not even allowed to open bank accounts, a condition which needs to be relaxed, and prevent them from applying and getting any loan.

In this context, **grants provided by aid actors to support small businesses are very welcome**. CARE for example held a competition as part of a wider project, whereby the top 20 start ups can get a grant of 3500 USD, based on criteria such as sustainability of business, commitment, and the extent to which this small contribution can have an impact. The monetary award is then combined with intensive business coaching to help beneficiaries get the most out of their new capital. While this kind of approach has proven successful and sustainable with existing entrepreneurs (more so than with start-ups) and should ideally be further scaled up, but the high cost of the grants – relative to the scale of need - mean that this sort of assistance will remain accessible for only a small fraction of businesses.

Combining the promotion of entrepreneurship and social stability is also possible, as partner NGO Makhzoumi⁴⁴ explained:

⁴² Meeting with local NGO partners, Tripoli, 28 May 2018.

⁴³ Extract from Focus Group Discussion with 12 SME businessmen, Tripoli, 31 May 2018.

⁴⁴ “Makhzoumi Foundation Partner”

“An NGO gave grants to entrepreneurs on the condition that a Lebanese and Syrian partner would team up and put in a business proposal together. For example a Lebanese and Syrian fisherman got a grant to buy a boat together, and now five years after the project, they are still working together”⁴⁵. In other cases this approach failed though because of the imbalanced power relation described above.

An additional step beyond grants would be to further scale up **micro-finance loans**, which currently exist but often demand exorbitant interest rates of 25% or higher. It can be a more sustainable model than grants and **improves risk sharing and therefore stabilizes ownership**, addressing two major challenges frequently cited by respondents as undermining the sustainability of businesses supported by grants. A particularly interesting model for Lebanon could be the one employed by the **Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs)**. A VSLA is a self-managed group of 20-30 individuals that meets on a regular basis to provide its members a safe place to **save their money, to access loans, and to obtain emergency insurance**. CARE has promoted VSLAs for over 25 years to enable women living in poverty to increase their financial management skills, gain access to and control over resources, and generate economic opportunities and income⁴⁶. It has been successfully tested with Syrian refugees by CARE Jordan, who has united over 2300 Jordanian and Syrian women in VSLAs since 2013. The VSLAs have proven to increase household livelihood security, as well as be a springboard for women’s wider empowerment, as women are able to increase confidence, become familiar with their rights and actively participate in decision making processes.

In practice, despite inventive strategies to survive, the 2017 vulnerability assessment showed a clear **increase in poverty of Syrian refugees**, with 76% of Syrian refugee households living below the poverty line with the average debt for a Syrian refugee family being USD 789. As a result, all refugees and NGOs confirmed an increase in **negative coping strategies**, in particular borrowing money to buy food of pay for healthcare costs:

“We borrow money from neighbours. If my husband is sick and take a one-day leave, it will be taken from his salary. If it happens twice, he’s likely to get fired”⁴⁷.

Households sell key assets (mattresses, medicine, water heater, toilet door...), or send their children to work to help increase the family’s income (for example working as delivery boys), instead of going to school. In addition, several refugees mentioned how they had no option but to eat less, or eat only bread, in difficult times: *“I am a liar. I just keep borrowing from the mini-market and tell him I’ll repay him. For the very worst time, I keep a UNHCR cash card so at least we can buy bread so we don’t starve”⁴⁸.* Several respondents also mentioned how they noticed an increase in polygamous marriages – a practice which was not very common before – as well as increased incidences of drugs abuse by adolescents. Lastly, an unintentional side-effect of UNHCR’s decision two years ago to maintain assistance for families with new-born babies while significantly cutting other types of aid, has led to an increased number of pregnancies. Given these negative indicators, there is a **huge importance of continuing humanitarian aid support to Syrian refugees** and prevent their vulnerabilities from increasing even further, while keeping to increase the boundaries they hit to be able to take care of themselves and their families.

⁴⁵ Meeting with local NGO partners, Tripoli, 28 May 2018.

⁴⁶ In 2009, CARE set out to scale up VSLAs and has since expanded access to this savings-led, community-based financial solution from an initial 1 million members in 2008 to 6.7 million across 46 countries today. These members represent 317,335 groups of predominantly rural, poor women collectively saving and investing over \$433 million per year.

⁴⁷ Interview with female Syrian refugee, Tripoli, 29 May 2018.

⁴⁸ Interview with male Syrian refugee, Halba, Akkar, 30 May 2018.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the majority of Syrian refugees in Lebanon none of the durable solutions are currently in sight, whether that is return, integration or resettlement. It is critical to ensure that the **non-refoulement principle is respected by all relevant parties and is a red line when it comes to non-humanitarian donor engagement**. In addition, it is in everyone's interest to seek to reduce tensions and improve livelihoods of both Lebanese and refugee communities, thereby contributing to the economic development and stability of Lebanon.

The number one change needed to improve refugees' feeling of security, increased access to services, improvement of protection and increase of their self-reliance through better access to employment, is the granting of a stable legal status. The **government of Lebanon should adopt a fair and transparent system that allows all refugees to obtain and maintain legal residency without fees or sponsorship**.

The aid sector can further support refugees' and host communities' access to employment by supporting a more **holistic approach to economic empowerment**. This approach should combine a skills sharing approach (in kind economy), connect employers to graduates from skills building training, improve businesses' capacity, and increase options for small businesses to access pro-poor savings schemes and loans, such as Village Savings and Loan Associations or existing financial institutions. Real economic empowerment also entails seeking to change the power relations between men and women, leading to gender transformation at both household and societal levels.

In order for **Lebanon to ensure that interventions benefit society as a whole, the Government of Lebanon should develop a national development plan**, formulated in collaboration with UN agencies and local and international civil society. The plan should focus on poverty reduction and reducing inequality in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. This would ensure a transparent framework that encompasses commitments from national and international stakeholders, into which the Capital Investment Plan or European External Investment Plan (for investment in large scale infrastructure such as electricity, transportation, wastewater and sewage) could be incorporated.

A national development plan should also include a decent work agenda, which leads to employment promotion, as well as increased respect for fundamental workers' rights and international labour standards (including of refugees), social protection, and social dialogue. The **international donor community should also make clear that (nonhumanitarian) investments are conditioned upon respect for the non-refoulement principle**.

Given the disconnect between the narrative of some Lebanese authorities at the national level, and the reality of refugee presence in cities, it is crucial to **better support municipalities**, by helping them to identify practical solutions to the challenges they face on a daily basis. They must be integrated in practice as full partners in the planning, implementation and evaluation of emergency, recovery and development initiatives and get a higher level of funding to set up rights-based Local Economic Development Plans. The **One Neighbourhood Approach could be a perfect fit**. CARE's experience has demonstrated that implementing such an area-based approach, responds to both the individual needs of the most vulnerable refugee and host community households. As such, it would address the needs of the wider community, enhance capabilities and dignity, and reduce tensions.

The process of working at a municipal level, and **promoting what Syrian refugees and Lebanese hosts have in common (rather than focusing on nationality) can reduce tensions, allowing** bridging social capital to increase and more role models and champions to emerge in civil society. This could challenge the narrative which casts refugees as a burden on Lebanese society.



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CARE International in Lebanon

Badaro | Sami El Soleh Ave

Serhal Building | 4th floor

Beirut | Lebanon

T) + 961 1 381 775

E) info@careliban.org for the local information



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