



Children throw rocks into the sea in a camp for Palestinian refugees in Northern Lebanon. Violent clashes erupted in this camp in 2007, resulting in the displacement of more than 30,000 people. Photo: Nour/2017

‘WE’RE NOT THERE YET...’

Voices of refugees from Syria in Lebanon

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Photos in this report were taken by Syrian and Palestinian refugee volunteers

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This research project looked at the perceptions and expectations of refugees in Lebanon in relation to their future, but also to their present situation and their past experiences. The report aims to open up discussions on lasting solutions that allow for refugees to influence the decisions being made and define conceptions of safe and dignified living. It argues that the perceptions, lived experiences and expectations of the refugees themselves should be the building blocks of their future, whereby freedom to make choices is a fundamental component of dignity.

This research project seeks to amplify the voices and concerns of refugees from Syria, and to investigate and report their own stories and needs. The study adopted a participatory approach, involving refugees at every stage of the research process. The research also captured the experiences of displaced Palestine Refugees in Lebanon (PRL) and of the Lebanese who were previously displaced, and generates indicative data on their experiences.

The overall project informs current and future Oxfam programming in Lebanon, and policy and influencing strategies.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANERA	American Near East Refugee Aid
GSO	General Security Office
IS	Informal settlement
ITS	Informal tented settlement
IDP	Internally displaced people
IAMP	Inter-Agency Mapping
FGD	Focus group discussion
NGO	Non-government organization
PRL	Palestine refugees in Lebanon
PRS	Palestine refugees from Syria
TOR	Terms of reference
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
USD	United States dollar

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the Syrian crisis enters its sixth year, the world is witness to what has been characterized as the largest humanitarian emergency of our time. More than 11 million people have fled their homes, of which around five million have sought refuge in neighbouring countries.¹ According to the Government of Lebanon, the country is hosting 1.5 million refugees from Syria, of whom 1,011,366 registered with UNHCR.² In addition, there were 31,502 registered Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS) as of December 2016,³ a decrease from the peak of 41,413 in December 2014.⁴

In addition to the significant challenges that come with being a refugee, those seeking refuge from Syria in neighbouring countries, and in particular in Lebanon, face difficult living conditions. Here, the government rejects calls to foster integration, and some tensions with host communities persist. Additionally, resettlement procedures are highly selective and complicated and there is currently no prospect of safe return. Public debate regarding temporary responses and durable solutions should acknowledge the needs and expectations of refugees, and should recognize that such responses must be adapted to suit the most pressing needs over time.

In light of these apparently dire prospects for the future, the aim of this research project is to amplify the voices and concerns of refugees, and to investigate and report their own stories and needs. It argues that the perceptions, lived experiences and expectations of the refugees themselves should be the building blocks of durable solutions, whereby freedom to make choices is a fundamental component of dignity. The study therefore focuses on the perceptions and expectations of refugees in relation to their future, but also to their present situation and their past experiences. In keeping with the aim of the project, it adopts a participatory approach, involving refugees from Syria in every stage of the research process.

The research also captures different experiences of displacement in the country to generate indicative data on the internal displacement of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon (PRL) and the Lebanese who were previously displaced.

The most vital factor that unites all people in displacement is their search for safety.

During the study, refugees from Syria, along with PRL and previously displaced Lebanese, all emphasized safety as their highest priority when fleeing violence or persecution. Yet the reality rarely met this expressed need, since only 21 percent of the Syrian refugee and 24 percent of Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS) respondents felt they were able to find safety in Lebanon. The perceived lack of protection in Lebanon has a significant impact on respondents, leaving them feeling unsafe and vulnerable at all times.

The sense of safety, or the lack of it, was associated with a number of factors. The lack of valid residency documents, for instance, has resulted in a decreased sense of safety among the refugee population, leading to self-imposed restrictions on movement. Limited or no access to work and workplace exploitation are other factors that cause refugees to feel anxiety about their level of safety; feelings that are linked to the inability to generate income and meet the family's needs. Respondents specifically referred to the recurrent threat of eviction that refugees face when they fail to pay rent. Finally, access to services, particularly access to education, was repeatedly identified as part of their understanding and definition of safety.

Safety was found to be a priority for PRL too, many of whom explained that although they may have found sanctuary from war, a different kind of insecurity had replaced the conflict in their homeland, and references to drugs and the normalization of violence informed many interviewee responses. The Lebanese respondents' definitions of safety varied over time; some associated it with the presence of security bodies, while others related it instead to gestures toward peace and peacemaking within the prevailing political rhetoric.

Human dignity is a priority for all, no matter what situation one may live in, or what country one may come from. Refugees from Syria expected to find a dignified life in Lebanon. Yet instead, the majority of participants identified that one of their greatest losses was that of dignity. From the stereotypes and hostility generated by the host community, to feelings of helplessness and daily humiliation, the space afforded to refugees within their communities is shrinking by the day, denying them the chance to a dignified life.

This research project draws on past and present experiences to understand the future expectations of refugees, in addition to the lived experiences of PRL and previously displaced Lebanese. This project emerges from the firm belief that **refugees must be given the space to make an informed decision about their future.** Discussions with refugees regarding their conceptions of a safe and dignified future point towards protection as a central consideration. Equally, respondents emphasized the importance of dignity as a core component to guarantee such a future. Protection and human dignity should be central pillars of any effort intended to end displacement and ease its consequences.

Less than **4 percent of Syrian respondents** and only **7 percent of PRS respondents** expressed a wish to remain in Lebanon. Refugees often described feeling stuck in the country, and having no possible future in it. According to the refugees themselves, for them to see tangible improvements to their safety and sense of dignity in Lebanon, the sponsorship system would have to be cancelled. Women, particularly, prioritized the receipt of assistance from UN agencies and NGOs, and a clear need was identified in relation to the right to work. Present protection threats that hinder refugees' safe and dignified living situations should be eliminated, in order to open new spaces to enable refugees to plan for their future.

Opinions on whether resettling to a third country was a preferred solution were polarized. For some, it represented an opportunity for a safe and dignified future, while for others it represented the loss of any hope for a return to Syria in the future. Opinions on resettlement to a third country seem to depend greatly on what respondents foresee for Syria in the future. Overall, 22 percent of the Syrian respondents and 34 percent of PRS respondents reported wanting to resettle in a third country. Temporary admissions, too, were viewed as a mid-term solution that could improve their current situations until return to Syria is possible, as reported by 28 percent of the Syrian respondents and 23 percent of the PRS respondents. Mechanisms whereby refugees apply for resettlement or temporary admissions were favoured by refugees over the current vetting procedures. Family unity emerged as another important factor to consider when relocating to a third country.

The research also identified the need for durable solutions for PRS, which were identified as a neglected group in the response planning. While Palestinian refugees are denied their right to return to their country of origin, they should have equal access to protection in a third country, as all refugees, including through resettlement and other forms of humanitarian admissions. Therefore, resettlement and humanitarian admissions to a third country should be increased, particularly to respond to those refugees who believe that temporary or long-term protection could be attained through such resettlement programmes.

Furthermore, the vast majority of refugees from Syria stress that their **preferred solution is to return to their country of origin as soon as conditions allow.** Safety is a decisive factor for all refugees in the decision to return home. Before certain conditions are met, namely the end of the war and the establishment of safety, the majority of refugees from Syria believe they have no option to return. In respect of the principle of non-refoulement, there should be no plans in the short term to force refugees to return to their homeland, given justified concerns over safety. When those conditions will be met, access to accurate information regarding the safety, and the broader situation of the particular region that they were forced to flee is therefore paramount. Refugees should also be allowed to make such decisions after being able to visit their hometowns and judge the situation themselves. If and when a safe return can be assured, the main priorities identified by Syrian respondents were the availability of shelter, reconstruction, work opportunities and financial support.

The research also reveals that the PRL and previously displaced Lebanese have not necessarily overcome the challenges associated with their displacement, with many reporting that they have yet to fully regain a sense of safety and dignity. Thus, further efforts should be made to bring about reconciliation and transitional justice processes for the Lebanese, and greater attention should be given to the PRL conditions in Lebanon. Palestinians still need to be granted their basic rights, to ensure their stay in Lebanon is safe and dignified.



An informal tented settlement in the Bekaa valley. Living conditions are dire for Syrian refugees living in the 655 informal tented settlements scattered across the Bekaa Valley where temperatures drop below zero in winter and reach 40°C in summer. Photo: Mohammad Ali

1 INTRODUCTION

With the total number of Syrian refugees worldwide exceeding 5 million,⁵ and 6.5 million internally displaced,⁶ the Syria crisis has been recognized as the biggest humanitarian emergency of our time. According to the Government of Lebanon, the number of Syrian refugees is estimated to be 1.5 million people, of whom 1,011,366 are registered with UNHCR.⁷ In addition, there were 31,502 registered Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS) as of December 2016,⁸ a decrease from the peak of 41,413 in December 2014,⁹ according to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), due to a number of reasons, including, but not limited to, return to Syria and moving to third countries.

The PRS are a particularly vulnerable and understudied group of all those affected by the crisis. As refugees in Syria before the current crisis broke out, they have twice been subjected to the hardships that life in a foreign country brings. According to American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA),¹⁰ PRS 'have fewer legal protections than other communities, no legal employment possibilities, and are mostly lodged with the poorest host communities in Lebanon'.

The government's response to the presence of Syrian refugees has been characterized by short-term policies that reinforce what they consider to be a temporary stay in Lebanon. At the political level, the government's stance regarding a durable solution for Syrian refugees makes no provision for local integration. In principle, it rejects the integration of refugees and does not consider itself a country of asylum, but rather one of transit,¹¹ arguing that the political dynamics already present within the country make for a precarious sectarian balance.¹² The Lebanese government has also referred to resettlement as a non-solution, due to the very low numbers that this has applied to so far, a fraction of the total caseload. As a result, the government's discourse on durable solutions for refugees from Syria is framed by calls from several high-ranking officials for refugees to be returned to so-called 'safe zones' in Syria, in coordination with the Syrian government.¹³

A combination of government policy and the country's limited resources and infrastructure make for a challenging environment in Lebanon that stands in the way of adequate responses to the refugee influx. For the refugees themselves, many felt that resettlement does not offer a real option due to the difficult living conditions in Lebanon and the fact that they are unable to directly apply for resettlement or other humanitarian admissions. As a result of desperation and uncertainty, a large number of refugees resorted to unofficial and risky routes to Europe, in the hope of escaping poverty and finding safety as quickly as possible. In addition to the dangers posed by these irregular travels, and the conditions in host countries, any prospects of a safe and dignified return to Syria, considering the current status of the conflict, is not foreseeable in the near future.

2 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

2.1 PURPOSE

An international NGOs briefing from 2015¹⁴ called on the international community to adopt a new humanitarian approach which offers 'hope, safety and dignity to the millions of refugees, and gives them a chance to contribute to the societies and economies of their hosts'. In support of this goal, Oxfam launched this research project with the aim of developing a more participatory approach that gives greater attention to the role of refugees in defining their future. The research aims to open up discussions on durable solutions that allow for refugees to express their agency and define conceptions of safe and dignified life. The overall project informs current and future Oxfam programming, but also policy and influencing strategies. Oxfam hopes that the findings of this research will serve as stepping stones in discussions on displacement and durable solutions for refugees from Syria. This report is limited to considering the prospects for refugees from Syria in Lebanon.

Accordingly, this research project raises the voices, concerns and challenges of refugees and '*tells it like it is*'.¹⁵ The research argues that refugees' perceptions, lived experiences and expectations should be the building blocks of durable solutions, whereby freedom to make choices is a fundamental component of dignity. Consequently, it puts human dignity at the core of the debate, while factoring in structural drivers and specific intersections in vulnerable groups' identities, to avoid further marginalization. The latter is not specific to nationality or religion but, rather, should overcome demographic considerations to target all those affected. For the purposes of this research, human dignity will be directly associated with its definition as provided by the refugees interviewed. In fact, conversations with refugees on the topic were framed around dignified life rather than the concept of human dignity. Accordingly, this research uses the latter concept in the way that it relates to the definitions of dignified life explored by refugees. Those definitions are outlined in the findings below, and should be the defining feature of any approach to durable solutions.

Based on the reviewed literature, this study also aims to contribute to knowledge concerning durable solutions for refugees from Syria in Lebanon, from their own perspective. Emphasizing agency and ownership, the research affirms the importance of allowing refugees to define their own future, and therefore adopts a different perspective on durable solutions to many mainstream positions.

The report begins by presenting the contextual background of the situation of refugees in Lebanon. The purpose and scope of the research are then detailed. The methodology section explains the data collection and sampling processes, with a particular focus on the participatory approach adopted in this research. The findings of the research project are categorized into two main sections: refugees from Syria, and people previously displaced in Lebanon. The first section explores the lives of refugees from Syria in the past, and looks into their narratives and lived experience of displacement. Perceptions and expectations of safety and dignity are afforded particularly close study. The last subsection examines the specific needs and expectations they identified in relation to a safe and dignified future, and details refugees' perceptions of durable solutions. The second part of the findings explores the narratives of the PRL and Lebanese who were previously or already displaced in the country. It delves into the experience of displacement itself, and later studies perceptions of the end of the displacement experience, and the range of factors that impact on that. Finally, the report explores the expectations and perceptions of the future, as experienced by both groups.

Acknowledging that the dynamics of every conflict are different, this report assesses lessons learned and perceptions of displacement, not to draw comparisons, but rather to explore the recurring themes in narratives of displacement, as well as the way that post-conflict situations

impact perceptions and expectations for the future, and to understand which factors most strongly influence perceptions of the end of displacement.

2.2 SCOPE

This research primarily focuses on the perceptions, lived experiences and expectations of Syrian refugees, and the PRS population, in order to gain an insight into their own narratives, and to offer them the opportunity to give voice to the challenges that confront them. Accordingly, this project answers the following research question: *What are the perceptions and expectations of refugees in relation to their past, present and future prospects?*

The research will respond to the following sub-questions:

1. What were their expectations for a safe and dignified living before displacement, and have they been met?
2. How have they been met, or not met?
3. What are their expectations for a safe and dignified future, and what are their perceptions of durable solutions?

Oxfam in Lebanon's 2015 research, which studied refugees' and host communities' coping mechanisms, attempted to investigate refugees' aspirations for the future; but researchers were thwarted by the reluctance on the part of interviewed refugees to discuss their future, owing to the weight of the hardships that they face. The current project, however, was able to explore in depth what refugees want and need concerning their future, as well as the ways in which their aspirations and expectations have changed over time.

The research focuses on perceptions, since they form the foundation of a person's outlook on life. Perceptions shape expectations, but also aspirations and ambitions. They define what concepts such as safety or dignity may mean for an individual or group, and the way they choose to achieve them. Perceptions and expectations are highly interrelated, and they often define one's present needs, perceived challenges and aspirations for the future. The focus on expectations and perceptions has already been examined in the context of durable solutions for Syrian refugees. An article published in *The Broker* in 2015 explored the push factors behind increasing numbers of refugees migrating to Europe.¹⁶ It states that 'the decision to migrate to Europe does not have to be rooted in a desire to live in Europe'. In fact, it explains that refugees are increasingly choosing to migrate to Europe because their expectations for a return to Syria – which remains their priority – are fading with the protracted nature of the conflict. In addition, socio-economic conditions in the countries bordering Syria have not met their needs.

The research narrates the lived experiences of Lebanese and PRL, which were chosen as examples of groups that have been through several phases of displacement as a result of a number of crises that have hit the country. Though not the focus of the research, this was used to generate indicative data on the relative impact of displacement on a host community which has itself been displaced on more than one occasion.¹⁷

2.3 VOICES OF THE DISPLACED

Over the past 15 years, Oxfam has conducted a number of protection assessments and surveys, ranging from a series of surveys of intention to return, conducted with refugees in West Timor, and later in Chad, Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire, to the annual protection assessments that have been carried out in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2006.¹⁸ The results of these surveys and assessments have provided valuable insights into how people are affected by conflict and crisis, what coping mechanisms they are using, and their views and ideas on what needs to happen to improve their situation.

In other contexts, a similar process has been adopted to focus on specific aspects of the protection situations; for example, in the Philippines or in Chad, where pressure is being placed on displaced populations to return home. In these cases, the surveys provide information on people's intentions, concerns and needs to ensure that the return process does not undermine their rights, increase their vulnerability or even put them at risk. In general, in countries where protection assessments and surveys have been carried out, the results have not only allowed country programmes to increase their understanding of the situation and to develop programmatic responses, but have also shaped advocacy priorities, civil society networks strategies, and provided stories and facts to support advocacy and campaigning work.¹⁹

Prior to this research Oxfam in Lebanon undertook a qualitative study of perceptions of safety and the self-protection strategies of refugees from Syria, Palestinians and Lebanese in 2015.²⁰ The study was used to inform programming efforts, as well as policy and advocacy work undertaken by the country programme since 2015. The research provided an in-depth analysis of the life of the interviewed population across the country, presenting in detail their protection concerns, as well as their strategies and mechanisms to find safety and protect themselves and their families or communities.

Overall, Oxfam's protection assessments have two key purposes: to ensure that humanitarian responses are appropriate and protection activities are included where necessary; and to develop a stronger evidence base to lobby and advocate for better protection of civilians. Both are fundamental to Oxfam's purpose and humanitarian mandate, and should be given equal weight.



Children sit outside their informal tented settlement in the Bekaa valley of Lebanon. Half of the school-aged Syrian refugee children in Lebanon are out of school. Photo: Yara and Rassil

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Building on the protection survey methodology developed by Oxfam over the years, this research used a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach. In acknowledging that there is considerable 'assessment fatigue' among refugees in the region, the research adopted a participatory approach, from the design of the survey questionnaires, to the data collection and analysis. Consultations with refugees were conducted to involve them in defining the focus of the project.

Participatory research is interesting in that it allows people to be actively involved in defining their priorities and seeking solutions. A key aspect of participatory research is the way it facilitates the study of perceptions, and caters for the most marginalized and vulnerable groups. In fact, through participatory research, those groups can raise their concerns and have their voices be heard. It allows for more accurate information about the communities involved in the research, and to question and evaluate assumptions, biases and power dynamics.²¹

The participatory approach was implemented in a variety of ways, particularly in respect to refugees from Syria and PRL.²² Selection of volunteers was based on criteria that included level of education and ease of access to the community. Oxfam, with the support of Utopia and Association Najdeh, selected 27 volunteers in Bekaa, 29 in the North, six in Beddawi and five in Chatila. Refugee volunteers were selected and trained on ethical data collection to participate in this research project, whereby the training is instrumental to an effective implementation of the participatory approach. Volunteers were consulted on the design of the survey, and each volunteer was allocated a number of interviews, with precise indications of gender and age required for respondents. The volunteers therefore surveyed refugees in their respective municipalities or districts, whereby the locations targeted were, to a certain extent, influenced by the ability of the data collectors to move safely.

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

The research project primarily examined Oxfam's existing areas of operations, namely, the Bekaa Valley and Tripoli in North Lebanon; the Chatila refugee camp, a Palestinian camp in the outskirts of Beirut; and Beddawi, a Palestinian camp in North Lebanon. Interviews were conducted with Lebanese respondents outside those geographic areas through the 'snowball' technique adopted by the researchers.²³ Areas such as Beirut, South Lebanon and Mount Lebanon²⁴ were specific targets of this project.

Two different approaches were used – one for refugees from Syria; the other for Lebanese and PRL respondents. For refugees from Syria, the data collection was divided into two phases, the first of which was used to inform the second one.

As part of the first phase and over a period of three weeks during November 2016, a total of 18 focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with refugees from Syria in different geographic locations. Open-ended questions were used to allow the researchers to probe and explore the perceptions and expectations of refugees, and to ensure flexibility in discussions. The most prominent themes, identified during FGDs conducted in the first phase, were used to formulate the questions of the surveys of the second phase, in consultation with refugee volunteers from the different communities.

The second phase (December 2016 to January 2017) was built on key themes and a preliminary analysis, based on the initial FGDs, in order to validate or reject hypotheses

formulated in the first phase. In view of these, a survey questionnaire was developed to further explore issues of concern. Refugee volunteers participated in designing as well as validating the survey questions through consultation sessions. During those sessions, volunteers explained the best way to formulate questions for people to understand what was asked of them. For instance, refugees recommended for the surveys to be written in spoken Arabic in order to ensure accuracy in communication and to avoid misinterpretation. They also modified the suggested answers, by removing, editing or adding options. The volunteers were also asked about the sensitivity of some topics, such as residency status, and confirmed which would be the most suitable questions to ask.

The study also explores the narratives of PRL who have been displaced, both from mandate Palestine and within Lebanon, as a result of a series of conflicts, as well as those of Lebanese who were displaced during the different wars that plagued the country. A qualitative method was used, since the researchers intended to explore the narratives of these two populations rather than bring to the fore any preconceived phenomena. The use of semi-structured methods such as in-depth interviews and FGDs allowed for greater flexibility.

3.3 RESPONDENT IDENTIFICATION AND SAMPLING

Identification of respondents for individual interviews

The Eastern Mediterranean region has seen multiple waves of displacement in the past century, some of which have directly impacted Lebanon, as the country has received different groups over time. In addition, the Lebanese and Palestinian population currently residing in Lebanon have directly experienced displacement in more recent years, and some of those affected have managed to find durable solutions. As a result, it was felt that it would be important to capture their reflections on their own perceptions of their displacement experience, their expectations when fleeing and when returning, and their feelings about the solutions to displacement that they themselves had lived through. A qualitative methodology was used whereby individual and group interviews were conducted with Key Informants in both communities. The PRL and Lebanese section of this report indicate a number of trends and common experiences of refugees during these periods. However, the researchers recognize that no far-reaching conclusions or generalizations should be drawn from this part of the research, as this was not the purpose of this study.

In total, 24 PRL Key Informants were interviewed in the form of gender disaggregated groups (two female groups and two male groups). PRL were asked about their life prior to displacement, and to reflect on the experience of displacement itself. They were also asked whether they considered that their displacement had ended, and the factors that contributed to such evaluations. The selection of participants was based on those who have experienced displacement within Lebanon, for instance, from Naher el Bared to Beddawi, and from Tal El Zaatar to Chatila. As for the Lebanese, a pilot group interview failed to yield the data intended, since Lebanese respondents were hesitant to discuss their experiences in the presence of others from their communities. Therefore, individual interviews were found to be more appropriate for this set of respondents. A total of 19 (11 female and 8 male) respondents participated in the research, among which were two *mukhtars* (local administrative officials) and a head of a municipality.

Open-ended questions were employed to ensure that information from the different types of participants was being reflected equally.

Refugees from Syria: focus group discussions

The sample was selected based on gender, age and location parameters. A total of 13 FGDs were conducted by Oxfam with Syrian refugees, (seven Bekaa and five North) with the participation of 56 females and 33 males. Additionally, five FGDs were conducted with Palestine refugees from Syria (two Beddawi and three Chatila) with the participation of 29 males and 25 females. A snowball technique was used to identify participants through focal points across the different locations. Focal points were asked to identify potential participants with certain profiles on the basis of gender and age, while taking into consideration representativeness in the neighbourhood, camp or informal settlement.

Table 1: Number of participants in focus group discussions

District	Group	M >60	F >60	M 25–60	F 25–60	M 16–25	F 16-25	Total
Bekaa	Syrian Refugees	11						11
Bekaa	Syrian Refugees				9			9
Bekaa	Syrian Refugees			1		5		6
Bekaa	Syrian Refugees		4					4
Bekaa	Syrian Refugees		1		11			12
Bekaa	Syrian Refugees						8	8
Bekaa	Syrian Refugees			1	5			6
Bekaa	Syrian Refugees			7				7
Tripoli	Syrian Refugees				6			6
Tripoli	Syrian Refugees						2	2
Tripoli	Syrian Refugees						5	5
Tripoli	Syrian Refugees				5			5
Tripoli	Syrian Refugees			8				8
Chatila	PRS			19				19
Chatila	PRS				11			11
Chatila	PRS					3	6	9
Beddawi	PRS			7				7
Beddawi	PRS						8	8
Total		11	5	43	47	8	29	143

Refugees from Syria: survey sampling

The total sample frame for **Syrian refugees** consists of 368 people in the Bekaa Valley and 361 people in the North. The sample frame was calculated based on the population of Oxfam's target locations, which amount to 8,210 in Bekaa and 5,665 in Tripoli. The sample of survey respondents is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Sample of Syrian refugees by age group

Gender	Age group			Total
	30-18	31- 59	60+	
<i>Female</i>	199	189	21	409
<i>Male</i>	152	157	18	327
<i>Total</i>	351	346	39	736 ²⁵

The sample frame for **Palestine refugees from Syria** was calculated based on the population of two camps in Beirut and the North, which totals 5,952. The result was a sample of 190 PRS for Beddawi and Chatila camps.

Table 3: Sample of Palestine refugees by age group

Gender	Age group			Total
	30-18	31-59	60+	
<i>Female</i>	54	54	6	114
<i>Male</i>	40	39	4	83
<i>Total</i>	94	93	10	197 ²⁶

Each sample was divided among the refugee volunteers in their respective areas. As previously mentioned, the mobility of refugees determined the locations in which the data was collected. While Oxfam and partners mitigated the latter through targeting the widest areas possible, limitations to the ability or the security for some volunteers to move around remained, therefore limiting their scope of coverage.

Also, in order to ensure anonymity of the respondents, simple coding was agreed upon with refugee volunteers whereby a code was given to each respondent that would be known to the volunteer alone.

After the collection was completed, data entry and processing took place. The researchers then analyzed the data and input it into the other findings of the research.

3.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The use of a participatory approach offers some significant advantages in ensuring that the topic and research questions chosen are considered relevant by the surveyed population; but also that questions used for the surveys are appropriate and relevant in their nature and formulation. On the other hand, we acknowledge the fact that individuals from the same community as those being surveyed were interviewing their peers, and that, particularly for some of the more sensitive topics; this can at times introduce an element of bias, particularly on the side of respondents. This was mitigated through the first phase of data collection by Oxfam researchers that provided an in-depth understanding on some of the issues, and by the training provided to the volunteers on ethical data collection, the importance of informing the community of the nature of the research project, and monitoring of the data collection.²⁷

In addition, the fact that refugees were directly engaged in the data collection has imposed some practical limitations, for example, the ability of some data collectors to travel²⁸ outside the municipality in which they reside. This was counterbalanced at the planning stage, when data collectors were selected in order to ensure a broad geographical spread and wide representation of the population at large, among other factors.

In relation to the interviews with Lebanese and PRL population, the research team experienced some obstacles in the identification of Lebanese respondents, in particular. Despite significant efforts invested in the snowball technique, and notwithstanding the fact that the purpose of the interviews were not to generalize, but rather to identify trends and similarities in the experiences, it has not necessarily been possible to adequately reflect all the different demographic variables of the Lebanese and PRL population affected by displacement within the groups of Lebanese and PRL interviewees sampled.

4 FINDINGS: REFUGEES FROM SYRIA

4.1 WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE BEFORE DISPLACEMENT?

When asked about their life in Syria before the crisis, many of the interviewees breathed a heavy sigh before offering, at times, vibrant memories and reminiscences to depict their lives before displacement.

Common themes raised by the Syrian focus group participants across the country included safety and freedom of movement, education, job opportunities, equality and unity, with stark contrasts drawn between these conditions in Syria before the war and their present situation.

'Even when we ate a tomato in Syria, it tasted better than here'

Syrian man in Bekaa

Many Syrian women and girls explained how they felt safe in Syria at all times, never having to worry about themselves, their children or their husbands. The importance of the free education that children received in Syria was frequently emphasized. Women seemed to be particularly concerned with education, as opposed to men, who were more concerned with the jobs they have lost. The description of their daily lives in Syria, however, was consistent across all groups: *'work, eat, drink, and sleep... we had nothing to worry about'*. Respondents reminisced not only about the standards of living that they had lost, but also the sense of community and

'We could go out at two AM, even as girls, nobody would talk to us'

Young Syrian woman in Tripoli

solidarity that existed in Syria before the war. Moreover, men and women described how the rich and the poor lived side by side, free from religious tensions or ethnic divisions. Such nostalgic portrayals of life in Syria may be exaggerated or embellished, but what cannot be dismissed is the gulf in perceptions regarding their previous lives and the lives they are living as displaced people.

The description of the Palestine refugees from Syria of their past in Syria is not any different than the Syrians. With even more poetry and imageries, all of the FGDs' respondents described Syria as the 'heaven for Palestinians'. Though the majority of PRS interviewed lived in camps in Syria, they perceived themselves as citizens rather than refugees. Their rights were granted by law, as stipulated by Law number 260 of 1956: *'Palestinians residing in Syria as of the date of the publication of this law are to be considered as originally Syrians in all things covered by the law and legally valid regulations connected with the rights to employment, commerce, and national service, while preserving their original nationality.'*²⁹

As a reflection of their past realities, but also to emphasize the way they were treated 'equally to Syrians', PRS stressed the fact that it was possible for them to reach senior positions, such as deputy minister, as opposed to the significant restrictions on their right to work in Lebanon. PRS respondents described how the sense of equality they enjoyed was manifested in their day-to-day lives, through accessing free public services and being granted the same rights as the Syrians.³⁰ They explained how they were protected and held accountable under the same laws as their Syrian counterparts. While Palestinians were refugees in Syria too, their displacement to Lebanon is an entirely different experience. Their description of life in Syria resembles that of non-Palestinians from Syria, suggesting an equality of treatment that belies their status of refugees.

4.2 WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF DISPLACEMENT?

Over the years, the experiences of Syrians and Palestinians fleeing the crisis in their country may have changed, but the reasons for leaving remain similar. People fled Syria forcibly and for survival. The majority of the survey respondents were displaced at least twice in Syria before reaching Lebanon.

The bombings, airstrikes and killings in the different parts of the country were identified by the respondents as the main reasons for people to flee their homes. The research shows that the death of family members was another reason for the family to flee. Abductions and arbitrary detention of men were described mostly by women as a reason to leave. Girls were also being kidnapped and raped, so people left out of fear for their children. Furthermore, the besieging of villages, in Homs for instance, led to food and gas shortages, as explained by the refugees. In other parts of the country, life had become so expensive that people could not afford even their basic needs, so they looked for alternatives for survival, such as leaving to Lebanon when they had the chance. A woman in the Bekaa Valley explained that it *'did not matter which side of the conflict you were on, you were going to get bombed'*.

'We never thought it would take that long. We thought it was going to take 15 days maximum. I even have my house key'

PRS woman in Chatila

'I was born in Haifa. In 1948, I went to Syria with my mother and siblings. I came here to Lebanon after my military service. I got 50% shares in a dry cleaning business with a Lebanese friend. I went back to Syria in 1975 because of the civil war. Today I am displaced again'

PRS man in Beddawi

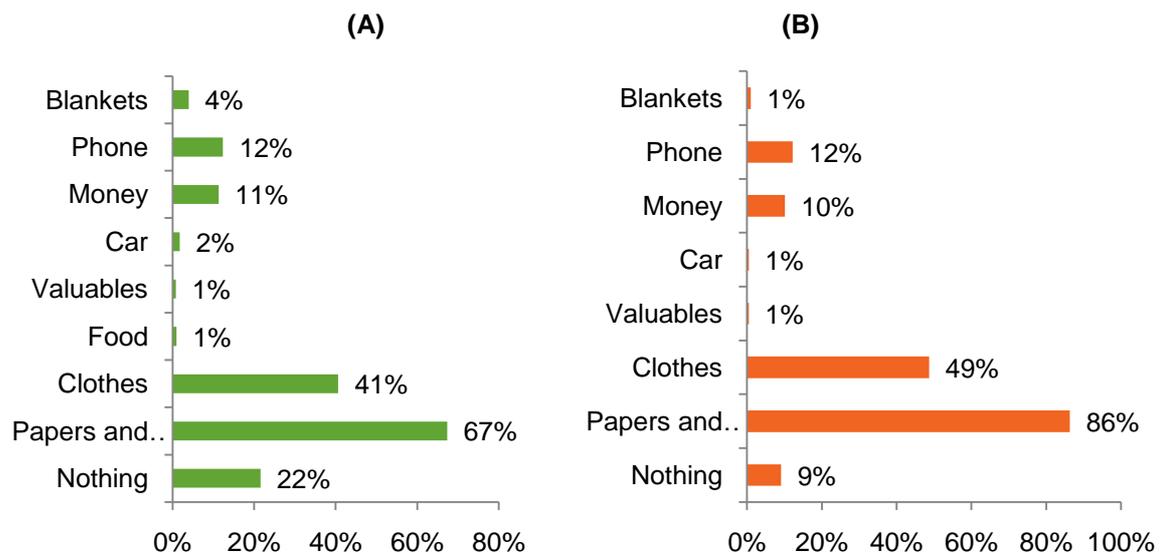
What was perceived as an advantageous situation to the Palestinians in Syria prior to the conflict (being treated like Syrians), exposed them to the same risks as the nationals of the country once the war broke out. The same reasons that forced the Syrians to leave their country forced the Palestinians to flee too. The bombings, the airstrikes and the arrests targeted Syrians and Palestinians alike. PRS from different

camps in Syria described how their houses were destroyed, forcing them to leave to seek refuge outside the camp or in other camps.

4.3 WHAT DID THEY TAKE WITH THEM?

Despite people giving different reasons for leaving their homes in Syria, the forcible and unexpected nature of fleeing took people by surprise. Whether crossing through official border control or the mountainous terrain from Syria to Lebanon, refugees described leaving everything behind. When people leave their property, their loved ones and their homeland, what they hold in their hand is nothing compared to what they have back home and what they need to survive. Accordingly, claiming to have left everything behind may seem figurative, but it simply points towards the value of one's home and family, as well as to the most trivial possessions. Figure 1(a) and (b) shows what the refugees from Syria brought with them to Lebanon. The data reveals that Syrians as well as PRS mainly brought papers and documents, in addition to clothes, when fleeing Syria. It is important to note that some refugees said they have brought nothing, while at the same time mentioning that they have brought the clothes they have on and some papers and documents. This, however, should not be understood as a contradictory statement, since people often feel like they have nothing, given the sense of loss experienced when leaving the vast majority of personal items behind.

Figure 1: What did you bring with you? (A) Syrian refugees (B) PRS



Note: Responses that received more than 10% are reflected in the chart. Respondents were allowed up to three answers per question

4.4 HOW LONG DID THEY EXPECT THE CRISIS TO LAST?

Understandably, the refugees questioned did not expect the conflict to be so protracted in nature. When asked about the expected duration of the conflict, 38% of Syrian refugees surveyed said they thought it would last a month, while 16% of people thought they were leaving for a few days or a few weeks only. Similarly, 79% of the PRS respondents said they expected their displacement to last for a few months or less. Not having prepared for such a protracted situation, people left their homes in the belief that they would shortly be able to go back to collect their things. The disparity between these expectations and the protracted reality of displacement accounts for much of the sense of lost hope or belief in a safe and dignified future. Displacement from Palestine³¹ has reached its 69th year and displacement from Syria is entering its 7th year.

Though many of the FGD participants are too young to have been displaced from Palestine, the majority compared leaving Syria to leaving Palestine. For instance, they discussed how in both cases, Palestinians expected to be back to their homes in a few days or months. Some told us stories about how their parents and grandparents still have the keys of their houses in Palestine, just like they still have the keys of their houses in Syria.

4.5 WHAT WERE THEY LOOKING FOR?

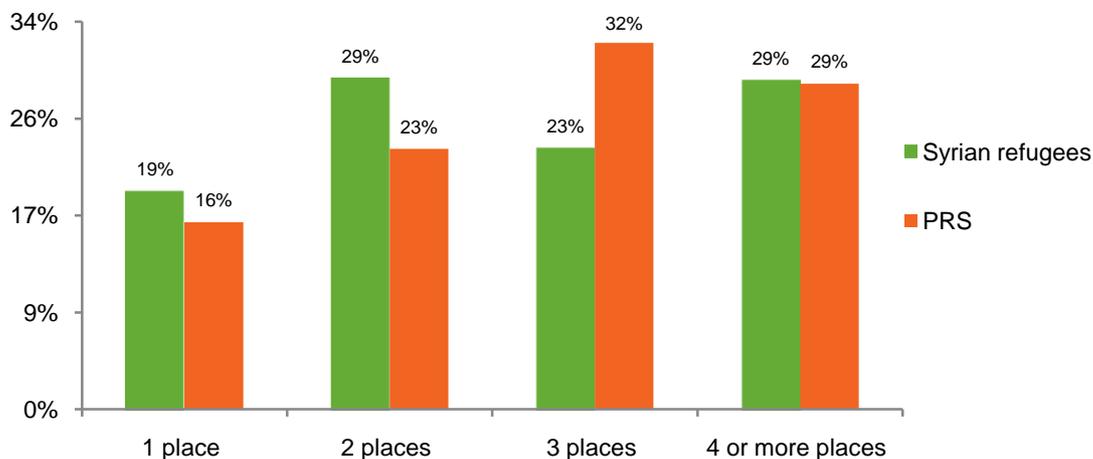
Regardless of where they came from or where they were going, when asked what they were looking for, almost all people interviewed immediately referred to safety. The notion of safety was often connected with safety from the war, shelling, airstrikes and armed groups. Whether inside or outside Syria, they were fleeing for their lives.

'Safety is when you are able to put your head on the pillow at night and sleep without having to worry about waking up in the morning'

Syrian woman in Bekaa

Wherever they found safety, they settled temporarily, and when safety was no longer available, people became displaced again. A few people referred to basic needs such as food or work opportunities, but these concerns always came second to safety. The survey findings show that 64% of Syrian refugees and 70% of PRS surveyed experienced displacement when they were in Syria. Moreover, 22% of Syrian refugees and 34% of PRS reported being displaced for over a year in Syria before seeking refuge in Lebanon. Figure 2 below shows the number of times refugees from Syria were displaced within Syria. According to respondents, multiple displacements occurred when new concerns over safety emerged.

Figure 2: Number of displacements experienced within Syria before arriving in Lebanon



'Every time we went to a place, the war would follow us'

Syrian girl in Tripoli

The survey indicated that 97% of Syrian refugees and 93% of the PRS respondents identified safety as their principal concern. Aside from safety, 23% of Syrian refugees and 39% of PRS were looking for shelter within the different regions of Syria.

Of the 39% of Syrian refugee respondents who fled directly to Lebanon, many told horrific stories of their routes from Syria to Lebanon, including accounts of the shelling of buses, the killing of entire families, arbitrary arrests, being forced to hide in the wilderness at night, and walking on dead bodies in the snow. The route's hardships did not end at border control. Over the years, access to Lebanon became increasingly restricted, until the border formally closed in January 2015.³² Whilst Syrian refugees entering before the policy came into force described the border crossing as *'normal'*, the majority of those who entered post-January 2015 were smuggled through the mountains separating Lebanon and Syria, which involved having to walk for days to reach safety. Besides the exploitation they suffered at the hands of their Syrian and Lebanese smugglers, many were injured, and some respondents even reported deaths.

'We think that we're bad luck because whenever we went to a supposedly safe area, it would be attacked'

Syrian girl in Tripoli

Restrictions on refuge in Lebanon started earlier for the PRS than for the Syrians. Denial of entry to Lebanon for PRS was put into force in May 2014, leaving little or no option for the Palestinians but to cross through unofficial borders³³. Most of the Palestinians that came to Lebanon from Syria settled in already overcrowded Palestinian camps, where they are being hosted by PRL, many of whom have been in Lebanon since 1948 or were born in the country.

Palestinians coming from Syria took the same mountain road described above when having to cross through unofficial borders. Several PRS described attempting to cross the borders several times before gaining access. This was true also for Palestinian women married to Syrian men, according to two FGD participants. When Syrian men were allowed in, Palestinian women were refused entry, forcing the family, on the brink of reaching safety, to separate.

4.6 HAVE SYRIAN REFUGEES FOUND SAFETY AND DIGNITY?

While safety was the main driver behind displacement in and from Syria, as repeatedly highlighted in all discussions, for most respondents, their expectations that they would find safety in Lebanon were not met. Respondents noted that they are continuously at risk: only 21% of the survey responses confirmed finding safety in Lebanon; more than 61% of the responses indicated having partly lost their sense of safety; and 15% perceived a complete loss of safety.

An indication of this perception can be found in views that refugees hold of national and international actors,³⁴ which are regarded as responsible for their protection, yet failing in this perceived responsibility to provide support and services necessary to mitigate the threats they face on a daily basis. Syrian refugees said that, at the beginning of the inflow to Lebanon, they felt safer and were treated better than at the time of the study. Today, after years of displacement, tension with the host community and the local authorities is further eroding their perception of safety. In addition, recurrent arrests, violent raids and the lack of valid documentation were described as daily fears for both men and women. More recently, threats of deportation and forced return pose further concerns for the refugees, leading them to further restrict their movements.

Mirroring the erosion of their sense of safety, respondents also reported how their expectations of a safe living, before the war, had changed over years of displacement. In their past lives, respondents did not have to worry about maintaining their safety, as they felt protected, whereas, in Lebanon, the lack of protection makes them feel vulnerable and unsafe at all times.

According to men in particular, the main factor that contributes to this vulnerability and the loss of safety specifically is the lack of valid residency documents. The continuous worry of arrest or possible deportation has affected every aspect of their lives as refugees. Refugees aren't even safe within their homes, as raids by the different security groups are a constant possibility. Neither are they safe at the workplace, since they are vulnerable to exploitation and can be handed over to the authorities for the smallest reason; nor are they safe walking on the streets, riding cabs, buying groceries or just going about their daily lives. They are therefore not only afraid of the authorities, but also of some parts of the Lebanese communities, due to the harassment they experience, often for no reason other than being Syrian. As a result, Syrian men have restricted their own movements to a large degree, and women and children have been forced to take up new roles in their communities, which at times contributes to further insecurity for them.

The threat of eviction is another source of concern, particularly at the end of the month, when rents are due.³⁵ The ability to fulfill their basic needs was also mentioned as a key element to retaining or regaining the feeling of safety. Respondents feel their basic rights are being violated through decreased access to all kinds of services such as education and healthcare and the failure to meet the provision of basic needs, particularly for food and water. In the absence of

adequate income, these limitations have led to them borrowing money to finance their living, which in turn generates new risks of exploitation and abuse.³⁶

Lastly, the limited access to education was highlighted as a primary constraint, which is systematically impacting their children's future. In some cases, respondents related access to education to the guarantee of a safe and dignified future.

In addition to expecting to regain safety, 34% of the Syrian respondents expected to find a dignified life in Lebanon. On the contrary, even when they found temporary safety, their greatest sense of loss was the loss of dignity. In their battle to maintain and uphold their dignities, refugees describe how their hosting community generates stereotypes that distort the image of a refugee. A young Syrian man in the Bekaa Valley expressed this view that he had left his dignity behind in Syria, saying: *'Dignity is being able to stay in our own country. Here in Lebanon, there is no way you can maintain your dignity'*. The feeling of helplessness leads refugees to succumb to discrimination and exploitation, especially by landlords, sponsors and aid workers. While refugees recognize that this behaviour is not representative of everyone, the effect that such daily humiliations have on them cannot be dismissed. Many consider that the word 'Syrian' is associated with negative connotations, exemplifying the humiliation that refugees are facing daily. With the loss of respect from their surrounding community, refugees feel belittled and think they are seen as lesser human beings than those born into their host communities. Participants repeatedly raised the particular hurt felt when even Lebanese children showed disrespect toward them, among other daily insults, offences, belittlements and beatings enacted against them.

4.7 HAVE PRS FOUND SAFETY AND DIGNITY?

Emphasis on the concept of safety seems to be the same regardless of the experience of the conflict or the place of origin. 70% of the PRS survey respondents expected to find safety in Lebanon when fleeing Syria. However, only 24% were able to find it, with the majority of those reporting to have found safety being women. With the issue of residency renewals, women are considered freer to move and less likely to be arrested, as checkpoints often let them through, as opposed to men.³⁷ Accordingly, their perception of safety may be different from that of men, in that regard, among others, as they do not necessarily fear arrests and detentions.

'The definition of safety has changed. Now, we have no rights, neither as Syrians, nor as Palestinians. Here, we get exploited in our work and insulted in our life'

PRS man in Beddawi

During the FGDs, participants explained that several factors contributed to the loss of safety. PRS do not feel protected in Lebanon, either from their environment or from the authorities. Their inability to hold valid residencies, either due to the General Security Office (GSO) rejecting

'We're stuck in a prison. This is what we found here ... a 1 by 1 km prison, especially if you don't have a valid residency. If you go out of the camp, then you're out of prison, and they can arrest you'

PRS man in Beddawi

their renewal applications or through the failure to secure the fee, have restricted their movements to within the camps or in the neighbouring vicinity. They feel they are held captive within the camps, which are in turn perceived as unsafe. According to FGD participants, the camps themselves foster a continued sense of insecurity, which is mainly due to the widespread presence of drugs and weapons.

Palestinians perceived Syria as safe prior to the crisis. Though they were refugees in Syria, their experience as refugees in Lebanon is very different. They believe they have lost all sense of safety as a result of not being able to maintain a sufficient sense of social, political and

economic well-being, as specifically stated by respondents in Chatila camp.³⁸ The PRS in Lebanon are denied their right to work, and therefore have little or no access to income. In addition, their access to services has been decreasing since the start of the crisis due to lack of funding. In short, with no income, limited assistance, and no recognition of their human and civil rights, coupled with expenses such as rent, residency renewal and payable public services, the PRS are in a dire situation that has a substantial negative impact on their sense of safety.

In addition, PRS households seemed to particularly suffer from separation of their families, which was highlighted in the FGDs as a key reason for a decreased sense of safety. Family fragmentation began with the split from family members left behind in Syria who can no longer flee due to the border closure, and is exacerbated by young men travelling onward from Lebanon. The conversation that took place in one of the FGDs gives a sense of the extent to which PRS experience the separation of their families:

'All families got divided. Young men travelled.'

'My husband is in Sweden and my parents are in Syria.'

'My husband is in Germany and I'm here with my children.'

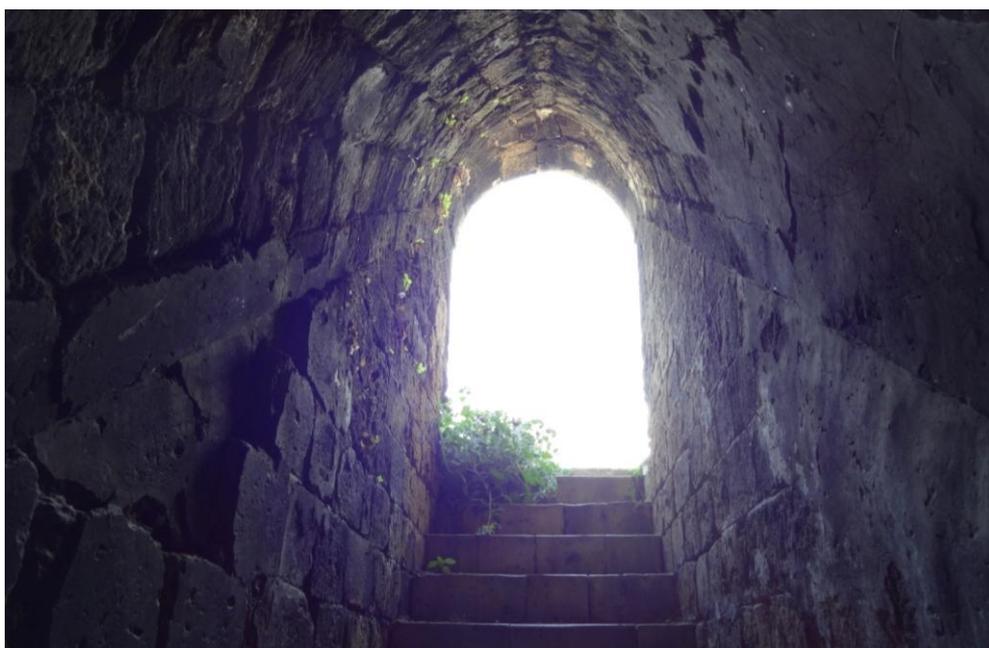
'My husband died. I'm here and my siblings are in Syria.'

'My husband is in the Netherlands. My parents are in Syria.'

'My husband is in Austria. My parents are in France. I'm here.'

The words 'shock', 'stress', 'pressure' and 'trauma' were consistently used by respondents when asked to compare their lives prior to displacement. This was also highlighted in the finding of the research conducted by Oxfam in 2015: *Self-Protection and Coping Strategies of Refugees from Syria and Host Communities in Lebanon*.³⁹

Furthermore, dignity is a priority for all, no matter what situation one may live in, or what country one may come from. When fleeing Syria, Palestinian refugees equally expected to find a safe and dignified life in Lebanon, similar to the one they had before the crisis, according to FGD participants. For the majority (51%), those expectations were not met. Instead, the PRS feel they are discriminated against by both their Palestinian hosting community and the Lebanese. They describe the daily struggle to maintain dignity in the face of obstacles to them acquiring jobs and making a living, and even if they are able to secure a job, they are insulted for having done so on the grounds that they are taking it from a PRL or a Lebanese, who are also suffering from shortages of services.



An arched passage in the city of Tripoli in Northern Lebanon. To many Syrian refugees, the city's architecture is very reminiscent of memories of the arches and coffee houses of Syrian cities. Photo: Ahmad

4.8 WHAT SHOULD THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE?

In academic literature on durable solutions, it is argued that dignity is a primary concern and a central element to ensure the success and sustainability of whatever policies are put in place.⁴⁰ As conversations with refugees on the humiliation they feel demonstrate, refugee crises are firstly human concerns, not merely political or economic issues. Accordingly, and as repeatedly pointed out by refugees, dignity should be a core component to guarantee a safe and dignified future.

Furthermore, as the Lebanese government continues to escalate its threats to forcibly return Syrian refugees, a safe and dignified future becomes increasingly unviable as the situation in Syria is perceived as unstable and unsafe by the refugees. The international community's preference for 'repatriation' is not the same as and cannot be used to cloak forced deportation.⁴¹ For this reason, protection considerations should remain central to discussions on durable solutions, and refugees must be given the opportunity to make informed decisions about their movement.

Box 1: Education – the key to a dignified future

'The future of this generation is lost. No education means no future.'

Syrian boy, Bekaa

Interestingly, refugees from Syria repeatedly mentioned education as an important factor to securing a dignified future. 20% of the Syrian respondents and 16% of the PRS respondents were studying in Syria. The war and displacement affected their education both in Syria and Lebanon, leaving some unable to finish school or university. Accordingly, 60% of the Syrian refugees whose education was interrupted by the war were not able to continue in Lebanon. Moreover, 69% of the PRS were also unable to continue their education in Lebanon. Parents of school aged children were also asked about their offspring's education. The survey reveals that 50% of Syrian refugee children and 38% of PRS children who were studying in Syria were unable to pursue their education Lebanon. The main reason for both populations experiencing this discontinuation is the lack of financial means. Though UN agencies and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education have been covering the tuition fee, not all costs have been covered leaving the refugees unable to pay for their education, or that of their children. Refugees have expressed in FGDs that the upcoming generations are lost as they have not received proper education.

Overall, Palestine refugees from Syria seemed less hopeful of a safe and dignified future than the Syrian refugees interviewed. They do not foresee the conflict in Syria ending soon, and even if it did end, they do not know what their status will be as non-Syrians returning to Syria, creating an additional layer of uncertainty and concern. Also, with limited resettlement plans⁴² for the Palestinians, their only way out of Lebanon is through dangerous irregular routes, which they do not favour. Palestine refugees remain barred from returning to their places of origin.⁴³ What they are left with is the option to remain in Lebanon, which only 7% of the PRS survey respondents perceive as a preferred solution for the future.

Restoring safety and dignity while in Lebanon

A future in Lebanon is not what the majority of refugees from Syria hope for. This was further confirmed by the surveys, in which less than 4% of the Syrian respondents reported wanting to stay in Lebanon after the end of the war in Syria. Similarly, only 7% of the PRS survey respondents wish to stay in Lebanon, and another 5.5% of PRS believe they are staying in Lebanon because it is their only option (Figures 3 and 4). Given all the hardships the PRS are experiencing at present, a future in Lebanon is by no means the preferred solution.

Figure 3: Do you want to stay in Lebanon long term? Syrian refugees

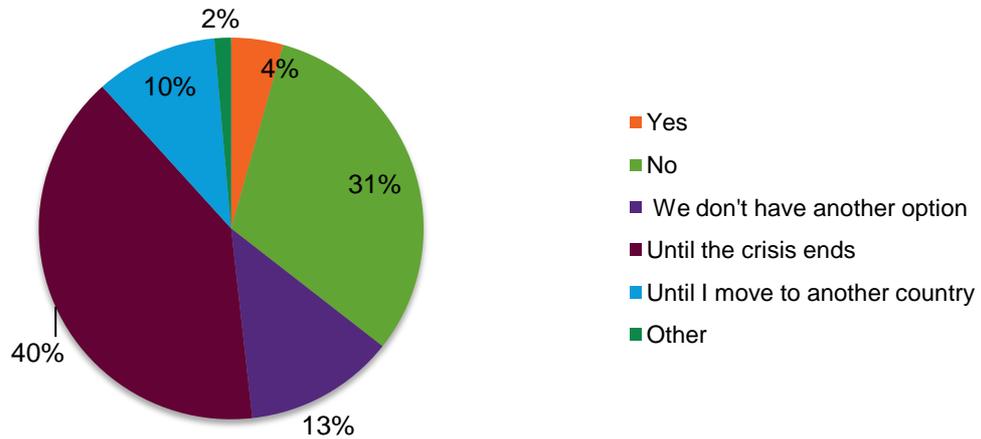
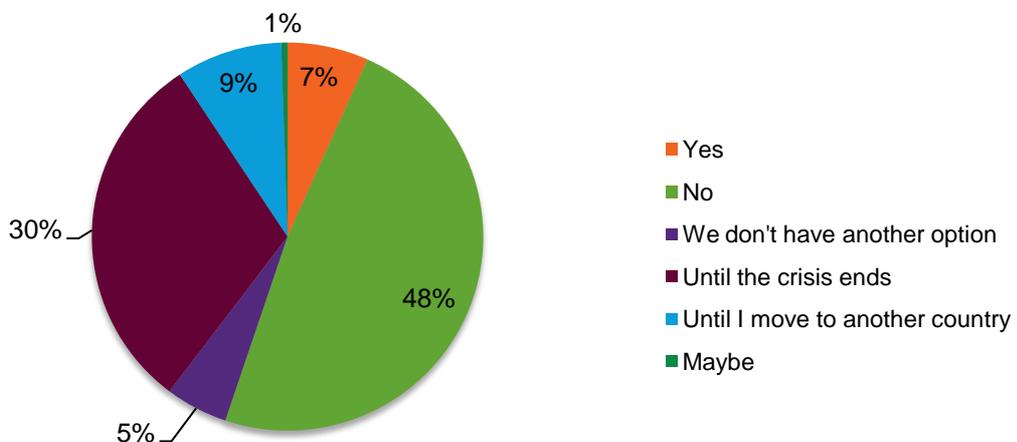


Figure 4: Do you want to stay in Lebanon long term? PRS

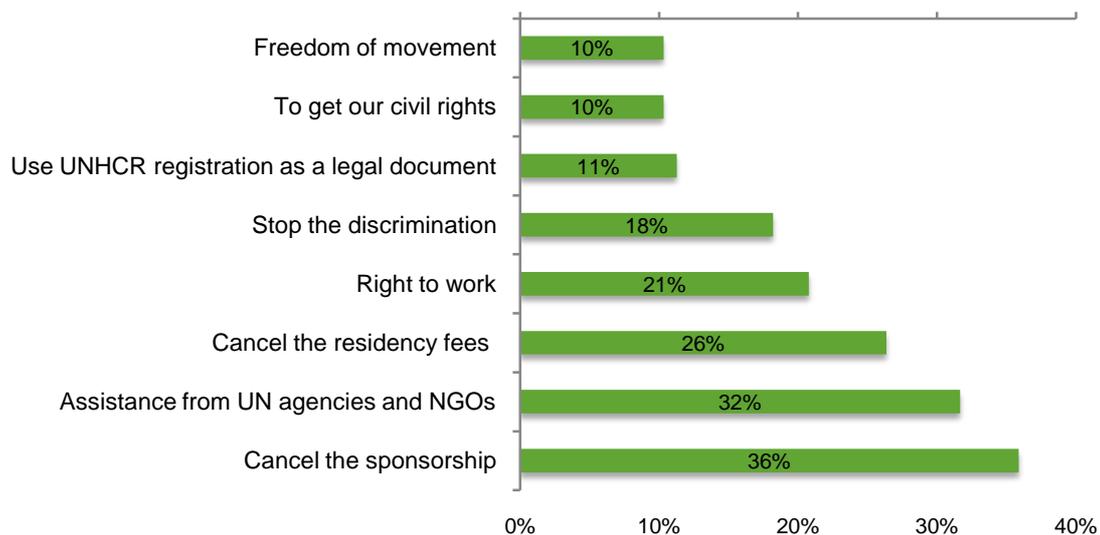


The feeling of being stuck in Lebanon was often raised by the refugees from Syria. During the research, the expression '*there is no future for Syrians in Lebanon*' was frequently repeated across the different locations. The loss of hope for a future in Lebanon stems from what the refugees have been going through since their arrival in the country, in addition to the common longing to return home. Furthermore, other than wanting to return to Syria, the hardships and struggles they face on a daily basis are perceived as a direct result of their displacement in Lebanon. Respondents believe that the situation is not any better for the poor Lebanese; the only difference being that they live in their own country. This could explain why refugees do not wish to become citizens of their 'country of asylum'.

Concerning Syrian refugees specifically, around 39% of the survey respondents reported that their stay in Lebanon would last as long as the conflict in their country, but that, once the crisis ends,⁴⁴ they would like to return. In the meantime, what they are asking for is for better treatment within an improved protection environment.

In order to better understand Syrian refugees' perceptions of what would constitute as a safe and dignified life in Lebanon, they were asked to identify the factors needed to secure it. Figure 5 reflects the factors identified by more than 10% of the respondents.⁴⁵

Figure 5: What do you need to make your stay in Lebanon safe and dignified? Syrian refugees



Note: Responses that received more than 10% are reflected in the chart. Respondents were allowed up to three answers per question.

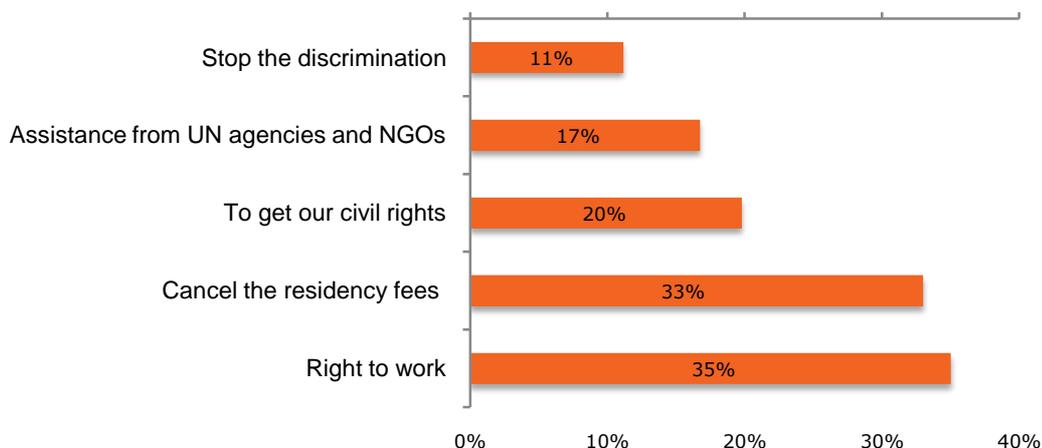
The cancelling of the sponsorship⁴⁶ system for residency renewal is the factor that scored highest among Syrian refugees in terms of needs for a safe and dignified life in Lebanon. Interestingly, the same number of men and women identified this as a need, whereas significantly more women (64%) reported receiving assistance from UN agencies and NGOs as necessary to secure these goals. This demonstrates how priorities on safety may converge on some issues, but clear gender disparities exist nonetheless. Therefore, women may have nuanced understandings of safety, often influenced by their personal experiences of the weight of societal and legal limitations. The feeling of safety was linked to being able to obtain a valid residency by the absolute majority of the FGD participants. The latter explains why factors such as cancelling the sponsorship system and the fees related to residency⁴⁷ were among the factors identified by respondents as priorities while in Lebanon.

'You force me to break the law and then you punish me for it'
 PRS woman in Chatila

On the other hand, PRS believe that certain restrictions need to be abolished to enable them to live safe and dignified lives in Lebanon. The main restrictions refugees described were their inability to access work and to acquire valid residencies. The latter was confirmed by the surveys, where 35% of the respondents said they need to have the right to work and 33% of the respondents said the visa fees need to be cancelled to ensure they can afford to hold valid documentation. As with the responses of the Syrian refugees, humanitarian assistance was identified as a priority for a safe and dignified life in Lebanon by 24% of women, and only 7% of PRS men. Gendered expectations may also come into play in this case, as men are often expected to provide for their families, making the right to work a priority for them. When compared to the responses of Syrian refugees, it is interesting to note that more PRS have identified the right to work as a priority. The latter may be due to the fact that PRS are more

restricted to camps in which competition is mainly with the PRL, who have been in Lebanon for much longer and still have not acquired the right to work.

Figure 6: What do you need to make your stay in Lebanon safe and dignified? PRS



Note: Responses that received more than 10% are reflected in the chart. Respondents were allowed up to three answers per question.

A safe and dignified future in a third country: Syrian refugees

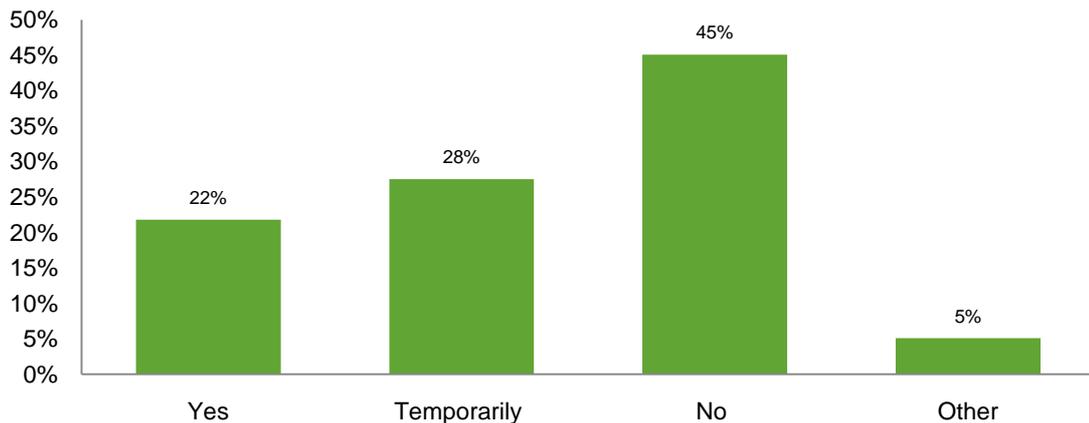
A future in a third country was a matter of debate among participants. While some identified this as their preferred solution, others believed that it would take them further away from Syria, thereby decreasing their chances of return. Some refugees perceived Europe in particular as a continent where rights are respected and protected.

‘Even if I went to Europe, I would eventually go back to Syria’
 Syrian boy in the Bekaa

Their perception of the world outside Lebanon – predominantly Europe – leads the refugees to believe that a move to a third country, either through a resettlement scheme or through other legal routes, will ensure protection and the upholding of their rights. Those perceptions are enriched through the media, as well as friends and families who live abroad, as indicated by Syrian participants of FGDs. They expressed hopes of improved living conditions outside Lebanon, with access to free services, job opportunities and, specifically, a safe and dignified future. Education was identified as another prominent reason to move abroad, given the frustration and despair felt by refugee youth battling the obstacles to education in Lebanon.⁴⁸ Furthermore, some refugees believe that a safe and dignified future could only be ensured through their access to ‘proper’ education, such as that which is available in Europe.

Overall, 22% of the respondents said they would like to be resettled in a third country (Figure 7). In addition to resettlement, 28% of refugees interviewed identified moving to a third country temporarily, or until the conflict in Syria ends, as a high-priority. The need for protection, which they have not necessarily found in Lebanon, could be fulfilled temporarily through moving abroad. Once the conflict in Syria ends, the majority of refugees expressed a preference to return to their home country, rather than to stay in a third country. The latter further demonstrates the importance of Oxfam’s calls for rich countries to admit more refugees under resettlement schemes and through humanitarian admissions.⁴⁹

Figure 7: Do you want to move to a third country long-term?



Two priorities were identified by Syrian refugees as part of any relocation to a third country. First, was family unity, whereby the whole family is allowed to resettle together: 38% of respondents confirmed this would be a decisive factor in making the decision to move to a third country. A second priority was for UNHCR to facilitate such a solution: 74% of the respondents believe that UNHCR should support them to resettle or move by allowing refugees to apply for resettlement through the agency. They agreed that, while vulnerability may be the most important factor in identifying people eligible for resettlement, giving refugees the possibility of proactively expressing their desire to move rather than waiting to be contacted by the agency should also be considered. In discussions with refugees, they gave examples of people who had an opportunity to resettle and rejected it because they were not willing to leave, whereas others who wanted to leave had not been vetted.

On the other hand, 45% of the respondents preferred not to move to a third country at all. Lebanon's proximity to Syria remains a consideration in refugees' decision making to stay rather than leave. In fact, a growing trend has been emerging concerning the decrease in the will to resettle among refugees; as confirmed by the survey and by global trends, resettlement may not be an adequate solution for all.⁵⁰

Some refugees explained that, regardless of the way they are treated, they prefer being in Lebanon because they feel close to their country. A young man living in an informal tented settlement in the Bekaa Valley (Btedaai) stated the following when asked about a potential future in Europe: *'I wouldn't go. I want to be able to smell Syria and have it nearby.'* Proximity to Syria may thus allow refugees to maintain a hope of eventual return. Reluctance to subject themselves to further cultural differences and an unfamiliar lifestyle also influenced their decision to move further from their homeland.

Accordingly, discussions on relocation to a third country were dependent on how the refugees foresee the conflict in Syria ending. One respondent in Tripoli indicated that it would be impossible to go back, as her house and property had been completely destroyed, and Syria, in her view, would never be safe again; therefore, a third country would be her best option. Other respondents expressed a desire to participate in the rebuilding of Syria once the conflict is over, yet for the time being, preferred to temporarily move to a third country to find better living conditions than the present ones. In either case, refugees were well aware of the countries they wanted to move to. For instance, what the respondents call 'Trump's America' was not an option, as they had heard of discrimination against refugees through the media. On the other hand, countries like Canada and Germany were more appealing to the refugees questioned.

'Refugees in Europe need nothing. I would not understand them (the Europeans) and they would not understand me, but if the future of my kids is there (in Europe) I would go'

Syrian man in Tripoli

A safe and dignified future in a third country: PRS

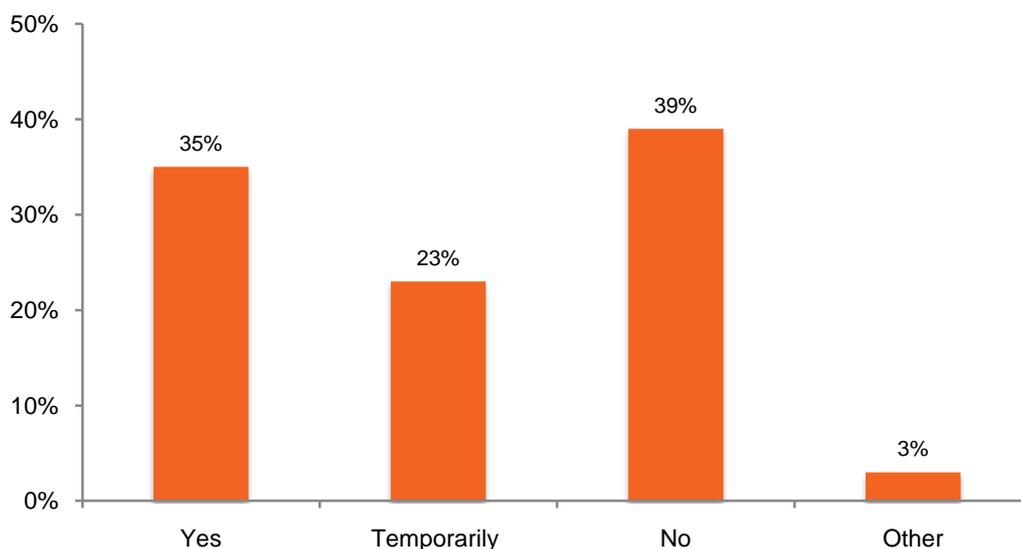
The feeling of being unwanted in Lebanon prevailed over the discussions that were held with PRS regarding the decision to move to a third country. More so than Syrian refugees, resettlement was seen as a durable solution by Palestinians, and a way out of their current dire conditions, with 34% of the survey respondents identifying this as their preferred durable solution. The latter is currently not a realistic prospect for PRS, as thus far, they have been largely excluded from safe or government-sponsored resettlement schemes. The only option for PRS to move to a third country is through unofficial routes, a journey respondents refused to make, having heard reports of their peers drowning at sea in the attempt.

'I wish I could go to Europe. At least they have education and a future and safety'

PRS woman in Chatila

In addition to official resettlement schemes, PRS respondents identified the same two priorities as the Syrian refugees to make their move to a third country possible. Women respondents, particularly, emphasized the fact that family unity was essential to making the decision to move or resettle to a third country. The latter again highlights Oxfam's calls for countries to respect family unity.⁵¹ Similar to the Syrian refugees, PRS identified the need for UN agencies to facilitate their resettlement, in the belief that the UNRWA and UNHCR could and should support them.⁵² Issues such as getting the opportunity and receiving a visa to travel legally also scored high, especially among men. Moving to a third country until the conflict in Syria is over was also seen as a medium-term possibility for PRS respondents. 23% of PRS respondents saw this as alternative to their current situation where they lack their basic rights and most importantly protection.

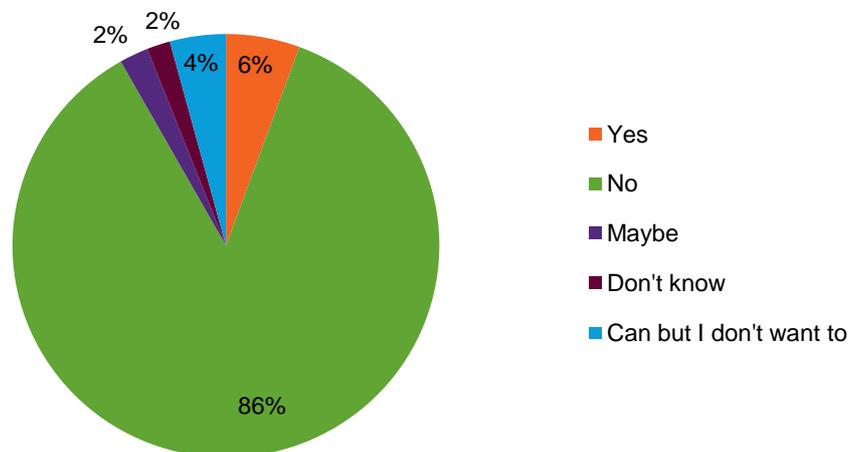
Figure 8: Do you want to move to a third country long-term?



A safe and dignified future in Syria: Syrian refugee voices

The vast majority of refugees who participated in this research foresee their future in Syria. Hope for a safe and dignified future is seen as synonymous with a return to Syria, despite the fact that this is not a viable option at present.

Figure 9: Can you go back to Syria now? Syrian refugees



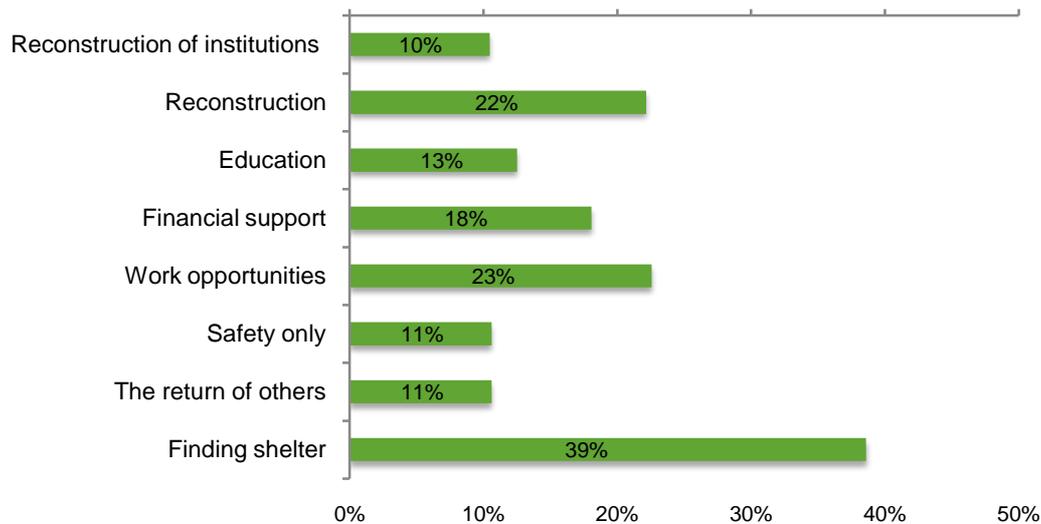
In order to make an informed decision regarding the right time to return to their homeland, respondents identified the importance of information on both the security situation in their respective regions and policies toward amnesty. As reported by more than 50% of the survey respondents, social media provides the source of their information on such issues, and this suggests to them that conditions for return have not yet been met. While refugees may have different criteria for returning, certain trends were noticed during the FGDs and confirmed through the surveys. Safety remained the most important factor in the decision to return, with more than 90% of the Syrian respondents identifying safety, the end of the crisis and peace, as key conditions necessary for their return to Syria.

When asked to identify what factors would need to be fulfilled to facilitate their return to Syria once the crisis is over, 11% of the Syrian refugees said they needed nothing but safety. Additional needs that were raised are shown in Figure 10 below. The chart represents what more than 10% of the respondents expect to be their main priorities once they return to Syria. Shelter is expected to be a priority need by 39% of the respondents. FGD participants explained that those whose homes have been destroyed will need any sort of shelter to protect them. Some have mentioned setting up tents in Syria since they have already experienced that in Lebanon. However, reconstruction also came across as a priority need. FGD participants believe that the work force is available but the financing will need to be guaranteed. The latter will tackle two of the priority needs identified by survey respondents: work opportunities and reconstruction. Refugees have also made a distinction between the material reconstruction and the institutional reconstruction. This was also confirmed through the survey where 10% of the respondents identified the availability of institutions that would be able to organize their lives and follow up on their needs as a priority.

'When they stop the bombings, if the war ends, you won't find anybody here. The traffic jam would block the roads of Lebanon because everybody would be leaving, if the war ended'

Syrian boy in the Bekaa

Figure 10: What do you expect your main needs to be when you return to Syria in the future? Syrian Refugees.



Note: Responses that received more than 10% are reflected in the chart. Respondents were allowed up to three answers per question.

Throughout the course of this research, the refugees’ discourse reflected their fear of forced return. Even though the research shows that refugees want to return to Syria in the future, it also confirms that interviewees feel that the conditions for return have not been met. Any attempts to return refugees to Syria at present will undoubtedly violate the principle of non-refoulement, and likely lead to the continued displacement of Syrians – this time inside their own country.

To ensure an informed, safe, dignified and voluntary return, the priorities and conditions raised by refugees through this research should be taken into consideration.

A safe and dignified future in Syria: PRS

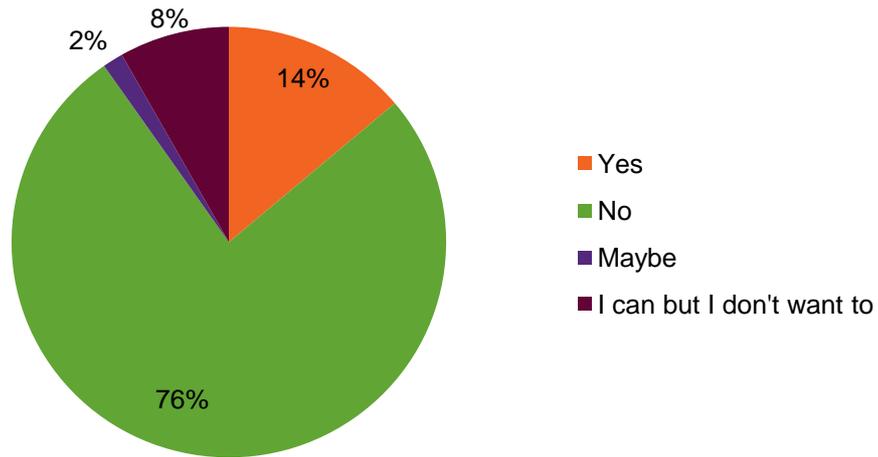
The elderly generation of PRS have undergone a dual displacement, firstly from mandate Palestine to Syria in 1948, and then from Syria to Lebanon after the current crisis. When discussing return, two possibilities emerged: return to Palestine, which was recognized as a right for return prior to the Syria crisis; and the right to return to Syria, where they had made lives for themselves following their initial displacement. Though discussions on the right to return took place during the FGDs, PRS survey respondents found it more practical to discuss return to Syria. It was observed during FGDs that older people who were born in Palestine were more prone to express their desire to return to Palestine rather than Syria. On the other hand, volunteers who collected the data in the Palestinian camps found that people were prone to talk about a return to Syria rather than Palestine, due to the fact that it was a more recent displacement and prospects for return were higher or more realistic.

‘Our future is our past in Syria’
PRS man in Chatila

In the long term, it may be easier for Syrian refugees to return to Syria, as it is indisputably their homeland, while Palestinian refugees, on the other hand, live in a state of renewed uncertainty.⁵³ Nonetheless, the majority of the PRS surveyed identified a future return to Syria as their preferred solution. However, for return to take place, refugees emphasized the need for certain conditions to be in place in Syria. With the current situation in Syria, the majority cannot return (Figure 11).

‘I want to go to Palestine. I want to return to Palestine. I have a belonging to Syria but my first belonging is to Palestine’
PRS woman in Chatila

Figure 11: Can you go back to Syria right now? PRS



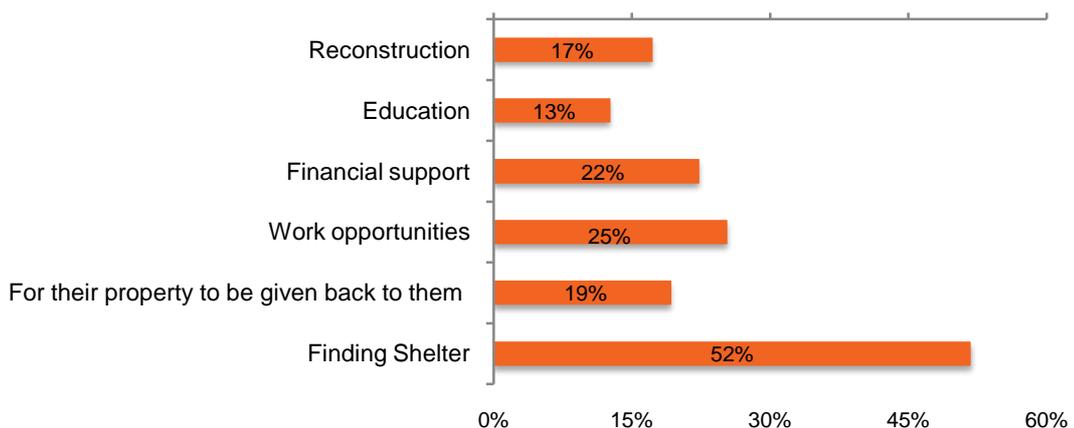
Similar to the responses given by Syrian refugees, the PRS expressed the importance of an improved security situation in Syria generally, and in their respective areas, specifically, in informing their decision making regarding any possible return. The majority (61%) of survey respondents confirmed that they relied on social media as the primary source for such information.

Safety and the end of the crisis were the deciding factors for PRS to return too. Once those two conditions are met in Syria, refugees feel they would be able to assess the other material needs that could make return possible. Access to shelter, for instance, was raised as a highly significant need for the PRS once back in Syria. The respondents' other priorities are illustrated in Figure 12 below.

'I'm Palestinian on my ID but I was born and raised and fed in Syria. I drank Syria's water. I ate its vegetables and drank its water. I want to go back to the old Syria, the way it used to be before the war. The new Syria is different.'

PRS man in Beddawi

Figure 12: What do you expect your main needs to be when you return to Syria in the future? PRS



Note: Only responses that received more than 10% are reflected in the chart. Respondents were allowed up to three answers per question

5 FINDINGS: PALESTINE REFUGEES IN LEBANON AND PREVIOUSLY DISPLACED LEBANESE

There are 449,957 Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA⁵⁴ in Lebanon, of which about 260,000–280,000 still reside in Lebanon, mainly in the 12 recognized camps and in the gatherings.⁵⁵ As with others residing in Lebanon, the PRL have suffered from war and fighting, adding internal displacement to their status as refugees. From Tal El Zaatar⁵⁶ to Nahr El Bared,⁵⁷ Palestinians have had to flee their homes in search for safety. The perceptions and expectations of 24 Palestinian refugees who have experienced one of those waves of displacement are voiced in this section of the report. Though the data does not profess to be representative of the entire population, it is indicative of the perspectives and experiences of this segment of the population.

'You have to start from scratch every time you get displaced. Because you would have nothing, you take nothing with you'

PRL woman in Chatila

It should be noted that the local Lebanese population has also experienced displacement as a consequence of the wars that affected the country: from the 15-year civil war that ended in 1990, to the 2006 war that lasted 34 days. For many years, the issue of IDPs in Lebanon was a contentious and highly politicized topic, and, as identified by members of the Institute for Human Rights at the Beirut Bar Association, *'Though huge funds have been allocated to resettling the displaced, remedies have generally been ineffective and unjust'*.⁵⁸ Therefore, the researchers decided to help to relate the lived experiences of the Lebanese who have experienced displacement, and to tell their stories. A total of 19 Lebanese key informants

'People cannot help each other financially even if they wanted to. They can barely help themselves'

PRL woman in Beddawi

'My 6-year-old asks me why we are displaced and why we have no country. What should I tell her?'

PRL woman in Chatila

who have experienced displacement were interviewed to understand their perceptions and expectations during and after displacement. The research also assessed how their experiences of displacement have affected their feelings towards people who are currently displaced.

5.1 WHAT IS THEIR EXPERIENCE OF DISPLACEMENT?

Given that the PRL are currently experiencing their third generation of displacement, many of the interviewees were born and raised in Lebanon. Nonetheless, even though only two of the PRL respondents were born in Palestine, respondents still referred to their country of origin as home.

In discussions about internal displacement, PRL respondents reminisced about their houses in their old camps, referring to them as home, and comparing the loss of them with what they have now following their displacement.

PRL and previously displaced Lebanese were asked questions, similar to the refugees from Syria, about their experiences of displacement. All the respondents related stories of multiple

displacements within Lebanon, and some Palestinian respondents were also able to recount the trauma of the initial displacement from Palestine.

War and destruction do not discriminate. Regardless of geopolitical, social, or other dynamics, wars touch civilians in similar ways. Just as PRS and Syrian refugees described, PRL and previously displaced Lebanese were driven out of their homes to escape shelling and violence. The PRL described how they fled by foot or using pickup trucks, often running for their

'I want to go to Palestine. Even if I live under an olive tree there, it's better than any European country'

PRL man in Chatila

lives, without the time to care for those around them. The Lebanese interviewees also described their experience of fleeing under shelling and gunfire, passing through checkpoints, and paths filled with corpses. Some people did not return to what they considered their new home within Lebanon, for reasons ranging from safety and the ability to reclaim their homes, to financial

'When you are displaced you start ignoring your dignity to find safety'

Lebanese woman in Beirut

constraints, work opportunities, and proximity to schools. Family separation was a recurrent theme among both populations, and was regarded as the worst consequence of displacement, one that could not be overcome by any support from the surrounding or the host community.

While not common among the PRL interviewees, who mainly fled to the nearest Palestinian camp, some of the Lebanese respondents went abroad for a few months or years, while others fled to whichever village was accessible to their religious sect or political party. In most cases, Lebanese interviewees said that they fled to places where relatives already lived. However, most of the PRL and Lebanese respondents still fled to the unknown, as the majority had to move inside the country multiple times.

All believed the duration of the conflict would be short, and that they would be back in their homes a few days later. Accordingly, and because of the unexpected nature of the displacement, people often fled with nothing but the clothes on their backs. One Lebanese woman explained how her father had

'We had to leave during the different wars and clashes. From the invasion to the Tal el Zaatar massacre, the Sabra and Shatila massacres, the war of the camps, the division of East and West and the Nahr El Bared clashes'

PRL woman in Chatila

been a very successful businessman, and lost all of his fortune within eight hours. Another recounted having to resort to wearing the same clothes for over three months. When recurrent displacement was experienced, some Lebanese explained that it would be normal for them to have prepared small bags of essential items, ready for whenever they needed to leave.

Safety was the common priority for all, regardless of conflict, location or the type of violence that respondents were subjected to. A number of PRL respondents explained that, after they fled, they felt safer in their new location, be it in Beddawi – having fled from Nahr El Bared – or in Chatila. However, this feeling of safety was only limited to immediate concerns, such as safety

'My son wanted to go back to get his piggy bank while we were fleeing. I told him we were only leaving for a couple of days and he could get it back later. We still haven't gone back'

PRL woman, displaced from Nahr El Bared to Beddawi

from clashes and shelling, whereas feelings of social insecurity were commonly referred to, including references to drugs and the normalization of violence. Generally, all refugees reported feeling unsafe in their environments, whether they had returned 'home' – meaning the camp they had fled from due to shelling and violence – or not.

Again, just as with other respondents, Lebanese interviewees often referred to safety as the primary need they were hoping to be satisfied by fleeing the conflict, and this was defined in terms of more than mere protection from the bombing, to include the ability to earn an income and provide for one's family.

PRL respondents also repeatedly related safety to dignity, claiming that this was in short supply for Palestinian refugees. Even within the PRL community, people reported feeling undignified in the camps they had fled to. A number of respondents discussed how they did not see an end to their displacement until their rights could be guaranteed, or, as several interviewees said, 'until Palestine is liberated,' linking their absence of rights to the experience of displacement. One woman explicitly identified Palestine as the only place that Palestinians could find a dignified future.

The Lebanese interviewees reported the difficulty of accessing services, and recounted feeling humiliated when they had to ask or benefit from assistance. Indeed, the very act of leaving everything behind was seen as a humiliation in itself, as well as the perceived indignities associated with a lack of independence or work opportunities. A number of Lebanese interviewees described their efforts not to depend on other people, adopting certain behaviour to indicate their independence as a means to maintain one's dignity. They also reported being called names or referred to as 'miserable', and felt that the way they were described as 'displaced' by members of their host community was an affront to their dignity.



Two girls play outside their family's tent in an informal settlement for Syrian refugees in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. The research findings show that one of the reasons families fled Syria was fear for their children. Photo: Yara and Rassil

5.2 HAS DISPLACEMENT ENDED?

Expectations for any kind of future were strongly linked to perceptions of safety. During periods of conflict and displacement, a significant number of respondents explained that they had no hopes of having any kind of future, let alone a safe and dignified one. However, after having gained safety from war, their expectations for the future shifted, and they started feeling like they had a future to build and live for.

'We lived through several displacements. Throughout the war it was all displacement [...] My house was burnt down during shelling that targeted it. We always had our bags with the baby stuff ready because we were always expecting displacement'

Lebanese woman in Beirut

Most people interviewed stated that they had adapted to their current surroundings, despite the fact that they were far from ideal. One middle-aged Palestinian woman explained how she fled to Syria for a few years during the Tal El Zaatar battle. She described an unwelcoming reception, and claimed that, even though she had later returned to Lebanon, she still considers herself displaced, having not returned to the camp where she grew up.

Interviewees raised a number of concerns about their life as internally displaced or previously internally displaced people. For the PRL, the first issue that came up was that of education. PRL young men explained how there is a significant lack of discipline, overcrowding of classes, and that teachers have given up on them. Other challenges identified by the PRL respondents concerned high rent, lack of work opportunities, malnourishment of children, and the constantly recurring theme of humiliation. As for other refugee population groups discussed in this report, perceptions of displacement seem to be consistently linked to humiliation, loss of houses, repeated movement, evictions, and – most of all – trauma. PRL respondents also explained that they don't feel at home anywhere, and feel in a constant state of displacement, without hope for a safe future.

According to the PRL interviewees, their expectations significantly changed before and after displacement. Regardless of age or gender, all PRL respondents explained that, prior to displacement, they were looking for a better life, for work opportunities, and for safety. However, due to the multiple displacements that they were subjected to, and the current state of insecurity they live in, expectations for a safe and dignified future have become less tangible. PRL expectations of a return to their initial homes in Lebanon varied among respondents. For instance, those displaced from Nahr El Bared emphasize the need for the UNRWA to rebuild their houses, in the hope that they would be able to return to their camp. Refugees who fled Nahr El Bared continue to face considerable challenges, especially since funding to humanitarian relief and subsidies was cut in 2015, and many respondents identified the ability to pay the rent as a particular difficulty, with over 1,800 families at risk of eviction since the cuts in funding.⁵⁹ Others who have fled Tal El Zaatar, for example, have completely lost hope of return, since the camp no longer exists.

Lebanese respondents demonstrated a range of responses to displacement. One woman explained that she is more able to persevere in her current circumstances by taking inspiration from the way her parents never gave up, even after losing all their possessions and having to start from scratch. Others, however, described suffering psychological scars as a result of years of worry and stress. A few told stories of what their dreams used to be, and how displacement had changed the course of their lives, preventing them from fulfilling their intended careers, or stopping their education, and therefore leading them to a life that they had not necessarily hoped for.

Although most Lebanese interviewees reported feeling as though their displacement had come to an end, a general sense of uncertainty and insecurity prevailed. This was in direct relation to

the current political and economic situation, and the belief that a conflict could break out at any moment. For some, the end of the conflict marked the end of their displacement, while for others it represented the possibility of going back home.

In general, the respondents agreed that the sense of being displaced comes to an end when one can find safety, stability and security. Although a number of people did not go back to where they were displaced from, this was mostly due to the fact that they had already integrated and settled in the area where they now lived. However, the process of integration itself took time, and people did not necessarily feel welcome at first. Nevertheless, after a while, people had to learn to live together and adapt, and a considerable number of respondents settled in areas far from home. A few reported still feeling displaced, and attributed this to the fact that they could not forget the perpetrators of violence, and that no reconciliation or transitional justice processes had taken place in the country.

5.3 DID EXPECTATIONS FOR THE FUTURE CHANGE?

Although a number of PRL respondents claimed that the end of their displacement was linked to a return to the camp from which they were forced to flee, answers were significantly different in reference to the long-term future.

'I lived through 10 displacements: Tal el Zaatar to South, to Jiyeh, to Bekaa, to Nahr el Bared to Chatila ... Next time, only God knows, it will be either the sea or the coffin'

PRL woman in Chatila

Some PRL respondents discussed the possibility of a safe and dignified future in Lebanon. They explained that for this to be an option they would need to be guaranteed their civil rights and the right to work. Young men, in particular, highlighted the fact that Palestinians often need to study and work much harder than others, simply in order to be able to safeguard a future for themselves. Several respondents referred to

the need to undergo further education than their Lebanese counterparts in order to compete for jobs, and even then, they were not guaranteed a job that matched their educational attainment. One of the PRL participants explained that he held degrees in literature, graphic design and theatre and was still unable to obtain a job, even in less demanding fields.

A few PRL respondents associated a proper future with integration and the right to obtain Lebanese citizenship, but in most cases, interviewees refused to consider this as an option, as they saw little to be gained from Lebanese citizenship and took pride in their Palestinian nationality. Rather, they argued that their rights should be safeguarded without assimilation by nationality. Consensus among all respondents was found in the desire to return to Palestine. Some linked this to the fact that they would have the right to work there, while others simply resorted to rhetoric to express their eagerness to return. When asked about expectations for the future, Lebanese respondents explained that, even though there isn't a complete sense of safety now, they still have hopes that the current situation can be maintained. Respondents did not wish anyone to experience displacement, and hoped for a stable and safe future for the generations to come. People also expressed the view that, once conflict ends, new possibilities open up, and expectations change accordingly.

Nevertheless, some people did not demonstrate solidarity with people who are currently displaced – namely Syrians and Palestinians – and instead expressed a desire to see refugees return to their home countries the soonest, regardless of conditions in those countries.

5.4 REFLECTIONS ON REFUGEES FROM SYRIA

Some PRL respondents compared their present situation to that of the refugees from Syria. They stated that Syrian refugees receive more assistance than Palestinians, and are better able

'I give my daughter money and other things to help Syrians because nobody was here to help us. I donate clothes because no one gave me clothes'

PRL woman in Beddawi

to find jobs, since their labour is cheaper. Despite some bitterness in these statements, respondents also showed an understanding of their situation, and they didn't blame refugees from Syria for it, acknowledging that all refugees face hardships. Some went a step further and explained how they welcomed them themselves and provide as much help as they can.

Lebanese interviewees were asked what they would share with people who are currently displaced. Emphasis was almost always on return. In some cases, people showed understanding and wanted to tell refugees to remain strong, as this phase would one day end and they will then be able to return to their homes. Others, however, expressed harsher feelings, indicating that they wanted refugees to leave their country immediately. Some respondents gave more practical answers, emphasizing the need for psychosocial support. Generally, people seemed to empathize with the situation of refugees, but still stressed the fact that they would eventually have to go home.

'Your expectations change on all levels because you can have plans for the future'

Lebanese woman in Baabda

'First, I tell them to be patient; you will go back home eventually. Live your days here as if you're in your own country and until you are able to go back safely. In the meantime, adapt and live a normal life with the people who welcomed you, wherever you may be.'

Lebanese woman in Mount Lebanon

6 CONCLUSION

The research findings show that the expectations of displaced people change over time, depending on the situation they are faced with. Nevertheless, a common thread could be identified across all respondents, namely, that a sense of safety and of dignity was their single most important consideration. Accordingly, the planning of both temporary responses and durable solutions should cater for these priority expectations of the refugees themselves, and this may require that responses are sufficiently flexible to adapt over time.

A clear finding from interviews with refugees from Syria was the urgency with which the need for safety and for more dignified living conditions should be addressed, as this would enable refugees to better formulate plans for the future. As such, the present protection concerns and threats that are preventing them from living in safe and dignified environments should be reduced, if not eliminated altogether.

The research shows that the vast majority of refugees from Syria do not plan to stay in Lebanon after the end of the conflict in Syria. The very explanation that was given for not moving to a third country – that by remaining in Lebanon they would be closer to their homeland of Syria for when a return became possible – would suggest that an improvement of their living conditions and support for them to maintain a safe and dignified life will not lead to their long-term integration in the country. On the contrary, enabling them to respond to their immediate needs, and to maintain regular contact with their areas of origin would open new spaces for them to be able to plan for the future. Nevertheless, those refugees who don't consider return to be an option, and would choose instead to build new lives in Lebanon (4% Syrians, 7% PRS) or in third countries (22% Syrians, 35% PRS), should not be denied this right, in line with international standards.

Additionally, increasing resettlement and humanitarian admissions to other third countries is a pressing issue, particularly to respond to those refugees who believe that temporary or long-term protection could be attained in such a setting. Such admissions would ensure legal routes are taken by refugees, decreasing the risk of smuggling and the threats that accompany it. Also, resettlement and other relocation processes should take into consideration that family unity remains the utmost important condition identified by refugees for them to be able to move to a third country.

Regardless of the prospects for durable solutions, refugees should be guaranteed safe and dignified living in Lebanon, as well as in other countries of refuge, for as long as they are present in the country. The research clearly shows that one key element to improve the safety and dignity of refugees would be to enable them to obtain a legal status in the country. However, any procedure that seeks to guarantee such rights should reject inherently exploitative mechanisms. The sponsorship system has in fact proved to be exploitative, as explained by refugees and seen in practice, and should therefore be reconsidered. Furthermore, the requirements to obtain residencies need to be revisited, with a view to simplifying them and better aligning them with national laws, as well as international standards. For refugees to be provided with dignified living conditions which also translate into an increased sense of safety, ability to access livelihoods or humanitarian assistance remains an important factor that should also be re-evaluated and guaranteed.

Discussions with PRS respondents showed a critical need to give attention to Palestinian refugees' resettlement options. Among all respondents, Palestine refugees from Syria showed uncertainty as to the possibility of return to Syria, with an inherent fear that, despite the fact that they enjoyed equal rights as Syrians before the war, this might not remain the case once the conflict ends. While acknowledging Palestine refugees have continued to maintain their right to return, resettlement and humanitarian admissions should not be disregarded, particularly in the case that these fears were to materialize. For as long as Palestinians are neither allowed to

return to their places of origin nor able to assimilate in their current country of residence, they should have equal rights to access a third country, which would in turn ease the challenges faced by their hosting community.

Considering return to Syria, the data show that the majority of refugees do not wish to, or cannot return at present, given the current situation in their country. Until return is no longer perceived as incompatible with leading safe or dignified lives, the conflict in Syria ends and peace is stable, any plans on returns in the short term should be abandoned, in respect of the principle of non-refoulement. Voluntary and informed return to Syria will only take place once refugees are able to foresee a safe and dignified future in their country of origin. The latter should be applicable to all refugees from Syria: Syrian and Palestinian, equally. For return to be a viable solution, as confirmed by the refugees, the conflict in Syria must end and peace and safety guaranteed.

Of those who wish to return to Syria, the majority anticipate future priorities to include finding shelter and efforts to reconstruct the country, as well as access to job opportunities and financial and other means of assistance. Furthermore, in order to facilitate informed decision making on the right time to return to Syria, accurate information on the security situation and prospective returnees' respective regions should be freely available. It is also important to note that, when the conditions for return are in place, return plans and procedures in the hosting country should include administrative solutions to respond to the lack of documentation of Syrian children born in Lebanon and the lack of valid residency documents among adults, so as to ensure that the challenges currently being experienced don't hinder the return process.

Furthermore, in both groups, women's experiences vary from those of men, having direct impacts on the way they perceive the future, as well as on their priorities and concerns. The report investigated some of the implications of these differences, such as the fact that women's perceptions of safety appear to differ from those of men, whether in the way they feel about safety or the consequences of such perceptions on their priorities and expectations. Any future decision making process regarding returns, should ensure that space is created for women to be able to voice their perspectives and needs.

The findings from the interviews conducted with PRL and Lebanese show that their present conditions also need to be reassessed. While they have endured similar experiences to the refugees from Syria, often they do not appear to consider their displacement to have ended, particularly in the case of PRL. Palestine refugees who were displaced to Lebanon and their descendents are still awaiting return or temporary integration within their communities. In Nahr El Bared, for example, reconstruction efforts need to be accelerated to allow the currently displaced Palestinians to return to their camp. For the rest, who have still not integrated in their new homes but want to stay as they have no other options, support should be offered from the different responsible agencies and actors.

Overall, Palestinians are still lacking various basic rights, which must be granted to ensure their stay in Lebanon is safe and dignified. PRLs who were questioned in the study expressed the need for an option to rebuild their lives in a dignified manner in a third country.

As for the Lebanese, the data indicates that the majority of respondents feel that their displacement has ended, yet feelings of safety and dignity have not been fully regained. Though the wars have ended, the changing political situation and thriving sectarianism are preventing them from feeling safe, even within current demographic divisions. Additionally, further consideration should be given to efforts to put in place reconciliation and transitional justice processes.

Ultimately, the findings show shared trends regarding the definition and perception of safety and dignity across the different groups that participated in the research. Education was identified by

all groups as a core need to guarantee a more hopeful future, and particularly one that can be considered safe and dignified.

The destiny of refugees from Syria does not have to replicate that of the PRL and the Lebanese. Lessons should be drawn from the fact that both protection and human dignity are central aspects to the debate, and processes that contribute to ending displacement and easing its consequences.



Tripoli is the second largest city in Lebanon, known as the capital of the North. Its historical wealth dates back to the 14th century, where many of its monuments are still preserved. Today, 57% of the families in Tripoli live in poverty.
Photo: Louai

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- 23 Two Oxfam staff undertook this research project over the period of five months. The two collected the qualitative data in the first phase of the project.
- 24 Specifically Baabda, Kesrwen and the Shouf areas.
- 25 The sample is slightly higher than projected. Oxfam had to ensure all volunteers in the same areas were given the same number of surveys which resulted in a slightly higher number of completed surveys.

- 26 See note 23.
- 27 The training on ethical data collection enabled volunteers to better understand the research objectives and the importance of their role in the process. The training highlighted the principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, objectivity, respect and confidentiality. Oxfam will be producing a case study that further explains the participatory approach adopted, including details of the training provided.
- 28 For the purpose of this research, refugee volunteers were able to collect data within their informal settlements in the rural areas of the Bekaa, without going beyond the respective municipalities in which they reside. The restriction of movement is mainly caused by the inability to obtain legal status in Lebanon which limits the mobility of refugees in general.
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- 31 Palestine in this document is used to refer to mandate Palestine (prior to the UN Partition Plan for Palestine, adopted by the UNGA in 1947 and subsequent establishment of the State of Israel), which includes what the international community now recognizes as occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) as well as present day Israel proper. Palestine refugee interviewees, whether from Lebanon or Syria, referred to their place of origin as Palestine. In order to accurately refer the sentiment conveyed by the Palestine refugees interviewed, the word Palestine is used to convey the refugees' place of origin, as they conveyed it in the interviews.
- 32 Since January 2015, any Syrian national wishing to enter the country can enter only under different categories of visas, and with a series of documents in support thereof, namely for/as: tourism, work visit, property owner, tenant, student, shopping, travelling to another country/transiting through Lebanon, medical visits, appointment with a foreign embassy, or as a displaced person. Syrian nationals can also enter the country under exceptional humanitarian criteria developed by the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) to enter Lebanon. Persons falling within the category of humanitarian exceptions include: unaccompanied and separated children (under 16 years of age) whose parents and legal guardians are confirmed to be displaced in Lebanon; persons with disabilities dependent on family and relatives confirmed to be displaced in Lebanon; persons in need of life-saving medical treatment not usually available in Syria, or not available in a timely manner; and individuals pursuing resettlement or transitioning through Lebanon to a third country, with proof of onward travel outside Lebanon. The number of cases granted has been minimal.
- 33 Amnesty International (2014), Lebanon: Denied Refuge: Palestinians from Syria Seeking Safety in Lebanon. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE18/002/2014/en/%2014/>
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- 42 A few countries, such as Ireland, has pledged resettlement places for non-Syrian nationals who have been displaced from the Syria crisis, which have been opened to Palestine refugees from Syria. However, there are no resettlement programs for Palestine refugees, including those from Lebanon.
- 43 A resolution for the Right of Return of Palestine refugees remain one of the final status issues to be negotiated in a political process.
- 44 The end of the crisis and return to Syria is further explained in Section 4.7.4.
- 45 Other factors identified as a need by less than 10% of the respondents are not reflected in this table. These include birth and marriage registration, proper education, acquiring Lebanese citizenship, being granted civil rights, acceptance for the Lebanese community, etc.

- 46 The sponsorship system is one of the tracks through which residency in Lebanon can be obtained for Syrian nationals. It requires a Lebanese national to pledge responsibility for the Syrian refugee to be able to remain in country.
- 47 A new circular issued on March 6th, 2017 by the Directorate of General Security, introduced the waiver of the fees for Syrian refugees holding “UNHCR certificates according to the requirements [of previous residency circulars], provided they meet one of the following conditions: (1) Previously granted temporary residency in 2015-2016 based on registration with UNHCR; (2) Present documentary proof of registration with UNHCR prior to 1/1/2015 (renewed and valid). Other categories of Syrian refugees, such as those who previously obtained residency through sponsorship are not benefitted by this circular. UNHCR (March 2017), Protection Update.
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- 50 Catherine Tyson (2014). *The Syrian Displacement Crisis: Future Durable Solutions*, *Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration*, 4(2), 23–6.
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- 52 While PRS are under the mandate of UNRWA and not of UNHCR, respondents specifically referred to both agencies in relation to their need for support in facilitating their access to resettlement or other legal routes to move abroad.
- 53 Leah Morrison (2014). *The Vulnerability of Palestinian Refugees from Syria*, *Forced Migration Review*, 47, 41–2.
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- 56 Tal El Zaatar is one of three Palestinian camps that were destroyed during the Lebanese civil war (1975–90).
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