URBAN DISPLACEMENT

SYRIA'S REFUGEES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Edited by **ARE JOHN KNUDSEN**
and **SARAH A. TOBIN**

Urban Displacement

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Are John Knudsen and Sarah A. Tobin

This volume is the outcome of a research project financed by a four-year grant (2019–23) from the Research Council of Norway (RCN 288530). More than a decade since the Syrian uprising turned into a civil war, the world is a different place. The Syrian mass displacement that once dominated everyday popular media, news, and public attention, has been replaced by the war in Ukraine. The world experienced a global pandemic, testing the limits of refugee hospitality, resilience, and compassion. Refugees became both subject and object of shifting geopolitical landscapes and right-wing populist politics that spurred refugee-generating conflict, increased displacement and altered asylum policies. Adding to this, the new deterrence policies invoke bilateral and multilateral agreements that constrain mobility, promote involuntary resettlement, and confine refugees to underserviced urban environments where humanitarian aid is ill-funded, poorly designed and protection difficult to attain.

This volume brings together a wide tapestry of experiences, knowledge and expertise, and cutting-edge research on some of the most vexing quandaries that Syrian refugees in the Middle East find themselves today and over the previous years. We would like to thank the project participants for contributing this depth to the volume, as well as the seminars, workshops, and conferences we have had along the way. We also want to thank the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), and Bergen Global for providing excellent facilities for research and outreach and Berghahn for the support during the publication process. A special thanks to Sari Hanafi for commenting on the draft papers, Leonardo Schiocchet for reviewing the full manuscript and Mark Wells for preparing the index. Most of all, we would like to thank the many Syrian refugees encountered across the Middle East 'host countries' who profoundly shaped the understanding of urban displacement underlying this volume. Their protracted displacement has transformed the Middle East and altered urban landscapes, migration trajectories, and resettlement futures – for themselves and for the generations of Syrians to come.

Introduction

Are John Knudsen and Sarah A. Tobin

Introduction

This book explores one of the largest, most complex and intractable humanitarian emergencies today: Syria's displacement crisis (2012–present). About half of Syria's pre-war population has been displaced, and of these, about five million as refugees in fragile Middle East states, mainly in cities and urban areas. Although the numbers are uncertain and changing, there are about 3.4 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, 805,000 in Lebanon, 660,000 in Jordan and an additional 260,00 in Iraqi Kurdistan (UNHRC Data Portal 2023). While cities offer economic opportunities, employment and services, displacement crises often turn protracted and strain local infrastructure, service provision and host communities. These features also apply to the Syrian refugee population. Aiding large numbers of urban displaced is therefore a major challenge to humanitarian policy. Unable or unwilling to tackle the root causes of displacement, the international community is searching for better polices to address displacement in fragile host countries. This is not only a key development challenge, but an opportunity: towns and cities offer better prospects for medium-term integration and self-reliance than camp-based responses.

Cities have become major sites of displacement, but aid policies have not kept pace with this urban transformation. There are many reasons: profiling is difficult with refugees living among the urban poor, it is costly, host communities need support too and agencies lack experience with support in urban areas in general and in middle-income countries in particular. Unlike

the refugee camps built and serviced by humanitarian organizations, the urban realm is governed by national and local authorities and subject to host state policies.

The size and complexity of cities and towns are reasons that they offer the best long-term prospects for the displaced. Cities have larger and often unregulated ('informal') labour markets, more shelter options and access to health and school facilities. Cities and towns offer greater freedom of movement, foster self-reliance and offer better prospects for socio-economic integration and entrepreneurship (Harb et al. 2018). Indeed, refugees are more economically minded and entrepreneurial than is often assumed (Betts 2021). However, cities can also turn into spatial 'poverty traps', where the displaced eke out a living below subsistence levels (Bird 2019). While emigration offers a route to economic development, this is often not the case with urban residency. Moreover, the displaced compete with other urban dwellers for housing jobs and services in a way that strains host–guest relations and may cause backlash against support for refugees both on the local and national level.

The urban displaced display a range of vulnerability markers such as unemployment, debts, housing insecurity and discrimination (Jacobsen and Cardona 2014: 7). The literature offers some clues as to what is needed to succeed in an urban environment, such as having at least one family member employed and with skills that are marketable in an urban setting. This is particularly important due to the market transactions typical of urban environments and the need for cash for food and services, referred to as a 'commoditization' of urban livelihoods (Moser, in Jacobsen and Nichols 2011: 12). This means that sources of cash income from one's own labour, credit or remittances are critically important for life to remain viable. Urban residence offers more opportunities for work, but the living costs are also higher (UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP 2017). Livelihood coping strategies involve reducing spending and buying on credit, but, over time, many displaced have depleted their savings, incurred debts and sold off productive assets. They must therefore adopt a variety of 'negative coping mechanisms' to survive such as begging, borrowing money, not sending their children to school, reducing health and food expenses or not paying rent.

Refugees are often stereotyped as passive agents in need of help. However, the evidence suggests that given the chance, refugees not only contribute to local economies but are drivers of change, revitalizing neighbourhoods and making inroads in traditional trades or complementing them. Recent research has highlighted the potential for entrepreneurship among refugees and the formation of refugee economies (Betts 2021). New studies of Syrian entrepreneurs in Beirut find that they suffer from prejudice, legal obstacles, persecution and discrimination (Harb et al. 2018). Despite several constraints, both legal and local, other studies find that the Syrian

residents have revitalized streets, transformed neighbourhoods and stimulated the local economy (Yassine and Al-Harithy 2021). Branding the Syrian refugees as entrepreneurial can also be a strategy to foreground their ability to thrive without help or support, thus representing a neoliberal refugee regime where refugees must pay their way. This can also be used to set Syrian refugees apart from other, potentially less business-oriented displaced, in an example of ethnic and racial stereotyping (Turner 2019).

Cities are not only the premier destination for refugees but also their preferred option, to the degree of either bypassing or leaving formal camps (Earle 2016). Research on urban refugees in Lebanon finds that post-displacement settlement choices are influenced by several factors such as kinship, social networks, denomination, and security considerations (Knudsen 2017). Typically, settlement processes are iterative, with families resettling consecutively before reaching their destination (World Bank 2017: 49). In many cases, the displaced converge in impoverished neighbourhoods and inner-city slums, which, as time passes, leads to a clustering of the displaced, living among the urban poor, in the vicinity of refugee camps and in squatted buildings, that has been termed urban encampment (Agier 2013). The Syrian displacement crisis has also led to new forms of urban cohabitation and homemaking, with young, unmarried men living and renting together, a solution to housing shortages for a group who are now recreating a new life in exile and earning a living from odd jobs and small business ventures (Dinger 2022a).

Over the past decades, academic research has centred on refugee camps and their genealogy, governance and security impact both on refugees and host societies (Lischer 2005; McConnachie 2016; Gatter 2023), but also on the urbanization of camps (Maqusi 2020) and the tendency for large camps to resemble proto-towns or 'camp-cities' (Agier 2002). For the Middle East region especially, key works have documented the historiography of forced displacement and relief (Chatty 2010; Watenpaugh 2015), as well as country-specific studies of Middle East refugee crises and encampment (Sassoon 2009; Hoffmann 2016; Gabiam 2016; Chatty 2018). The large and sophisticated literature on camp-based refugees in the Middle East reflects historical precedents, in particular the Palestinian encampment (Peteet 2005; Knudsen and Hanafi 2011; Achilli 2014; Schiocchet 2022). There has until recently been less research on the out-of-camp urban displaced ('non-camp refugees') although they are the largest group worldwide (Koizumi and Hoffstaedter 2015) and in the Syrian displacement crisis (UN-HCR Data Portal 2023). Indeed, very little is known about the settlement choices and post-displacement outcomes for the urban displaced. Refugees are often reluctant to provide details of their economic situation. Standard survey sessions among the urban displaced suffer from a lack of trust, and thus important information is either withheld or distorted. The refugees can

also struggle to access services and amenities, and are faced with housing, schooling and employment barriers (World Bank 2016, 2017).

This introduction provides an overview of the urban displacement literature and is structured along three key themes at different scales: first, refugees self-settling in cities and arrival sites; second, an examination of host country policies and processes of refugee urbanism; and third, assessing global policy instruments and approaches that aim to meet the needs of the urban displaced. To this end, the chapters in this volume employ a range of research methods to illuminate these levels, interventions, practices and impacts, from qualitative interview-based research to urban planning interventions and studies, as well as a quantitative, multi-country survey across cities and sites in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraqi Kurdistan (URBAN3DP 2020). The mixed-methods approach reveals novel insights across this wide range of contributions. These include, among others, the inter-digitated experiences of the displaced with host country citizens and other displaced persons as well as class-based interactions with other urban poor. The mixed methods used in this volume also demonstrate that trends of urbanization link with those of impoverishment of residents – both citizens and non-citizens. Furthermore, the persistent inabilities of policies to 'catch up' to the actual movements of people and support their self-settlements is a pronounced problem. Finally, the chapters in the volume also demonstrate that there are historical and global policy approaches – some of which have been successful – that now lack coherence in their implementation and ignore key lessons that could be learned.

Urban Displacement and Aid Interventions

The magnitude, scale and timing of displacement depend on conflict intensity, duration and scale, as well as regime type and conflict outcomes. Displacement and migration routes, in turn, are influenced by security concerns, distance and terrain type as well as information sourced through social networks and social media (Moore and Shellman 2007). This means that we know why, when and where the forcibly displaced leave their homes, regions and countries, but much less about where they are heading once they cross international and state boundaries and what determines post-settlement outcomes. This remains a critical knowledge gap. Preliminary findings from a multi-country survey (URBAN3DP 2020) show that they move to cities and towns often consecutively in search of safety, via border towns and areas towards peri-urban centres and towns. Ease of return can also be an issue, with some settling in border areas to facilitate future return. These decisions can change over time, and there is thus a temporal dimension to secondary migration, with the displaced resettling when cir-

cumstances change or host country policies shift, as evidenced by examples from Jordan (Kvittingen et al. 2019), Turkey (Içduygu and Nimer 2019) and Lebanon (Fakhoury and Ozkul 2019).

Post-settlement studies from Lebanon, for example, show that the Syrian families are place-centred, with limited spatial mobility, social interaction and host–population interaction (Knudsen 2017). This is consistent with studies showing that cities offer anonymity and with the fact that many displaced remain unregistered and unaided (Crisp et al. 2012). Moreover, studies confirm that most of the urban displaced do not return, thus remaining in protracted displacement, exceeding the ten-year average for displaced refugees (Devictor and Do 2017). Beyond this, we know less about the processes whereby self-settled refugees make themselves at home in Middle East cities and towns. These knowledge gaps are also one of the reasons that there is a lack of effective aid policies for urban areas; indeed, the UNHCR has only recently reoriented its work away from camps and towards urban contexts (UNHCR 2014; Crisp 2017, 2021).

Current aid modalities and systems such as the UN Syrian Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) are overtaxed, underfunded and suffer from coordination problems (World Bank 2017: 126; Culbertson et al. 2016). At the same time, the many vulnerability reports on Syrian refugees show that they are getting poorer and depleting their assets, with skills underutilized due to labour-market exclusion (World Bank 2016). Despite cash and in-kind assistance to more than two-thirds of Syrian refugees, nine out of ten are food insecure, with cash expenditures declining amid rising house rents (UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP 2017: 26). Adding to this, they often live in substandard and insecure shelters, paying exorbitant rents or facing eviction (Kirbyshire et al. 2017: 10). Moreover, social capital gets depleted, as demonstrated in Lebanon where host–guest relations have gone from a warm welcome to competition over labour, scarce public resources and services amid an overburdened infrastructure, rising unemployment and negative GDP growth (Knudsen 2017). In sum, this means that current aid systems and volumes have not prevented a slide towards poverty and destitution, with female-headed households the most vulnerable (UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP 2017: 85, 100). To address this, the World Bank (2017) has advocated a 'developmental approach' to displacement with a special focus on the urban displaced (World Bank, GFDRR and GPFD 2017).

The most widely used policy intervention targeting the urban displaced is area-based approaches (ABAs) and can be considered a key element in the shift from a humanitarian to a developmental approach. Area-based approaches have been proposed as a solution that can benefit poor urban dwellers and urban displaced alike (Parker and Maynard 2015). Moving away from traditional service delivery, area-based approaches represent a shift towards a participatory approach where humanitarian agencies engage

national and local authorities to expand services and amenities among both the urban displaced and the host population. The approach is especially relevant in high-need areas, typical of urban displacement clusters (Ruaudel and Morrison-Métois 2017).

Closely linked to this is what is known as 'community-based assistance' (CBA), which is a time-delimited intervention in cities whereby the lead agency (mainly the UNHCR) negotiates access to social services with host country programmes and until these are put in place, and establishes supplemental services to refugees, organizes mobile registration services for refugees and offers training and technical assistance (Ward 2014). One of the limitations of this approach is its limited duration, along with the risk of services becoming unavailable due to lack of funding, access or both. This has prompted a shift from short-term to medium-term interventions, as well as a transition from camps to urban areas, and from humanitarian aid to development and resilience (Culbertson et al. 2016). The massive Refugee Response and Resilience Plan (3RP) for the Syrian refugee crisis attempted to combine a humanitarian response with host country development considerations, using the term 're-silience' to blend the two approaches (Anholt and Sinatti 2019; Gatter 2021).

New approaches to aiding refugees also include unconditional cash transfers, which are a cost-effective solution, with results equal to or better than traditional programmes run by NGOs, and are especially relevant in urban areas where injecting cash transfers helps revive local economies, but can also heighten community tensions (Crisp 2021). Closely linked to this are new funding modalities, which move away from project funding and instead channel money through government ministries to capacitate state institutions (Buscher 2018: 10) and cooperate with public and private partners, as well as community-based organizations (CBOs).

The prioritization of the state is also integral to area-based approaches and relevant for finding new ways to alleviate housing shortages among refugees. This was demonstrated in Lebanon's Occupancy Free of Charge (OFC) facility, which provided affordable housing in buildings that met minimal living standards for a time-limited period (AUB and Save the Children 2020: 7). While the OFC schemes and fee waivers have enabled beneficiaries to shed some of their old debts, they are accumulating new ones and are caught in a debt cycle. This means that the refugee households' economies are mediated through managing debts rather than money.

Settling in Cities

Managing mass displacement and settlement in urban areas is a major development issue, relevant to both bilateral and multilateral efforts to aid those displaced in fragile middle-income countries (Betts and Collier 2017).

An 'urban refugee' is neither a recognized legal term nor a definite category. Rather it is used as a shorthand for refugees settling in cities and urban areas. As a generic term, 'urban refugees' can encompass different refugee groups, and it often focuses on the impact of their displacement on the infrastructure and growth of cities and towns. At present, almost two-thirds of the world's refugees live in urban areas, compared to 35 per cent in the 1950s. The academic focus on urban refugees began in Africa in the 1980s (Kibreab 2007). After an initial reluctance to acknowledge the scale and relevance of urban displacement, new urban crises pushed the UNHCR to formulate a policy on alternatives to camps (UNHCR 2014). Although camps have re-emerged in response to Middle East displacement crises, the large majority of refugees are self-settling in cities and towns. The focus on urban refugees increased after the Iraq War, with Iraqi refugees settling in cities like Damascus, Amman and Cairo (Chatty and Mansour 2012; Hoffmann 2016; Twigt 2022).

Current aggregate data on urban refugees is insufficient and unreliable (World Bank 2017: 29), reflecting a range of methodological challenges (Jacobsen and Nichols 2011). Cities and towns are neither equally affected nor equipped to manage displacement, and thus can be placed along a gradient of displacement impact and fragility (World Bank, GFDRR and GPFD 2017). Available research indicates that the poorest segments of the displaced end up in smaller and medium-sized towns, because capital cities are either too expensive or inaccessible (IDMC 2018: 6). In addition, cities and towns are differently affected by displacement and vary in their capacity to handle the population influx.

Refugees and migrants typically settle in informal areas because of the greater availability and affordability of housing in poor and underserved areas (Fawaz 2017). Middle Eastern cities, in particular the largest ones, often have large informal areas and slums, which is one reason that refugees have settled among the urban poor in capital and cosmopolitan cities such as Istanbul, Beirut and Amman. The poorest refugees have mostly, but not exclusively, settled in urban poverty zones and cores, informal areas and slums. A 'slum' can be defined as a poor and densely settled area where the residents lack proper water, sanitation and electricity supply (Gilbert 2007). In informal areas property rights and land tenure are typically either blurred or contested (UNDP 2018). Both informal areas and slums are imprecise terms that are not consistently applied, but they typically have building morphologies that are small, dense and irregular (Taubenböck et al. 2018).

In Lebanon, refugee camps established since the 1920s have served as nuclei for informal settlements (Fawaz and Peillen 2003). In this way, the once remote camps were overtaken by urban sprawl to become mixed neighbourhoods (Doraï 2011). Urbanizing city camps, over the course of time, transformed into popular neighbourhoods and coalesced as extended

and visually undifferentiated campscapes (Martin 2015). An example of this is Sabra, one of Beirut's largest informal areas, with the tiny Shatila refugee camp at its centre (Allan 2014).

When refugees settle among the urban poor, they burden the existing infrastructure and increase the pressure on understaffed and overtaxed health facilities, schools and transportation systems. Despite the lack of proper infrastructure and facilities, the lower rents and greater availability of shelters in informal areas make them an attractive destination for urban refugees settling in dense and overcrowded neighbourhoods, thus recreating camp-like structures in an urban setting, which has been referred to as 'urban encampment' (Agier 2013; Fawaz 2017). Informal areas are populated by residents who lack political clout, which – at least in part – explains why public services have not been extended to these areas in the first place. Another reason is that the residents often do not pay taxes, nor in most cases utility bills, with losses incurred by providers (Verdeil 2016).

Due to the lack of affordable housing, some of the urban displaced resort to squatting in abandoned and unfinished buildings (Al-Harithy et al. 2021). Squatting can, in this context, be defined as living in, or using, a dwelling (or land) without the consent of the owner for a longer period, usually a year or more (Vasudevan 2015). Unlike renting, squatting is a precarious existence associated with the threat of eviction or arrest and typically involves lacking basic amenities – water, sanitation and electricity – and is correlated with lower income and education levels (UNDP 2018). Squatting comes in many forms, including squatting in camps (Sanyal 2011), whereby refugees expand living quarters and improve homes in contravention of regulations limiting both the size and type of buildings allowed (Sanyal 2014: 567).

The informal areas, slums and shanty towns found in cities around the world are the first point of arrival for rural-to-urban migrants, labourers and refugees, and thus have been labelled 'arrival cities' (Saunders 2011: 18–20), but may more aptly be termed 'arrival sites'. Arrival cities provide refugees and migrants with a foothold in the city and can support socio-economic integration, self-sufficiency and, for some, upward social mobility. Examples include the *gecekondu* in Turkey, which are simple houses set up overnight on a vacant piece of land without building permissions. Yet after years of conflict, they were legalized to become valuable urban quarters. The *gecekondu* example not only illustrates why arrival cities are important as a housing solution for refugees and migrants, but also their role in changing and legitimating cities as new repositories for the urban displaced (Fawaz 2009, 2013).

Taking arrival cities as their point of departure, Robert Forster and Are John Knudsen compare settlement choices and outcomes for Syrian refugees living in the poorest neighbourhoods in Beirut, Tripoli and Tyre. The latter two are secondary cities trailing the capital and suffer from economic

divisions and rampant inequality. The three cities have large refugee populations, both Palestinian and, since 2012, Syrian. The chapter demonstrates that Syrian refugees' settlement choices and pathways are influenced by kinship networks, affordable housing and employment opportunities. The cities' resources to provide for refugees differ: Tripoli is the country's poorest city, with Syrian refugees concentrated in the residential extensions around the run-down urban core. In Beirut, the Sabra area is a refugee and poverty agglomeration where city and camp merge and refugees, migrants and the urban poor cohabit. In Tyre, the Syrian refugees have settled in the urban core, informal settlements and Palestinian refugee camps, making the two groups intersect while remaining socially distinct.

Family and kinship dynamics in mobility considerations and decisions in the Middle East are complex and have been a long-standing subject in Middle Eastern scholarship (Tobin et al. 2021. Recent research on displaced Syrians in Jordan has expanded this line of inquiry, emphasizing the long history of circular and seasonal migration between Syria and Jordan and its relationship to family and kinship connections. Historically, many Syrian men left for seasonal labour migration to the Middle East and the Gulf countries, which left female spouses as the de facto heads of households, managing the economic affairs, raising children and calling in support as needed (Wagner 2019; Lokot 2018). Once the Syrian crisis began, those economic ties substantially influenced family migration decision-making, as well as contributing to new social networks to sustain Syrian refugee livelihoods in displacement (Stevens 2016). The processes of rebuilding social capital in displacement are not always predictable, easy to discern or straightforward, however, as they are crosscut by class, gender and generations (Lokot 2020).

In her chapter from Jordan's urban north, Sarah A. Tobin examines the role of family networks among women in Mafraq, a major destination for Syrian refugees from Homs, Syria, which is 300 km away. Many Syrian refugees in Mafraq migrated this lengthy journey because of previous labour migration patterns. There, these Syrian women rely upon local networks to source information about humanitarian aid, which is insufficient. Lacking employment options and the ability to source sufficient humanitarian aid, Syrian women turn to remittances from their transnational networks. This chapter examines the ways that Syrian women have cultivated a 'nested' networking system for economic viability in an otherwise economically challenging environment. Syrian women are thus embedded in diverse and dynamic connections that shift in geographic reach, utility and outcomes, as they crosscut gender, are impacted by scarcity and change over time.

Forced migration research has shown that people tend to follow in the footsteps of those fleeing or migrating before them, something that is known as 'path dependency'. This means that people flee to destinations they have previous knowledge of, may have visited or where people have gone before

them, often also with a local or national presence as a migrant and diaspora community (Moore and Shellman 2006, 2007). This is the case in Lebanon, a long-time destination for Syrian labour migrants, eased by bilateral treaties, short distance, porous borders and language and cultural similarities, with migrants taking advantage of the country's open economy (Knudsen 2017). For similar reasons, Jordan was a destination for Syrians displaced from the south of the country due to proximity to the border, migrant labour ties and cross-border trade, as well as sociocultural similarities. In the case of Turkey, the country's proximity to major rebel cities such as Aleppo was a major reason for the cross-border flight to Turkey's border cities such as Gaziantep and Diyarbakir, as well as its status as a transit country for onward migration to Europe. Much fewer fled in the direction of Iraq, a war-torn country that since its break-up following the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime has strained under multiple displacement and governance crises (Hoffmann 2016).

Despite a general trend towards urban self-settlement, there has been a dearth of knowledge that can predict how and why destinations are selected or reached and their socio-economic outcomes. In their chapter Khogir Wirya, Fuad Smail and Tine Gade examine the fate of ethnic Syrian Kurds displaced as refugees to Erbil, the capital of the autonomous Kurdistan region (KRI). About 40 per cent of the Kurdish refugees have settled in Erbil, while the rest live in camps. Despite sharing ethnic identities, those displaced are treated as Syrians (*Suriyakan*), rather than fellow Kurds, which has alienated them from the host population and disconnected them from international organizations offering support. Living in communal enclaves, their Kurdish identity has not enabled meaningful integration with fellow Kurds in Erbil. Moreover, the experience of displacement and the lack of legal protection have created distinctive vulnerabilities among the Syrian Kurdish refugees and hampered their socio-economic integration.

Turkey has traditionally been a transit country for refugees from Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq (Woods 2016). The Syrian refugees who are settling in Turkey have seen their migration aspirations tempered by the country's context. Contrary to the official state welcome of migrants as 'guests' and 'religious brothers', popular support for Syrian integration is extremely low in local communities in Turkey (Rottmann and Kaya 2020). Nonetheless, Syrian refugees in Turkey are increasingly unwilling to move to Europe despite the significant legal obstacles, hostility and discrimination they face in Turkey. As time passes by, the Syrian refugees have become emotionally attached to their new homeland to the degree that many are not only making Turkey their home, but also feel at home in the country. In this way a transit country has become a host country not only due to migration barriers, but also to cultural intimacy and the social protection stemming from living in a Muslim society. Wirya et al.'s study indicate that the 'transit country' cat-

egory label is simplistic, masking the fact that for many Syrians, Turkey has become a host country.

This serves as a backdrop to the chapter by Rebecca Bryant and Dunya Habash, examining how young Syrians have adapted to settling in cosmopolitan Istanbul, a major host city with more than half a million Syrian refugees. Examining the relationship between urban and national belonging, displaced Syrian youth have begun to view Turkey's cities as spaces of vernacular cosmopolitan aspirations. The chapter demonstrates that exile is transformative and challenges the perception of Turkey as a country that most Syrians want to leave, despite the growing xenophobia. While young Syrians have carved out a place for themselves in cosmopolitan Istanbul, they seek futures where their mobility is unconstrained both within and outside a country that in many ways continues to disenfranchise them.

Refugee Urbanism and Country Policies

In the popular imagination, most of Syria's refugees live in camps, while in fact nearly all (95 per cent) of the displaced live outside camps (UNHCR Data Portal 2023). The combined rural-to-urban migration, population growth and displacement in the Middle East region place great strain on many cities' challenged infrastructure, already struggling under the lack of resources, governance failures and conflict (World Bank, GFDRR and GPFD 2017). Hosting non-citizens can strengthen underlying tensions and xenophobia and is one reason that refugees suffer from social isolation and labour market exclusion in some Middle East host states. Except for Turkey, the Middle East host countries are non-signatories to the international refugee convention (Janmyr 2017), which has left refugees to de facto integration without civil rights.

Settling in the city is often synonymous with renting, mainly from landlords or proprietors. On the countryside, rentals are often controlled by a local manager (*shaweesh*). Lebanon's non-camp policy (or 'policy of no-policy') has created rural and urban refugee clusters where Syrian refugees suffer from exploitative rents and unlawful evictions (Kikano et al. 2021: 441). Self-settled Syrians in Beirut's informal areas displace the poor Lebanese who, dispossessed in their own neighbourhoods, resent their Syrian neighbours. The Syrian refugees on their part feel unsafe and suffer from harassment and abuse, which are conditions replicated in other high-density refugee communities. These findings concur with the growing resentment over the Syrian refugee presence in Lebanon (Knudsen 2017).

The run-down buildings and dwellings in informal areas are subject to minor and ineffectual upgrading, a patchwork of minor repairs and quick fixes that neither solves structural nor systemic deficiencies. They are un-

able to address the root problems stemming from lacking civil and property rights, which are both key elements of urban informality. To make room for new entrants, new floors and rooms are added in contravention of building codes and zoning regulations (Fawaz 2016, 2017). Incremental housing becomes a key strategy for increasing the size of living quarters and rental space as capital, opportunities and bypassing regulations permit. This is also a reminder that refugees are not only city dwellers but also city builders who shape the urban environment (Sanyal 2014). Syrian refugees thus represent a new market for local entrepreneurs who take advantage of new zoning and building regulations to build poorly constructed flats and compounds aimed at Lebanese buyers. With time, the Lebanese owners have become outnumbered by Syrian tenants, compelling them to leave and become absentee landlords (Fawaz et al. 2022).

In Lebanon, the poorest Syrian refugees typically settle in informal areas, including in and adjacent to Palestinian refugee camps (Knudsen 2018). This has reconfigured refugee camps and increases urban densification, as detailed by Ismae'l Sheikh Hassan's chapter from north Lebanon. The new high-rise buildings that are constructed in Beddawi, a Palestinian refugee camp in Tripoli, represent a new building typology used to accommodate the growing number of Syrian refugees. Financed and built by local and non-local entrepreneurs, the multistorey buildings reflect socio-economic and demographic changes in the camp and beyond in recent years. The Palestinian residents have changed their priorities too, with some selling their single-storey houses and flats to commercial developers, while others are being forced to sell for familial and economic reasons. The Beddawi case is indicative of more general changes to camps being drawn into commercially driven urbanization processes that turn them into 'city camps' and cause tensions between Syrians and the Palestinians who are forced to sell and leave.

Access to affordable housing is one of the most important policy issues for refugees displaced in urban areas. Cities, especially capital cities, are typically costly to live in, which is one reason that poor migrants and refugees tend to settle in informal areas where housing and rentals are more affordable. Affordable housing can involve the provision of housing subsidies as rental support from UNHCR, NGOs and charities. Studies from Beirut's Sabra area, however, indicate that rental subsidies are captured by slum landlords asking higher than average rents for substandard flats (Knudsen 2023). The lack of affordable housing has made refugees settle in run-down buildings, many not suited for human habitation, where marginalized tenants depend on food vouchers to survive.

The physical difference between cities and camps is one of degree, with some camps, such as Jordan's mega-camp Zaatari, rivalling cities in their size, complexity and infrastructure (Dalal 2015). Refugee camps provide

shelter, access to health and schooling facilities that, although often inadequate and underfunded, offer protection against destitution, which self-settlement in cities does not. Leaving camps often means abandoning the right to claim support and becoming dependent on one's own income and resources to cover expenses. An important policy question is whether residence in camp or out-of-camp provides better socio-economic outcomes in the long run, especially for the poorest and least connected refugees. While recent research has highlighted the advantage of out-of-camp living for long-term integration and livelihoods, refugee camps can protect against destitution, but at the expense of personal freedoms (Tobin et al. 2021). Turkey's twenty-five refugee camps are well run, equipped and managed (Woods 2016), but now only cater for a tiny minority of the Syrians in the country (UNHCR Data Portal 2023). Studies from urban settlements in Diyarbakir, a major refugee hosting city (Veul 2015), show that the Syrian refugees hold deeply negative views of camps and have found shelters and rentals through local ethnic and religious networks.

Unlike Jordan and Turkey (Chatty 2017), Lebanon did not set up formal camps to house refugees from Syria, seeing camps as a prelude to later settlement. The no-camp approach led to self-settlement of refugees in several thousand sites across the country (Knudsen 2017). The 'no-camp policy' came on the heels of more than two years of negotiations between the Lebanese government, international organizations and the UNHCR, with Lebanon rejecting setting up camps and prefabricated homes for refugees (Fawaz 2017). While Lebanon's non-camp approach was meant literally, informal tented settlements (ITSs) were set up in the Bekaa valley, one of four new 'shelter' categories established in response to the Syrian displacement crisis (UNHCR 2012). The country's non-camp approach is more strategic and complex than is alluded to here (Nassar and Stel 2019) and shifted the responsibility for aiding refugees to underfunded and overtaxed municipalities (Mourad 2017), some hostile to, or unwilling to host, refugees (Sanyal 2017). Lebanon also changed from a mere recipient of aid to capitalizing on the crisis (Geha and Talhouk 2018). The country benefits from an estimated USD 36 million that refugees pay in rent to Lebanese property owners every month, boosting the local economy through income from renting out private houses, rooms and land to refugees (UN-Habitat and UNHCR 2014). The governance crisis, economic collapse and COVID-19 pandemic sharply increased poverty in Lebanon, with nine out of ten Syrian refugees living in extreme poverty (UNHCR-Lebanon 2020).

More than 80 per cent of Syrians in Lebanon are settled in private apartments, with smaller numbers living in substandard shelters such as garages, worksites and unfinished buildings (Boustani et al. 2016). Detailed studies of tenement buildings find that land tenure is unclear, undocumented or contested, and refugees, migrants and the urban poor live next to each other in

overcrowded and substandard flats (Knudsen 2019). The number of urban refugees living in squalid shelters has increased over the past decade, affecting their health, legal protection and economic status. In order to help the Syrian refugees find affordable shelter, humanitarian agencies have sought to improve shelter conditions and standards, increase tenure security and strengthen social relations between the refugees and host communities.

The Occupancy Free of Charge (OFC) facility aims to provide affordable housing especially for the poorest refugees by covering their rental expenses (AUB and Save the Children 2020). In Lebanon, NGOs like the Norwegian Refugee Council have pioneered the OFC approach and entered rental and refurbishing deals with proprietors and owners for a time-limited period, an approach marketed as a win-win solution for both landlords and tenants. The main problem with the OFC approach is that it is costly and thus unsustainable, with NGOs unable to afford the support for longer periods of time. Moreover, when the rental period ends, longer-term hosting solutions may still be unavailable or out of reach, making the residents unwilling or unable to move, which can renew conflict between owners and proprietors. Studies of the OFC facility in Lebanon's Bekaa valley (Boano et al. 2021) show that the scheme has provided a windfall to local landowners, who combine profits from renting land with income from renting houses that are upgraded by the OFC facility (Kikano et al. 2021). State absenteeism has increased the leverage of local landowners and Syrian managers (*shaweesh*), who exploit the refugees' precarious situation.

The OFC approach is analysed in the chapter by Watfa Najdi, Mona Fawaz and Nasser Yassin, which finds that a large majority of the beneficiaries in Lebanon's Bekaa valley have benefited from the rental support and improved housing standards and livelihoods. However, several issues give grounds for concern. Market exchanges rest mostly on ad hoc agreements between tenants and landlords, and persistent tenure insecurity is related to the inability to pay rent. Only a tiny fraction of the beneficiaries has signed written lease contracts and most lack reliable information about market conditions and rents. This allows landlords to take advantage of the beneficiaries, with about one-third living under the threat of eviction. Alas, money saved through the rent ('fee') waiver is spent on pressing food and nutrition needs, rather than on longer-term human capital investments such as education. The short twelve-month duration of lease contracts adds to the families' challenges, although some are aided by benevolent landlords. The analysis shows that the OFC scheme can act as a temporary relief but is unable to resolve the longer-term housing and livelihood issues.

Like in Lebanon, many of the Syrian refugees in Turkey are found clustered in poor urban areas and neighbourhoods. In the capital Ankara (Erman 2017), Syrian refugees have moved into dilapidated and abandoned houses due to the low rents, available employment and support from local

NGOs. Similar problems are found in Istanbul, which hosts the largest population of refugees in Turkey, with about three to five hundred thousand Syrians residing in the city. There is no state support for urban refugees in Turkey, and many pay high rents and work for low wages in unskilled professions. The refugees struggle with discrimination, barriers to accessing banking, health and education services, and poor housing and employment conditions (Woods 2016). Many of the Syrians do not identify as refugees, even rejecting the label, seeing their plight as a human rights issue, with urban (non-camp) refugees lacking both documentation and legal protection. The handful of Turkish NGOs assisting urban refugees have been slow to reorient their approach from a camp-based to an urban response.

The role of Turkey as a host country is examined by Ahmet İçduygu and Souad Osseiran, who provide a historical overview of the country's policies vis-à-vis urban refugees during the past ten years. They analyse the shift towards normalizing the urban refugee presence and the implications for state, local-level and non-governmental actors. The chapter interrogates urban self-settlement of refugees and finds that outcomes are a result of both deliberate policies and spontaneous realities. About half a million Syrian refugees live in Istanbul, having self-settled in districts based on their connections, affordable rents and economic opportunities. Turkey's policy response demonstrates that interventions in urban settings for refugees concerning health, education and social security are possible. Turkey has made three hundred thousand citizenships available to Syrian refugees, signalling a shift towards accepting their long-term presence. However, since 2016 the government has instituted different measures to contain refugee movement within Turkey and relocate refugees to the area of their first registration. Since 2019, negative public opinion vis-à-vis refugees has increased the importance of facilitating their return, including by establishing a 'safe zone' in northern Syria. This is yet another example of how refugee policies in Turkey emerge as a response to public debates and popular sentiments about the Syrian refugee presence.

In Jordan's sprawling capital Amman, about one-third of the country's 650,000 Syrian refugees have settled in low-income areas, with the remainder in camps and cities in the north, especially Irbid and Mafraq (Tobin et al. 2021). In East Amman's Jubilee neighbourhood, the Jordanians have moved out and Syrian refugees moved in, along with migrants from Egypt, Iraq and Yemen (Al-Tal and Ghanem 2019). The area is marked by urban decay, lack of services and problems with waste collection and electricity provision. Most of the Syrian refugees' hail from the southern cities such as Deraa, but some hail from Damascus, Homs and Aleppo. East Amman therefore shares many similarities with Beirut, where Syrian refugees have settled in informal areas alongside other urban poor, refugees and migrants. Jordan has eased legal access to labour markets for refuges with regional

compacts and special economic zones (SEZs) targeting Syrian labour. However, the uptake has not been nearly as high as policymakers had envisioned (Lenner and Turner 2019; Betts and Collier 2017).

As shown by Kamel Doraï's analysis of Jordan's asylum policies, the country's urban geography has been profoundly transformed by the long-term settlement of forced migrants. The Palestinian refugee experience largely determines the way Jordanian authorities plan and implement policies related to the arrival of new refugee groups. Since 2012, Jordan has established several refugee camps near the Syrian border, in part to give visibility to the Syrian refugee crisis and attract funding from the international community. Zaatari, Jordan's largest camp, has been transformed from a humanitarian space to an urbanizing proto-city with a myriad of small businesses and economic activities. However, most of the country's refugees have self-settled in cities and urban areas where employment opportunities are better. In Amman, new Syrian neighbourhoods have formed around the Palestinian refugee camps that are now an integral part of the capital's hosting core. The impact of forced migrants on the urban fabric can thus be understood through a double dynamic: the settlement of refugees in urban areas and the ongoing urbanization of Jordan's refugee camps.

Global Policy Approaches

Syria is currently engulfed by war amid a catastrophic internal displacement and refugee crisis, but the country has historically been an important host country since Ottoman times (Chatty 2018: 2023). The interventionist wars in Iraq (2003–9) led to massive internal displacement and refugee crises, with about two million Iraqis fleeing as urban refugees to Amman, Aleppo and Damascus. The Iraqi refugee crisis forced the international aid community to rethink its strategies and recognize that refugees in the region prefer to self-settle in urban areas, with many relying on social, economic and kin networks.

As described by Dawn Chatty, Syria has been a long-term host to refugees from neighbouring countries dating back to the late Ottoman period, when Syria (*Bilad al-Sham*) integrated hundreds of thousands of forced migrants from the borderlands of the Ottoman and Imperial Russian empires. This reception policy was extended in the twenty-first century to the about 1.5 million Iraqi refugees fleeing interventionist wars and settling in Damascus. The Syrian government resisted calls from the UNHCR to set up camps for the refugees and prioritized 'duty' over 'rights' as defined by the international aid regime, extending the country's historical hospitality traditions to support and integrate displaced Iraqis. As shown in Chatty's chapter, pre-conflict Syria provides a historical precedent for the urban residence in

the country's hosting of Iraqi refugees. However, the Syrian example was, until recently, taken up neither by the UNHCR nor the host countries in the region (Betts and Collier 2017).

Internationally, there have been attempts to find global solutions to the growing displacement problem, especially after the EU's erratic, ad hoc response to the Mediterranean refugee influx in 2015–16. This led to a call for greater international cooperation and commitment in responding to mass displacement (Loescher 2021: 61). In 2016, the UN General Assembly adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, which aimed to strengthen mechanisms to protect people on the move. The declaration was accompanied by the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF), promoting stronger support for refugees and the countries that host them (ibid.). The New York Declaration paved the way for the adoption of two new global compacts in 2018: the Global Compact for Migration (GCM) and a Global Compact on Refugees (GCR). An important element of the GCR is that refugees should be included in the host communities from the very beginning and refugee camps reserved for emergencies only. The GCR is an intergovernmental agreement that is not binding for the signatories, and thus could have limited significance for the countries' asylum practices and policies.

The role of changing refugee polices, especially urban refugee policies, is examined by Jeff Crisp, who analyses the way in which the Syrian displacement crisis put the refugee issue at the very top of the global policy agenda, a process that culminated in the establishment of the above-mentioned GCR, a non-binding treaty that lacks specific targets or measurable objectives and so far has had modest results. Crisp shows how the Syrian emergency encouraged the international community to pursue new strategies in relation to the settlement of refugees in urban areas and outside of camps, and to adopt a long-term and developmental approach to the refugee issue, in place of the usual short-term and relief-oriented interventions. However, despite pioneering the use of cash transfers, policies and new labour schemes targeting urban refugees, the developmental approach to refugees has so far failed to take off. Looking into the future, it seems likely that most Syrian refugees will remain within the region, many of them living in urban areas and alongside host populations, surviving on the assistance they receive from humanitarian organizations, coupled with whatever livelihoods opportunities they are able to find.

Even though urban refugees are now the majority among the world's refugees, policies have not kept pace with this development. It was not until 2014 that the UNHCR formulated a new strategy on 'alternatives to camps' (UNHCR 2014). However, the UNHCR's new policy does not adequately address the challenges facing urban refugees. On the contrary, critics argue that it has given rise to a new form of internment of refugees trapped in an

eternal temporary state (Ward 2014: 93). The UNHCR is often either the only or the major service provider and is therefore perceived and treated by governments as a state-like actor. For many host countries, camps remain important, because they make refugees visible and 'legible' (Turner 2015), and therefore serve to attract humanitarian aid to the degree that host countries become refugee rentier states (Tsourapas 2019).

The changing nature of the UNHCR's policy is examined by Astri Suhrke. She argues that operating in a charged political environment, and hamstrung by limited financial autonomy, the UNHCR has developed a distinct organizational culture that blends strategic caution with tactical innovation. The refugee regime is state-centric, with key decisions regarding protection and assistance of refugees made by national governments. The UNHCR can plead and prod, but the final decision lies with the states. This leads to structural fragmentation. Second, the regime is normatively diverse and national governments develop policies in relation to their own interests. In 2002, the UNHCR initiated a shift towards a development-oriented refugee policy and introduced a scheme for greater responsibility-sharing, including more resettlement to third countries, labelled 'Convention Plus'. However, host countries still feared that programmes would enable refugees to remain indefinitely. This made the Convention Plus initiative fizzle out, while the New York Declaration and, later, the GCR were unanimously approved by the UN General Assembly. The GCR is committed to burden-sharing, but geographic proximity to conflict has remained the primary distributive mechanism and responsibility-sharing has consequently focused on the sharing of monetary costs, rather than giving refugees greater options to resettle in third countries.

Closely linked to the UNCHR's urban policies are humanitarian and urban crisis responses targeting the urban displaced. To address them, international organizations began developing unified tools, approaches and mechanisms that would ensure adequate, timely and at-scale responses in cities. Several of these global approaches and tools were tested, or partially initiated, in the response to urban emergencies in the MENA region, most of them geographically targeted and referred to under the umbrella term 'area-based approaches'. In their chapter, Ida Lien and Synne Bergby examine the evolution of global approaches and mechanisms for urban crisis response and investigate their application in the Lebanese context. Several of the global approaches and tools were partially initiated and tested in the response to the Syrian refugee crisis in the Middle East. The Syrian crisis has unfolded in urban centres characterized by socio-economic vulnerabilities and inequalities and inherited governance problems. The analysis of urban crisis responses points to competing frameworks, models and plans that have often been partially implemented and funded by a proliferation of different actors. In many cases, agencies collect their own data and carry

out their own assessments in the same area, leading to duplication of work. This also undercuts the application of area-based approaches as it can lead to competing or dissimilar plans for the same area. The so-called 'cluster approach' that divides interventions into clearly defined sectors to avoid duplication has also been difficult to adapt to cities. Overall, urban crisis responses remain fragmented and underfunded, reflecting the funding deficit globally and the high costs of interventions in middle-income countries such as those in the Middle East.

Conclusion: A Right to the City?

As the book's chapters outline, the pervasive urban settlement of Syrians in the Middle East has historical precedent and has carved out important patterns in the region's urbanization. Regional tensions between policies of encampment and self-settling in urban areas have resulted in a wide variety of approaches by the UNHCR and national and local governments to intervene for the sake of the refugee and the host country alike, especially in urban contexts. However, outcomes are uneven, vary across national borders and are subject to the political economy of donor policies and practice (Dinger 2022b). Furthermore, such interventions are crosscut by gender and family, economic linkages and ethnic and linguistic cleavages. Ultimately, the volume underscores that the decade-long Syrian crisis has implications that go beyond numbers of movements of people, and into the ways in which places are shaped and formed, the ways that policies and so-called 'solutions' are devised and implemented, and the everyday efforts that Syrians themselves put into making it work in their new urban environs.

The widespread poverty documented by the annual Syrian vulnerability surveys over the past decade underscores that urban residence is not a panacea for the livelihood challenges facing urban refugees: large segments are mired in poverty amid shrinking aid budgets. In the Syrian crisis, long since turned protracted, the refugees remain dependent on humanitarian aid, yet the 3RP call launched in 2015 as the UN's largest call is also one of the most underfunded. The humanitarian aid is part of broader policies of refugee governance in the Middle East (Carpi 2023), with secondary migration towards Europe marked by ambivalence (Tyldum 2021) and curbed by a range of measures, agreements and 'compacts' that contain refugees in sending, transit and host states (Knudsen and Berg 2023). This has made Middle East states long-term hosts for millions of refugees, paradoxically, as they, except for Turkey, are non-signatories to the refugee convention yet have become the new 'landscapes of protection' (Cole 2021). With most refugees unable or unwilling to return to Syria, and resettlement at an all-time low, supporting the many urban displaced necessitates a new approach, one

based on an understanding of the special challenges of urban displacement and resettlement. This volume has highlighted the challenges and vulnerabilities that disproportionally affect the poorest refugees from Syria settled in urban areas. They have moved to cities but have yet been unable to claim their 'right to the city', which is why a rights-based developmental rather than a long-term humanitarian approach is needed to end the decade-long 'urban displacement crisis'. Combining local, national and global policy instruments that legalize residence, formalize employment and safeguard housing would be a first step in realizing Lefebvre's urban vision.

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Part I
Settling in Cities

1

Syrian Self-Settlement in Lebanon's 'Arrival Cities'

Refugee Livelihoods in Tripoli, Beirut and Tyre

Robert Forster and Are John Knudsen

Introduction

The informal areas, slums and shanty towns found in cities around the world are the first point of arrival for rural-to-urban migrants, labourers and refugees, and thus have been labelled 'arrival cities'. The epithet was coined by Doug Saunders (2011: 18–20) to capture their role in providing migrants with a foothold in urban and peri-urban areas, often in defiance of zoning and building regulations. Considering their localized character, they can more aptly be termed 'arrival sites' and are a key feature of the cities and towns in the Middle East. Arrival sites provide refugees and migrants with a foothold in the city and offer socio-economic integration, self-sufficiency and for some, upward social mobility. Yet, recent research challenges the narrative of arrival cities as sites of upward social mobility and emphasizes the diverse outcomes caused by the settlement choices of migrants (Meeus et al. 2019: 2).

This chapter furthers this debate by analysing refugee self-settlement in select cities and neighbourhood sites in Lebanon.[1] 'Arrival city' is a promising analytical concept for the comparative analysis of settlement choice and outcomes for the urban displaced and migrants (Taubenböck et al. 2018). In this chapter we use 'arrival city' as an analytical lens for examining settlement choices and livelihood outcomes of Syrian refugees living in disadvan-

taged urban neighbourhoods and informal settlements in Beirut, Tripoli and Tyre (Map 1.1). The three cities differ in size, economy and administrative capacity to cater for refugees, as do individual neighbourhoods. Refugees do not settle in cities as such, but rather in neighbourhoods, each with different characteristics, although they typically share their building typologies and urban form with informal settlements and slums (ibid.).

Refugee self-settlement is closely related to what has been termed 'arrival infrastructures', defined as comprising legal, administrative and material conditions that influence settlement choices and outcomes for the urban displaced (Meeus et al. 2019; Kreichauf and Glorius 2021). Arrival infrastructures differ both between cities and across neighbourhoods and housing (shelter) stocks and influence settlement outcomes, which also depend on refugee agency. Refugee urbanism also alters neighbourhood characteristics, as refugees transform neighbourhoods, quarters and shelters not only as city dwellers, but as city-makers (Fawaz et al. 2018).

The following section provides an analysis of self-settled refugees from Syria living in Beirut, Tripoli and Tyre that together account for about a third (three hundred thousand) of Lebanon's Syrian refugee population. The neighbourhoods examined here belong to the most vulnerable percentile of the urban areas where self-settled refugees live (UNHCR 2015), often alongside other disenfranchised and poor groups.[2] They can broadly be defined as poverty-stricken mixed residential areas and settlements defined by informality, many of them with buildings that are structurally unsound ('red-flagged') and in danger of collapse (Table 1.1).

This chapter draws on background data on cities, neighbourhoods and shelters, as well as author-generated data from field research, small-N surveys and semi-structured focus group and personal interviews.[3] The results show that the factors influencing refugee self-settlement include affordable housing, employment opportunities and social networks, especially the presence of family and kin. The chapter ends with the role of 'arrival cities' in shaping the reception, housing and service provision for the urban displaced.

Lebanon's Urban Refugee Crisis

Lebanon is a highly urbanized society where two-thirds of the population live in major cities, with Syrian refugees and the urban poor confined to the poorest and most vulnerable areas (Boustani et al. 2016: 12; Atallah and Mahdi 2017: 15). Unlike the neighbouring countries of Jordan and Turkey (Chatty 2017), Lebanon did not set up formal camps to house refugees, seeing camps as a prelude to later settlement. Nonetheless, informal tented settlements were established in Beqaa valley as one of four shelter categories
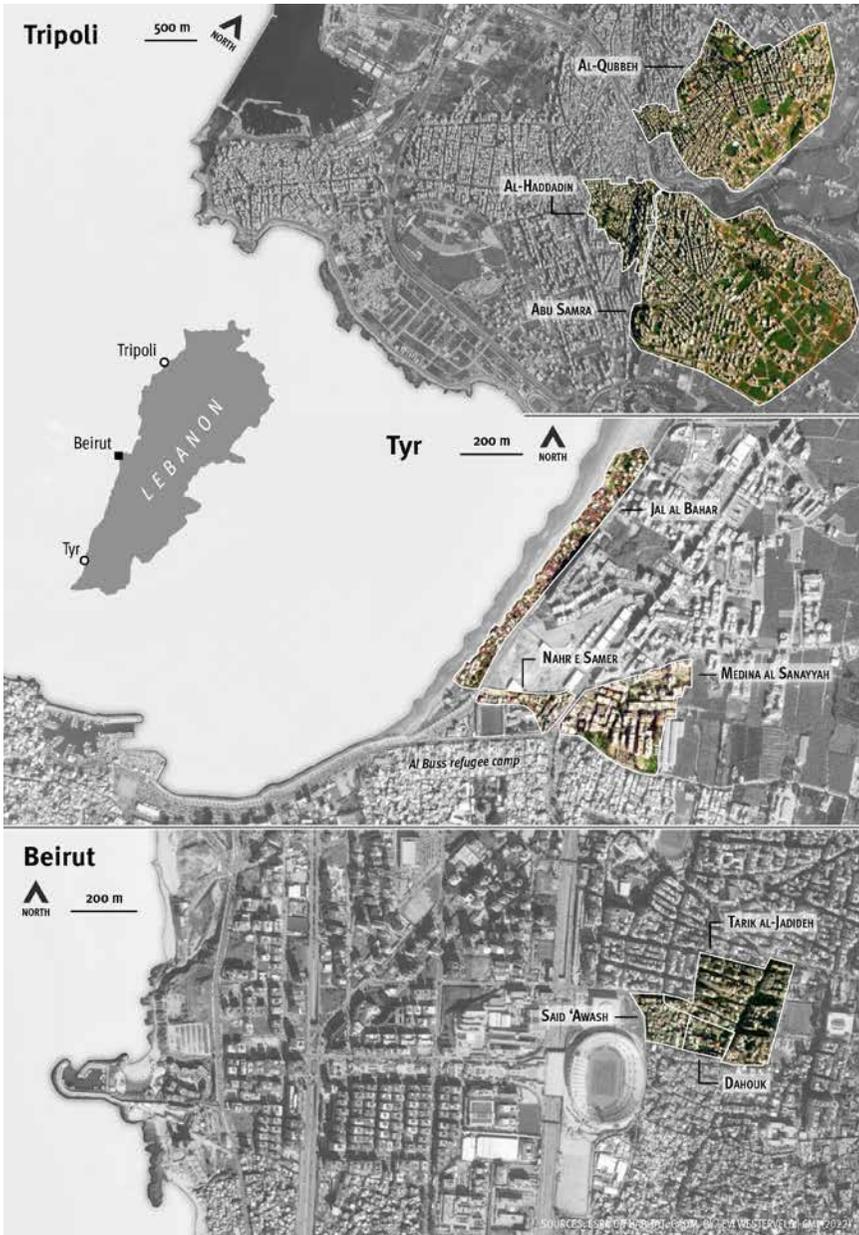
Map 1.1. Map of the cities and neighbourhoods under study. Levi Westerveld, © CMI.

Table 1.1. Overview of cities and neighbourhoods under study.

City				Neighbourhood/s		
Name	Pop. (sq.km2)	Refugees *	Refugee impact	Name	Type	Quintile **
Tripoli	0.5 mill (24.7 sq. km)	100,000 (S) 32,000 (P)	*Significant*	Abu Samra	MRA	1
				al-Qubbeh	MRA	1
				al-Haddadin	MRA	2
Beirut	2.2 mill (19.8 sq. km) ***	220,000 (S) 100,000 (P)	*Localised*	Tariq al-Jadideh	MRA	1
				Daouk	IS-G	1
				Said 'Awash	IS-G	1
Tyre	0,22 mill (6.7 sq. km)	16,000 (S) 70,000 (P)	*Significant*	Nahr al-Samer	MRA	1
				Al-Madineh al-Sanaa'iyyeh	MRA	1
				Jal al-Bahar	IS-G	1

Legend:
S – Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS)
P – Palestinian refugees
MRA – Mixed-residential area
IS-G – Informal settlement – 'gathering'
(*) Population figures are crude estimates due to the lack of census data and the dynamic refugee situation.
(**) A total of 251 Most Vulnerable Localities ("cadastre") were identified and ranked into five quintiles (each 50 cadastre): 1 (most) to 5 (least) vulnerable (UNHCR, 2015).
(***) Greater Beirut covers 200 sq. km, and includes the city proper (Beirut Governate, 19.8 sq. km) and adjacent municipalities.

created in the response to the Syrian displacement crisis (UNHCR 2012).[4] Meanwhile, the Lebanese government withdrew from managing the refugee influx, except in promoting the return of refugees and limiting the ability of Syrians to enter and remain in Lebanon (Knudsen 2017). Instead, the burden of refugee management was shifted to underfunded municipalities that varied in their ability and stance towards Syrian refugees (Mourad 2017; Nachebe 2019). The local implementation of these policies thus contributed to an opaque, arbitrary and inconsistent refugee governance (Stel 2020).

The influx of close to 1.2 million Syrian refugees taxed Lebanon's underdeveloped housing market and public services, exacerbated by weak local governance, insufficient public resources and widespread corruption. On arrival, Syrians sought affordable rentals through the same channels as the

urban poor, which led to a rapid, unregulated expansion and subdivision of rental units, leading to overcrowding and urban densification (Fawaz 2017). The fallout from Syria's civil war and multilayered governance, financial and public health crises in Lebanon after 2019 added to the acute vulnerability of host and refugee populations alike. Vulnerability surveys have found a decline in extended families and an increase in smaller (nuclear) family unions. Two-thirds of the refugees rent accommodation in residential buildings, but there is a gradual shift towards residence in non-residential structures across almost all governorates (UNHCR et al. 2018: 2). In addition to Lebanon's two no's – 'no refugees and no camps' – there is also a third 'no': no urban policies. The combination of the three has led to non-recognition of refugees, no formal settlement assistance and no effort to organize or provide adequate housing for the displaced (Knudsen 2018). Lebanon has ratified neither the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 extension. Instead, refugee governance is based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the UNHCR, with Lebanese authorities authorizing residency permits (Janmyr 2017). However, many refugees either failed to obtain permits or were later unable to renew them due to the exorbitant fees, thereby denying them legal residency – a trend that has increased since 2015.[5] Thus, most Syrians are now at risk of being detained or deported (Chaccour 2022).

Despite the recent policy shift towards the urban displaced, neither the UNHCR's policy on 'alternatives to camps' (UNHCR 2014) nor the strategic policy documents offer guidance on how to engage cities with urban refugees. There are neither concrete recommendations on how to manage such refugee influxes, nor viable alternatives for integrating refugees in urban areas (Muggah and Abdenur 2018: 8). The importance of this has only increased as the growth of cities and urbanization has magnified the number of 'urban refugees' globally. Some countries have pursued new modes of aiding the urban displaced, such as area-based approaches (ABAs), but face issues in implementation due to a lack of funding and questions around the sustainability of interventions. The integration and sustainability touted as possible benefits of urban settlement depend on upholding the rights of the urban displaced regarding their 'right to the city' (Fawaz 2012) and access to housing, employment and public services . These are factors that vary greatly between urban areas and across neighbourhoods. The pull factors of cities include better and more options for employment and public services (water, electricity and internet) and access to healthcare, education and transportation, but access often depends on cost, availability, information flows and distance (Crisp et al. 2012; Harb et al. 2018; Forster 2021). However, and as is evident from Lebanon, Syrian refugees face several legal restrictions, in addition to a sectarian rhetoric portraying them as a security risk, economic burden and demographic threat.

Housing and Settlement in Tripoli, Beirut and Tyre

Beirut, Tripoli and Tyre, the three 'arrival cities' examined in this chapter, differ in many respects: size, ethnic composition, refugee impact and economic means; yet all of them have informal areas and poor neighbourhoods with self-settled Syrian refugees (Table 1.1). The aid response to Syrians in Lebanon focused predominantly on impoverished Syrians, rather than the well-to-do, and the targeting of programming was informed by classifications of vulnerability on the municipal level (Kikano et al. 2021; UNHCR 2015). The selection and ranking of the 'most vulnerable localities' were based on a multi-deprivation index (MDI) that included income levels, access to water and sanitation, and housing conditions (Mourad 2016). In the most vulnerable subsection ('percentile') of these localities, self-settled refugees from Syria (54.1 per cent) and deprived Lebanese (35.8 per cent) cohabit (UNHCR 2015). In this chapter, we examine nine localities that belong to the most vulnerable percentiles (Table 1.1), across a north–south transect and using a mixed-method approach that combines background data (UN-HCR, UNDP, UN-Habitat) with small-N surveys and ethnographic interviews (URBAN3DP 2020).

Most of the neighbourhoods surveyed are part of deteriorating city centres – a product of the civil war era (1975–90) and post-civil war deindustrialization, the centralization of finance and the bureaucracy in Beirut, and the lack of investment in secondary cities such as Tyre and Tripoli. The political stability and economic prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s made the middle class move from the city centre to new homes in peri-urban suburbs and rent their old homes to rural Lebanese migrants (Gilsenan 1996). The many master plans for Beirut and Tripoli, obsessively commissioned but rarely implemented, created legal frameworks that continue to define much of the urban fabric even with irregular implementation (Verdeil 2005). During the civil war, population transfers along ethnic and religious lines were accompanied by 'quiet encroachment' on public and private land and the construction of illegal and unplanned buildings (Bayat 2013). Other irregular spaces, such as the Armenian and Palestinian refugee camps of the 1920–40s, were incorporated into the urban sprawl to become hybrid city-camps (Fawaz and Peillen 2003). During the post-civil war period, some of the unplanned buildings were regularized (Verdeil 2005), but political connections and weak governance led to the expansion of informal areas that provided investment opportunities for businessmen, property developers and neighbourhood strongmen. The post-civil war building boom created new sectarian enclaves (Bou Akar 2018), and tensions over housing increased with the influx of displaced Syrians who were accused of inflating the cost of rent while simultaneously receiving international aid (Kikano et al. 2021).

The 1992 abolition of the old rent law that capped rents and new legislation on construction in 2004 enabled a construction boom in the 1990s and the 2000s (Ashkar 2015; Marot 2015). However, instead of alleviating the post-war housing crisis, this led to a demolition-and-construction boom, with luxury apartments offered for sale to the wealthy members of the Lebanese diaspora and Gulf country investors. The influx of Syrians after 2012 intensified the subdivision of rental units and utilization of properties not designed for human occupation (Fawaz 2017). Industrial and commercial workshops and buildings were retrofitted with the bare necessities, often lacking basic amenities including plumbing (Kikano et al. 2021). The improvised living quarters were essential in absorbing the displaced but led to overcrowding (Fawaz 2017). Despite the poor quality of housing, rent consumes on average 30 per cent of monthly income (sometimes more) and is the second largest expense for Syrians in Lebanon after food (UNHCR et al. 2017: 55). Interventions aiming to reduce the burden of rent through time-delimited rental support such as the Occupancy Free of Charge (OFC) scheme have so far neither proved successful nor sustainable (AUB and Save the Children 2020).

The surveys from select neighbourhoods in Beirut, Tripoli and Tyre show that the decision to leave Syria was often a collective family decision and that most fled in groups consisting of household units together with relatives and in-laws (URBAN3DP 2020). Occasionally, single male 'pioneers' who had left Syria to avoid being drafted in the army facilitated the settlement of their families in Lebanon a year or two later. Family reunions meant that the demography of the Syrians matched that of the host population, contradicting the stereotype of the entrepreneurial, young and male 'urban refugee' (Buscher 2018).

Across the cities surveyed, self-settlement is predominantly urban-to-urban (85 per cent), that is, Syrian refugees who hail from cities tend to resettle in cities, with the important exception of Tyre (addressed below). The survey results and interviews indicate that Syrians in Lebanon settle in cities and neighbourhoods based on three main factors. On the city level, the presence of kin, either close family or relatives, was the main factor in settlement choice. At the neighbourhood level, the cost of housing and opportunities for employment were the two primary factors for settlement (Table 1.2).[6] Following their arrival in Lebanon, Syrians integrated into a parallel community of co-nationals, with links to the host community through employment and other connections. This phenomenon is indicative of the barriers to integration and the importance of kinship in settlement decisions. Despite the relative stabilization in many areas in Syria after 2017 and the economic crisis in Lebanon after 2019, nearly all the respondents (89 per cent) surveyed in March 2021 did not intend to return to Syria (UNHCR 2021: 6).

Table 1.2. Factors influencing the choice of settling in cities and neighbourhoods (as percentage of survey responses, N=450).

City	Neighbourhoods	Choice of city				Choice of neighbourhood				
		Relatives	Previous visit	Diaspora present	Other (*)	Rental costs	Employment options	Household expenses	Services (health, admin, etc.)	Other (*)
Beirut	Tariq al-Jadideh Daouk Said 'Awash	76	8	8	8	39	14	9	11	27
Tripoli	Abu Samra al-Qubbeh al-Haddadin	77	8	11	4	90	0	6	0	4
Tyre	Nahr al-Samr Al-Madineh al-Sanaa'iyyeh Jal al-Bahar	63	28	4	5	64	17	1	6	12

Source: URBAN3DP (2020)
(*) The "other" category was not disaggregated.

Tripoli

In 2017 Tripoli's population was estimated at 508,000, including about 100,000 Syrians (Table 1.1). Despite a strong sense of Tripolitan identity, communal conflict linked to civil war-era grievances escalated after the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011 (Gade 2017). Since the earliest poverty studies in the 1950s, Tripoli has been Lebanon's poorest city, yet its urban topography includes a pocket of prosperity between al-Tall, the main square on the outskirts of the Old City, and the al-Mina port, surrounded by lower-middle-class neighbourhoods (Nemeh 2012). Tripoli's economic deterioration is linked to the establishment of the French Mandate in 1920, which divorced the city from long-standing mercantile networks extending into Syria (Chahal 2015). The city industrialized rapidly after the 1920s, driven by the Iraqi Petroleum Company headquartered in al-Qubbeh and the Beddawi refinery, as well as some fifty other factories and mills (Lefèvre 2021). In 1948–49, Palestinian refugees settled in Tripoli, with the two refugee camps Nahr el-Bared and Beddawi, and the adjacent areas served as hosting cores for the urban poor.

The post-civil war deindustrialization was exacerbated by a lack of economic investment and the concentration of financial wealth in Beirut, as well as political bickering, elite rivalry and communal conflict. Over the past decade, extreme poverty, defined as living on less than USD 3 a day, increased from 52 per cent in 2012 to an estimated 70 per cent in early 2021 (Geldi 2021). The many attempts at regenerating Tripoli's economy since the late 1990s, focused on renewing the city's dilapidated infrastructure and promoting heritage tourism in its Mamluk-period urban core, have not been successful. The settlement of Syrian refugees reflects historical linkages between Tripoli and the Syrian cities Homs, Aleppo and Hama, and these are evident in kinship linkages between Tripoli residents and those living in Syria's border cities. The presence of relatives in Tripoli, at times through mixed-nationality marriages, is a driver in city selection (Forster and Abdalkader 2021: 16). Nearly all the surveyed households stated that the reason for settlement in a neighbourhood was related to the low cost of rent (Table 1.2). Living conditions are poor, with exposure to pollution and noise. Safety is a major reason for choosing a specific neighbourhood across all cities. However, only half of Syrians surveyed in Tripoli said they felt safe there. Indeed, with intermittent armed conflict in the city, nearly all the respondents identified 'man-made hazards' in Tripoli, compared to two-thirds in Tyre and about one-third in Beirut (ibid.: 11).

Overall, the Syrian refugees in Tripoli endure acute overcrowding, with about half living in five square metres per person (UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP2015: 58). Housing shortages are reflective of property speculation in the Old City and the construction of new luxury accommodations in ar-

eas such as Dam w-al-Fares. Working-class areas such as Abu Samra and al-Qubbeh have seen rapid urbanization over the past twenty years, but a lack of investment and maintenance has made housing standards deteriorate. The most critical livelihood issue in the surveyed neighbourhoods was employment (82 per cent) and more than two-thirds of households were indebted to their relatives or shopkeepers. Almost a third of households in Tripoli reported that school-aged children contributed to household income, compared to a quarter in Tyre and a sixth in Beirut. Housing insecurity and unemployment mean that one-third of the households have moved at least once during the past six months in search of more affordable accommodation. Additionally, more than a third of the respondents were planning to change accommodation to lower the cost of rent, indicative of frequent resettlement as a marker of urban precarity. As noted by one interviewee in al-Shalfeh: 'I want to move, but I cannot find a cheaper place. At the same time, I cannot afford the rent here.'

Abu Samra (with Al-Shawq and Al-Shalfeh)

Abu Samra was formerly the location of summer holiday homes for Tripoli's middle classes, and residential homes for Tripoli's working professionals began to be built there in the 1950s (Nahas and Yahya 2001: 86). The neighbourhood is located on the southern plateau above the Abu Ali river channel in the 'cadastre' of Zeitoun. A mixture of residential, commercial, waste- and agricultural land, Abu Samra also contains the informal settlements of al-Shalfeh and al-Shawq. In al-Shawq, Syrian refugee households constitute between 65 and 75 per cent of the population (Campbell 2020: 12), and some have created private 'courtyards' that are screened off around the ground floor apartments with sticks, poles, tin sheeting and tarpaulins, some bearing the UNHCR logo. A deprived area, al-Shawq is targeted by several NGO interventions such as schooling and homework support, psychosocial workshops and regeneration and greening initiatives.

Abu Samra was severely damaged by internal clashes during the civil war and is the site of recurring and violent tensions. On average, the homes are some of the most spacious in Tripoli and the area has the largest rental market in the city due to the transience of formerly rural Lebanese who rent their properties to Syrians (UN-Habitat 2016: 56). As a result, the Zeitoun cadastre has the highest ratio of Syrians vis-à-vis Lebanese in Tripoli (ibid.: 40). Despite newer homes and slightly higher than average rents (around USD 150 a month), four-fifths of the households noted that their housing was inadequate. The Syrians living in Abu Samra are predominantly from urban, middle-class backgrounds, with class differences contributing to social tensions with the rural Lebanese residents.[7]

Al-Qubbeh

Located on the eastern bank of the Abu Ali river, the al-Qubbeh neighbour-hood expanded from the Old City up the hillside to the Qubbeh plateau (*qubbeh* translates as 'dome') beginning in the 1920s and coalesced around the French-built military barracks constructed in 1937. By the 1960s, the neighbourhood included the headquarters of the now defunct Iraqi Petroleum Company (Gulick 1967: 206). A primary driver of the neighbourhood's growth was the migration of rural populations from the predominantly Sunni rural districts north of Tripoli. The area consists of mixed residential and commercial areas with small-scale agriculture along the periphery, including the grazing of animals on unused plots as residences fall away to olive groves. Housing is 'low-quality' and on the eastern edge, where new informal apartment buildings were constructed after 2010. Of the estimated sixty thousand residents in al-Qubbeh, around twelve thousand are Syrians, one-fifth of whom settled in the neighbourhood prior to 2011 (UN-Habitat and UNICEF 2018: 20–21). Al-Qubbeh offers the cheapest accommodation and living expenses in this sample of Tripoli. The satisfaction with accommodation in al-Qubbeh is high, with four-fifths reporting it as 'adequate', but still citing concerns regarding overcrowding, harassment, noise, pollution and dampness. Opportunities for employment are slightly better than, for instance, Abu Samra, in part due to the pre-war Syrian pioneer population settled in the area and a large commercial sector in the neighbourhood (New Street and Cedar Street), but the wages are among the lowest in the three areas surveyed.[8]

Al-Haddadin

Situated between Abu Samra and Nejmeh Square, al-Haddadin is one of the most densely populated areas of Tripoli, with an estimated population of about seventy-eight thousand (UN-Habitat 2016: 36). It is an important commercial area that hosts a section of the fresh goods market, as well as being a node through which residents pass daily on their commutes (Nahas and Yahya 2001: 88). Like much of the Old City, the infrastructure in al-Haddadin has become dilapidated and many houses bear the scars of communal conflict (ibid.: 87, 102; Harake et al. 2016: 7).

In 2015, about fifteen hundred Syrians lived in al-Haddadin. In 2020, nearly a third of surveyed households hailed from rural areas, compared to a sixth in Abu Samra, and only 2 per cent in al-Qubbeh. The reasons for settling in al-Haddadin were more varied than with respect to Abu Samra and al-Qubbeh. Survey responses included the presence of co-nationals including former neighbours, as well as previous knowledge of the area. The rural and farming background of Syrian residents is reflected in the survey

responses, which highlighted multiple vulnerability markers, including the lowest levels of formal education and a lower rate of skilled workers. In addition, the rate of post-settlement displacement is twice that of Abu Samra and al-Qubbeh, and there is a higher level of debt among households. Al-Haddadin has the most expensive rents in the sample and the highest percentage of children not enrolled in school (26 per cent), compared to, for instance, 15 per cent in Abu Samra. Satisfaction with housing quality is low and homes are substantially smaller than in other areas, with about half of the residents living in apartments sized 10–29 square metres. However, the centrality of the neighbourhood, low transportation costs, slightly better yet still limited services and reduced noise due to scarce traffic were all highlighted as benefits of settlement.

Beirut

The capital Beirut has by far the largest economy among the cities surveyed and the greatest diversity in employment sectors, as well as in the ethnic and sectarian make-up. Some two hundred thousand Syrians reside in the urban agglomeration of Greater Beirut Area, which comprises the city proper and adjacent municipalities, with an estimated population of around 2.2 million (Table 1.1). The civil war solidified ethnic enclaves of the 'Muslim' west and 'Christian' east that feature strongly in the contemporary demography. The post-civil war reconstruction of the city centre demolished many historic buildings and displaced the original inhabitants and wartime squatters (Becherer 2005). Many of the war-displaced resettled in the capital's southern suburbs during the 1990s. Sabra is one of the largest informal areas since the establishment of the Shatila refugee camp in 1949, and a premier destination for Syrian refugees since 2012 (Knudsen 2019).

Syrian settlement in the three surveyed neighbourhoods of Sabra – Said 'Awash, Daouk and Tarik al-Jadideh – highlighted that employment prospects are among the most cited reasons for settling there. Although the low cost of housing was noted as a main reason for selecting a particular neighbourhood (39 per cent of households), the reasons for settling in Beirut were more varied than in Tripoli or Tyre, highlighting transportation, low household expenditures and the availability of services including education and healthcare. In Sabra, nearly all the male respondents had part-time employment and one-fifth were employed full-time or had one or more adult family members with a valid work permit, which was substantially higher than in non-Beirut neighbourhoods. Indicators highlighted other beneficial aspects of settlement in the capital: the households had the lowest incidence of school-aged children working (3 per cent) and only 4 per cent of households had moved in the previous six months.

Host–refugee and refugee–refugee relations were also the least contentious in Sabra and only 6 per cent of households reported problems among groups in their neighbourhoods, likely due to the Palestinian majority in the informal areas such as Sabra. Regarding Lebanese hosts and relations with other refugee groups (mostly Palestinian), the large majority (80 per cent) of the Syrian households responded that relations were respectful. In the surveyed neighbourhoods, nine out of ten respondents reported feeling safe. Rent was listed as the main livelihood difficulty across surveyed neighbourhoods. As stated by a Syrian woman in her late twenties: 'Food, clothes and rent are cheap: . . . [the] problem is finding money to pay the rent'.

Tariq al-Jadideh (Gaza Buildings)

Tariq al-Jadideh is a mixed residential neighbourhood, forming the northern part of Sabra and including refugees living in the former Gaza Hospital buildings. The hospital complex was commissioned by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in the late 1970s but was closed during the civil war after extensive damage. The gutted buildings then became a temporary shelter for Palestinian families displaced from elsewhere in the capital. The buildings are nominally under PLO ownership, but as the latter were unable to afford refurbishing, they became de facto resident-controlled (Knudsen 2019). Palestinians are still in the majority among the about 450 households in the buildings, but around half of the flats have, since 2012, been sublet to refugees displaced from Syria. A smaller number of Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi and Egyptian migrants live in the buildings' dark and humid basement flats. There is no formal committee in charge of managing the buildings, but self-styled gatekeepers collect fees for renovation and water. Interviews with residents confirm that living costs and household expenses in Palestinian-majority areas are cheaper than in other parts of Beirut. The Shatila camp nearby and the Sabra street market provide cheap foodstuffs and untaxed goods from Syria, as well as opportunities for employment and lower start-up costs for entrepreneurial and skilled workers (Dahdah 2014). Although households noted the presence of relatives nearby, many of whom had settled in the area before 2011, most residents found their way into the buildings after being tipped off by members of their social networks.

Some households have family members living nearby or elsewhere in Lebanon, but few benefit from support from kin because relatives are in similar circumstances. None of the households in the Gaza buildings receive remittances from abroad, and the families mostly keep to themselves. For some, living among Palestinian refugees is easier due to both groups' outsider status in Lebanon. Most of the residents benefit from food vouchers and hygiene kits distributed by a Palestinian NGO, and some also receive

rental support from the UNHCR. Despite NGO-assisted upgrades to the buildings a decade ago, the residents live in overcrowded, humid and damp conditions that cause a range of chronic ailments (Zabaneh et al. 2008).

Daouk

Daouk is an informal settlement and Palestinian 'gathering' in Sabra, the latter of which is provisionally defined as a cluster of twenty-five or more Palestinian households. Established in 1968 and named after the original landowning family, property rights are contested with implications for housing standards and service delivery. The demography of Daouk reflects Syrian self-settlement since 2012; of the 400 homes in the gathering, 200 are now rented to Syrians, while 150 Palestinian and 50 Lebanese families live in the remainder. There are no Asian residents, a result of the community having not allowed them to settle. Although interviewed households mentioned discrimination, the consensus highlighted amicable relations in the community. Acceptance of Syrians in Daouk is facilitated in part due to the high number of co-nationals, many originating from the same villages. There is also a perception that Syrians and Palestinians are both subaltern groups lacking civil rights, thus facing similar challenges and prospects.

As an informal settlement with a mixed population, Daouk provides affordable housing and proximity to local employment opportunities. Daouk's houses are strung along narrow alleyways of slightly better quality than those in neighbouring Said 'Awash (detailed below). Daouk is managed by a Popular Committee, but municipality services are not extended to the area. The reasons for settling in Daouk were related to the presence of family members as well as the availability of NGO assistance. A local NGO provides food vouchers to more than two hundred Syrian households and vocational training for women. There are no international NGOs working in Daouk. Syrian households received assistance from the UNHCR in the past, but this was discontinued following funding shortages and cost-cutting within the organization in 2020. Services – water, electricity and waste disposal – are accessible but require the payment of fees. Households adopt cost-cutting measures such as using the free clinic provided by UNRWA and Doctors without Borders, as well as taking children out of school.

Said 'Awash

Said 'Awash, like Daouk, is an informal Palestinian 'gathering', built on squatted public land. Thus, land tenure is contested and most of the buildings are small and in disrepair. Said 'Awash comprises around 450 households, which include Syrian (200), Palestinian (70) and Lebanese households (70),

as well a handful of Asians. The gathering is managed by a five-member Popular Committee organizing community services and resolving disputes. The municipality does not service the area, but many benefit from in-kind support from the local NGO. Other services are available at cost; therefore, most households dispose of their own household waste rather than paying a fee.

The main reasons for settling in Said 'Awash were related to the presence of relatives, the opportunities for work, the cost of housing and the availability of public services such as electricity and water. The lower cost of living means that most interviewees in the area found living conditions fair compared to other areas in Beirut (although this was still only 40 per cent). To access healthcare, Syrian households who are not entitled to use the UNRWA clinics are hamstrung by the high costs of private medical services. Some families leave the neighbourhood to attend the Doctors without Borders clinic. Employment options are limited within Said 'Awash, but residents can find work in Sabra's markets and stalls. Employment in the informal sector was challenged in 2019 when the Ministry of Labour cracked down on Syrian-owned businesses and the employment of Syrians across Lebanon. Livelihood assistance is also limited to food vouchers from a local NGO, in addition to basic support from the UN, UNRWA in the case of Palestinians and the UNHCR for Syrians.

Tyre

Following decades of rural-to-urban migration and repeated refugee influxes, Tyre has become the country's fourth largest city with an estimated population of 200,000 (UN-Habitat 2017). The dense urban core includes Lebanese residents (approximately 78,000), as well as camp-based (approx. 70,000) and out-of-camp Palestinian refugees (approx. 37,000) (Table 1.1). Most of the Palestinian refugees live in one of the three refugee camps – al-Buss, al-Rashedieh and Burj al-Shamali – as well as in several informal 'Palestinian gatherings' and adjacent areas. Since 2012, displaced Syrian and Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) added an additional 10 per cent to the urban refugee population (approx. 16,200), and settled in the dilapidated urban core and in or adjacent to the refugee camps.

Despite the city's strategic seaside location, fertile land and political patrons (the Amal Movement), Tyre has suffered from a slump in tourism, agriculture and trade. As a result, residents living in the urban core are now among Lebanon's most vulnerable (UN-Habitat 2017: 43, 59). Poverty levels for the Lebanese and the Syrian and Palestinian refugees are higher than the national average, as are unemployment rates (37–43 per cent), with

most engaged in low-skilled labour in construction, the service industry and agriculture. The household expenditures in Tyre are among the highest in the country and the monthly per capita income the lowest, leaving refugee families indebted and food insecure (ibid.).

Settlement in particular neighbourhoods was most often motivated by the proximity of employment, with a fifth of the respondents employed in the agricultural sector. Relatives and acquaintances were instrumental in facilitating the search for accommodation and employment in Tyre. Transience is also evident in terms of displacement within Lebanon, whereby 95 per cent of respondents had been displaced at least once. Of the three cities examined in this chapter, Tyre stands out as having the highest number of Syrians (27 per cent) reporting that they had previously visited or had prior knowledge of the city, in contrast to 8 percent in Beirut and Tripoli (Table 1.2). This was, for instance, the case with Palestinian refugees displaced from Damascus's ruined Yarmouk camp who fled to the Palestinian camps and gatherings in Tyre through kinship networks. Despite the close ethnic, religious and cultural ties between the Palestinian residents and those displaced from Syria (PRS), there are differences in gender roles, customs and hospitality that keep them apart and limit social interaction.

Nahr al-Samar

Nahr al-Samar is an informal settlement that was founded after the Palestinian exodus from Palestine (*nakba*) in 1948–49. The land is owned by the local municipality and occupied by an estimated 156 households, including thirty-five Syrian and twenty-eight Palestinian households. The buildings in the neighbourhood are illegal, but tacitly permitted by the municipality despite a lack of documentation. In 1960, constructions became more durable, using materials such as concrete and stone. The footprint of the area grew during the early stages of the civil war after 1975 when oversight was minimal. Before 2011, Nahr al-Samar consisted predominantly of two- and three-storey buildings with ground-floor shops, but the mixed residential buildings expanded after the influx of Syrians. As an informal settlement and Palestinian 'gathering' the area is not serviced by UNRWA, with basic services provided by the municipality (Yassin et al. 2016). There is no Popular Committee in Nahr al-Samar, but the Palestinian community sends a representative to coordinate with the Popular Committee in the adjacent Palestinian gathering, Jal al-Bahr (see below).

Occupying houses of 'middle building quality' (UN-Habitat 2017: 76), the Syrian residents of Nahr al-Samar explained that they felt safe in the area. Several residents described living in Nahr al-Samar as 'better than Beirut' or the countryside, where transportation and access to work was

an issue. In addition, relatives were living nearby (sometimes in the same neighbourhood), the apartments were larger and their location meant that commutes to work were often short and on foot. Primary issues, on the other hand, related to the ban on repairing houses, overcrowding and the many car repair shops in the area that pose hazards for children in addition to being a source of noise and pollution. Generally, however, interviews highlighted that many residents were satisfied with their housing in terms of quality and location. The nearby al-Buss refugee camp, for instance, provides access to free clinics and schools for Palestinian residents (and PRS), as well as cheaper foodstuffs in the street markets lining the camp, with the nearby seaside promenade functioning as a recreational area, especially among the youth (Perdigon 2008).

Al-Madineh al-Sanaaʻiyyeh

Al-Madineh al-Sanaaʻiyyeh ('Industrial city') is an informal settlement and mixed residential neighbourhood located on formerly agricultural land based on a lease agreement between local landowners and Palestinian families displaced from Upper Galilee in 1948. Industrialization began in 1958, when a confectionary factory was built there and was followed by the construction of the first single-storey bungalows nearby. In 1975, some of the bungalows were sold or rented to Palestinians and Lebanese nationals relocated from the Israeli border. During the next decade, the footprint of the area grew following the construction of mostly Palestinian-owned mixed commercial-residential blocks. Several apartments in the area were rented out to migratory Syrian labourers before 2011. The settlement now comprises around 420 households. The majority are Lebanese, while about seventy-seven Syrian and PRS households live in a mixed residential area that includes several workshops, auto repair facilities and parts dealers. The Palestinians in the neighbourhood can access UNRWA services in nearby al-Buss camp. There is no Popular Committee in the area, although the PRS are registered with the Popular Committee in al-Buss. Like elsewhere in Tyre, PRS and Syrians took diverging paths of settlement, with PRS settling first in or alongside Palestinian areas before finding their way into the neighbourhood (Knudsen 2018). Many of the Syrian refugees spent time in border villages in the Beqaa valley before consecutive resettlements landed them in Tyre.

Like in nearby Nahr al-Samar, the residents suffer from pollution and noise from workshops, traffic and diesel generators, as well as overcrowding. The location, however, is adjacent to the city centre and has access to cheaper goods in markets along the al-Buss camp. Moreover, many residents combine rural (agriculture and seasonal) work with urban (service,

construction, artisanal and skilled) work. There are no restrictions on entering or leaving the area, yet Syrians and PRS newcomers avoid socializing with the resident Palestinian and Lebanese neighbours, reflecting the tendency to restrict social interaction with majority groups. One said: 'I feel that we're not accepted by the community . . . actually we are very cautious that we don't interact with people in [the] community because if we do, problems could occur.'

Jal al-Bahr

Jal al-Bahr is an unofficial Palestinian refugee camp, also referred to as a 'gathering', established in 1948 by Palestinian Bedouins on municipal land, adjacent to the Nahr al-Samar neighbourhood. The original tents were replaced by more durable shelters of concrete and stone as late as the 1960s. By this time most of the animals had disappeared and many of the original Bedouin residents turned to inshore fishing (Allan 2020), which is now a main source of livelihood in the neighbourhood. During the first phase of the civil war, reconstruction and restoration of the buildings saw residents rebuild homes and the footprint of the settlement was enlarged, with houses strung out along the beach close to the city centre. Since 2012, PRS have settled in Jal al-Bahr, most of whom were linked to the area through kinship networks. Many of them hail from the ruined Yarmouk camp in Damascus that was besieged by the Syrian army. The gathering has a total population of around two thousand, comprising about 156 Palestinian households as well as about sixty-two Syrian and Palestinian refugee households from Syria (Knudsen 2018). Many of the refugees from Syria have been unable to renew their residence permit, and therefore avoid leaving the gathering for fear of being arrested. Some are still able to find menial jobs such as car cleaning and vending, while others are supported by resident relatives and in-laws.

The building quality in Jal al-Bahr is 'very poor', with run-down houses covered with metal roofs (*zinco*), and the residents live under threat of eviction due to squatting on public land. During the winter, storms and gale-force winds damage homes and erode foundations. With insufficient drainage, seasonal flooding and torrential rains inundate the lower-lying sections. While the residents are neither permitted to enlarge nor improve their homes, emergency repairs have been allowed with funding from an international NGO. The gathering has Popular Committee representation through one seat in the Jal al-Bahr refugee camp assembly. Another characteristic of the Jal al-Bahr gathering is poverty-induced migration, primarily to Berlin, Germany. The migrants have turned absentee landlords in the gathering and may subsidize rent, allowing some households to live rent-free.

The main avenue for settling in the neighbourhood is utilizing networks of relatives and acquaintances, many of whom live in the gatherings and camps nearby. Although residents struggle to pay the rent, the leaky and damp houses and flats in Jal al-Bahr are cheaper than the housing in the nearby al-Buss refugee camp, but they are also further from the city centre, and the residents must commute by foot along the heavily trafficked road or pay transportation costs. The neighbourhood has public space for the children to play along the beach, but the beachfront is littered with plastic waste. Overall, however, the residents consider the neighbourhood to be calm, especially compared to other places where they have lived.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined settlement choices and livelihood outcomes across three cities in nine localities that are among Lebanon's most vulnerable as defined by recent surveys. Despite many similarities – rundown houses, insufficient or non-existent public services – the neighbourhoods examined here differ in size, density and ethnic composition. Across the cities studied here, the main settlement factors are linked to familial and kinship ties in combination with social networks. The self-settlement process is shortened as time passes, with 'pioneers' easing settlement for subsequent arrivals. At the neighbourhood level, accessing affordable housing and employment are key placement factors. This, in turn, leads to distinct settlement pathways, which are either swift and enabled by familial and kinship links (Tripoli), or incremental across border villages and peri-urban sites in search of improved livelihoods (Beirut and Tyre).

The three 'arrival cities' differ in their capacity to accommodate self-settled Syrian refugees, with Beirut hosting the largest number, and Tripoli and Tyre having the highest ratio of refugees to residents, with implications for the displacement impact on the urban fabric and hosting cores. The economies of the cities differ markedly too, with Beirut being the country's economic and political centre, compared to the economic decline of secondary cities like Tripoli and Tyre. Nonetheless, since 2019, all households are struggling in the wake of the combined economic, political and health crises affecting the country. At neither the country nor city level have specific urban polices been formulated or implemented, a fact that is reflective of the decentralized approach that has left reception to local communities reliant on support from UN agencies and local and international NGOs.

Most of the refugees have settled in mixed residential areas and informal settlements, and some also in the light industry zones vacated by Lebanon's ailing manufacturing sector. The poorest Syrian refugees predominantly settle in the country's most vulnerable areas, including in the vicinity of Pales-

tinian refugee camps, reflective of the social protection that refugee camps and adjacent 'grey areas' offer. These are the areas with the lowest rents and the greatest availability, leading to residential overcrowding when families and relatives share the same flats or premises, with time resolved by splitting families into smaller units and households. The general lack of secure tenure (due in part to verbal contracts) in combination with inflated rents makes refugees resettle in search of affordable housing and better living conditions, with frequent resettlement a sign of urban precarity and vulnerability. This is also evident in the resort to child labour, a 'negative coping mechanism' that is correlated with income poverty among the most vulnerable refugee households and consistent with countrywide surveys on refugee livelihoods.

The availability of employment differs between the three cities; Beirut has the largest economy, with refugees employed as day labourers and hired hands in low-paid work, primarily in construction, service sectors and sidewalk peddling. This is consistent with findings in other Middle East capitals and primary cities such as Amman and Istanbul, which also hold the largest number of refugees, reflecting their greater options for employment, residence and service provision. Tripoli, a Sunni majority city, has been caught up in economic decline and communal conflict, which together with widespread unemployment have impoverished both the middle class and refugee communities. In Tyre, the long-term settlement of Palestinian refugees and Syrian displaced converge, with employment in the local agri-business only offering low-paid, seasonal work, in combination with inshore fishing and vending.

Syrian refugees predominantly settle among co-nationals in low-income neighbourhoods and informal settlements where refugees, migrants and the urban poor cohabit. Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) are more often found in, or adjacent to, Palestinian refugee camps and informal settlements ('gatherings'). In the low-income and underserved areas, refugee and emergency urbanism has made refugee camps amalgamate into mixed city-camps that serve as housing cores for the urban poor and refugees alike. The housing standard is generally very poor, with Beirut residents paying the highest rents for the least habitable shelters. Informal areas and gatherings typically have the weakest infrastructure with only rudimentary water, sanitation and electricity provision, some only accessible at added costs to residents. The same applies to the availability of schools, hospitals and other underfunded and undersupplied public services, which refugees are often unable to access due to lack of capacity or lack of funds, forcing them to seek out charitable and other free-of-charge alternatives.

There is limited capacity in all three cities to cater to refugees, with the UNHCR acting as an intermediary for the state. Overshadowing these limited capabilities are the legal frameworks governing Syrian refugees in Lebanon that curtail rights and freedoms and are designed to promote in-

voluntary return or secondary migration. The humanitarian aid to refugees is undersupplied and limited to cash transfers (e-cards from the UNHCR), housing allowances (often reduced or discontinued) and in-kind aid (food vouchers and hygiene kits) from local NGOs. Current aid levels are underfunded and under-dimensioned, and that is causing living conditions and livelihoods to decline amid the country's economic malaise and governance crisis. Suffering from chronic poverty and saddled with debt, refugees are forced to seek out piecemeal and short-term NGO support where and when this is available, with frequent resettlement a sign of precarity.

Taken together, this chapter has demonstrated the role of arrival infrastructures in shaping the reception, housing and service provision for the urban displaced in the cities and urban sites under study. Self-settled refugees reside in underserved sites and low-cost shelters, with settlement choice and pathways guided by social networks, kinship ties and livelihood issues. The predominant neighbourhood types are mixed residential and informal areas, with smaller numbers residing in refugee camps, gatherings and converted buildings. Disenfranchised refugees suffer from a lack of services and social protection, which increases their vulnerability and deepens poverty. Easing legal restrictions, increasing employment opportunities and improving access to affordable housing would go a long way in reversing these trends and making 'arrival cities' a key element in empowering 'urban refugees' as new urban denizens.

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Notes

1. 'Arrival cities' have structural and functional similarities with what have been termed 'cities of refuge'. Cities of refuge are predominantly settled by displaced persons and refugees, and they vary in their capacity to cater for new entrants due to rudimentary or non-existent reception facilities, damage from armed conflict, or financial and administrative constraints (World Bank et al. 2017).

2. The naming of administrative divisions includes the Ottoman period *caza* (district), the French *cadastre* (a register showing details of land ownership) and present-day municipalities and vernacular neighbourhood boundaries. This means that population figures, ethnic composition and housing stock depend on how residential areas and neighbourhoods are defined and circumscribed.

3. The data for this article draws on intermittent fieldwork between 2016–18 and includes semi-structured, focus group, and life history interviews with Syrians and Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS), collected with the help of local research assistants who in the case of Beirut were facilitated by a local NGO. Additional data were collected during 2019–22, through author-designed surveys covering fifty households in each of the nine localities, or 150 households in each city (URBAN3DP 2020). In addition, members of Popular Committees, academics, NGOs, urban planners and architects were interviewed.

4. The categories include collective shelter (CS), informal tented settlement (ITS), small shelter unit (SHU) and rented houses (RH).

5. After 2015, the only route to legal residency for Syrians was through sponsorship costing USD 200 annually per family member over 15. The prohibitive costs also increased the number of unregistered Syrians after 2017 when the renewal fee was waived (UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, 2017, 2018).

6. As described by interviewees, relatives or family facilitated the initial move to their selected city and could potentially impact the decision to settle in a neighbourhood. However, neighbourhood settlement would usually by facilitated by a wider array of social ties and the agency of individual refugees, including through activities such as door-knocking, engaging concierges and asking co-nationals (rarely Lebanese unless they had been settled for a while) if they were aware of opportunities for accommodation or employment.

7. Abu Samra had the highest number of households that lived in privately owned houses in urban areas in Syria before 2011. This is as opposed to al-Qubbeh, where Syrian households were living in self-owned apartments in urban areas in Syria before 2011, thus indicating differences in wealth prior to displacement (URBAN3DP 2020).

8. The hyperinflation during the survey period (February–July 2020) means that wages, rent and other economic estimates are unreliable due to daily fluctuations in exchange rates and the rapid increase in prices.

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2

At the Intersection of Economic and Family Networks

Female Syrian Refugees from Homs in Mafraq, Jordan

Sarah A. Tobin

Introduction

A large number of Syrian refugees in Mafraq, Jordan, hail from Homs, Syria, which is 300 km away. Homs is much closer geographically to Lebanon (38 km) and Turkey (175 km). These Syrian refugees from Homs have economic connections to Mafraq that derive from seasonal migrant labour in the agricultural fields outside the city, which predate the Syrian crisis and facilitated migration the longer distance to Mafraq.

Despite these long-standing and proven economic connections, Syrians in Mafraq are often economically marginalized, especially women, who are even more economically vulnerable within their own families. These Syrian women rely upon other Syrians in their networks in Mafraq to source information about available humanitarian aid, which is often low level and insufficient to meet their needs. Lacking the limited employment options of their husbands and the ability to source sufficient humanitarian aid, Syrian women turn frequently to remittances from their translocal and transnational networks of Syrian family members located outside Mafraq and outside Jordan. This demonstrates that Syrian women have cultivated a 'nested' networking system for economic viability in an otherwise economically debilitating environment.

Utilizing data from the TRAFIG project and the URBAN3DP survey, this chapter examines the case of Syrian women in Mafraq, demonstrating that their own and their families' local, translocal and transnational economic connections are diverse in their support and outcomes. While employment-based, transnational connections have provided mobility and labour opportunities into and within Jordan (especially for and through male heads of households), local family connections provide humanitarian aid information, and translocal and transnational family connections provide necessary remittances. The case demonstrates that Syrian women in Mafraq are embedded in diverse and dynamic connections that shift in geographic reach, utility and outcomes, as they are crosscut by gender, impacted by scarcity and change over time. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the challenges in maintaining these diverse and dynamic connections in conditions of protracted displacement and future uncertainties.

Transnational Networks, Mobility and Economic Support

As I have discussed elsewhere, family and kinship dynamics in mobility considerations and decisions in the Middle East are complex and have been a long-standing subject in Middle Eastern scholarship (Tobin et al. 2020). Though dense, overlapping social networks also typified pre-conflict Syrian life (Stevens 2017), often through categories of shared religion or sect and ethnicity and nationality (Batatu 1999; Leenders 2012; Lesch 2012; Phillips 2012; Rabinovich 2008; Salamandra 2004; Wedeen 1999, 2013), many scholars of the region agree that the Arab family (often constituted through tribal affiliations and shared family genealogy) 'constitutes the dominant social institution through which persons and groups inherit their religious, class, and cultural affiliations. It also provides security and support in times of individual and societal stress' (Barakat 1993: 98). Suad Joseph, for example, has written extensively about the ways that people in the Middle East access and share resources through kinship ties. Connectivity through family networks (Joseph 1993: 452–53) is a durable and key cornerstone for psychosocial dynamics in the Middle East, including in conditions of displacement where Arab family structures stand in for the state and adapt to larger structural and political change (Joseph 1997: 80; King 2005: 347–49).

More recent scholarship on displaced Syrians in Jordan has expanded this line of inquiry in the context of Syrian refugees, emphasizing the long history of migration between Syria and Jordan and its relationship to family and kinship connections (Tobin et al. 2022). Many Syrian families have a long history of circular migration between Syria and Jordan. As Lokot (2018), Wagner (2019) and Sidhva et al. (2021) discuss, many men in Syrian households obtained seasonal, migratory labour in the Middle East – in-

cluding Jordan – and the Gulf countries, which regularly left Syrian women back home as the de facto heads of households, managing daily household and economic affairs, raising children and calling in support as needed. Thus, Lokot (2018: 34) is correct to point out that displacement and mobility do not necessarily mean that Syrian refugees in Jordan are experiencing 'seismic shifts' in duties and roles.

Once the Syrian crisis began, those economic ties strongly influenced family decisions to migrate (Zuntz 2021). As Lagarde (2019: 11) discusses in the case of Syrian migration to Amman, Jordan, the men who moved into street vending from 2012 tended to join up with cousins, brothers and those friends from the village to whom they felt closest. By joining a collective to which they were linked by village or family affiliations (or both), in groups with a strong spirit of solidarity and possessing their own resources, they were able to settle much more easily into the urban fabric of the cities in which they arrived. Indeed, in addition to finding shelter with relatives who already had accommodation in Jordan, they also benefited from their advice when it came to choosing their sales areas and obtaining supplies of goods in Jordan itself.

The ability to be mobile in critical moments of displacement has become a key feature in recent literature in the field of transnational migration (Black and King 2004). This ability warrants attention not only concerning return migration, but also other forms of secondary migration, including onward migration within and outside of the first country of refuge (Jeffery and Murison 2011). Further, the ability to call in favours and support from family networks is based upon social capital as 'features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit' (Putnam 2000: 2). Mobility plays a key role in the experiences of displaced persons, the policies and laws that govern them, and the organization and delivery of humanitarian aid and development assistance. Frequently, the loss of mobility is a key cornerstone to defining, containing, and even controlling and securitizing refugees and displaced persons. However, refugees and displaced persons are not limited to one place when it comes to their networks and relations, which spread across multiple places and country borders. In other words, family and kinship connections in displacement constitute social practices and lifeworlds that are grounded in multi-nodal relations through translocal networks (Dahinden 2017; Faist et al. 2013; Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013).

Furthermore, family and kin networks play a key role in sourcing aid information, and they often do so in gendered ways. As Stevens (2016, 2017) and Zuntz (2021) discuss, social and family networks provide key access to NGOs and to sources of aid from the humanitarian sector, especially for women (Turner 2019). As Turner rightly points out, humanitarian aid is often targeted at women, as objects in need of help and empowerment. Thus,

women's networks for information are key to bridging the gap between the offerings of aid actors and women's needs and demands. As my previous research has demonstrated (Tobin et al. 2021: 13), the most important source of information about aid is one's own family, relatives and friends. I also found (Tobin et al. 2021) that needing help and support may be considered embarrassing or shameful – even straining marriages – and therefore might not be disclosed outside of the immediate family.

Family and kin networks also play a key role in remittances for displaced persons. As Lindley (2009, 2010) discusses, ongoing conflict in home countries of displaced persons serves as a motivation for sending remittances, especially for women. A study by Carling et al. (2012) found that Somalis in Norway remit payments monthly at six times the rate of Pakistanis, and they do so at even higher rates than other migrant groups. The main factor explaining this difference in remittance rates between Somalis and other migrant groups is that there is a much more severe collapse of state security, protracted conditions of armed conflict, and exceptionally difficult conditions of insecurity and precarity in Somalia. The authors find that ongoing or recent conflict in the country of origin stimulates remittances because it exacerbates the financial needs for those in such conditions, whether through price inflation or emergency needs like healthcare, or even to support onward migration for those who are internally displaced or refugees. Remittances have also been found to play a role in development of the home country, particularly in terms of poverty alleviation (de Haas 2005), consumption and investment (Horst et al. 2014). The assumption that migrants feel a sense of loyalty to the wider community back home, and not just individuals, drives the idea that remittances contribute to both emergency support and national development.

The Levant saw remittances used regularly prior to the Syrian crisis, and especially among the displaced (Al-Khalidi et al. 2007). Al-Khalidi et al. detail the usage of remittances among Iraqi refugees in Syria between 2003 and 2007. About 40 per cent of Iraqi refugees in Syria received aid of some kind from Iraq (Doocy et al. 2012). The Iraqis would remit funds from Syria to those family and friends who were worse off in Iraq during that time. They also received cash from Iraq that was due to them from their pensions, savings, food rations or other business income, such as from rental properties (ibid.: 2). Due to the financial exclusion of Iraqis from Syrian banks at that time, most Iraqis relied upon remittances transferred through middlemen or family and friends. Though the stereotype was that displaced Iraqis were quite well off, in fact a large number of them still relied upon their financial arrangements and incomes from Iraq, and they were loath to carry large amounts of cash with them across the border for fear of robbers. They also relied on their food rations in Iraq. In fact, food transfers were also established so that displaced Iraqis could still get their food rations

while in Syria from middlemen, even without actually transporting the food (ibid.: 2).

Stevens (2016) has argued that Syrian refugees in Jordan no longer actively turn to family and kinship networks for support or information-sourcing because the financial and emotional strain of exile has led to a 'collapse' of social capital among Syrian refugees in Jordan. He argues that this is due to the failure of international aid agencies to maintain pre-existing social connections and to support the development of new ones. Many have argued against this hypothesis, including myself (Tobin et al. 2020). Similarly to other authors such as Van Raemdonck (2021), Zbeidy (2020) and Zuntz et al. (2021), I find that social networks have not 'collapsed'. They certainly have been strained, while social capital is challenged and new figurations are required – and built, often in 'nested' formations of local, translocal and transnational – in order to obtain mobility and security, source aid information and obtain remittances to meet economic needs amid the Syrians' protracted displacement. Furthermore, processes of rebuilding social capital and fostering these sourcing networks are crosscut by class, gender and generations, and are not always predictable or straightforward (Lokot 2020).

Methods

This chapter presents data collected from two projects in 2019–20, URBAN-3DP and the 'Transnational Figurations of Displacement' (TRAFIG) project,[1] combining the findings into a more conclusive whole. The URBAN3DP survey in Jordan comprised 151 Syrian refugee respondents. The dataset used for this chapter includes a quantitative survey of twenty-eight women living in Mafraq who hail from Homs.

In the TRAFIG project, for Jordan, six Jordanian and Syrian researchers employed snowball sampling to collect data from over 530 people in qualitative interviews and a quantitative survey during 2019–20. The overall objective of TRAFIG is 'to contribute to the development of alternative solutions to protracted displacement that are better tailored to the needs and capacities of persons affected by displacement' (Etzold et al. 2019). It is grounded theoretically on the concept of 'transnational figurations', which stresses the processes of networks in time and space and the interdependencies of displaced people at distinct places.[2] This chapter echoes some of the larger findings of the project's study in Jordan, which we published in a working paper (Tobin et al. 2020), that demonstrate that out-of-camp refugees have distinctive vulnerabilities when it comes to their economic status and income, as well as their connections to other Syrians and their Jordanian hosts. While all Syrians are vulnerable, those who reside outside camps have felt the repercussions most acutely. The dataset from the TRAFIG

project used in this chapter includes a quantitative survey (N = 39), as well as six semi-structured interviews and one life history of Syrian women from Homs who live in Mafraq.

Mafraq – a 'Little Syria' in Jordan

The city of Mafraq is located approximately 15 km from the Syrian border. Pre-Syrian crisis, Mafraq was a small border town of ninety thousand people that one could stop in while en route to the Syrian border and further on to Damascus or beyond. Mafraq was one of the earliest sites for Syrian refugees to congregate in Jordan, given its proximity to southern Syria, where the anti-Assad regime demonstrations were quickly and violently repressed. The greater Mafraq area is now home to over two hundred thousand people, many or most of whom are Syrians, and the area is known for high population density (Tiltnes et al. 2019). Mafraq now hosts a large number of refugees that has surpassed its local population. One Mercy Corps (2013) report indicates that the number of Syrian refugees in Mafraq city outnumbers the Jordanian population there by 150 per cent.

As discussed above, many Syrians in these studies came to Jordan, and specifically Mafraq, because of their pre-existing economic and social networks, bringing along their family networks. This study's interviewees also reported the same pattern. For example, in one interview, a woman said that her husband chose Jordan for them as a country of refuge because he had previously driven commodity trucks between Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia. Although the female interviewee did not know anyone in Jordan, her husband had employment connections there and thus took his family to Jordan. She said that it was hard to stay in Jordan initially, but that she then grew closer with her husband's family and their friends there, and now relies on those social networks and the capital they provide.

In fact, 66 per cent of the sample for this chapter said they came from Homs to Mafraq because of pre-existing economic networks that had promised that 'economic conditions here are better [e.g. more jobs] than in other places'. In addition, 82 per cent indicated that an important reason for leaving home was 'economic reasons, such as to find employment'. Thus, the need for employment (a 'push factor'), coupled with the promise of employment (a 'pull factor'), made Mafraq a location preference. Other push factors included 'insecurity, war and violence' (87 per cent) and 'land conflicts' (71 per cent). Further, 71 per cent said they came to Mafraq because it was easier to get to than Turkey or Lebanon, which indicates that their passage to Mafraq was less troubled, at least potentially, because of prior knowledge of the passage and location. However, pre-existing economic connections were not always sufficient to facilitate such movement. Family ties also played a crucial role in selecting Mafraq as a place of refuge, with 58 per cent moving to Mafraq be-

cause they had family already living there, out of which 63 per cent indicated having received help to come to Mafraq from those family members.

While geographic proximity and cultural similarities were the most important structural aspects considered, fleeing to Jordan also required family safety and, in many instances, socio-economic help. At the beginning of the conflict, utilizing such networks was expected, as social capital facilitated this confluence of factors. However, in migrations within Jordan, we begin to see that such figurations are not without limits and require social capital inputs to sustain them or even remake them, which is often challenging in protracted displacement (Tobin et al. 2022).

Despite being the demographic majority and relatively well connected locally through employment and family networks, Syrians in Mafraq are economically worse off than both their Syrian peers in other, nearby towns and their local Jordanian neighbours. For example, the average annual income for Syrians in Mafraq is approximately 30 per cent lower than for those in Irbid (Tiltnes et al. 2019). Two-thirds of the Syrian refugees in Mafraq are living below the national poverty line (UNHCR 2015). In addition, one-sixth of Syrian refugee households are in abject poverty, with less than USD 40 per person per month to meet their needs. Thus, there are approximately ten thousand households that have been identified as being financially vulnerable and are on a waiting list to receive monthly financial assistance (Anabtawi and Al Amad 2019: 645).

The quantitative survey results shed much light on the lives and livelihoods of Syrian women from Homs in Mafraq (N = 67). The women ranged in age from 16 to 59, with most (68 per cent) between ages 30 and 49. Most were married (79 per cent) with a primary school-level education (68 per cent), and had received some aid in the previous month (83 per cent). A majority (61 per cent) came to Jordan in 2013. On average, the women reported five to seven persons in their household, nearly all of whom were part of their nuclear families. All of them were living with children, and most were living with spouses (64 per cent). Beyond the nuclear family, a spouse's parent was the next individual in the home (five families) or other relatives such as cousins, uncles, aunts or grandparents (three families). Overall, the nuclear family arrangement was the typical case. These results point to an intensification of family networks that are present within one's place of living or nearby, and they demonstrate the challenge of supporting more distant family networks.

Work and Women in Mafraq

In 2016, the Government of Jordan and the international community signed the Jordan Compact, an agreement combining labour market access for refugees with favourable terms of trade with the EU (Tobin and Alahmed

2019; Tobin et al. 2021). The agreement is financed by the World Bank and the European Union, and aid disbursement (USD 300 million) is measured against implementing two hundred thousand work permits for Syrian refugees and enhancing job opportunities for host-country Jordanians. In June 2020, the programme received a two-year extension and additional financing of USD 100 million. The investment in and enthusiasm for the agreement reflects an increased emphasis at the international level on supporting development opportunities in refugee host-country states as a 'win-win' solution in protracted crises (Betts and Collier 2017).

The agreement legalizes Syrian refugees' access to formal work to enhance self-reliance, reduce onward migration and protect refugees from exploitation. Syrians can work legally in open sectors, including agriculture, construction, textiles and garment manufacturing and food service. The Ministry of Labour exempted the Syrians from the work permit fees: they only pay a symbolic administrative fee of JOD 10 (USD 14) (Tobin et al. 2021). Of the almost 160,000 work permits issued, only one fourth are in active use (Durable Solutions Platform 2020). Syrian refugees are highly reliant upon paid labour because, although they have access to basic public services such as housing, schooling and medical care, they experience difficulties in accessing and utilizing these services and in affording better ones (Tobin et al. 2021).

The issuance of work permits and gaining of meaningful employment among Syrian refugee women, in particular, have been a tremendous challenge. As of 2018, only 4 per cent of the work permits issued went to women (Buffoni 2018), and by 2020 the percentage had only increased to 5 per cent (Ministry of Labour 2021). Jordanian women report very low labour force participation rates of only 15 per cent (Ali Slimane et al. 2020). Thus, the same kinds of employment opportunities are generally limited for both Jordanian and Syrian women alike: according to the UN, the vast majority of women in Jordan self-reported being stay-at-home mothers, working on the family farm or doing some work from home (such as self-employment or small businesses entrepreneurship) within a general category denoted as 'housewife'; the only profession where women worked in significant numbers was teaching (Buffoni 2018). Low labour force participation for both Jordanian and Syrian refugee women in Jordan can be explained by several factors, including the lack of decent job opportunities and transportation, lack of childcare services, and social norms that do not prioritize women working outside the home in paid labour (Ali Slimane et al. 2020). The unemployment rate of Syrian women before they became refugees in Jordan was about 28 per cent, and the unemployment rate of Syrian women living outside the camps in Jordan and in areas such as Mafraq is 88 per cent. Since there is a low participation rate of Syrian women in the workforce, very few Syrian women are actually being paid to work in Jordan (Stave and Hillesund 2015).

The survey for this chapter reveals that employment among female-headed households is even lower. Nineteen per cent of female-headed households have a work permit, as compared to 25 per cent in the larger survey. Furthermore, 18 per cent of the women from Homs in Mafraq in this study had worked in the previous thirty days, which is much lower than the studies' larger amount of nearly half (47 per cent). The most common economic arrangement was to rely upon work-based income primarily (50 per cent) and then humanitarian aid next (66 per cent). It is thus clear that female-headed households are accessing work permits and are regularly employed (with a permit) less frequently than the larger sample of respondents. Work, for Syrian women in Mafraq in our study, is not a viable means of supporting the family economy.

Gendered Family Connections for Aid Information in Mafraq

In Mafraq, Syrians' interactions are highly gendered (Wagner 2019: 185–86). This plays out in key ways that affect Syrian household economy: as discussed above, economic connections that brought Syrian refugees to Mafraq were primarily (though not exclusively; see Zuntz 2021) derived from the men's connections to Mafraq and were then sustained this way. Women, meanwhile, in the absence of labour market possibilities, have to rely upon the aid economy to support their families, which is supplied by information-sourcing from local and translocal family networks. In this study, it was mainly women who ventured out of the house to register for humanitarian aid with NGOs. Women are considered, at least by some NGOs, to be 'better' and more reliable aid recipients (Turner 2019; Wagner 2019: 185). Thus, we find that local and translocal family ties become a key avenue to information about economic support for women.

On average, Syrian women from Homs indicated that they spent time with seven other people outside their home during the previous week. Eighty-four per cent said that they were persons from their family, and the same number said that they were persons who were also from Homs (family or otherwise). Socializing, thus, is happening primarily with family from Homs or other Syrians from Homs. Only 14 per cent said that they socialize with the host population. Despite the low level of engagement with local Jordanians, 68 per cent said that their interactions with Jordanians are 'respectful', with 96 per cent reporting that there are no problems between hosts and refugees and that they feel safe in Mafraq.

In the survey, when asked, 'In the last 12 months, have you received support by the government or state agencies, international organizations, local non-governmental organizations or religious groups?', most of the female

respondents in Mafraq said yes (91 per cent). Meanwhile, only 50 per cent of the greater sample in these studies indicated that they had received the same. This indicates that female respondents felt more reliant upon and able to access the aid regime in Jordan to meet their financial needs. Despite the greater receipt of aid by women, 80 per cent reported that their current economic situation in Jordan was 'worse' or 'much worse' than it was in Syria. The larger sample reported the same occurrence by 82 per cent.

Nevertheless, the combination of high need and local and translocal connections do not result in improved economic status. Most said that their economic situation was worse or much worse than it was in Syria. This is despite the fact that all respondents were registered with the UNHCR and had reported receiving aid of some kind during the last year. Ninety-six per cent indicated that they are food secure, but this is insufficient to meet the rest of the family needs. Most respondents indicated that they are in debt (95 per cent). The average amount of debt reported totalled 338 Jordanian dinars (JOD), which exceeds the average monthly income of JOD 290. The largest expense is the monthly rent, at JOD 109, which is 37.5 per cent of the average monthly income. Thus, most are in-debt to shopkeepers (42 per cent) and family members (33 per cent).

Aid information comes from family and fellow Syrians, especially those from Homs. As one Syrian said: 'I get some information from my relatives and family members. I do not get information from friends or acquaintances because I do not mix much with people.' Aid agencies use digital and social media such as WhatsApp and SMS messages to disseminate information and contact refugees directly. They also post information in user groups for Syrian refugees (Tobin and Alahmed 2019). Facebook and social media have become important sources of information for refugees but are still not universally used or accessed: 'I had no idea that there are WhatsApp groups and Facebook posts that provide information about aid', one interviewee reported. Another said that while she is able to obtain information from neighbours and relatives, she relies most heavily on WhatsApp groups with others from Homs: 'Relatives and family members are the ones who bring information about the services I can benefit from, but I can find better information myself on Facebook.' At least one found that information was shared, but too late, which indicates that even family members may be reluctant to provide information for fear of losing out themselves; in fact, she said, 'There are some job opportunities. Some of my neighbours attended a workshop and got paid. I myself could not join because I only knew about it at the end. This is the problem, because people do not tell each other about such things.'

Without local or translocal family connections, some had trouble sourcing any aid information. One discussed the challenges of sourcing information from non-family connections saying, 'I know about possible aid from

the neighbours and acquaintances that live in the same building. However, by the time I know about the aid, it is all gone.' Umm-Khaled said,

> I had access to free health services in public hospitals. I also had received health services from local health centres for small payments of JOD 2. I didn't consult other organizations that provided free health services because I did not know any of them because I don't mix much with people. I am not used to going out because I felt I was a bit nervous, sensitive, and I had a lot of psychological pressure on my own. I think it's the same with employment. There are many opportunities to access employment but I didn't go out to look for work. But I do not go anywhere outside the building because I have no relatives in the neighbourhood.

Most interviewees socialize primarily or exclusively with fellow Syrians, especially those from Homs. But socializing requires leaving the house for a social visit, which those who are most impoverished struggle to do. For example, Miriam said,

> I do not get information from my family because we don't leave the house. This is because if I left the house and my children asked me to buy them a packet of chips, I would not be able to. Imagine how I should behave (or look like) in such an embarrassing situation. I get my information from my friends and acquaintances who are in a Quranic recitation class with me, which I go out for. We don't socialize, but I receive a lot of information from them; they tell me the new things they learn about aid.

The Possibilities and Promises of Remittances

The study found that, in the absence of viable work opportunities and sufficient aid sourced from family network information, women turn to remittances from translocal and transnational connections to try to fill the gap. It is quite difficult to assess the rates and types of remittances by Syrians in Jordan in general. This is partly because such activity conducted outside of Western Union or other sanctioned means is considered illegal. In late 2014, the Jordanian government officially ruled that the informal cash transfer system of *hawala* (the transfer system for remittances through middlemen) was illegal. At that time, approximately forty-five Syrians who were engaged in *hawala* in both camps and urban areas, along with their families, were transferred to the highly securitized 'open-air jail' of 'Village 5' in the Azraq Syrian refugee camp (Associated Press 2016, 2018; Staton 2017). Syrian refugees suspected of breaking Jordanian law have been, and continue to be, rounded up and sent to the isolated part of the Azraq camp. In this case, they were ultimately deported along with their families back to Syria without a formal, legal or transparent investigation, and without a judge's

ruling or having gone through the justice system. The forty-five Syrians who were deported for engaging in *hawala* and their families all came from Dara`a in southern Syria, which is the area where the Syrian uprising and crisis began in 2012.

Rates and types of remittances are also difficult to assess because cash transfers, even those conducted through sanctioned avenues, are often considered part of the private sphere, even an individual action, and are a sensitive aspect of transnational relationships (Zuntz 2021), such that families may not know about the transfers between and among themselves (Carling 2008; Horst et al. 2014; Krawatzek and Müller-Funk 2020). Furthermore, development policies and practices are penetrating into the private spheres of economic life and livelihoods (Carroll and Jarvis 2015), through methods such as retinal scans for cash withdrawals of aid in which refugees must grant 'ownership' of their biometric data to the UNHCR and other governance regimes as a condition of their receipt (Jacobsen 2017; Madianou 2019). Refugee actors struggle to hang onto a private economic sphere, it seems, in the face of the impinging demands of poverty, intrusive governance formations and economic policies.

Quantitative methods appear to have better results with their research into the topic. One study found that around 30 per cent of Syrian households receive informal transfers, both domestically and internationally (Tiltnes et al. 2019). Gulf countries are the main source for funds coming to Syrians in Jordan (50 per cent), followed by funds coming from Syrians in Syria to Syrians in Jordan (17 per cent) (Chehade et al. 2017).

Among the Syrian refugees in Jordan that send money, 36 per cent reported using an official, formal money transfer company or business (Dean 2015). Twenty-one per cent used an informal family connection, and 7 per cent used a courier, which might be formal or informal (ibid.). Syrian refugees in Jordan engage in international transfers at a much higher rate than they do in domestic transfers, with 13 per cent involved in international transfers and 1.6 per cent in domestic (Chehade et al. 2017).

Syrians, similarly to other displaced populations around the world, are under keen pressures to send money back home to family and other connections. These pressures are especially acute because those still back home in Syria are particularly vulnerable: they were often unable to leave the country due to physical impediments such as disabilities or age; they face economic pressures due to warfare and conflict interruptions to supply chains for necessary goods, as well as rising inflation and structural breakdowns in water, sanitation or healthcare; and they may be in immediate danger and in need of some cash on hand for quick movements (Vargas-Silva 2017: 1840; Jacobsen 2005). For outward movements of capital, 90 per cent of Syrians send money to Syria. International transfers are mostly formal, and 80 per cent of them are conducted through the exchange houses; 20 per

cent are through *hawala* transfers (Chehade et al. 2017). On average, international transfers amount to USD 259 around three times per year (ibid.).

Domestic transfers – that is, transfers by local and translocal family networks within Jordan – are largely informal (50 per cent), and usually done by handing over cash directly or through *hawala* (Chehade et al. 2017). The domestic transfers average USD 137 at a time and occur around five times per year. Over a quarter of Syrians reported borrowing money (26 per cent), and 97 per cent of them do so informally. Furthermore, the most vulnerable among them appear to borrow most frequently: refugees who live in camps are twice as likely to have an outstanding loan.

The study survey questions asked for first and second choice answers to: 'What are currently the most important sources of living for you and the members of your household?' When it came to first choice, 31 per cent of female respondents said 'Money/aid received from people living abroad (in another country)', which only 9 per cent of the larger survey respondents also indicated. As for the second choice, 33 per cent said 'Aid or welfare benefits from the state or other organizations', which was followed by 12 per cent who indicated 'Money/aid received from people living abroad (in another country)', as compared to 8 per cent in the larger survey. This indicates that for 64 per cent of Syrian female respondents, remittance payments from abroad constitute a first- or second-choice stream of income. By contrast, only 17 per cent of the larger survey said the same.

The Case of Umm-Alaa

To elaborate on this, the case of Umm-Alaa is indicative. Umm-Alaa is a divorced woman in her forties who lives in Ramtha. She has completed primary education. She divorced from her husband before leaving Syria, and she has five children (four boys and one girl). She indicates that her profession is a 'housewife.' One of her sons had been taken into Syrian government custody, and after five days in prison was returned to his mother, badly beaten and in need of medical treatment. The next day Umm-Alaa brought her children to Jordan without any assistance or anyone to travel with her. She says,

> The reason I came to Jordan is that I just didn't know where else to go. I had nobody to help me. My brother was here in Jordan. Initially, we stayed in his house for a week, but you know what life with brothers and sisters is like. . . . You know my sons are grown-ups. My brother's wife was almost the same age as my sons. I looked for a house to live in, but I couldn't find one. So we had to live in an underground shelter for six months until I could move into a house. My brother never helped! He used to bring us some food packages when we first arrived, but that didn't last for long. Then I started working for

3 or 4 dinars at first. I was in an endless need for financial aid from someone here in Jordan, but I got none and no help . . . I only get the food coupons from the UNHCR.

My ex-husband is not here. We know nothing about where he is now. He sometimes calls us on the phone. I think he is living in the Gulf. We keep asking him to come, but he keeps just giving promises. I can receive about 200 dinars from someone abroad every six or seven months, including him. His mother [is] living here, but always gives excuses for him not sending more. My brother-in-law is also here, but he never helps us despite the fact that he's doing well. When my sister went to Canada, she used to send about 100 dinars per month to help me with my medication. But she is no longer doing that.

I feel exhausted. I cannot keep up unless I find someone to help me out. Years are passing, and I shoulder the responsibility alone.

As the case of Umm-Alaa demonstrates, the work opportunities are minimal and low-paying for women, especially female heads of households (whether through death or divorce or absentee husbands). At the same time, demands to look after children's safety and security are paramount, even for adult children. Expenses are high for basic necessities such as medicine. Thus, women such as Umm-Alaa may mobilize social networks differently, turning to the possibility of remittances to close the economic gaps, including asking for them from her ex-husband and his family.

The Case of Umm-Mohammed

Umm-Mohammed is a 41-year-old woman (born 1978) who had a basic level of education and had not worked previously. She had a poor childhood in a village named Binij, lacking many basic needs. She describes her early childhood:

I had a difficult childhood because my mother was the second wife of my father. I and my sister had had bad treatment from our father. We were six sisters and three brothers. There was much discrimination against us. The other wife of my father was very strong and tough. She was able to take everything. We used to take very little. My half-sisters and half-brothers used to take everything. We could not compete. My father used to hit my mother because of his other wife. As for my education, I studied in schools until the Fourth Grade. I did not want to go to school because I was scared that my father would hit my mother while I was away. I wanted to stay next to my mother. My relationship with my half-brothers and sisters was good. I always blame my mother because she accepted to be the second wife. It was her fault from the very beginning.

Umm-Mohammed got married at the age of 17 (in 1995) into a village near Homs. She indicated that she was not happy in her husband's family

because of her father-in-law's treatment of her husband and of her, as he was very authoritative. She and her husband began seasonal labour migration into Jordan, which was a positive turn in her life:

> Life with them was very difficult. I used to do farming all the year long. They did not even give me a rest to go and visit my family. I lived with them for six years. Then I moved out to Jordan with my husband. I lived in Jordan for thirteen years. My husband used to have work in construction. I was happy during those years.

Between 1998 and 2001, Umm-Mohammed lived in Jordan. In 2001, she and her husband went back to Syria where they built an independent house in order to be near to her family and cultivate social capital with them. When the events of the crisis erupted in 2011, she brought her family and a number of acquaintances and neighbours to Jordan. They first moved to Rukban camp, where they stayed for two months and fifteen days. After that, they moved to Azraq camp, where they stayed for about eight months. After that, they moved to Mafraq because of her pre-existing ties. She recounts:

> Then we moved back to Al-Hussan where we built a house for us. We continued to live there until the events of war started in the country. I used to treat my father-in-law well when he got sick despite his bad treatment to me in early years. Anyways, we moved out to Jordan a second time. We moved out with my acquaintances and friends from the same area in Syria. We used more than one means of transport until we reached [the] Al-Rukban area. Upon arrival in Jordan, I stayed in Al-Azraq for eight months.

When asked why she chose Mafraq as a place to move to, Umm-Mohammed said, 'I chose Mafraq because I used to live here before the events [in Syria]. It was the same neighbourhood I used to live in when my husband was working here. I changed the house twice but remained in the same neighbourhood. I came to the same area where I used to live before the events because I had many friends there. I have been here for about four years now.'

However, simply moving back to Mafraq did not lead to a vibrant and informative social world. She says, 'Nothing has changed since then. But I do not feel as much comfortable [socially] nowadays. I do not have the desire to mix with people as I used to. The new apartment is very comfortable. There's safety and security. I love Jordan. I did not feel safe except here in Jordan. I used to live here and now I am living in the same place.'

Umm-Mohammed describes a feeling of being unsettled in Jordan, despite having lived there before, at least in part because of the pressures to be mobile that her husband experiences. She says, 'My experience was really difficult. When I moved out to Jordan the first time, I felt comfortable

because I moved away from my father-in-law. As for the current situation, there is some difficulty because my husband is longing to migrate to Canada because he has had health problems. As for me, I do not like to migrate. I prefer to stay here. I have no clue about my future. I feel there is no way out. My relatives are doing well. My husband needs to find a job because he is the only breadwinner of the family.'

As the case of Umm-Mohammed demonstrates, long-standing connections due to labour migration may have initially provided for mobility and security, but they alone do not fill the economic gaps that Syrians from Homs experience in Mafraq. In fact, family networks – even within Mafraq – are not sufficient. In the case of Umm-Mohammed, when the remittances from abroad are not available, the result is to consider onward migration, which is an even more difficult possibility for fulfilling economic needs (Tobin et al. 2022).

Conclusion

The data shows that, overall, family networks have developed important local, translocal and transnational characteristics in the presence of often-challenged social capital in protracted displacement. While seasonal migration and long-standing economic connections between Syrians in Homs and Jordanian hosts in Mafraq proved vital for Syrian mobility out of the crisis, they alone have not provided sufficient economic support for longer-term residency. Furthermore, local and translocal family networks are insufficient for sourcing aid, which has largely become a woman's responsibility due to the targeting of humanitarian aid at women. But, again, such aid is insufficient to provide for family needs, and women turn to remittances from translocal and transnational networks. In their absence, few options remain, but those that do include drawing from social networks of all kinds or aspiring for resettlement to a third country where there is greater government support.

The case of Syrians in Mafraq reveals that such trying economic circumstances have required adaptation and change on the part of – especially – refugee women, who have cultivated 'nested' family networks that are dynamic in their possibilities and promises. Transnational networks have provided opportunities for mobility and security, and those of a familial nature can provide assistance in the form of remittances. Local family networks may provide humanitarian aid information, but a generalized dearth of information means that it may be more useful to simply source the information for oneself directly from the provider via social media. Translocal networks may provide for a bit of both – remittances and information – in an overlapping and imperfect manner.

Cultivating these family networks is challenging. Gender and networks collide here in important ways. While the initial connections for mobility into Mafraq and security within Jordan are vital, they are almost exclusively due to the husband's connections, which do not also transfer into secure employment for either the husband or other family members. This leaves women to source information and locate humanitarian aid, which can be a difficult and time-consuming endeavour, especially when it requires building new networks and supporting pre-existing ones with limited offerings.

These networks are also crosscut by general scarcity. When one's capital for trade – financial or informational – is lacking, along with everyone else's, how can one hope to protect against vulnerability? Syrian families are now also far-flung across the globe, making the cultivation of networks physically challenging. In other cases of poverty, we know that social networks help to pool resources and promote general welfare. However, the development of these networks takes time. Given that the Syrian refugee population in Jordan is a protracted case with little hope for resolution in sight, the future survival of Syrians in Jordan will require the same strategies developed in other contexts of impoverishment, including resource pooling, asset sharing, bartering and off-market activities. It is a challenging prospect, to be sure, but one that time and precarity will likely make necessary in the pursuit of financial security for these Syrians into the future.

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Notes

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2. For more information, see TRAFIG (n.d.).

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3

'Here, I'm a Syrian in Erbil'

Identities and Livelihoods of the Syrian Refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

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Introduction

This article examines the livelihood and identities of the Syrian self-settled refugees living in Erbil city, the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). Although our case analyses a population of only a few more than fifty thousand people (UNHCR 2023),[1] it is worthy of scholarly attention for several reasons. The urban refugees in the KRI are vastly understudied, as they are hard for field researchers and humanitarian organizations to reach. Official statistics on urban refugees are largely unavailable in Iraq. The focus of scholars and aid agencies has been on refugees settled in camps. However, recently urban non-camp refugees have become not only more numerous, but also a focal point of humanitarian organizations and scholars (see, for example, Sanyal 2012).

The scholars analysing interethnic relations in migration studies generally do so in a European context, where refugees and host communities hail from different ethnic groups (see, for example, Lancee and Hartung 2012; Slavnic 2011). Unlike the latter, this chapter analyses a case of intra-ethnic relations, which are more common in Syria's neighbouring areas. Understanding the integration of Syrians with their host communities is not only vital to assessing the humanitarian situation of the Syrians, but also to understanding the reformulation of inter- and intra-ethnic relations in a sectarian-

ized new Middle East. To curb the reach of the tumultuous Arab Spring in 2011 and keep themselves in place, authoritarian regimes across the Middle East resorted to sectarian narratives. In countries with religious and ethnic diversity, the Shia–Sunni sectarian line was used to prevent the formulation of cross-sectarian oppositions and polarize communities (Matthiesen et al. 2017). Sectarianism coloured trajectories of displacement and return as well. Shiites in Iraq mostly fled to areas inhabited by their co-religionists, as did Sunnis. Returning families in Syria were found to be brought in from the Shiite community of Iraq and Lebanon in place of the displaced Sunnis (Chulov 2017).

Based on original field data – a survey conducted in Erbil in March 2020 (N = 152), key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders and in-depth life story interviews with refugees conducted by the authors in Erbil – this chapter shows that these refugees are in a more dire situation and in more need of protection than most aid agencies think, especially during shocks and crises. Although the permissive policies in place in the KRI have created a favourable market environment where Syrians can access public services, establish business and move freely within the KRI (Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2021; Hayes 2018), the lack of legal protection puts refugees up against economic hardship on the ground.

Moreover, Syrians may face differential treatment while receiving services, an aspect that could bring into question the rhetoric of successful assimilation into the host community often touted by local authorities and the UNHCR. However, differential treatment and access to state services is systemic also for Iraqi Kurds in the KRI, due to the pervasiveness of *wasta* and patronage.

Despite sharing a common ethnic bond, Kurdish Syrian refugees in Erbil also often feel a sense of alienation emanating from an othering label of 'Syrians' commonly used by the host community. The experience of displacement and the lack of protection have created significant vulnerabilities among the Syrian Kurdish refugees in Erbil. Being Syrian nationals, ethnic Kurds and refugees or displaced persons creates a compounded identity that is different from that of the Kurdish Iraqi host population. This comes into play when Syrians need to access state services and in relation to gender roles.

Importantly, our study analyses livelihood during a period of economic crisis and external shocks in the Kurdistan Region, due to the economic downturn in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region following the decline in oil prices from 2014 and the conflict between Baghdad and Erbil over sharing oil resources. The economy was also affected by the war against ISIS between 2014 and 2017 and the pressure of the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout.

The chapter first reviews the relevant literature and then provides a brief methods section before it turns to an analysis of the socio-economic backgrounds of the Syrian refugees in Erbil in the KRI. Finally, the chapter

examines the relationship between the Syrian Kurdish refugees in Erbil, on the one hand, and the Kurdish Iraqi host community, on the other, in light of our findings and the secondary literature.

Background

The UNHCR, through its operational data portal, puts the total number of Syrian refugees residing in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) at 248,404 individuals, inhabiting Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah governorates. Out of the three governorates, Erbil hosts the largest proportion, around half, followed by Dohuk (a third of the Syrians) and Sulaymaniyah (around 10 per cent) (UNHCR 2023).[2]

Prior to the Syrian conflict, the KRI was already attracting Syrian Kurds. Many had come to the KRI for work prior to 2011. The economic prospects in the KRI, enabled through oil sales, and the shared Kurdish culture had prompted many Syrian Kurds to cross into the region through the porous state borders (Dionigi 2018). This amalgam of pull factors along with the start of the conflict might have coalesced to facilitate large-scale movement into the KRI. By 2012, one year after the onset of the Syrian war, around 150,000 Syrian Kurds – that is, a little more than half of those living in the KRI today – had already settled in a refugee camp in the city of Duhok in the KRI (Dudlák 2017). As the conflict intensified in Syria over the next few years, cross-border displacement also picked up. The besiegement of the town of Kobani spurred the influx of thousands more into the KRI in search for safety and security (Bahram 2018; Dudlák 2017). The UNHCR Operational Data Portal shows that the cross-border displacement peaked in March 2015, with numbers exceeding 246,000 Syrian refugees (UNHCR 2023). The number has roughly plateaued ever since, with the latest June 2023 figure registering 262,218 individuals.

Iraq is not party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, nor its Protocol of 1967 (Janmyr 2021), and as such it deals with refugees through the Political Refugee Law of 1971, Law No. 21 of 2009 of the Ministry of Migration and Displacement of Iraq and a memorandum of understanding between the UNHCR and the Iraqi government (Warda and Almaffraji 2020: 36; Yassen 2019). Refugee rights, especially economic rights, have in light of the absence of a legal framework been conferred to this population on a de facto basis (Petersohn 2022). This reality has produced an unstable legal environment where regulations keep changing and exceptions to formal procedures are granted on a whim.

Syrians living in Iraqi Kurdistan also need to constantly renew their papers: both the asylum seeker certificate from the UNHCR as well as the identification card from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have

to be renewed yearly with the Kurdish security (known as Asayish)[3] and residency unit (Bahram 2018).[4] The process of renewal is done at the UNHCR compound, which has Asayish and residency units.[5] Moreover, given rifts in administration within the KRI, regulations are believed to 'constantly change', and vary in each of the three Kurdish governorates in the KRI (ibid.). Decisions are taken at the governorate level and not at the level of the KRI. Moreover, KRI authorities have self-interest in welcoming refugees to the three Kurdish governorates of Iraq, with regards to the burning issues (with Baghdad) of demographics and control over disputed areas (ibid.). Baghdad, on the other hand, places a heavy emphasis on security in dealing with the Syrian Kurdish refugees.

The Syrian refugees are spread across Erbil governorate, and many are economically self-reliant. Upon registering with the UNHCR, Syrian refugees can undertake economic activities within the private sector, where they tend to occupy reconstruction, wholesale and retail trade industries (Krishnan et al. 2020), sectors avoided by Iraqis (Durable Solutions Platform 2019). The Syrian population appear to be largely engaging with the informal economy and have no access to public employment given statutory confinements (Petersohn 2022).

Few Syrians have a work permit, and important challenges remain concerning full integration into the job market: the need for security approval from the authorities to gain a work permit and the frequent need for personal connections (*wasta*) to secure a job in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan. Moreover, Syrians say that Iraqi employers sometimes do not recognize Syrian qualifications (Durable Solutions Platform 2019). Additionally, Syrian refugees enjoy equal access to public services and goods, including education and health, as the host community (Durable Solutions Platform 2019), although the quality of these services could be improved (Ministry of Planning 2013; World Bank 2016).

Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region, has approximately two million inhabitants (Durable Solutions Platform 2019). It sits on expansive, flat, dry terrain and is considered one of the largest cities in Iraq (Map 3.1). Erbil governorate is considered the economic hub of the KRI and has attracted more than half of the Syrian refugee population in the region. Most of them live in urban areas, and only a fourth reside in camps on the peripheries of Erbil city (Durable Solutions Platform and Impact Initiative 2021). Certain neighbourhoods such as Havalan, Mamzawa and Bahirka appear to have accumulated sizable Syrian populations.

The KRI's economic downturn starting in 2014 challenged the integration of Syrians in Erbil into the local labour market (WANA 2017). Economic hardship spread across the KRI and Iraq because of the decline in oil prices from 2014 and the conflict between Baghdad and Erbil over sharing oil resources. The local economy was also affected by the war against the

organization of the Islamic State (also known as Daesh) between 2014 and 2017. Arguably, from 2015 onwards, Syrian refugees increasingly found themselves out of work (ibid.). Economic vulnerabilities, jobs, income and making ends meet have now come to the fore (Durable Solutions Platform 2019). Furthermore, Erbil is becoming increasingly expensive for everyone, not only for the refugees but for the host population as well. For all these reasons, the refugees have become more vulnerable in recent years.

Compared to Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey, the Syrian refugee response in Iraq was somewhat overshadowed by the sheer number of internally displaced people (IDPs). Iraq had 3.3 million people fleeing ISIS in 2015, and around 1.2 million of these came to the KRI, while many of the displaced are yet to return (KRG 2018; IOM 2023). The presence of the IDPs, who are covered by a separate response programme (Redvers 2014), created a more difficult situation for the refugees, and sparked competition for jobs and wages in the private market among refugees, IDPs and members of the host community (WANA 2017; Dudlák 2017; Durable Solutions Platform 2019; World Bank 2015). The insecurity linked to the armed struggle against Daesh, which seized large parts of the areas surrounding Erbil in 2013 and 2014, also strained livelihoods.

In terms of assistance, there is a sense among Syrian refugees in Iraq that humanitarian aid is centred on the refugees living in camps only. According to a senior UNHCR official, formerly based in Erbil, there might be some basis to that claim, although it is mostly because private donations for Eid only take place in refugee camps, where they are more easily organized. The UNHCR indeed has a programme of monthly cash assistance for urban Syrian refugees in Erbil, yet only the most vulnerable receive support (UNHCR n.d.). To become beneficiaries of this programme, refugees need to have a valid registration with the UNHCR and to show documentation that they are vulnerable and need assistance.[6]

Literature Review

The literature on Syrian refugees in the KRI is in short supply, especially compared with that on Syrian refugees in the wider region. This is not surprising, because Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan all host more Syrians in absolute and relative terms than Iraq.[7] The literature has focused on the issue of legal protection (Kamal and Sadeeq 2014; Janmyr 2021), schooling for Syrian refugees (El-Ghali et al. 2017), the resilience of Syrian refugees (Singh et al. 2015) and the reintegration and future perspective of the Syrian population in Iraq (Durable Solutions Platform 2019). Other studies have examined issues such as gender and host–guest relations. Hayes (2019) mentions that the experience of migration is gendered because Syrian Kurdish men have

often been to Iraqi Kurdistan before as economic migrants, while women arrive for the first time as refugees. Moreover, since men fear conscription in Syria, it is easier for women to go back and forth between Syria and Iraq.

The relationship between the Syrian Kurds taking refuge in the KRI and the fellow Kurdish host population has been analysed from the perspective of intra-ethnic Kurdish relations. Dionigi (2018) argues that KRI officials and the public are to be thanked for avoiding xenophobia and conflict, and stresses that integrating Syrian refugees has been more 'successful' (the job market being one example) than the integration of internally displaced Iraqis has been (ibid.; WANA 2017). The historical and kinship bonds existing between the Syrian Kurdish refugees and the host communities in the KRI partially explain this. Additionally, Dudlák (2017) posits that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has not securitized nor instrumentalized the Syrian refugee issue. The Syrian Kurdish refugees are believed to share national aspirations with their Iraqi Kurdish counterparts.

Bahram (2018) and Hayes (2019), however, show that while many Syrian Kurdish refugees perceived the KRI to be part of their own symbolic homeland, Greater Kurdistan, they were disappointed once they arrived, facing challenges in accessing opportunities and feeling vulnerable. Aiming to fill the void in the literature on refugees in cities and out-of-camp settings, this chapter focuses on the relationship between the host community and the refugees in Erbil city. Building on original data from a mixed-methods study, it updates and explains existing scientific and sociological studies by Bahram (2018), Hayes (2018, 2019, 2020) and Dionigi (2018).

Methods and Data Collection

To capture a detailed picture reflective of the overall conditions of the Syrian refugees in the KRI, we employed a 'mixed-methods' approach. This included a preliminary desk review of existing literature on the Syrian refugees in the KRI, three expert interviews (two on-site and one via Skype), a household survey of 152 respondents and six in-depth interviews with Syrian refugees residing in Erbil. Among the survey respondents, eighty were male and seventy-two were female.

Building on knowledge gained from informal discussions with Syrians and Iraqi Kurds in Erbil, we selected three urban areas in Erbil city widely known for the density of the Syrian population (Map 3.1).[8] Havalan, the most affluent neighbourhood among the three, is to the east of Erbil, adjacent to the one hundred-metre road that circles the city.[9] Proximity to this road and the presence of a thriving economic market in Havalan, reflected in malls and restaurants that dot the area, could have arguably pulled the Syrian Kurdish population to this quarter.

Bahirka, the second area selected for this study, lies to the far north of Erbil city. Given its distance to the city, this area is a subdistrict of Erbil district (Erbil Governorate n.d.) and can be considered peri-urban. The website of Erbil governorate states that the area is largely a flat agrarian terrain with some residential complexes recently built (ibid.). These complexes and the agrarian nature of Bahirka, along with lower rent prices in comparison to other areas in the city, could have coalesced to draw a sizeable Syrian community to the neighbourhood.

Mamzawa, on the other hand, is not as developed as the other two areas in terms of infrastructure. Mamzawa is an intensely populated neighbourhood to the south-west of Erbil. On the outskirts of Erbil city, the area sits on a highway bisecting it into two sections. The inhabitants of Mamzawa are mostly tribal, with low incomes generated through daily labour, selling merchandise or service in the Peshmerga, one of the major armed forces of the KRI. Mamzawa possesses an informal market made up of car repair shops, restaurants and construction factories of cinder blocks, iron bars and bricks. Such merchandise is used for the booming construction industry in Erbil. It is possible that this informal economy and the low rental prices drove Syrian Kurds to Mamzawa. It is also a peri-urban area.

A minimum of fifty households were surveyed in each of these three target areas. After obtaining approval from the authorities, the enumerator teams headed to each target area at a given time and used a method to randomly select Syrian households. After attaining verbal participation consent, they would administer the survey, which took an average of forty-five minutes. Enumerators considered gender representation while selecting survey participants. The survey data yielded significant amounts of descriptive statistics.

Snowball sampling was utilized to recruit the in-depth interview participants, who were initially recruited by the Middle East Research Institute's (MERI) contacts and networks. This technique might have created bias in the sample but was chosen given the difficult fieldwork context. A randomized sample involving GPS coordinates would have been very difficult to obtain with the available resources in this project (for a discussion of sampling and sampling frames, see Fowler 2009). Moreover, the enumerators were unable to access a fourth target location, to which the security forces gravely limit access on the assumption that the Syrians residing there sympathize with the People's Defence Unit (*Yakejankani Parastini Gal*, YPG). Our sample therefore does not reflect the livelihood and concerns of these populations, who are believed to be living under stronger state surveillance and scrutiny.

The first author trained the enumerators, and KoboToolbox software was used while administrating the survey. As our survey was part of a bigger cross-country survey, the survey questions were provided by the PI of the larger project. The authors had influence on how to translate questions but

Map 3.1. Map of Erbil city, highlighting Bahirka, Havalan and Mamzawa within the city. Used with public domain permission.

were not able to run a pilot on the ground or to adjust questions after seeing some initial results and weaknesses. We suspect that some unclarity in the formulation of survey questions (especially related to translation issues) might have yielded some unclear results. All data collection activities and materials were made available in both Kurdish and Arabic.

The global coronavirus pandemic was a major challenge during our fieldwork. The survey and the in-depth interviews were conducted during the

early stages of the lockdown of Erbil in March 2020. The data might reflect the exceptional situation created by the pandemic and the shutdown and might therefore not be representative of the livelihood and the refugees themselves pre-pandemic. For example, many of the refugees we talked to had just recently been furloughed because of the closure of many restaurants. The survey did not pick up these nuances, since in asking about unemployment, it only gathered data about the last thirty days.[10]

Soon after we finalized data collection in Erbil, as a precautionary measure to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus, roads between the cities were shut. Nevertheless, the pandemic did not cause difficulty in accessing the target group within Erbil as restrictions were loosely applied at the start of the pandemic. Most of the participants in the survey were household heads. Being a household head means being the person who holds responsibility for organizing and caring for their family, though not being a household head does not necessarily imply participating in income generation. We believe that interviewing household heads has given us more accurate information about overall conditions because they are often more aware of the family needs and the neighbourhood, given the need to interact with the surrounding environment. However, it could also be a weakness in the data, as we surveyed mostly household heads rather than all members of the households randomly. Our survey therefore reflects the concerns and situations of the household heads primarily.

Survey Findings: Who Are the Syrian Refugees in Erbil?

Our survey data from Erbil indicates that the majority of the Syrian Kurdish refugees living in Erbil city are relatively young, literate and from urban origins in Syria, generally Al-Hasaka Governorate (two-thirds) or Aleppo Governorate (one-third).[11] This is in line with other studies (Petersohn 2022; UNHCR 2022; El-Ghali et al. 2017; Durable Solutions Platform 2019).

Most (eight out of ten) of the surveyed Syrian refugees were married, and their household sizes, at 4.5 members, were smaller than the average of the regional Syrian refugee population in camp settings overall: 5.9 on average reported in 2017 by the United Nations and, reportedly, 6.3 on average among Syrians in Jordan in 2013 (ACTED 2013).[12] All this could indicate that despite their deprivation in Erbil, the refugees we surveyed might actually come from relatively more privileged or educated backgrounds than the general Syrian refugee population in Iraq.

Moreover, most of them (four-fifths) reported never having spent time in refugee camps, but having arrived directly from Syria to Erbil. Out-of-camp settlement seems to have been a choice available to them because they already had family members in the KRI who could help them find ac-

commodation. This finding is slightly different to that of the Durable Solutions Platform (2019) study, which assumes that many refugees moved from camps to Erbil city in search of job opportunities.

The vast majority of the survey respondents were literate and had either completed primary, secondary, high school or tertiary education levels. More than two-thirds of the survey participants lived in Syrian cities and towns before their departure to the KRI, where access to education is easier than in villages. Most of the Syrian refugees in the KRI were attending school prior to their displacement to Iraq (NRC 2013). Syria's overall literacy rate was at around 86 per cent in 2017, a figure comparable to Iraq's literacy rate (Their World 2017; UNESCO n.d.).

The Syrian refugees in Erbil were, as expected, vulnerable in terms of access to income-generating opportunities (see also Durable Solutions Platform 2019). Around half of the male refugees surveyed stated that they were unemployed in Syria prior to their flight to the KRI. This must be interpreted in light of the war and economic hardship that have beset Syria since 2011. The other half appear to have engaged in the local economy in Syria as either unskilled workers, skilled workers, farmers or self-employed workers.

The men we interviewed were mostly unskilled workers, many working as daily laborers in the construction sector. Although many of the Syrian Kurdish male refugees that we interviewed had been skilled workers before they fled to Iraqi Kurdistan, employment opportunities in Erbil were limited for them at the time of the data collection. This could be because 'white collar' or 'high-profile' jobs were hard to come by, and many Syrian university graduates took unskilled work (Durable Solutions Platform 2019).

Only a quarter of the surveyed population had reportedly worked in the last thirty days. Building on our interviews and the secondary literature, we believe that many of the surveyed men had been furloughed due to the coronavirus pandemic, which caused the local economy to nosedive. Our survey was conducted in early March 2020, when businesses had sent their staff on furlough as a measure of mitigation against the pandemic. According to a survey conducted in August 2018, 45 per cent of refugee households in Erbil city had access to an income-generating opportunity, compared to 85 per cent of the host population in Erbil (Durable Solutions Platform 2019).

The negative consequences of the pandemic are reported to have disproportionally affected the Syrian population in the KRI, more so than the host community. Unlike the latter, Syrians mostly engage in the private informal economy with little enforced labour rights, and as the economy buckled under the pandemic and financial mismanagement, they faced furlough, reduced wages and longer working hours. Moreover, they were also forced to resort to coping mechanisms such as taking debts and taking children out of schools (Petersohn 2022). The ability to provide basic needs such as food and shelter was strained, increasing poverty by 21 per cent among

this population (Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan 2021; Petersohn 2022). Financial insecurity appears to be commonplace among the Syrian refugees in Erbil. Three-quarters of the respondents to our survey reported being in debt. Relatives and family members first and foremost, and then shopkeepers, are the most common sources to whom the refugees would resort for loans.

Almost half of the households in our survey from Erbil told us that they had school-aged children. However, around a third of the school-aged children do not attend school. The number of children out of school is lower than the reports from the UN about the Syrian refugee population in Iraq overall suggest, and lower than what our impressions from the in-depth interviews and local newspapers indicate. This is another indication that our surveyed population was *relatively* more privileged than the average. The coronavirus pandemic has considerably worsened the situation since we conducted our survey: Less than half of refugee boys and girls in Iraq enrolled in formal primary and secondary school prior to COVID-19 continued schooling at home after physical school closures (UNICEF 2021).

While reasons for not attending school were not asked about in this survey, we learned from our in-depth interviews that the harsh economic conditions put constraints on the capacity of the Syrian refugees to send their children to school. This is also the case in Lebanon, especially since the 2019 economic and financial crisis. In fact, Petersohn (2022) found that children dropped out of school in response to worsening economic conditions. Although Syrian refugees are entitled to free public primary and secondary schooling, indirect costs associated with education (transportation, stationary, clothing) are difficult to cover in the absence of income.[13] This was clearly visible in the less developed area of Mamzawa, in comparison to Bahirka and Havalan.

Some families also mentioned the language barrier. Syrian Kurds commonly speak the Kurmanji dialect of Kurdish, while Sorani is spoken in Erbil and Sulaymaniyah governorates (Hayes 2019: 664). However, at the time we conducted our data collection, in 2020, many Syrians had lived more than eight years in Erbil and had learned the language. Additionally, the qualitative interviews pointed to the poor quality of the public education system, with one respondent noting that 'that it was of no use to send our children to school'.[14] This also speaks to Hayes (2020) and Bahram (2018), who have argued that Syrian Kurdish refugees (and Iraqi Kurds) did not see education in the KRI as the right way to find a good job and secure their own futures, because political connections were more useful than university degrees.

In terms of assistance, a large majority of our survey respondents reported not having received any cash assistance from the UN or other non-governmental organizations nor any family remittance in the three months preceding the survey administration. As mentioned above, support programmes

exist in urban areas in Erbil. Those who stated that they had not received cash assistance might not have been considered vulnerable enough by the UNHCR, or had not all updated their registration with the UNHCR, and this effectively excluded them from becoming beneficiaries. The majority of the respondents reported that they had not received in-kind assistance in the three months prior to the administration of the survey – unsurprisingly, because most handing out of food, clothes and other supplies takes place exclusively in camps; it is simply too difficult to organize in urban areas, where Syrians live alongside the host population.[15] For individuals and or- ganizations wishing to donate something to refugees, for example during Eid, it is easier to give it to a refugee camp manager. Yet the UNHCR has been relatively very present in Mamzawa, one of the areas where the survey was conducted, for example through a community centre for women run by a partner organization.

During our in-depth interviews, most of the refugees stated that they had little knowledge of any organizations able to help them, and they asked us (the authors) for help.

> After my arrival [in Iraq], I went to the UN and registered with them and that is it. I started working. The issue is that Syrians do not receive any help unlike what happens in Europe. This is the first time I meet an expatriate. I have not encountered any other international organization at all so far. (Young male Syrian refugee)

Another interviewee said:

> When we face issues, we can only rely on ourselves. There is no one to turn to. If you do not have *wasta* [connections], then you cannot do anything. We have no hope here. We remain silent. Listen, we have a contract with the landowner for a year. But now we are being evicted even though the contract is still valid and not yet over. We do not know who to turn to. No organization has ever knocked [on] our door to tell us our rights or help us. The UN is like a labyrinth. Go to them and they keep sending you to different units and at the end you get nothing. (Young male Syrian refugee)

Thus, many refugees expressed uncertainty about who to turn to for help. This might indicate that humanitarian organizations may have more diffi- culty in reaching urban refugees than they believe. However, it might also be that the refugees expressed frustration that they did not actually *receive* help from the UNHCR. Moreover, shocks and crises related to the coro- navirus pandemic have posed disproportionate challenges to the lives and livelihoods of urban refugees.

Our data indicates that most respondents were registered with local Kurdish authorities but not with the UNHCR. We are unsure of the validity of this data, because it is not in line with other sources. In fact, registra-

tion with the UNHCR and with the Kurdish security authorities (Asayish) is done at the same place, and both the UNHCR and the Kurdish authorities require registration with the other party in order to validate the registration. It is therefore not plausible that the refugees only register with local authorities – except for those who are registered not as refugees (but through other schemes), but that is a completely different process, and much more costly.[16] Yet more than half of the participants reported not being registered with the UNHCR given delays in registration. The registration process is not lengthy, but the wait to get an appointment is seemingly tedious; for some, it could take up months. The main reason that refugees register with the UNHCR is not to seek resettlement (because only as few as 1 per cent obtain resettlement in a third country); it is because registration with the UNHCR is needed in order to obtain residency in Iraq.

Relations with the Host Communities and Implications for the Kurdish National Movements

Bahram (2018) argues that when arriving in Erbil, Syrian refugees were alienated because Iraqi Kurds often saw them as 'Syrians' (*Suriyakan*), rather than as fellow Kurds. This created a distinction between local and Syrian Kurds and therefore raised a barrier to equal rights and economic opportunities. Hayes (2019: 666) also sheds light on the intra-Kurdish boundaries, regarding which one of the participants stated, 'In Damascus, I was a Kurd. Here, I'm a Syrian, not a Kurd'.[17] Moreover, the lack of envisaged economic opportunities and of legal protection strengthened feelings of alienation. It was not only the country of residence, it was above all also the lifestyle and the vulnerability experienced by the refugees that created the feeling of displacement, because of the weakness of the rule of law in Iraq and the country's failure to ratify international refugee law (Bahram 2018). Syrian Kurds in the KRI, facing more limited opportunities than the host population, never felt completely at home, and still expressed a firm intention to return to Syria if the country stabilized (Hayes 2018, 2019).

In our in-depth interviews with refugees, it seemed that gender played an important role in explaining the level of integration. Syrian women we talked to were more likely to express feelings of unease and isolation than male counterparts. Most of the refugees we talked to were of the view that the conservative and restrictive attitude that the host community holds towards women's societal role stands in sharp contrast to that of the Syrians or the Syrian Kurds. As one young girl said:

> We do not leave the house much. We stay in. As a girl, I am fearful because I have heard many things. I will not take taxi[s] alone. I have heard a lot. I have

found a Syrian taxi driver who takes me to work and brings me back home. (Young female Syrian refugee)

The problem of harassment in taxis is mentioned in the secondary literature (Durable Solutions Platform 2019). During our interviews, the women and girls we talked to all avoided taking taxis. As one Syrian male told us:

Recently, I had to rearrange my working hours to the evening to take my female cousin to a meeting and back to home, because here you cannot trust the taxi drivers. In Syria, women could get out of [the] home alone, nothing would have happened, a girl could travel between the cities of Qamishli and Damascus for 14–15 hours. They would feel OK and comfortable and no problems at all. But here, in five–ten minutes from Havalan to Family mall, they do not feel fine.[18]

The Kurdish women we interviewed said that they were part of the workforce in Syria prior to 2011, but that they were unable to work in Iraq, due to a lack of networks and to cultural and social norms. Many women identified this as a great source of frustration for them, as they felt obliged to stay inside their houses most of the time, without having many contacts in the KRI, an aspect that may explain the stated widespread feelings of loneliness and alienation.

This included women with university degrees from Syria, who said that the historical influence of Marxism on the Kurdish areas in Syria had led to women's emancipation in Syrian Kurdish cities and towns.[19] Conversely, Iraqi Kurds in Erbil are known to often have traditional perceptions about gender roles and look down upon and stigmatize families where women work. Especially in Erbil, which has a more tribal structure than the city of Sulaymaniyah, even women with university diplomas are often expected by the community to stay at home after marriage, though this norm is reportedly changing at a rapid pace.

The stereotype about Syrians in Erbil is that both women and men are employed. According to our interviews, it is often easier for a young girl to find an unskilled job at a restaurant than for an older man. Nevertheless, our survey found that a mere 16 per cent of Syrian women in Erbil city had participated in the workforce in the thirty days preceding the survey administration (approximately one out of six women). Most women (three-quarters) reported being housewives. This finding poses a challenge to the common assumption among the host community in Erbil that Syrian women, unlike women of the Iraqi Kurdish host community, are in the workforce on a large scale.

Moreover, according to statistics, women's participation in the labour force is equally low in Syria and Iraq, at around one-sixth (Sen et al. 2022). This number is similar to the finding of our survey. There are no available statistics on women's participation in the labour force exclusively centred

on women in Kurdish areas of Syria (Rojava), and Kurdish areas in Syria are also diverse in themselves and have been in transformation since 2011. It is still safe to assume that Kurdish women's integration into the workforce has been slightly higher than for Arab women, given the influence of the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the prevalent YPG movement in Syria.[20] However, more data is needed to shed light on gender roles, perceived and real, and how these issues might create barriers between guests and hosts in Erbil city.

It could be that our findings from the in-depth interviews point rather to the isolation of some Syrian women in Erbil, who wanted to work but were unable to find an adequate job. Some, for example a young woman who was recently married, and who had recently joined her husband in Erbil, said that this isolation had seriously affected her mental health.[21] She also said that had she known, she would not have left Syria. She claimed to have been studying in Deir Ezzor literally 'under the bombs' but had arrived in Erbil to become isolated inside a simple apartment and unable to find a qualified job. However, she had arrived just months earlier, and might not have had time to completely settle yet.

Host–Guest Relations in Access to Services and Authorities

Another source of host–guest tension appears to arise from perceived differential levels of access to public services such as health and education. There appears to be a perception among the refugees that public services are not equally extended to the refugee community in Erbil. While the refugees are entitled to the same public services, the interviews suggest unequal treatments and discriminatory practices such as longer waiting hours, denial of services and verbal insults. Syrian young people are entitled to enrol in Iraqi universities, but not if they lack their official education certificates from Syria, which many do[22]. One lady we interviewed chose to go back to Syria for three months to undergo surgery in the city of Qamishly in the northeast, because it was reportedly cheaper there than the equivalent in Erbil[23]. Many services were allegedly not available in the Iraqi public system. She and others said that she sought out Syrian doctors in Erbil privately when needing check-ups and treatments.

Some Syrians said that they were not being paid their monthly wages by the employers (interview, Bahirka, Erbil, March 2020). The authorities, such as the mall administrative office or the police, did little to help them (interview, Havalan, Erbil, March 2020). In one of our interviews, a young Syrian told us that his Syrian colleague had been beaten at his workplace:

> Something happened at a restaurant where I worked, they accused someone
> of theft. They took him to the store and started beating him with a cable. I rec-

ommended him to go to the Syrian consulate and take photos of his bruises. But, eventually, [if] you do not have the connections, you better go home and keep silent.[24]

In another case, a woman we interviewed said that she had been insulted when undergoing a caesarean. Allegedly, hospital staff had asked her why she was having children while she was a refugee[25]. In the same interview, her husband said that being a Syrian made you liable to being accused of crimes in society: 'As long as you are Syrian, that is it, you are always accused.' Moreover, he also said: 'True, we are refugees, but this country has benefited from us so much, we did not stay home and make you feed us, but we are working to do so ourselves.' Reportedly, the host population in Erbil perceived the arrival of Syrians to have negatively affected the level of safety in the neighbourhood (Durable Solutions 2019). These divergences have given rise to schisms between the host and refugee communities, causing Syrians to form clusters comprised of their own members instead of assimilating with the host community (Kamal and Sadeeq 2014).

However, we also interviewed a Syrian Kurdish refugee who was a lieutenant within a Peshmerga group close to the dominant Kurdistan Democratic Party in Erbil; a separate Peshmerga faction for Syrians exists within the Peshmerga[26]. His descriptions of the Kurdish authorities were much more positive; he reported not being subject to discrimination. He had been involved in politics prior to his flight from Syria. He praised the Kurdish authorities in Erbil, and reported that all his children were enrolled in education and at the university, and that they had received stipends to cover transportation to school[27]. Moreover, the Barzani Charity Foundation had provided help in crossing the border as well as 'house stuff' to furnish their rented house.

Other participants in our semi-structured interviews did share with us that they lacked the necessary contacts to obtain access to basic public services. We therefore have some reason to believe that the lack of access to services is not only because of refugee status, but because access to public services in the KRI in general may be facilitated only when connections (*wasta*) are available, a reality that applies even to locals. One strategy that some Syrian Kurds appear to resort to is to say that they are from Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan), rather than Syria, emphasizing their common Kurdish identity vis-a-vis Iraqi Kurds (Hayes 2018).

Conclusion

The Syrian refugees in the KRI are understudied, and the urban refugees are especially so. This chapter details the socio-economic conditions of the Syrian refugees in the capital of the KRI. Based on a mixed-method ap-

proach with a small-N survey and in-depth interviews, the chapter attempts to identify the demographic features of the Syrian refugees; their interaction with the host community, the local authorities and the relevant international organizations; and their housing conditions. We found that similarly to the case in Lebanon, Syrian school-aged children in Erbil often do not attend school even if school is free, because transportation and other related costs are too high. Unlike in Lebanon, however, Syrians in Erbil seem to have relocated to Iraqi Kurdistan with their entire families, as they do not appear to have large family networks in Turkey or remaining in Syria. Like in Lebanon and Jordan, the Syrian refugees in Erbil work in unskilled and vulnerable jobs. Like in Jordan and Lebanon, most female refugees do not work; they are housewives and report limited mobility outside of their immediate house and neighbourhood.

The chapter has detailed the fact that despite commonalities with the host community and facilitations by authorities, the Syrian refugee community may still be vulnerable and isolated due to perceived discriminatory practices in service provisions, cultural stereotypes and a disconnect with the relevant international organizations. Syrians report feeling particularly alienated when seeking state services. We argue that this might be due to their lack of connections (*wasta*) in a highly patronage-structured society, in addition to their lack of legal protection. Moreover, Syrian women feel alienated as gender roles are reportedly more conservative in Erbil than in Kurdish parts of Syria.

Given their skills, young age and shared sense of ethnic identity, the authorities in the KRI would do a good service if they invested in finding better opportunities to exploit the dividend that the Syrians could bring to the region. Finally, the UNCHR needs to quickly do a better job in reaching the Syrians in Erbil and registering them, to meet at least some of their protection needs.

Nevertheless, the limited amount of qualitative data admittedly does not help to provide a detailed picture of the conditions of the Syrian refugees and their relations with the host community. More in-depth research is needed to better understand how the Syrian population is fairing in the Kurdistan Region and what it implies for intra-Kurdish relations and the Kurdish national movements. Further studies should seek to understand how forced migration in Syria's neighbouring countries not only tilts the fragile sectarian and ethnic balance in the region, but also how the experience of migration, the vulnerability of refugeehood and the relationship between host communities and refugees contribute to reshaping ethnic identities within and across these countries. Finally, further studies could also examine how specific refugee communities are used politically by agile political actors across the Middle East.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. There are, as of December 2022, a total of 94,574 non-camp Syrian refugees in Erbil governorate (UNHCR 2022). The numbers on how many of them live in Erbil city vary, depending on how the city boundaries are drawn.
2. Nearly all of the Syrian refugees in Iraq are settled in the KRI within the jurisdiction of the Kurdistan Regional Government. This chapter deals exclusively with the KRI response and not with Baghdad's response towards Syrians hosted in other governorates of Iraq.
3. Asayish is the Kurdish Security Organization (intelligence). The word Asayish is Kurdish for 'Security'.
4. Phone interview, former head of UNHCR Erbil office, February 2023.
5. The residency unit is part of the Ministry of the Interior.
6. Phone interview with a UNHCR senior staffer, former head of the Erbil office, February 2022.
7. There are about 3.73 million Syrians in Turkey, 1.5 million in Lebanon, and 672,000 in Jordan (UNHCR 2023).
8. Profiling at the neighbourhood level is no easy task in Iraq, a fact that might explain the scarcity of information about the Syrian population in urban settings.

Humanitarian and developmental stakeholders are up against this reality when they implement programmes. Information about numbers, profession, family size, place of origin and more can be found at the Asayish. However, the Asayish does not readily share information.

9. The information in the following three paragraphs was gathered by the Middle East Research Institute in Erbil, through their contacts in the areas and with local community leaders.

10. Another consequence of the lockdown was that we had to cancel our plans to collect similar survey data for Duhok and limit ourselves to the Erbil data only. We conducted a similar survey in Duhok in June 2022, and plan to publish the results in a forthcoming article.

11. The Durable Solutions Platform (2019) survey also found that the Syrians were from Al-Hasaka and Aleppo governorates. It does not say anything about household size, marital status or literacy levels of the refugees.

12. Household size is a significant benchmarking factor for several economic characteristics and growth of the refugee population over time (United Nations 2017).

13. Interview with Syrian refugees in Erbil, March 2020.

14. Interview with a female Syrian refugee, Mamzawa, Erbil, March 2020.

15. Phone interview with a UNHCR senior staffer, former head of the Erbil office, February 2022.

16. Phone interview, former UNHCR head of Erbil office, February 2023.

17. Hayes's study is based on fifty-three interviews with Syrian refugees (individuals and families) living either in the city of Suleymaniyye or in the Arbat camp in the summers of 2017 and 2018 (Hayes 2019: 662).

18. Interview, Havalan, Erbil, March 2020.

19. Interview, Erbil, March 2020.

20. Interview, Bahirka, Erbil, March 2020.

21. Interview, Havalan, Erbil, March 2020.

22. Interview, Havalan, Erbil, March 2020.

23. Interview, Mamzawa, Erbil, March 2020.

24. Interview, Havalan, Erbil, March 2020.

25. Interview, Mamzawa, Erbil, March 2020.

26. Interview, Erbil, March 2020.

27. Interview, Erbil, March 2020.

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4

Aspiring Cosmopolitans
Syrian Youth in Urban Turkey

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Rebecca Bryant and Dunya Habash

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Introduction

> [In Istanbul] you feel that you are part of a society that is very similar to you but also way more advanced and developed and open to the rest of the world. This was not available in our country, we were closed in our country. . . . We used to not know what was happening outside our society in Aleppo. Here, you live in comfort and you see what's happening outside while also engaging with this development. You are engaging with all of it, technology, development, the idea that you can develop yourself, this country doesn't stop you.
>
> –Rawda, 31 years old, originally from Aleppo

Over the course of a decade, almost four million Syrian refugees have fled in waves into neighbouring Turkey, altering the texture of urban life in that country. This chapter explores the relationship between urban belonging and national belonging, and particularly the ways that Syrian youth in Istanbul express cosmopolitan aspirations that they imagine realizing in Turkey's cities. The chapter builds on an anthropological literature regarding cosmopolitanism in unlikely places, such as slums in Alexandria (Schielke 2015) or hip-hop barbershops in Tanzania (Weiss 2002, 2009). Cosmopolitanism, in this literature, 'is about aspiring to the world, a sense of there being a wider array of paths, possibilities, styles and aims "out there"' (Schielke 2012: 29). While youth in marginalized spaces often imagine fulfilling their cosmopolitan dreams in 'the Outside' (Elliott 2021), and many such youth in the

Middle East and Africa have focused on Europe as the space to realize such dreams, this chapter shows how many displaced Syrian youth have begun to view Turkey's cities as spaces of vernacular cosmopolitan aspirations.

Following the 2015 wave of mass migrations towards Europe, public discourse in most EU countries has tended to assume that Syrians are only held back from migrating west by the 2016 EU–Turkey deal, discussed more below. Indeed, Turkish President Erdoğan has also employed such perceptions, threatening to 'open the gates' and allow Syrians to leave towards Europe if certain conditions are not met. Recent research in Turkey, however, has converged on quite a different finding: that as time passes, European futures have become less desirable (e.g. Düvell 2019 Erdoğan 2017a, 2017b).[1]

The majority of Syrians in Turkey today express a desire to remain in the country, and this number is especially high for the Syrian youth in our study. This chapter shows why Syrian youth may view Turkey as a space of possibility, a place to try out different selves and imagine cosmopolitan lives. We argue that in the case of large numbers of Syrian refugees who have now spent almost a decade in Turkey, the urban landscape becomes a space to rehearse and feel belonging in a country that in many ways continues to disenfranchise them.

Syrians are refashioning Turkey's urban fabric, and especially that of the global city of Istanbul. Despite the city's cosmopolitan character, older residents now complain that it is no longer 'Turkish'. Syrian neighbourhoods and market areas have sprung up to cater to Syrian tastes and to create what one popular newspaper article called 'Aleppo in exile' (BBC 2013). Indeed, it is not coincidental that the largest numbers of displaced Syrians in these cities derive from the Aleppo district of north-west Syria. Previous research has also shown that perceived similarities between Istanbul and Aleppo, in particular, give many Syrians today living in Turkey's metropolis a sense of belonging there (esp. Kaya 2017a; Rottman and Kaya 2020). Many of our interlocutors noted this, including Rawda, quoted in the epigraph, who observed,

> In a very strange way, my sense of belonging to my country changed to this country [after living in Istanbul]. I am actually surprised by this, I didn't think my sense of belonging would change so quickly. . . . The culture is very similar. Hearing the azan, seeing Islam, seeing the hijab. Because of these things they don't look at you like you are a stranger because it's a very similar culture. This all helps me feel a sense of belonging. . . . Now, when I visit somewhere else, when I come back and smell Istanbul's air, I feel relaxed.

Like so many young people whom we interviewed, Rawda noted similarities with Aleppo, echoing the observations of Rottman and Kaya's interlocutors.

While the similarities with Aleppo made Istanbul familiar, however, it was actually Istanbul's differences from her native city that increased Rawda's sense of belonging there. 'Here, you live in comfort and you see what's

happening outside', she remarked. 'You are engaging with all of it, technology, development, the idea that you can develop yourself.' Indeed, our research indicates that for many Syrians in the transitional period of youth, feeling at home in exile is not only about reproducing familiar lifestyles, but is also about a newfound sense of mobility that is both spatial and temporal. This is mobility as moving forward, a sense of progress and possibilities that concentrates on the future rather than the past. Youth that we interviewed often expressed this sense of both familiarity and 'progress' through the trope of Istanbul being on the cusp between 'East' and 'West'. As Rawda expressed it, 'The mix between East and West gives you a lovely and comfortable feeling. All this gives you a sense of belonging in the city'.

This sense of urban belonging, we will show, translates for many Syrians into imaginations of futures in Turkey. While similarities to the spaces where they lived in the past are important, our focus here is on how the affordances of the urban environment in Turkey open up new potential futures. In particular, we show how many young Syrians in Turkey have begun to imagine themselves as cosmopolitan, putting emphasis on mobility not as a way to move elsewhere but as an aspiration in its own right and a part of what it means to live 'normal lives'.

The chapter, then, first discusses literature on cosmopolitan aspirations, the affordances of the urban environment and future-making in relation to Syrian refugees in urban Turkey. We then turn to the particular urban context of Istanbul and the possibilities afforded by its cosmopolitan environment. Our analysis is based on fifteen life history interviews conducted with displaced Syrian youths from a range of socio-economic backgrounds now living in various districts around Istanbul (mainly Üsküdar, Fatih, Ensenler, Beyoğlu and Başakşehir), as well as on results of a three-year research project on Syrian youth in five Turkish cities, for which Bryant was co-principal investigator.[2] Participants were selected through snowball sampling while Habash was conducting ten months of ethnographic fieldwork with Syrian migrants in Istanbul from September 2020 to August 2021.[3] In our analysis, we show the relationship between, on the one hand, the affordances of technology and potentiality within the context of urban Turkey, and, on the other, refugees' senses of belonging in the country. In particular, we show how the global emerges as a discourse within which young Syrians become aspiring cosmopolitans in the Turkish urban landscape.

On Aspirational Cosmopolitanism and the Affordances of the City

Turkey currently hosts more Syrian refugees than any country in the world, and they are mostly settled in Turkey's urban areas. At the beginning of the Syrian conflict, in 2011, then-prime minister Erdoğan announced an open-

door policy for Syrians fleeing the violence and at the end of the year gave them Temporary Protection status. The Turkish government called Syrians 'guests' (*misafir*), an intentional use of a normatively laden term to suggest both that they would ultimately leave and also that Turks should display hospitality towards them (Orhun and Şenyücel Gündoğar 2015). This linguistic play was also in line with Turkey's signature of the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which at the time of signing promised asylum only to refugees fleeing Europe in the wake of the Second World War. While initially the influx from the Syrian conflict was minimal, the 2012 breakdown of a ceasefire in that country suddenly increased the refugee flow to more than one hundred thousand.

Although the Turkish government tried to encourage settlement in refugee camps, otherwise known as Temporary Protection Centres, many refugees instead followed networks of relatives, friends and trading partners to cities or moved independently to urban areas to find work. Fluctuations in the Syrian conflict meant that by the end of 2014, Turkey was hosting more than one million Syrian refugees, and by the end of 2015 more than two million. The twenty-five camps coordinated by the Ministry of Disaster and Emergency Management (AFAD) accommodated only around 250,000, or about 10 per cent of the country's Syrian population, at the end of 2015.

That year was a turning point in the history of the Eastern Mediterranean and the lives of Syrians trying to escape violence, as conditions in Turkey pushed many towards Europe. Television and computer screens filled with images of desperate migrants braving choppy seas in dinghies. While the loss of life during this period was significant,[4] the discourse of a so-called 'refugee crisis' that emerged in the period was less about the fate of the migrants themselves than about the crises of politics and legitimacy that shook receiving states in Europe (Hafez 2014; Pickel and Öztürk 2021). The result of that political crisis was the 2016 EU–Turkey deal, in which the EU promised EUR 6 billion to Turkey to aid refugee settlement and integration and to stem the migrant flow. At the same time, the deal produced the impression that Europe was the world's destination and that only the most stringent measures would stop the continent from being overrun. Certainly, much of the media of the period and afterwards produced the impression that Syrians' aspirations are oriented firmly towards Europe.

The majority of those who attempted that dangerous journey to Europe were young people. The first survey conducted with arriving migrants in Germany showed that of the almost one thousand Syrian refugees interviewed, most were young males, more than 90 per cent of whom said that armed fighting in Syria was a threat to their safety and that they feared conscription or kidnapping by one of the various organizations involved in the fighting (Ragab et al. 2017). Moreover, in 2019, 46.4 per cent of the registered Syrian population in Turkey was under 18 (Erdoğan 2020: 7), while

as of June 2020 this figure had risen to 46.8 per cent, and the percentage of youth between 18 and 30 stood at 23.5 per cent. This means that as of mid-2020 more than 70 per cent of the Syrian population in Turkey was under the age of 30.

Our research has focused on youth primarily because this is the age category that has been caught in between, stuck in the limbo of 'permanent temporariness' precisely at a transitional time of their lives. Youth between 18 and 30 years of age would have attended university or entered the job market in their home country, but many are finding that their plans for education and training, or marrying and building a family, must be deferred or altered. Many young people described to us the circuitous routes that they had to take to enter university, or the compromises they made in choosing other professions, such as one young man who had wanted to study but instead became a real estate broker. Others bide their time in menial jobs but pursue their ambitions through research on the internet and occasional courses. All talked about the importance of their families to the decisions that they made. Moreover, opportunities for youth often determine decisions that families make, as they calculate the best options for the family unit.

Despite the importance of this age category, however, research focused specifically on refugee youth and their experiences and needs is sparse (for similar observations, see Chatty 2007). Some limited research has addressed migrant youth perceptions of time and the future (e.g. Allsopp et al. 2014; Andersson 2014), especially in relation to immigration regimes. Other qualitative research has examined youth agency, particularly the experience of illegality or lack of documentation in the transition to adulthood (esp. Gonzales 2011). However, the experience of stalled temporality, an impeded transition to adulthood and the impediments of immigration regimes experienced so keenly by many refugee youth is an area still in need of much qualitative research.

Moreover, much of the 'stuckedness' or existential immobility (Hage 2009) that refugee youth in Turkey experience arises from their legal and social status as 'temporary' refugees. Turkey's Temporary Protection Regulation (*Geçici Koruma Yönetmeliği*) of October 2014 ensured that asylum seekers would not be returned against their will and gave them access to fundamental rights and services, such as healthcare and education.[5] This temporary status has provided Syrians in the country with basic rights such as access to health, education and social assistance, but refugees continue to face challenges in access to those rights. Moreover, while even as early as 2015 many polls reported large numbers of Syrians preferring to stay in Turkey, the regime of temporary protection offered few obvious pathways to citizenship and permanence.

As we know from other cases of prolonged displacement, however, war rarely creates refugees who are 'temporary'. Rather, throughout the world,

from Afghanistan to Georgia to Uganda, we find millions of persons left in the limbo of 'permanent temporariness' (e.g. Dunn 2018; Weber and Peek 2012), often held for decades in the squalor of camps while unable fully to plan for the future (Harrell-Bond 1989). Even in cases where forced migrants return to their homes, as in Bosnia or Rwanda, return is often prolonged, painful and may entail secondary displacement (e.g. Blitz 2005; Stefansson 2010). In cases of ethnic or secessionist conflict, we see that while return may remain an ideal, the likelihood of return in IDPs' lifetimes is slim. In the Syrian case, while a regime change could open the door to return, changing work and educational opportunities and life circumstances invariably shift such views as time passes. As Roger Zetter (2021: 9) notes, among the UNHCR options of resettlement, repatriation or local integration for refugees, return is the 'not-so-easy' option, a 'contested territory figuratively and in practice' (ibid.: 10). Rather, Zetter observes, exile is transformative (ibid.: 13). Anthropological studies of war, as well, have emphasized that it is important to see conflict not only as an exceptional eruption in the present, but also as a transformative social process (esp. Lubkemann 2008; also Kelly 2008). We suggest that the imaginations of youth are key to this process.

In a recent book (Bryant and Knight 2019), Bryant and coauthor outline methods for ethnographic study of the future, in particular by encouraging attention to 'orientations', or the open-ended and interdeterminate ways in which we orient ourselves to the future in everyday life. 'While orientations entail planning, hoping for, and imagining the future, they also often entail the collapse or exhaustion of those efforts: moments in which hope may turn to apathy, frustrated planning to disillusion, and imagination to fatigue' (ibid.: 19). Importantly, anthropological studies of even what seem to be hopeless or 'futureless' presents show how people nevertheless plan, long and hope for particular kinds of futures (e.g. Bear et al. 2015; Dzenovska 2018; Hage 2009; Jansen 2014, 2015; Kelly 2008).

In this regard, while many of the refugee youth whom we interviewed consider their state to be 'abnormal', they do not necessarily subscribe to the idea that 'normalcy' implies returning to their 'normal' state prior to war. Rather, as we show below, they are constructing new visions of a 'normal life' from the affordances of urban landscapes in Turkey. As Schielke (2012: 31) notes for youth in Egypt, 'The global class difference between the fantastic world of possibilities – be it Europe, America and the Gulf or the upper class milieus in Egypt – and the everyday world of limited means is marked by the difference in the material qualities of surfaces, dress, vehicles, media, pavement, fashion brands, or sports'. It is this 'Westernness' or globality that many of the youth in our study said that they found in Turkish cities, which they viewed as 'open' in contrast to the closed lives they claimed to have led before. In a similar way, ethnographic work from the post-Yugoslav Balkans, for instance, has shown how a situation of pervasive corruption

and political uncertainty produces longings for 'normal lives' that are often measured through markers such as consumer items (Fehérváry 2002), passports (Jansen 2009) and having a state that works (Gilbert et al. 2008; Greenberg 2011).

Indeed, research shows that for many youth who are today intensely connected to the world through technology and who share transnational images of what constitute the material aspirations of a 'normal' life, luxury villas with new cars parked outside are often not only about material comfort, but also about creating themselves as the sorts of persons who should live in those spaces (Elliott 2021; Elsayed 2010). Fehérváry (2002), for instance, shows how postsocialist Hungarian aspirations to possess particular consumer goods were not only about their possession, but also about attaining social respectability through 'becoming modern'. 'The pressure to transform personal material worlds goes beyond local class positioning', Fehérváry notes. 'It stems from the correlation between "upscale" material environments and a level of belonging in an imagined international order' (ibid.: 394).

As will become clear below, the realization of such aspirations also depends on spaces in which they can be realized. Many Syrian youth in Turkey's urban environments today see the possibility of fulfilling such aspirations, and indeed can imagine lives in which they can 'become modern' while retaining their own culture. However, these futures that many young Syrians are envisioning are increasingly at odds with public opinion in Turkey, which has become virulently anti-migrant. The next section, then, explores how young Syrians engage in future-making practices that create senses of belonging in a state that increasingly rejects them.

Cultural Affinity and Belonging

Not surprisingly, as documented in other studies of Syrian integration in Turkey (Kaya 2017a, 2017b; Rottman and Kaya 2020), most Syrians we spoke to mentioned that one of Turkey's major attractions was the cultural similarities between Turks and Syrians, what Kaya (2017a) calls 'cultural affinity'. As Rawda explained, 'Istanbul is close to us culturally, close to our society, close to our way of living. You don't feel yourself a foreigner in it . . . All this gives you a sense of belonging in the city.' Kaya (2017a, 2017b) discusses the historical reasons for this cultural closeness, mainly the traces of the Ottoman Empire in the region. Given that the Ottoman Turks controlled the Levant for nearly four centuries between 1516 and 1918, the people of greater Syria absorbed various Ottoman traditions and vice versa (Ahmad 2003). This is especially true of culinary, musical and religious culture.

Because the Turkish language uses numerous Arabic words even today, this effect is also felt linguistically. Quite a few of the Syrian youth we encountered had by the time of our interviews spent more than five years in Turkey and now spoke Turkish fluently, while others were working to learn. Of those who were fluent speakers, many claimed that the language was easy to learn because of the heavy use of Arabic in Turkish vocabulary. Even without fluent Turkish, 'you can get around and do what you need to do because of the same Arabic words that are used in Turkish . . . You can still communicate with them in the stores wherever you go', explained Rawda. Interestingly, some interviewees discussed a deeper layer of cultural affinity beyond similar vocabulary. For instance, Abdullah, a young man in his mid-twenties who left Aleppo in 2016 and now lives in a flat with a group of Syrian friends on the European side close to the Golden Horn, claimed that even the 'stubborn' nature of 'Turkish people' resembles that of Syrians:

> The *tabee'a* [environment] and the people are very similar to us . . . the weddings, the way they [Turks] think, these sorts of things. Especially us in Halab, we have lots of people who share similar ways of thinking with Turks . . . sometimes the similarities are like *tafkeer mahdood* [stubbornness], sometimes bureaucratic thinking, sometimes *mikh al-tiraji* [entrepreneurial thinking]. We have these things a lot [in Halab]. This behaviour is not strange for us. (Abdullah, 28 years old, originally from Aleppo)

These cultural similarities have helped Syrians connect to their host communities, feeling tied to their new country of residence on account of the shared history – however distant this history might be in reality. As Rottman and Kaya (2020: 5) note, 'this cultural intimacy is built in part by asserting difference from Europeans'. The urban landscape is an important place in which this cultural intimacy is made tangible, through familiar sounds, such as music and the call to prayer; familiar sights, such as minarets and women wearing the hijab; and familiar tastes and smells in the form of food, drink and other aspects of daily and ritual life. These tangible signs, and the ways of life associated with them, were often negatively contrasted with the experience in Europe among interviewees in Bryant's project on Syrian youth. As one young woman from Der Zor who was 23 years old and studying in Antakya at the time of the interview noted,

> There are those who are in Germany or Sweden, but my dad, when he came to Turkey, he found that its culture is close to Syria, at least they have some of the Islamic aspects, you hear the azan, there are covered women. So their traditions and habits are somehow similar to ours. For example, dad didn't like living outside, in any European country, and I kind of agree with him. Of course, it all depends on the rearing, but child-rearing is very hard in Europe, very hard . . . traditions, habits, culture . . . and those who went out are suffering from this.

The idea that 'child-rearing is very hard in Europe' is one that many interviewees repeated as they planned for their own future marriages and families.

Rottman and Kaya (2020: 11) observe that this imagined cultural intimacy with Turkish society has a basis in historical consciousness but 'must also be seen as a constructed intimacy – a process of stereotyping and essentializing both Turkish and European cultures while asserting their belonging in the former'. While this is no doubt the case, our own interviews showed that Turkey's perceived 'Europeanness' was equally important for young refugees' senses of belonging, as it allowed them to aspire to European forms of temporal mobility – mobility as 'going somewhere' or 'moving forward' – without foregoing those aspects of cultural intimacy that allowed them to imagine a place outside Syria where they would be able to marry and raise their children.

Indeed, young Syrians whom we interviewed used the differences between their current Turkish and their former Syrian urban lives to create and imagine futures as 'local' cosmopolitans and global residents. Striving for these new potential futures not only gives young Syrians in Turkey today productive tools for feeling a sense of belonging to a country that continues to disenfranchise them, but also allows them to 'become modern' through access to an 'imagined international order' (Fehérváry 2002: 394) by way of technological, educational and sociopolitical awareness not experienced before in Syria. The next section explores some of the aspirations formed by these young Syrians through a new transnational imaginary.

'Istanbul Changes You': Becoming an Aspiring Cosmopolitan in a Global City

The idea that 'Syria was a closed society' featured frequently in most of our interviews in Istanbul. When interviewees were asked to explain what this means, common responses included the fact that back in Syria everybody knew you wherever you went, that little interaction with the international arena was available and that access to technological advancement being developed 'outside' Syria was scarce. Najwa, a 30-year-old Syrian woman who moved to Istanbul in 2018 with her young family, and now lives in a Turkish neighbourhood in Üsküdar, explained most succinctly how Syria's tight-knit social life functioned:

> Over there [in Syria], the people care a lot about 'image'. It was a nice feeling, you enter the restaurant and your head is raised, everyone knows you. Everyone knows who you are, who your dad is, who your mom is, who your sister is, what you do, where you work. If some negative gossip comes out about you, they talk about it. . . . We used to focus and care a lot about our reputations

and worry about something bad happening in front of others. Our parents raised us to be careful not to ruin our reputation in front of society. . . . If anyone wanted to do something [that wasn't socially acceptable], he would do it in secret so that no one could speak badly about him. [Parents] raise you to believe that you won't get married if you do something wrong [e.g. sex before marriage, being seen with men or women who are not family, etc.].

Living in a metropolis like Istanbul where 'everyone [who knows you] is so far way' makes it easier to avoid the gaze of those who would talk about you. This physical and social distance has allowed young Syrians to explore events, activities and new ideas that they perceived as not having been possible in the closed circles of their relatives and friends back in Syria. For this reason, Syrians like Najwa are pleased to be living in a majority Turkish neighbourhood where the 'gaze' of other Syrians can be avoided.

These new urban experiences, which we conceptualize as 'openings', have allowed young Syrians to experiment with ideas and lifestyles unfamiliar to them because of cultural norms, lack of resources and the need for patronage in order to access those resources back in Syria. Especially for those aspiring to be musicians, artists or anything deemed socially unacceptable, leaving Syria and integrating into Turkey's urban fabric has not only allowed them to imagine and fulfil personal aspirations, but also to feel appreciated in their new host society. The following excerpt from an interview with Nuha, a 24-year-old fine arts student at Istanbul University, reveals her initial struggles settling into urban Turkey after being forced to leave her home town on the outskirts of Damascus, as well as her sense of security and freedom to pursue the activities she loves, such as becoming a painter in the future:

Dunya: What were the personal changes that happened to you after you moved to this country?
Nuha: Firstly, the personal things that would happen to anyone who is learning about/getting exposed to a new culture. . . . I had to get over the fear, the fear of living [before] in a place where there are always air strikes, killing, explosions. [Here in Turkey] I got used to having electricity always, running water. . . . I got used to the idea that the most basic form of human rights is available here [for the most part]. This is the most important thing. . . . [pauses to think] . . . I got stronger.
D: You got stronger . . .
N: Yes, I was saying I got stronger. I entered a new kind of war where I needed to learn how to interact with people who lived normal lives. This was really difficult.
D: Really? Why?
N: Suddenly, I came out of *'adam* [i.e. loss, nothingness], in every sense of the word, and I was put in a place where everything is available. There is

no danger, people have everything, living a life that [at that time] I felt was impossible.

. . . When I feel and remember that I don't take these simple things for granted any more like these people, I feel good that I lived this [war] experience. Because it's true they are happy, but they don't know the real worth of the normalcy they are living. But I know it.

D: Wow, this is very powerful. Really.

N: These are the main things, apart from starting to enter a new *mujtama'* [society], starting to learn a new language, I also began to focus on, of course after I got through the first step of getting used to the new sense of security, I began to feel like I am finally in a place where I can accomplish the things I want to do.

D: Do you feel like you began to feel this way because you are now living in Istanbul?

N: Yes, in Turkey in general. Outside Syria, a place where they would not have appreciated me if I became an artist or a musician.

D: Can you tell me why this [becoming an artist or a musician] was difficult in Syria?

N: Not that it was difficult. . . . It's more a cultural thing and the way people think. It's frowned up[on] for a woman to become a musician or artist.

Nuha's sense of appreciation comes from her perception that the 'arts' as an industry and discipline is more established in urban Turkey, especially Istanbul. This perception is what led her to choose an 'undesirable' area of study against her parents' wishes when she applied for a fine arts degree in secrecy. 'I came home with my student ID one day and showed it to my mother. . . . She didn't say a word', Nuha explained. From that moment, Nuha's career choice was accepted, something she attributes to the indirect influence of Turkey's 'modern' sensibilities on her parents' world view. Now, Nuha lives in a flat in Fatih nearer to her job and university; she visits her family home in Esenler during her off days. She admits that her current lifestyle would not have been possible in Syria where a daughter only leaves the family home after she marries: 'It took some time for my parents to accept my decisions, but now they know that I am following a new and different path.' Therefore, for young Syrians like Nuha, settling in urban Turkey not only 'opened' their horizons through the development of new aspirations, but also changed their perspectives on what constitutes a 'normal' life. Now, a normal life means pursuing your interests even if they are socially undesirable, or in Nuha's terminology, even if your interests have the potential to ruin your social reputation.

A more direct example of how the social fabric of Istanbul helped transform aspirations for young and talented Syrians is the case of Hassan, a musician from Aleppo in his late twenties. The city gave him the opportunity to turn his hobby into a career, something he would not have been able to do if he stayed in Syria. Although Hassan owned a small studio with his family

back in Aleppo, he told us that living in Istanbul, which he refers to as the 'city of stars', helped him grow his name as a musician and producer because of the skilled Turkish musicians he encountered and the international scene he tapped into thanks to Istanbul's diversity. Although he sees his arrival in Istanbul as a 'beautiful coincidence', something that occurred not intentionally but rather because of circumstances, he claims that his time in the city was key for his development as a musician and that 'this is the place I need to continue living in'. When asked what made Istanbul such a place for him, he explained,

> It's the mixture between East and West, it's very nice. You will find everything in Istanbul. You will find the European life, Western society and you will find Eastern society. You hear the *adan* from the mosque while also people drinking beers at the bars. And its music, for me the heart of Turkish music is in Istanbul. All the musicians here in Istanbul are 'high-level' so you can develop yourself as a musician. It's a great place to be in terms of Eastern music.

Beyond the 'high-level' artists Hassan that was able to learn from and perform with through networking in various artistic circles around the city, he also pursued a university degree in film studies, where he learned important skills to help with his branding and music videos. He told us in follow-up conversations that if it wasn't for Istanbul's 'development' he never would have thought to pursue such a creative degree and would not have taken his talent as a musician to the next level by turning music into a career.

Access to technology provides another 'opening' for young Syrians in urban Turkey. This 'technology' was described to us as physical infrastructure such as public transportation, bridges and skyscrapers; *nizam* or temporal organization of the business day; and technical or soft infrastructure such as credit cards, online banking and computers. For many youth, all of this converged in the high-tech university campuses, which they compared to their equivalents in Syria. As Rawda remarks in the epigraph, this exposure to what many Syrians are calling 'development and technological advancement' helps them feel a sense of belonging in and appreciation for Turkey. For example, Bilal, an entrepreneur from Homs in his mid-twenties who now runs his own consulting firm in Istanbul, explains how his appreciation for his new life in Turkey makes him feel a stronger sense of belonging to the country than native Turks do:

> **Dunya**: Do you now feel like Istanbul has become your new home?
> **Bilal**: Yes, of course.
> **D**: So, you feel a sense of belonging to the city?
> **B**: Exactly. Probably, I feel a stronger sense of belonging than the native of this country. Because here, *ibn al-balad* [the native] is always complaining and doesn't like his own country. And if you will excuse me, I know I wasn't raised

here and I didn't live here [in my youth], but when I compare Turkey's past and the present we are in now [in terms of progress and development], the *dawle* [state] has a lot to do with the progress we see now, including the president himself. I won't hide from you, I know any individual or leader can have mistakes, but his mistakes aren't something that should make you forget all the good he has done for the country.

His comments focused on the development that Turkey has experienced during two decades under Justice and Development Party governance. Aware of intense criticism of the government, he later admitted that he would be at the frontlines of any revolutionary movement in Turkey in order to stop the destruction and decay experienced in Syria as a result of the conflict. 'In Syria, I was ignorant. I didn't know what was happening around the world, no one was speaking about anything. And if someone decided to speak, he would be gone with the wind. I don't want this to happen here. Not now, not ever', insisted Bilal. Through the development and technological progress available in Turkey, Bilal and other Syrians finally feel connected to an 'imagined international order' where they know what's happening around the world.

A final 'opening' that Istanbul gave young Syrians is their exposure to social diversity. Many interviewees discussed how Istanbul 'changed them' because the city allowed them to meet people from all over the world (other migrants, tourists, even other Syrians from different parts of Syria). For example, Abdullah decided to try 'couch-surfing' in Istanbul as a way of meeting new people from around the world because his status as a refugee does not allow him to travel outside Turkey. As a result, he and his Syrian flatmates gave up their living room for travellers wanting to visit and experience the city with locals. He told us that he never could have invited strangers into his home back in Syria, and that doing so in Istanbul has allowed him to meet over one hundred people from every part of the globe, including China, Brazil, the UK, Spain and Italy. Apart from meeting tourists, Abdullah also met migrants from other parts of Syria in Istanbul as his Syrian network grew over time: 'I never went to the army, so I didn't interact with anyone from Damascus, Der Ezour, Deraa or Homs. Here I met them and became friends with many people [from all over Syria]'.

Although these 'openings' or new urban experiences have given young Syrians new aspirations for success and belonging, it is important to note the impediments to the full integration of Syrians in Turkey. The most significant impediment is the difficulty of acquiring Turkish citizenship. According to interviewees in Bryant's three-year study, the process by which Syrians acquire a Turkish passport remains shrouded in mystery. Youth interviewed for the study related anecdotally that friends and family who had some sort of educational or professional capital – students in desirable

disciplines or young professionals such as doctors and teachers – often received invitations to apply. However, they also reported that others who seemed to have no such capital had also succeeded in receiving passports.

Another impediment is the hostility felt from Turkish neighbours and colleagues, especially as rising anti-migrant sentiments grow across the country. At the time of writing, the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan has resulted in thousands of Afghanis attempting to cross the Iranian border in Turkey, and efforts by the Turkish government to block their entry. These events also triggered violent anti-migrant reactions by members of the Turkish public against Syrians and Syrian businesses. The sense of cultural intimacy that we discussed earlier is often not reciprocated by Turks (Rottman and Kaya 2020), making it an ambivalent belonging. Nevertheless, almost all Syrians we interviewed saw their futures in Turkey, precisely because the urban environment enabled them to imagine *having* a future (see Bryant and Knight 2019: 50–51). One way in which one can see this is in the anxious discussions of how to acquire Turkish citizenship and the types of mobility that it brings.

Mobility, 'Normal' Lives and Urban Aspirations

'Of course I would get the citizenship if they offered it', remarked Subhi, a mechanical engineering graduate from Aleppo who currently works in the human resources office of an international company in Istanbul. The company had originally offered him a position in his own field that would have required him to move abroad, to Pakistan or Oman. When they found out that he only had a Syrian passport, they instead offered him a position in the Istanbul office. The experience left him with a lasting desire to have a 'real' passport, one that would allow him to travel 'normally', as anyone else with his aspirations would do. He wanted citizenship, he said, 'For one reason only, or for two reasons. The first is the horizons that the citizenship would open for me. . . . The second is that I want to be done with the curse of having a Syrian passport. . . . I want to be a citizen who will receive it [a visa to travel] in a normal manner like all the others.'

As Bryant notes in a related article (forthcoming), refugee youth most often expressed the desire for citizenship as a desire for mobility. This was both physical mobility – as in moving freely to other parts of Turkey or travelling for work or education – and mobility as aspiration, part of what they imagined as a 'normal', middle-class life. Subhi dismissed his own country's passport as abnormal and wanted one that would allow him to go to an embassy and receive a visa without having them 'investigate me many times to see why I'm coming [to that country]'. As other anthropological work has shown, the hierarchical position of various passports in the global order

makes particular ones into 'a symbol of free movement and travel' (Jansen 2009: 822) and representative of 'a high quality of life' and 'respected geopolitical position' (Greenberg 2011: 88).

For our interviewees, then, Syrian documents were associated with immobility and abnormality, and Turkish documents were associated with mobility and 'normal lives'. The possibility of travel and its association with middle-class jobs and aspirations were, in turn, part of the 'openness' that many Syrian youth found in Istanbul and other Turkish cities and that they compared to life in Syria.

Nuha, quoted above, continued:

> If I was in Syria, there was a chance that I [wouldn't] study in a different city but here, I went after my dream. . . . Here in Turkey there are principles and the possibility of developing yourself. However, in Syria, after you graduate, the maximum would be a master's degree and then work with those who don't have a master's, and sometimes not in your field . . . But here, especially [since] most of the students are getting citizenships, they can work on themselves and improve their knowledge, even if not in their field, there are a lot of trainings. . . . Many things like this happen, you can improve yourself on all levels.

As noted above, youth in this study often described this 'openness' as an openness to the world. In this sense, the aspiration to physical mobility via Turkish citizenship and passports is also an intrinsic part of what Michael Jackson (2013) calls existential mobility. Mobility, he notes, is not only about survival, but must also be understood as 'a metaphor for freedom' (ibid.: 226). It is within this context that the 'openness' of a cosmopolitan metropolis may provide the model and wherewithal for moving forward even in a context of increasing rejection.

Conclusion: Urbanity, Aspiration and Belonging

This chapter has described a certain group of Syrian youth today making their lives in Istanbul as 'aspiring cosmopolitans' for whom the affordances of the city – its infrastructure, technology and 'openness' – offer not only a vision of global interconnectedness (Peterson 2011), but also the possibility of realizing it. Much of the recent anthropological literature on cosmopolitanism has addressed the frustrations of such a global vision. As Schielke (2015: 154) summarizes, 'The notion of cosmopolitanism, although properly speaking a privilege of intellectual and economical elites, is also useful for understanding what it means to have a horizon of expectation that is global but means of movement and advancement that are much more limited.' As noted earlier, the sense that such cosmopolitan aspirations cannot be

fulfilled in one's own country or environment pushes many youths in the Middle East and North Africa towards 'the Outside', a term that Moroccans use (as *l'barra*) to denote what Alice Elliott (2021) describes as a topography or horizon of possibility. Our interlocutors in this study, as well as large numbers of the youth in Bryant's previous study, describe Turkey's cities as offering such a horizon of possibility, in contrast to their lives before displacement.

That contrast particularly emerges in descriptions of Istanbul as offering 'openings' and 'openness'. For such youth, a cosmopolitan metropolis like Istanbul brings you a few steps closer to 'freedom': freedom to pursue your interests against social expectations (Nuha), freedom from the gaze of others (Najwa), freedom to interact with strangers and invite them into your home (Abdullah) and freedom to know what's happening around the world and to engage with technological progress and development (Bilal).

In turn, imaginations of global futures in Istanbul create senses of belonging in Turkey. As one recent work notes, there has been little research conducted on 'the power of cities as forums for creating, maintaining, and contesting notions of national identity and belonging' (Diener and Hagen 2019: 14). While identity remains an open question for many of the youth in our study, they were able to speak clearly about senses of belonging and how to demarcate their homeland from the place where they imagined working and raising their children. Such belonging emerges, for instance, in Rawda's sense of relaxation when she returns to Istanbul or Bilal's willingness to fight should a civil war erupt in Turkey.

This suggests that cosmopolitanism as aspiration needs to be taken seriously not only in studies of economic migrants, but also in those of forced migration, particularly migrant youth. The youth population in the Middle East has been growing for more than four decades, and an ample anthropological literature shows how in an age of globalization their own states rarely provide the conditions for youth to fulfil such cosmopolitan aspirations. Whether or not Turkey will maintain the 'openness' that attracts such youth is itself an open question.

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Notes

1. The basis of Syrian refugees' preferences during the 2015 period is also not clear, however. Despite an assumption that conditions in Turkey pushed Syrians to risk their lives to make it to Europe during that period, Kaya (2017b: 372) notes that only 20 per cent of the Syrians who arrived on the Greek islands in that period reported having previously spent more than six months in Turkey (see also UNHCR 2015).
2. This project was 'Integration and Well-Being of Syrian Youth in Turkey', Rebecca Bryant and Ahmet İçduygu, principal investigators, funded by Research Councils UK and TÜBİTAK (Türkiye Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Kuruma, or the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey). During this project, the research team conducted a household survey in five cities (510 interviews) and in-depth interviews with 105 Syrian youth in those same cities.
3. Habash is currently completing research for a PhD project that explores the musical and cultural integration of Syrians in Turkey. For that research, she spent ten months in Istanbul interviewing and working with Syrian artists, musicians, students, entrepreneurs and teachers. She drew on her contacts using the snowball method to find participants for this study. The interviews that she conducted for her PhD project also informed this study's analysis.
4. By the International Office of Migration (IOM) estimates, 3,770 persons drowned trying to cross the Mediterranean in 2015 (see IOM 2015).
5. Law on Foreigners and International Protection, Article 91.

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Part II

Refugee Urbanism
and Urban Policies

<center>*5*</center>

The (Re)Making of a Palestinian Ghetto

Syrian Displacement and Urban Transformation in the Beddawi Refugee Camp

<center>*Ismae'l Sheikh Hassan*</center>

Introduction

In the beginning of 2018, UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) announced that they had chosen the Palestinian refugee camp Beddawi as the site for the implementation of an ambitious camp improvement process and project. The more than sixty-five-year-old refugee camp was afflicted with a variety of urban problems, high levels of unemployment, and 'security'-related challenges. Camp improvement programmes (CIPs) are area-based approaches (ABAs) implemented by UNRWA that focus on improving and addressing the complex urban challenges that are emerging in Palestinian refugee camps, which conventional humanitarian approaches are unable to address. CIPs use participatory processes to develop innovative visions for improving Palestinian camps while identifying and implementing community priorities. UNRWA is also empowered through this process to implement large-scale projects while acquiring new funding from sources beyond its core budget, which is approved by the UN General Assembly on a yearly basis. Given that UNRWA's core budget has been insufficient in the past 10 years to cover UNRWA's basic services to the Palestinian refugees, CIPs open new possibilities for improving living conditions within Palestinian camps.

However, three years after initiating the project and halfway through its implementation phase, UNRWA suspended the CIP in Beddawi camp due to a variety of local conflicts. Discussions with various professionals and community members who worked on this project referred to the chaotic conditions in Beddawi camp and the ease with which local 'strongmen' can halt projects to demand personal favours or shares of contracts. Members of the community participatory platform routinely received physical threats, and local camp authorities and notables were unable to protect the participatory process or implementation of the projects. It was thus common to hear descriptions of Beddawi as a 'ghetto', which also goes hand-in-hand with descriptions of Palestinian camps as urban ghettoes in both media and academic contexts (Ashour 2012; Agier 2011; Ron 2003).

During the past fifteen years, Beddawi camp had undergone major social and urban transformations. Due to conflicts in both Lebanon and Syria, thousands of refugees arrived in Beddawi camp seeking shelter. Today almost half the camp's population is Syrian refugees. In order to accommodate them, new high-rise buildings, some reaching eleven stories, are emerging within the camp's dense and overcrowded urban fabric. Although a lucrative rental market is emerging in Beddawi camp, its physical urban fabric is deteriorating, and a large percentage of the homes in the camp suffer from a lack of natural light and ventilation.

This research is based on my involvement with the Beddawi camp improvement programme as an urban planner during 2018–19. The chapter also builds on interviews that Sara Kayed in 2020–21 conducted with camp residents, building owners, and real estate developers in Beddawi. The chapter first discusses some of the historic and contemporary tensions between local political activism in the camp and international humanitarian assistance in the context of Beddawi. I then detail the urban and social transformations that have changed Beddawi over the past fifteen years. More specifically, this chapter discusses the emergence of a new building typology in the camp, known as 'commercial buildings' (Ar. *mabani tijariya*), that is playing a central role in the densification, social transformation, and deterioration of the urban fabric of Beddawi. While local displacement and population growth led to the emergence of the commercial buildings, the arrival of Syrian refugees in 2011 also significantly impacted them. Finally, the chapter aims to discuss the potential and limitations of area-based approaches and the lessons from camp improvement programmes in Beddawi and other Palestinian camps.

The Formation of Beddawi Camp

Beddawi is one of twelve Palestinian refugee camps established in Lebanon after Zionist armed militias forcefully expelled Palestinians from historic Palestine with the goal of creating a Jewish state in May 1948. This ethnic

cleansing (Pappe 2007) project resulted in the expulsion of 80 per cent of the indigenous population from their homes and lands in what then became the state of Israel, with around one hundred thousand (Sayigh 1979) Palestinians arriving in Lebanon. The path to Beddawi was long, and it took the Palestinian refugees around seven years to arrive at Beddawi, as they moved from southern Lebanon to Beirut and eventually to various informal encampments in northern Lebanon.

The informal camps created a dilemma for UNRWA, which preferred concentrating refugees in camps to facilitate its humanitarian operations. The Lebanese state also preferred concentrating refugees into fewer official camps rather than having them dispersed into smaller and more numerous informal camps – but in its case, mostly to facilitate surveillance and control (Berg 2014). By the mid-1950s, various groups of Palestinian refugees scattered across the southern, northern, and eastern regions of Lebanon were relocated to newly established camps in Beddawi (north Lebanon) and Rashidieh (south Lebanon).

From the beginning, Beddawi differed from most Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. This was a 'planned and modern' camp established later than other camps that had been constructed in 1948–49 by the refugees themselves. The design was based on a rational grid pattern, unlike the organic urban structure of camps built by the refugees. House shapes and sizes were uniform and modular, and the tiny sheds were constructed from tin and asbestos, unlike the tents found in the other camps.

The Palestinian refugees resisted relocation to Beddawi (Yassine 2014), because as a 'modern camp' it was perceived as part of a plan to settle Palestinian refugees in the new host countries, which was part of UNRWA's initial mandate for refugee reintegration (Schiff 1989: 62). Refugees feared that agreeing to be settled in Beddawi's camp meant forgoing their right to return to Palestine, and thus the camp remained empty after its construction. Such developments mark the beginnings of the symbolic relations between the materiality of camps of Palestine and the right of return to Palestine. These developments also underline the tensions between international agendas of development aid and Palestinian aspirations and political priorities.

In 1955, the Abu Ali river located on the northern edge of Tripoli flooded, destroying the historic urban fabric that bordered the river, as well as an informal Palestinian refugee camp composed of tents. The Palestinian refugees who lived on the Abu Ali riverbanks still resisted relocation to the new Beddawi camp. After the destruction of their tented camp, the Lebanese state prevented its reconstruction, and the Palestinian refugees were forcibly relocated to Beddawi, as well as to other informal encampments in the north.

Because of the Abu Ali refugees' forced resettlement to Beddawi, the camp's social and urban structure differed from that of the other Palestinian camps in Lebanon. Most of the other camps were refugee-created camps

with an organic urban fabric that was initiated with makeshift tents. Thus, refugees from the same village set up their tents close to one another and searched for family members and fellow villagers, inviting them to set up camp within existing tent-based clusters. Camp neighbourhoods were therefore based on the refugees' village of origin in Palestine, and became sites for maintaining the refugees' village identities in exile. In Beddawi, however, UNRWA managed the distribution process of sheds to different families (Hajj 2014: 404), based on various criteria such as family size, registration numbers, and a first-come-first-served basis. Thus, the village of origin and neighbourhood structure were not as pronounced in the Beddawi camp as they were in the other camps. An exception to this pattern, however, was the neighbourhood of Shefa-Amr, whose members originally stayed in the Beqaa valley but had to relocate to Beddawi because of family feuds. After collectively resettling in Beddawi, they formed a large village-based neighbourhood at the western edge of the camp, which turned out to be more socially cohesive and homogeneous than the other neighbourhoods in the camp. This difference would eventually play a role in the patterns of urban development in Beddawi.

Political and Urban Transformations in Beddawi, 1956–2005

The political developments within Palestinian refugee camps between their formation in 1948 and the aftermath of the Lebanese civil war (1975–90) have been well researched and documented. At first, the Palestinian refugee camps emerged as sites for the liberation of Palestine, thus hosting a political project that was inspired by global movements confronting imperialism and colonialism (Sayigh 1979). However, in the post-war period this political project was compromised, with the Palestinian political leadership abandoning the camps and their cause (Sayigh 2000). That political leadership 'forgot' the Palestinian refugees' right of return, the camps transformed into urban slums, and the residents turned into non-citizens deprived of civil rights. This transition from 'sites of anti-colonial resistance' to 'urban slums' is essential to understanding the urban developments that took place in Beddawi after 2005.

Beddawi camp joined the Palestinian liberation project in 1969, when the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), the main umbrella group for Palestinian politics and resistance, reached an agreement with the Lebanese state on how the PLO could engage in armed struggle from the Lebanese territories. This agreement, which was brokered by Egypt and was known as the Cairo accords, allowed the PLO to officially manage the Palestinian

camps in Lebanon. And thus with these developments Beddawi became not only a centre for Palestinian resistance, but it also became a military target for Israeli air strikes and assassinations of the camp's leadership. In February 1973, Israeli commandos infiltrated Palestinian camps in northern Lebanon and assassinated Abu Hassan Mansour Kortam, a military leader from Beddawi.[1] Targeted assassinations of leaders of the Palestinian resistance, artists, and intellectuals have been part of a long-standing Israeli strategy that has harmed Palestinian communities in the diaspora camps, in Arab or Western cities, and living under Israeli occupation (Gregory 2004; Said 1992). There is, hence, a relation between the eradication of Palestinian leadership (and elites) and the urban deterioration of the camps that is resonant of other colonial and racial regimes seeking to control, eradicate, and subjugate indigenous populations (Pappe 2007; Bob and Nepstad 2007; Wolfe 2006).

During the Lebanese civil war, the Palestinian liberation project got entangled with Arab politics, and Palestinian factions' alliances got split between the different local and regional actors. The refugee camps thus became a hotbed of regional, internal and civil conflicts. A new generation of Palestinian leaders, fighters, and activists were killed or went missing during this period, and internal conflicts emerged between those loyal to PLO's chairman Yasser Arafat and other factions who allied with the Syrian regime.

When the PLO opted to engage in a negotiation process with Israel and signed the Oslo Accords (1993), the internal Palestinian political scene became even more fractured. The Palestinian refugees felt that the political elite had abandoned their cause for the liberation of Palestine and the 'right of return' to their homeland. These elites wanted to reap the fruits of armed struggle and overnight transformed into state-builders and diplomats.

In the aftermath of the civil war, the Palestinian refugees became scapegoats, blamed for starting the war. The consequent legal discrimination by the Lebanese state and the fact that their political leaders had abandoned them caused tens of thousands of refugees to emigrate to Western countries or become expatriate workers in the Gulf countries. What appeared as the fragmentation of the Palestinian liberation project at that moment thus motivated a new exodus from the camps.

Parallel to that, a new humanitarian development industry emerged in the camps, as dozens of Palestinian NGOs emerged to provide humanitarian assistance and services, but were neither able to improve refugee livelihoods nor address their root causes, such as legal discrimination against Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The NGOs were seen as 'businesses' competing for aid money, and they contributed to maintaining the status quo by transforming Palestinian activists into humanitarian aid workers(Smith

2017; Choudry 2010). While NGOs played important roles in channelling development funding into the camps and also succeeded in coordinating humanitarian efforts in various moments of crisis, they were unable to foster new social movements that could address the deteriorating conditions of Palestinian civil rights in Lebanon.

Thus, the post-1990s marked a steady deterioration in the social and economic conditions in the camps and a corresponding increase in refugee dependencies on different types of patrons, whether NGOs, Lebanese political leaders, Palestinian political parties, or militant Islamist movements. During this period, the Lebanese state charged its own military intelligence apparatus with the surveillance and control of the Palestinian camps. The Lebanese military controlled the camps from their outside perimeter, and they depended on the cooperation of the Palestinian factions for the internal security management of the camps. Later Lebanese military intelligence expanded their own intelligence networks among strongmen and collaborators within the camps, which eventually strengthened their influence over local camp dynamics (Sheikh Hassan 2017).

For example, in Beddawi the Palestinian factions selected the head of their own security committee to liaison with the military intelligence on security issues. With time, the head of the security committee became the strongest and most powerful actor in the camp, since his power was manifested through the direct relations with the Lebanese army. The factions depended on the head of the security committee for favours from the army, and his influence grew to include non-security-related matters as well.

Situating Area-Based Approaches within Palestinian Refugee Camps

In principle, area-based approaches (ABAs), such as the camp improvement programme in Beddawi camp, are better positioned than traditional humanitarian approaches to address complex urban challenges that have emerged in Palestinian camps over the past two decades. Humanitarian interventions that that have dominated development work typically fund interventions targeting one theme or sector at a time, for instance only addressing health issues or education. By contrast, ABAs target specific urban areas and develop inter-sectoral and multi-stakeholder projects that can enable collaboration on project assessment, development, and implementation (Schell et al. 2020). Theoretically, this approach is better suited to the complex social, economic, and infrastructure problems that typically exist in marginalised communities and underserved areas.

Figure 5.1. Northern border of the Beddawi refugee camp. © Ismae'l Sheikh Hassan.

However, the limits of area-based approaches arise when communities suffer from structural and legal discrimination (Tosics 2009) at a national level. In such conditions, even the comprehensive and integrated approaches of ABAs will struggle to address the systematic inequalities that have been constructed and maintained over decades within such populations. These can only be addressed by changing national policies and discriminatory laws to finally impact the root causes of the plight within communities. These are similar conditions to camp-based Palestinians in Lebanon, who suffer from discriminatory policies and laws and are denied the right to work and to own property (Hajj 2016).

Another limitation of ABAs arises in contexts that are rife with corruption, especially because of the reliance of ABAs on collaborative planning methodologies and consensus-building practices within communities. In the Beddawi camp, local activists were uncomfortable engaging in participatory decision-making processes with local corrupt politicians and thugs. This forced a group of young activists to eventually withdraw from the project's participatory platforms. This situation highlights one of the limits of collaborative planning approaches within such contexts, where instead of participation succeeding in empowering nascent reform initiatives and young activist groups, they often end up legitimising powerful stakeholders who are better positioned to control the participatory process and benefit from its foreign-funded projects (Sheikh Hassan 2015). Still, the potential of ABAs emerges in conditions where the primary challenges are physical in nature (Tosics 2009), which is the case in Palestinian refugee camps that are suffering from deteriorating housing conditions. This was especially the case in Beddawi camp, where the proliferation of commercial buildings contributed to the deterioration of the urban and physical environment of the camp (Figure 5.1).

Beddawi Camp's Commercial Buildings

Background to Commercial Buildings

Between 2005 and 2011, three events had significant impacts on the urban fabric of Beddawi. The first was the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, which weakened the influence of Syrian-backed Palestinian political parties in Beddawi and started fierce rivalries among the more than twenty Palestinian factions vying for control of the camp. The political confrontations and territorial competitions between these different factions affected the governance of service provision and the management of civic issues. The internal conflict also manifested in the camp's urban fabric, where prior to 2005, a four-story limit was enforced in the construction of new buildings within the camp in order to maintain acceptable natural lighting and ventilation conditions. After 2005, the construction limit was no longer enforced, and local strongmen allied with different Palestinian factions allowed contractors to construct taller buildings in their areas of influence in exchange for a 'fee'. Thus, higher-rise buildings started to emerge in Beddawi camp.

The second event was the army siege and destruction of the nearby Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr el Bared in 2007 (Knudsen 2018), where the large majority of the displaced residents found shelter in the Beddawi camp. Initially, the residents of Beddawi shared their homes with the Nahr el Bared displaced while the UNRWA schools and classrooms were transformed into temporary housing. However, with the prolongation of the battle in Nahr el Bared and delays in the reconstruction process, the displaced were eventually forced to search for apartments to rent in Beddawi. In this way, a new and lucrative rental market was created in Beddawi, which was further reinforced by UNRWA's financial support of the Nahr el Bared displaced through payment of rental subsidies. New pressures on the rental market in Beddawi emerged with the arrival of Syrian refugees in the aftermath of the Syrian crisis in 2011, who received rental subsidies from the UNHCR. As a result of the new demand for housing, a construction boom began in Beddawi, and a new building typology emerged known as 'commercial buildings' (Ar. *mabani tijariya*).

The typical building type in Palestinian camps and Beddawi is the extended-family building (Ar. *mabani ạl 'ayilati ạlmumtada*), which began as a single-story unit with additional floors being added to accommodate new family members and married couples. The buildings were therefore constructed organically over time in response to the needs of expanding family. By contrast, commercial buildings are purpose-built high-rises planned, financed, and constructed by real estate developers; hence their name 'commercial buildings'.

Extended-family buildings typically have a lot of common rooms and shared spaces. This could be a central 'salon' on the ground floor, used by

all building residents for receiving guests and for social events. The rooftops serve as a collective open space for the family that is used for social events (weddings, family gatherings), food preparation (drying foods, cooking), laundry, planting, and as a playground for children. The staircase of the building is an extension of the apartments and is still part of the private domain of the family.

Unlike the traditional dwellings, the commercial buildings have rigid distinction between the inside (private sphere) and the outside (public sphere). They lack the diverse, semi-private and shared spaces that typify extended-family buildings. This is also related to the fact that most commercial buildings house 'strangers', that is, families who have no family ties with their neighbours. Given the conservative nature of Palestinian communities in the Beddawi camp, this diminishes the potential for socialising with those who live in the commercial buildings. Adding to this, the families who live in the commercial buildings are mostly tenants who tend to stay for a limited period, which makes forming social relations between neighbours more difficult.

The Emergence of Commercial Buildings

In 1992, the first commercial buildings were constructed in Beddawi, by a local contractor and real estate developer known as Abu Jack. He obtained an exception from the four-story construction limit from the popular committee[2] by paying a fee and won over neighbouring residents by bringing in a new electricity line from the national Lebanese grid and digging three wells in the neighbourhood. The eight buildings Abu Jack constructed at first housed newly married Palestinian couples.

Another precursor to the 'commercial buildings' began when families decided to demolish old and deteriorating family homes and built new ground-floor foundations on which higher buildings could be eventually constructed. The demolition-construction process was financed using remittances from relatives working in the Gulf countries to construct these new multi-story buildings for the extended family. However, the families would sometimes sell apartments in the new building (to finance the construction) or rent some of them out to secure a reliable source of income for the longer term. This hybrid building typology mixed elements of the extended-family buildings with the commercial building. However, the hybrid buildings would often transform into fully commercial buildings, especially when other high-rise buildings started to emerge in the neighbourhood.

Even before the emergence of commercial buildings, many of the existing buildings and apartments in Beddawi suffered from a lack of adequate natural lighting and ventilation. Before started adding new floors, the owners first expanded their homes horizontally by adding new rooms that ex-

Figure 5.2. Interior architectural layout of Beddawi homes. © Ismae'l Sheikh Hassan.

tended to the edges of their plots. As all their neighbours did the same, most of the newly built rooms would lack windows or only leave a meagre 30 cm space between the buildings. The new rooms were devoid of natural light and ventilation, and when more floors were added this problem became even worse.[3]

It is quite common in Beddawi to find apartments with four rooms but only a single window. People therefore live in rooms that are humid and pitch-dark even in the middle of the day (Figure 5.2). Respiratory problems were thus very common in Beddawi camp, given the presence of mould in the houses caused by darkness and lack of natural ventilation.

The new commercial buildings further deteriorated the camp's urban fabric. Traditionally, the extended-family buildings in Beddawi averaged between two and three stories, while the commercial buildings ranged from five to eleven stories. This meant that lighting and ventilation conditions deteriorated sharply for the homes next to the commercial buildings. It also meant that electricity and water shortages increased in the neighbourhoods, given the increase in population within them. As the number of new in-coming refugees to Beddawi increased the rental market expanded significantly and

more commercial buildings started to be constructed. This led to conflicts between the old and new residents amidst problems with waste collection/disposal and sharing of the limited electricity and water resources. The steep rise in building density and residents increased noise levels in the neighbourhood and encouraged owners of extended-family buildings to sell their homes to real estate developers.

In the Beddawi camp, there are now at least seventy-five new commercial buildings that are rented exclusively to Syrian refugees. Landlords prefer to rent their apartments to Syrian refugees rather than to Palestinians, as Syrians can be more easily evicted if they cause problems or are unable to pay the rent. Evicting Palestinians is much more complicated, because it involves negotiations and even confrontations with family, kin and social networks..

Who Are the Real Estate Developers?

Some of the hybrid and commercial buildings were funded and instigated by the homeowners themselves, who hired local contractors to implement the construction projects. However, there were also local 'real estate developers' who scouted for opportunities to buy buildings or plots of land in the camp. They typically targeted corner plots, which enabled them to have two sides of the building open to the street (instead of just one), and so that they could have more windows and better ventilation. They also preferred to purchase plots with one-story structures, which were most often the original huts with asbestos roofs built by UNRWA back in the 1950s. They were either empty, because the owners had migrated, or housed very poor families who could not afford to improve them. Real estate developers offered to the buy plots for cash or, alternatively, to provide the original owners with two or three new apartments in the new commercial buildings as financial compensation. For poor families, these deals were seen as an opportunity to significantly improve their housing conditions and secure stable incomes from rent.

Some real estate developers were traditional contractors, but others were local strongmen who had just recently entered the construction business. At least one of them was a member of the Beddawi popular committee. One of the well-known local developers was a lady called Um-Darweesh, originally the owner of a clothing shop in the camp, who grew to become a real estate developer and owner of many buildings and apartments in the camp. In the beginning, she would walk around the camp scouting for potential plots to buy, but later people started to contact her to buy their plots. When the Nahr el Bared camp was destroyed in 2007, Um-Darweesh owned ten apartments, and she rented all of them to the Nahr el Bared displaced. Later, she built two more buildings that she rented out, and then she purchased another fourteen apartments and rented all of them to Syrian refugees.

The Dilemmas of Leaving the Camp and Selling the Home

A family's decision to leave the camp and sell the family home to a real estate developer was always a very difficult one, and it sometimes leads to internal family conflicts. Neighbours also try to stop the construction of commercial buildings, but tend to lose when faced with powerful real estate developers and contractors, supported by local strongmen, members of security committees, and Palestinian factions receiving financial payoffs. An exception to this pattern is the Shefa-Amr neighbourhood, whose residents all come from the same village in historic Palestine and who have had strong social ties to one another since the foundation of the Beddawi refugee camp. Attempts to build commercial buildings in this neighbourhood were stopped by the residents, who forcefully resisted new constructions and demolitions. This illustrates the power of cohesive family and village-based communities in preventing the construction of buildings they opposed and confronting various perceived threats to their small community.

Mohamad was a homeowner and political activist in the Fatah movement who was wanted by the Syrian regime during the Lebanese Civil War. His story illustrates the complicated processes by which an extended-family building is transformed into a commercial building:

> In 1985 my house was hit [by] a mortar shell, and I had to escape from Beddawi camp to avoid capture by the Syrians. We fled to Saida . . . My daughter became sick with leukaemia and the treatment was very expensive. We had no choice but to sell part of the ground floor of our home in Beddawi to pay for her treatment.[4]

The part of Mohamad's house that was sold was converted by the new owners into commercial shops, but he maintained his ownership of the roof slab above the shops. When he returned to the camp in 1999, he was surprised to find that Abu Jack, the real estate developer, had constructed a commercial building next to his home, and that the sewage pipes passed over his roof without his permission. This started a conflict between the two families that eventually turned violent. Later, Mohamad's son became wanted by the local authorities because of this conflict and was smuggled from Lebanon to Ukraine. The family was then once again broke and therefore sold the rooftop and the right to build on it to Um-Darweesh, another local developer. The sale was completed in 2013 for a sum of USD 12,000 – and Um-Darweesh later added five storeys to the ground floor. With this money, Mohamad's family moved to an apartment in Jabal-El-Beddawi outside the camp.

When his son returned from Ukraine with his wife and family, they preferred to live in the family's ground-floor home in the Beddawi camp. However, the house was humid, lacked natural lighting, and the ceiling was

crumbling. As a result, the son moved back with his family to the Jabal-El-Beddawi apartment and rented their house in the camp to Syrian refugees:

> We never wanted to sell our family home, we loved our house and our neighbourhood. We often talk about it, and we feel a lot of regret, but life did not give us much choice in this matter.[5]

Building commercial buildings was usually a consensual decision even though some family members were hesitant or tended to regret it afterwards. In some cases building commercial buildings led to fierce family conflicts. This was the case for Yehya, who worked in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) while his wife and children lived in the family home in the camp next door to his brother's family home. Since his home suffered from severe humidity problems, Yehya's wife wanted him to rent another house for them outside the camp. Yehya was reluctant, as he preferred that his children grow up in the camp. This motivated him to demolish the old family home and build a new, better house and settle there with his family after his retirement. He agreed with his brother and neighbour to use a part of the brother's garden in order to make more room for a new building that would be used only for extended family members. However, once construction started, Yehya realised he was unable to cover the costs and was forced to collaborate with a real estate developer to continue the construction in exchange for providing the developer with several apartments in the new building. This caused a conflict between the two brothers that continues to this day, as Yehya's brother objected to the construction of a semi-commercial building next to his home and on part of his private land.

Constructing commercial buildings within the cramped camp's space is a difficult exercise, whether internally, within the extended family, or in relation to neighbours. This new construction was also inevitable, given the huge demand for apartments, especially with newly arriving Syrian refugees after 2011. Given the dismal economic conditions among the residents in Beddawi, commercial buildings presented golden opportunities for improving family livelihoods.

The construction of commercial buildings changed the camp's social structure especially as it pushed frustrated Palestinian camp residents to relocate to new neighbourhoods outside the camp with better living conditions. An example of this is Jabal-El-Beddawi neighbourhood, an urban development project that was constructed at the eastern edge of the camp (Map 5.1). It consisted of modern high-rise buildings that followed official Lebanese zoning laws and became an urban extension of Beddawi camp. As the camp's elites and better-off families started to move to Jabal-El-Beddawi, the social structure in Beddawi camp started to change and for the most part, only the poorest families remained. In this way, the power of families and local notables declined, as most no longer lived inside the

historic camp boundaries. Meanwhile, the power of local thugs, contractors, armed groups, and security committee leaders collaborating with military intelligence increased significantly.

Syrian Refugee Experiences in the Beddawi Camp

> Having crossed the Syrian-Lebanese border, they [Syrian refugees] were physically on Lebanese territory and yet explained that they travelled directly to and arrived in Beddawi camp, where established residents and local organisations offered them shelter, food and clothes. In many ways, the urban camp has superseded the [hyper visible] Lebanese state, with many refugees from Syria explicitly stating that, from the very onset of their journeys, they had identified Beddawi refugee camp as their intended destination. (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016a)

Syrian refugees flock to the Beddawi camp because the rent and general living costs are cheaper than in Lebanese cities. Beddawi camp is also served by local and international NGOs, and the Syrian refugees can access medical care and schools. More importantly, the Syrians arriving in Palestinian camps felt more welcome in sharing an urban space with other refugees where they could become part of the 'broader "refugee nation"' (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016b: 27).

Some Syrian families had prior social ties and economic relations with the Palestinians in the camp, and they depended on these relations to find work, protect their families and access affordable housing. (cf., Yassine et al. 2019). Beddawi camp also became a site where new social and political relations were formed. Intermarriage between Palestinian and newly arriving Syrian families after 2011 was common. The young Palestinian activists who raised charity money for the poor in the camp raised money for both Palestinian and Syrian families (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2020), while some young Syrian refugees joined local youth groups. The camp's economy increased with the Syrians' arrival, and the Beddawi camp's historically very small market serving local customers expanded. Meanwhile a new and larger market emerged in Abu el Fowz Street, with Syrian shopkeepers opening new shops there.

However, the narratives of the Syrian refugee presence in the camp were not always so welcoming and positive (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2016b). It is not uncommon to hear complaints against Syrian refugees in Beddawi camp, who are blamed for rising unemployment, lack of water and electricity, and the deteriorating urban conditions of the camp.

While sentiments such as 'Syrians are stealing our jobs' or 'Syrian brides are stealing our young men' exist in the camp and can be exaggerated by local organisations in order to attract more development aid from international donors, they are also contested. At a conference on accessing employ-
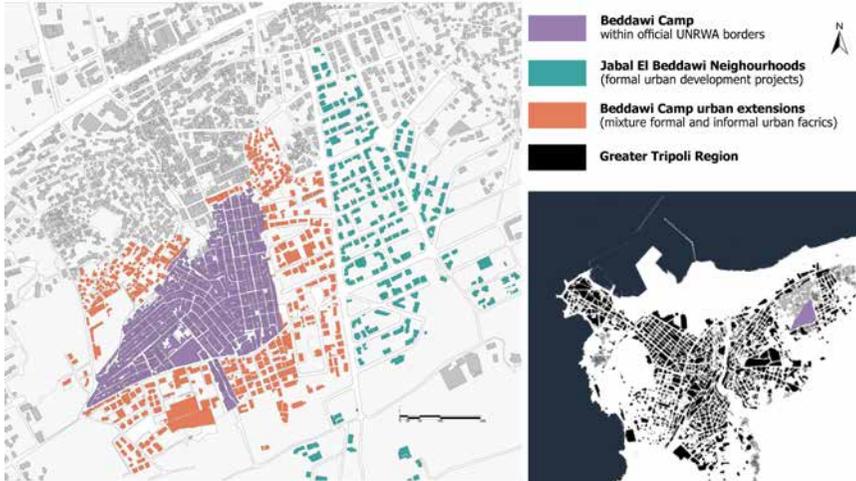
Map 5.1. Map of the Beddawi refugee camp.

ment for Palestinian refugees organised in 2019, one of the directors of a large Palestinian NGO asked for restrictions on Syrian refugee employment in Palestinian camps. Young Palestinian activists, however, opposed such restrictions, denouncing such statements and arguing that thriving economies are created by exchange and solidarity and that Beddawi and the other Palestinian camps should not follow the actions of some Lebanese municipalities in restricting the Syrian refugees' movement and employment.

The narrative of Ali, a Syrian refugee who had sought refuge in Beddawi, illustrates some of the contradictions of living in the camp. Ali came as a refugee to Lebanon in 2012 and moved to Beddawi in 2016. Before that he lived in a Lebanese neighbourhood known as Wadi-Nahleh, but his family was forced to leave because of the many conflicts between the Lebanese and Syrians. Ali worked in a bakery near the Beddawi camp, and he was invited to move to Beddawi by his Palestinian co-workers. Ali complained of sometimes hearing discriminatory remarks against Syrians, but when a fire started in his rented apartment, all the Palestinian neighbours rushed to the family's rescue. His wife recalled that:

> Palestinians rushed to our help in that difficult time, much more than the Syrians in the camp! Neighbours came and helped us to paint the house and brought supplies, and our neighbour Um Magdi gave us furniture and things from her house.[6]

Still, there are other segments of Syrian refugees who have no social connections with the other families in the camp, whether Palestinian or even Syrian. They are also the poorest and depend on charity handouts and humanitarian aid for their survival. This was the case for Buthaina:

> I came to Beddawi camp because it is closer to the hospitals. All of my three children have kidney diseases and [are] dependent on dialysis treatments that I can't afford. I'm divorced, my husband does not provide any financial support and I cannot find a job.[7]

Many of the poorest Syrian refugee families live in relative isolation and suffer from anxiety and panic attacks due to the trauma of their displacement and of the violence that they have experienced and witnessed in Syria. Several of them talked of waking up in fear at night, hearing gunshots in Beddawi camp, and said that they never knew who was fighting, what was happening and whether they were in danger. These socially isolated and extremely poor Syrian refugees typically live on the ground and lower floors of old buildings with the worst lighting and ventilation problems in the camp. They suffer from high levels of humidity and mould, lack of water and electricity, and infestations of rodents and insects. Many of them move frequently either because they cannot afford the rent, cannot handle the unhealthy housing conditions anymore, or fear for their safety, as the interview with Samira illustrates:

> We had to leave the first house we [rented] in Beddawi camp, because my son was in a fight with local young men. We didn't know what to do or who to talk to and were worried that things were escalat[ing] and feared for his safety. So we moved to another house in Beddawi camp to avoid any problems.[8]

Area-Based Approaches and the Unmaking of the Palestinian Ghetto

Issues such as the lack of natural lighting and ventilation in the interior of Beddawi homes cannot be addressed by the typical home and shelter rehabilitation projects that various international organisations in the Beddawi area have implemented. These projects typically focused on small-scale emergency interventions aiming to benefit the largest number of individuals. Such projects are thus designed to deal with access to water, sanitation and hygiene, and to repair structural problems in buildings. Meanwhile, addressing lighting and ventilation issues requires more expensive and intrusive interventions in the urban fabric of Palestinian camps, which must be coordinated with improving local governance practices. Thus, camp improvement processes (CIPs) and area-based approaches (ABAs) appear to be better situated to address these urban problems in Palestinian camps.

Addressing these housing challenges in Beddawi requires an in-depth investigation into the history, building practices, and socio-economic processes that have generated the urban densification patterns in the camp. Also needed is a thorough architectural analysis of the lighting and ventilation

Figure 5.3. Newly inserted light wells (shafts). © Ismae'l Sheikh Hassan.

problems and a mapping of their locations at the building, neighbourhood, and broader urban levels of the camp. Such research can guide the design of architectural interventions and address them at the scale of buildings, urban clusters, or even urban blocks. The CIP in Beddawi camp succeeded in initiating such a process. Pilot projects were launched with residents at the building level or the urban cluster level in some of the neighbourhoods with the worst lighting and ventilation problems. Through negotiation and building consensus among neighbours, different design interventions were developed that would change the internal layout of homes and implement light-ventilation wells (voids) between buildings. These shared light wells bring natural light into the interior of the homes and improve cross-ventilation within the urban fabric (Figure 5.3).

Around thirty such interventions were implemented in Beddawi. They were envisioned as a first step of a broader strategy of developing urban guidelines to better manage the construction of new buildings without deteriorating the urban conditions in the camp. This broader strategy also involved the creation and rehabilitation of much-needed public and open spaces in the overcrowded camp. However, due to the hijacking of the par-

ticipatory platform by local strongmen and the subsequent suspension of the CIP in Beddawi, this process and its projects were discontinued.

As a preliminary assessment, it can be argued that ABAs are unable to achieve all of their objectives within contexts where the rule of law is fragile and where the political landscape is rife with corruption and infighting amongst multiple factions at the local level. Such contexts are unstable and the ability to implement participatory processes can be easily compromised. This adds an additional layer to the limits of ABAs in contexts where there is structural and legal discrimination at the national level (Tosics 2009).

However, one can still argue for the need of ABAs, specifically given their ability to address certain physical urban challenges in the camps that traditional humanitarian projects framed in an emergency mind-set are unable to resolve. There is a direct link between the deterioration of the physical environment and the migration of better-off families, notables with influence, middle-class business owners, and various local actors who have valuable social capital and networks within the camps. This migration plays a role in further empowering corrupt local actors and thugs, given that these social networks that previously had some capacity to hold them accountable and limit their negative practices have gradually eroded and moved away. On the longer term, such developments typically open up populist discourses at the national level calling for the removal of such 'slums' when they become, in the words of policymakers, 'ungovernable' or 'hotbeds for crime'. And thus, cities lose the few sanctuaries that have provided spaces of refuge for the poor, migrant workers, refugees, and other marginalised communities for many decades and instead make way for new neoliberal and 'sanitised' real estate development projects.

In many ways, the Beddawi camp resembles an earlier stage of the urban trajectory of the overcrowded Shatila refugee camp in Beirut, with its dense urban fabric, minimal open space, and dismal living conditions for residents in the rickety high-rise buildings that reach more than seven stories high. On 1 June 2020, Wurud Kanj, a 28-year-old mother carrying groceries in one arm and her baby in the other, was killed in the crossfire between drug traffickers in the Shatila camp (France 24 2020). This incident reflects the growing power of local thugs, drug dealers and weapons dealers who are protected by corrupt actors in both the Palestinian and Lebanese authorities, especially as local communities grow poorer and more socially fragmented.

Yet the ability of ABAs to even partially succeed will depend upon the presence of talented and progressive professionals who can lead these processes, properly utilise the strategic disbursement of their funds, and articulate creative solutions to the camp's most pressing urban challenges. Their success will also be heavily dependent on their ability to forge alliances with local social movements and some empathetic policy makers with influence within the Lebanese government. Such strategic coalitions can create win-

dows of opportunity that enable the ABA processes to manoeuvre around or at least contain corrupt local actors so as to partially shield the projects from their negative influence.

However, there are other layers that will significantly impact how ABAs operate within the Lebanese context, especially when we consider that all ABAs being implemented in Syrian or Palestinian camps are in fact internationally funded. This is a different institutional set up than ABAs that are implemented within liberal democratic societies and funded by local governments with aims to improve their local communities and cities (Andersen 2001). Internationally funded ABAs will therefore lack much of the institutional, political, and citizen support that comes with such projects when they are funded by local governments and local taxpayers' money. Consequently, the ABAs implemented in the refugee camps in Lebanon suffer from the same problems that afflict most internationally funded projects in the Lebanese context: corrupt and sectarian local politicians who manipulate how and where international funding is spent, especially since international organisations need their permission to implement projects. This reinforces the role of local politicians as gatekeepers and patrons while increasing the marginalised communities' dependence on sectarian actors, which is one of the tragedies of international aid in a Lebanese context.

The politics behind the international funding inevitably impacts how such projects are perceived locally, especially as they relate to EU's agenda of limiting migration towards Europe. The EUR 2.2 billion that was provided by the EU to Lebanon between 2011 and 2020 (European Commission 2020) has been described as reinforcing the notion of 'Fortress Europe' and as an 'outsourcing of the Syrian refugee crisis to Lebanon' (Facon 2020). This is also how Palestinians and Syrians perceive the rationale behind humanitarian aid, especially as refugees are sensitive to the contradictions that exist between humanitarian slogans and the tragedy of their entrapment in different types of camps and extra-legal conditions.

Internationally funded ABAs in the context of Palestinian refugee camps will always be burdened by such politics. Thus, the depoliticised readings of Palestinian camps as economically impoverished urban slums that only need adequate funding to stop their deterioration will always have its limits. On the other hand, scholarly readings of Palestinian camps as 'ghettos' can help articulate more effective strategies for dealing with the seemingly irreconcilable dilemmas posed by these sites. The importance of situating Palestinian camps in the theoretical context of ghettoes is that it places them in a political-urban category that has globally and historically been identified as an outcome of injustices that should be overcome through political means and collective struggle and not (only) through humanitarian assistance. It is through such lenses that the structural, historical, and ongoing injustices that relate to the refugees' dilemmas can start to be more clearly brought to

light. This in effect has been the paradox of Palestinian camps since their very inception, as they bring together the victims and potential challengers of the s colonial and post-colonial regimes that have created and maintained these sites into one common urban space.

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Notes

1. Other political activists from Beddawi who were assassinated by such operations are Yunis Qishqash and Mohamad Gimhawi.
2. Popular committees and local governance bodies in the Palestinian camps are typically composed of representatives of all Palestinian political parties and factions (one representative per faction). They play roles in service provision and other responsibilities that municipalities usually address.
3. Other reasons for a worsening of natural lighting and ventilation conditions are dividing apartments into sections to accommodate expanding families and constructing new floors covering internal courtyards which also reduce the available light and ventilation.
4. Interview by field researcher S. Kayed, Beddawi camp, April 2021.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

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6

'Give Them Shelter'

An Investigation of the Occupancy Free of Charge Refugee Response in Lebanon

Watfa Najdi, Mona Fawaz and Nasser Yassin

Introduction

Despite a global policy framework that continues to imagine forced displacement responses through tented settlements and centralized and well-coordinated humanitarian responses, the growing number of refugee populations and the protracted nature of the crises have meant that most refugees have converged towards cities (Fawaz 2017; Jacobsen 2006; Fábos and Kibreab 2007). There, refugees often blend with other vulnerable populations, securing access to shelter in informal settlements and ad hoc temporary and precarious arrangements (Martin 2015; Sanyal 2015; Fawaz et al. 2022). As such, humanitarian agencies have had to follow suit, experimenting with new shelter modalities that acknowledge the new realities of forced displacement and move away from the traditional camp setting (Archer and Dodman 2017; Darling 2016). The new integrated approaches rest on engaging with and repairing existing systems in urban areas (Earle 2016; Archer and Dodman, 2017). Indeed, in 2016, following the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development (Habitat III), the New Urban Agenda acknowledged the need to facilitate the settlement of refugees and displaced populations in existing urban structures (UN General Assembly 2016). However, these changes in the humanitarian context and the development of new shelter alternatives generated additional and as-yet-unanswered

challenges associated with operating in cities (Archer and Dodman 2017). As a result, humanitarian organizations continue to experiment with programmes and strategies that can optimize their limited resources.

Between 2011 and 2015, over one million Syrian refugees are estimated to have arrived in Lebanon while fleeing the war in their country. The modalities of border crossing and settlement reflected the mix of laissez-faire and discriminatory practices with which refugees were officially met in the country. In the absence of a framework to guide their settlement, the majority of Syrian refugees converged towards cities where they could secure survival through menial jobs. In cities, their access to housing has largely been through informal rental market channels (Fawaz 2017).

In many ways, the informal market exacerbated experiences of housing insecurity and deprivation. With the absence of regulations to control exchanges, and little transparency about the quality of available housing products, the prices at which similar houses were exchanged and the reliability and trustworthiness of landlords, refugees were often treading in the dark. Those who could rely on relatives or employers to secure information about a specific housing market may have been better off, although they remain trapped in a relatively limited circle because the risks of exploring new spaces may be too high. Furthermore, refugees who lack access to social networks end up typically occupying poorer-quality housing than the host community and paying higher fees while receiving insufficient service levels. They often fall prey to abuse and lose most of their savings before they learn that one can negotiate the prices.

Refugee housing needs have fuelled the expansion of pre-existing informal housing rental markets, and the establishment of ad hoc camps, informal tented settlements[1] and collective shelters. They have also fuelled the production of substandard buildings or housing units within buildings (Fawaz et al. 2022a, 2022b). Thus, several UNHCR shelter surveys show that over half of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in unfinished building apartments that offer insufficient services or are in danger of collapsing (or both) (UNHCR et al. 2020). As the crisis extended, many refugees depleted their savings and sold their assets to cover the hefty rents demanded by landlords (UN-HABITAT and UNHCR 2018). These households are at a higher risk of eviction, while their living conditions are considerably deteriorated,[2] amid a legal framework that fails to protect their housing rights (Saghieh 2015; Saghieh and Frangieh 2014).

Refugee response in Lebanon has largely been orchestrated by the humanitarian sector,[3] while the Lebanese government has taken a back seat, failing to set up a response framework. Given that refugees had relied on pre-existing informal housing market channels to secure shelter, international organizations looking to support shelter provision were led to experiment with modalities of shelter interventions that would improve these

pre-existing market mechanisms, potentially responding to the needs of both host and refugee populations. Multiple modalities of shelter interventions can be noted, including weatherproofing, rehabilitating substandard buildings, constructing temporary shelters, providing cash for shelter, and carrying out minor repairs.

In 2015, the shelter strategy's objectives,[4] as outlined in the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan,[5] explicitly endorsed the rehabilitation of privately held occupied and unoccupied building structures in exchange for a twelve-month occupancy free of charge (OFC) period given to vulnerable Syrian refugee families (Government of Lebanon and the United Nations 2015). The stated goals of this approach to refugee shelter provision were three-fold: to increase the availability of adequate and affordable housing stock, to enhance refugees' tenure security and to reduce construction costs for the host community. As such, shelter actors made OFC benefits available to refugee families based on various criteria, including their socio-economic vulnerability, their shelter conditions and their protection needs related to security of tenure. Starting from the premise that accessing safe, adequate and durable housing has a great influence on refugees' livelihoods, health and protection (CRS 2015), the NRC's OFC impact evaluation report claims that the OFC shelter modality, by securing refugees' access to stable housing, facilitates their access to better and more consistent nutrition and healthcare. The report further notes that staying in the same location allows refugees to build stronger social capital and thus enhances social cohesion (NRC 2018).

To what extent is OFC a successful experiment that should be replicated in this and other contexts? Aside from reducing the burden of rent payments and the threats of eviction for the short duration of a year, does OFC respond to the aspiration of improving refugee livelihood by allowing them to invest the rent in long-term productive trajectories? Does residing among Lebanese families improve relations between the two groups of actors? And what are the unsuspected advantages or disadvantages of this modality?

Our field findings showed that while OFC provides a temporary respite for refugee families, it has no significant impact on the physical housing conditions or long-term shelter circumstances in which refugee households reside, since the money saved on the rent waiver over a year is often quickly absorbed by debt repayment and pressing food and nutrition needs. Findings further indicated that OFC contributes towards improved relations between landlords and tenants, especially when landlords own and manage a small number of rental units and live nearby. In these circumstances, we found that better tenancy conditions had developed, and that refugee households were able to maintain them beyond the duration of the OFC contract. In other cases, however, refugee tenants returned to pre-OFC conditions once the year was over. From the perspective of refugee shelter organiza-

tion, the research findings signalled that although OFC is approached on an individual scale by international organizations, there is an imperative need to introduce a wider planning approach to its implementation, particularly in relation to (i) acceptable minimum housing standards and regulations, and (ii) environmental urban and regional costs where OFC is implemented densely. Finally, the chapter finds that given the limited number of units introduced in relation to need, the OFC programme had only limited impacts on the availability of affordable and adequate housing stock in the areas where it unfolded.

The chapter's findings are based on the empirical investigation of the physical and legal housing conditions of a select group of refugee households who benefited from OFC assistance in three areas of high refugee settlement in Lebanon: Bar Elias (Bekaa), Amayer (Akkar) and Minieh (north Lebanon). The case of Lebanon offers important insights about efforts to secure housing solutions for refugees amid a protracted crisis, an ambiguous national refugee policy and a highly unregulated housing market.

Methodology

The research methodology relied on an in-depth investigation of the OFC programme in three localities in Lebanon where the programme had been introduced: Bar Elias (Bekaa), Amayer (Akkar) and Minieh (north Lebanon). These areas were selected because they are located within the 251 most vulnerable cadastres in Lebanon (UNHCR 2015)[6] and they host a significant number of OFC shelter units and beneficiaries.

Data collection included mixed methods of surveying, focus groups and targeted interviews. We conducted the surveys in late 2018 and early 2019.[7] These surveys covered 1,284 households and included three groups: (i) OFC beneficiary households at the time of the survey (281), previous OFC beneficiary households (505 individuals who had used OFC between 2015 and 2017) and non-OFC beneficiaries (498).[8] The control group of non-OFC beneficiaries was drawn from a population that shared similar economic and demographic profiles to the current and previous OFC beneficiary groups, but did not receive the OFC intervention in each cluster. The protection of participants was ensured by anonymizing the data, coding names and deleting all other identifiers that could be linked to participants. This data was complemented by six focus group discussions conducted during the same period with focal points from current and previous OFC households. In addition, we conducted key informant interviews (KIIs) with landlords and local authorities in the selected areas of study.

The three areas selected differ in the organization of their economy and their spatial morphologies: Amayer is a rural setting where there are houses

with lower density, Bar-Elias is semi-urban and Minieh presents the most urban context, with higher density and no agriculture. The survey and analysis presented in this chapter draw on a study conducted at the Issam Fares Institute of Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut and commissioned by Save the Children – an international humanitarian organization that has championed the occupation free of charge approach in Lebanon. Save the Children's commission in 2018 reflected the need for an assessment of the OFC shelter modality to understand its impacts on refugee households. Our research responded to Save the Children's requests, but it went beyond the original study in drawing larger lessons about refugee housing.

Contextualizing the Programme: Household Profiles and Housing Conditions of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

The research sample indicated that most of the interviewed beneficiaries across all three localities belonged to male-headed households that had arrived in Lebanon during the early phase of the Syrian war, between 2012 and 2013. Similar to the general refugee population, the sample showed that 90 per cent of refugees in Amayer, Bar Elias and Minieh did not have valid residency papers. Obtaining a residency permit remains a challenge that affects the livelihoods of all family members and puts them at risk of arrest (UNHCR et al. 2017; Saghieh 2015). The difficulty is related to the process imposed by the Lebanese state, which has set in place a path-dependent strategy that ultimately forces most refugees into illegal residency and work statuses (Saghieh 2015). During the focus group discussions (FGDs), most refugees noted that they had trouble renewing their residency permits, pointing to the costs of residency renewal and the 'complicated process' as major obstacles. One of the participants specifically pointed to constraints imposed by the pathways for renewing residencies, which impose on refugees a Lebanese work sponsor (*kafeel*), leaving the country and re-entering again, 'which is nearly impossible', he said (Respondent 1, Bar Elias, FGD with OFC beneficiaries, October 2018). The absence of valid residency papers has great impacts on shelter security. First, illegal status constrains the mobility of Syrian refugees and hence their ability to seek employment or conduct economic activity. Second, illegal status places refugees at a disadvantage when negotiating shelter conditions with Lebanese landlords, since they cannot appeal to a public authority or another arbitrator (Fawaz 2017).

In the three areas of the study, the high vulnerability of surveyed households was evident. Most reported that their monthly income barely covered their expenses, as they often earned (at the time of the interview) less than LBP 150,000 (USD 100) per month.[9] Most refugee households, regardless of

their OFC status, stated that they relied on e-card (electronic cash) food pro-grammes provided by the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), in addition to assistance provided by the UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies, to cover their daily expenses. Refugees who were not receiving financial assistance or food vouchers relied heavily on informal loans from nearby shops, friends or landlords, which caused them to incur unsustain-able levels of debt. Moreover, refugees stressed that it was very difficult to secure employment, and over a quarter of the interviewed sample was consistently unemployed. Thus, 26.8 per cent of interviewed households in Amayer, 26.2 per cent in Minieh and 30.9 per cent in Bar Elias had no member of the household engaged in income-generating activities. Unem-ployment among refugees in Lebanon has a direct impact on their ability to secure daily needs such as rent, food and healthcare.

The Rent Burden: A Hefty Cost

Given that OFC seeks to alleviate the rent burden, the survey and focus groups inquired about the rent burden for these households and its impacts on their livelihoods. During the focus group discussions conducted with Syr-ian refugees in the three areas, the majority of refugees reported often facing major obstacles in securing housing and seeking barely habitable structures due to their inability to afford rent. Our findings revealed that most refu-gee households find it very difficult to cover rent expenses,[10] which often range between LBP 150,000 and LBP 450,000 (USD 100 and USD 300) per housing unit, depending on the area.[11] In Bar Elias, a semi-urban area, 45.3 per cent of surveyed refugee households (previously benefiting from the OFC modality) reported paying less than USD 100 per month for their housing unit, while 44.3 per cent said that they were paying between USD 100 and USD 200. Only 2.8 per cent said that they paid more than USD 200 a month.

In Amayer, a rural area, the mayor confirmed that landlords were keep-ing the rent costs low (below USD 100) out of 'compassion' for the 'poor Syrian refugees' whose rent burden they try to ease. The physical, social and cultural proximity of Amayer to the city of Homs may explain the affinity with the Syrian refugees who settled in the town. The mayor further added that most Syrian refugees cannot afford to pay rent and most Lebanese peo-ple are not asking them to pay it any more. 'Few people ask for rent; [those that do] are either people looking for materialistic gain or poor people in need of the money', he added (mayor of Amayer, Amayer, KII with mayors, November 2018). Conversely, in Minieh, an urban area, rent is relatively higher, about double, with 59.4 per cent of refugees (previously benefiting from OFC) reporting that their rent fees range between USD 100 and USD 200 and 34.4 per cent saying that they pay between USD 200 and USD

300 per month; this follows global trends whereby rents in urban areas are significantly higher than rural areas. These findings echo the figures listed in the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR) 2018 report (UNHCR et al. 2018).

When previous and non-OFC participants were asked how much of their household's income was allocated to cover rent, more than 50 per cent of respondents in Bar Elias and Amayer said that one quarter of their incomes went to rent, whereas in Minieh, more than 80 per cent said that they often paid half or more of their incomes to cover rent. It is evident that refugee households living in urban areas such as Minieh pay more on rent than those living in semi-urban or rural areas like Bar Elias and Amayer, where rent is usually less expensive. For refugees to manage their expenses in a sustainable way, typically 30 per cent of the household's income should be allocated to shelter, including housing and services. However, not only are many households exceeding this amount for housing costs, but the additional money that households in the surveyed area spend on services has caused them to become financially over-extended, requiring external support to cover current housing costs. Furthermore, the burden of those in urban areas who reported paying more than half their income on shelter is substantial. In the following section, we discuss the impact of the OFC shelter assistance on refugee families.

The Modality of Occupancy Free of Charge (OFC) Assistance: Providing a Slightly Higher Quality of Affordable Shelter

How does OFC work? The programme consists of helping a Lebanese household to complete an unfinished housing unit in exchange for waiving rent for a refugee household over a full year. The process begins with the identification of a targeted 'pair' that includes a vulnerable refugee household to be sheltered and Lebanese landlords who own unfinished or dilapidated buildings or housing units.[12] The humanitarian agency then develops a Bill of Quantities (BOQ) for the shelter upgrading process. The BOQ details the required upgrades and the amount of money the landlord will receive (typically USD 1,500–2,000 for each housing unit). Payment is made by the humanitarian agency in three instalments: a conditional cash advance payment of a specific percentage of the agreement value to commence the upgrades, a second payment when half the work is completed and the final payment upon full completion. A 'completion certificate' is issued and a twelve-month rent-free agreement is signed. Throughout this process, monitoring teams from the relevant organization track the upgrading works. Additionally, to give more weight to the agreement, local authorities (a mayor

or *mukhtar*) are invited to witness the signing process between the relevant organization and the landlord.[13]

To what extent does OFC secure better housing quality for refugees? According to the survey findings, the standards secured in OFC housing units are slightly better than those that refugees could secure on their own. The quality of some of the building elements (e.g. doors, walls, flooring, storage space) was consistently higher in OFC units than refugees found on their own and was widely described as acceptable. Yet respondents reported consistent deficiencies in relation to heating, insulation and waterproofing. As for tenure security, over 90 per cent reported feeling safe in their residences, particularly after being relieved of the threat of eviction. When asked about their housing conditions prior to, during and after receiving OFC, more than 70 per cent of previous OFC beneficiaries said that they considered their physical and legal housing conditions to have been better while they were on OFC. This indicates that as an overall investment, OFC may be contributing to creating a slightly higher quality of affordable and stable housing stock. In the following sections, we report on the physical conditions of housing units, the tenure (in)security of refugee families and landlord–tenant interaction.

Physical Conditions of OFC Housing Units

Although OFC tends to improve refugees' living conditions, the secured housing quality is typically well below the desired standards. OFC units undergo three levels of rehabilitation. The first level provides a closed housing unit that includes 'doors, windows, electricity, cold water, bathrooms, and sewage' (NRC 2018) (Figure 6.1). However, in the first-level upgrade, walls remain without plastering and floors without tiles. All the OFC housing units we surveyed had received a first-level upgrade only. As such, each room had at least one window, single-glazed with permanent aluminium or PVC panes. All units had a lockable door, access to electricity, water and heating. Kitchens were equipped with one water point, a cooking flame and a work surface for food preparation. According to interviewed landlords, this is a basic standard, which Lebanese families are unlikely to accept.

During the focus group discussions (FGDs), many refugees said that before they started benefiting from OFC, the housing units they lived in were in a worse condition than the units they currently occupied, as they had no windows or doors: 'We used to use blankets for doors and plastic covers for the windows. It was extremely cold, and we didn't feel safe at all', said one of the participants (Respondent 2, Bar Elias FGD, October 2018).

To assess the housing conditions of Syrian refugees, the survey further looked at the physical characteristics of each unit, mainly focusing on leaks, physical damage and privacy.

Figure 6.1. OFC building in Amayer. © Watfa Najdi.

The OFC housing units that we surveyed had received one level of re-habilitation only. Consequently, in most cases housing units had exposed concrete-block walls with unfinished surfaces (non-plastered and unpainted), while floors were mostly untiled and uneven (Figure 6.2). The first level of complaint regarded adequate living standards. In Bar Elias, 32.1 per cent of surveyed OFC beneficiaries said that their houses suffered from leaks, compared to 50 per cent in Minieh and 57.8 per cent in Amayer. Worse, in Amayer and Bar Elias, a concerning 20.5 per cent of the current OFC ben-eficiaries reported that their housing units suffered from structural damage that placed them and their family members at risk. The situation was better in Minieh, where all current OFC beneficiaries reported that their housing units were structurally safe.

An additional concern raised by refugees is the lack of privacy, which seemed to be equally prevalent in OFC and non-OFC housing units. Look-ing into the conditions that produce this lack of privacy, we found that refu-gee families often resided in housing units redesigned to subdivide a larger unfinished apartment into two or three units. The separation between the individual units was often insufficient. In some cases, refugee households found themselves forced to share the kitchen or the toilet (or both) with other families living in the same apartment or on the same floor. The lack of

Figure 6.2. OFC house interior in Bar Elias. © Watfa Najdi.

privacy is further compounded by overcrowding. While most refugees said that their housing unit consisted of two to three rooms, they also reported living with an average of four to six people in the same unit. This number was even greater in some cases, with refugees saying that they lived with six to eight people in the same housing unit. Aside from the issue of privacy, overcrowding is correlated with serious hygiene concerns that could lead to worse health problems.

In comparison, housing conditions were equally bad or worse for previous and non-OFC beneficiaries. A considerable percentage of refugee households that did not benefit from OFC (45.4 per cent in Bar Elias, 64.2 per cent in Minieh and 55.1 per cent in Amayer) or had previously benefited from the shelter assistance (46.6 per cent in Bar Elias, 43.9 per cent in Minieh and 67.5 per cent in Amayer) reported having leaks in their housing units. Similarly to those in the OFC houses, most of these households dwelled in units that were partially finished, with exposed concrete walls that poorly insulated them. In focus groups with these households, one participant noted that 'during the [most recent] storm, the house flooded because the walls are not plastered' (Respondent 3, Amayer, FGD with previous OFC beneficiaries, November 2018). Another participant added that 'the concrete blocks are porous and can't withstand wind-driven rain or water-soaked ground,

Figure 6.3. OFC house interior in Bar Elias. © Watfa Najdi.

which results in leaks' (Respondent 4, Amayer, FGD with previous OFC beneficiaries, November 2018). Almost half the surveyed Syrian refugee households that were not benefiting from OFC (including non-OFC participants and previous OFC beneficiaries) in Bar Elias, Amayer and Minieh reported suffering from bad heating and insulation. These poor conditions, in turn, negatively affected the health of the occupants, as noted by one of the participant women: 'The children are all getting sick because of the cold, and we can't manage to keep the rooms warm' (Respondent 5, Bar Elias, FGD with previous OFC beneficiaries, October 2018).

Tenure (In)security of Syrian Refugees

The OFC programme's best outcome may well be improved tenure security for refugees. The literature recognizes tenure security as one of the main conditions required by individuals and households to improve their liveability (Razzaz 1994). Given that most refugees struggle to pay rent and face growing barriers to securing the needed income, it is not surprising that tenure insecurity is the worst threat they typically face. Earlier studies conducted in Beirut had pointed to poor tenure security as exacerbating Syrian refugees' vulnerability (UN-Habitat and UNHCR 2014). Indeed,

refugees are often forced to settle for insecure shelter arrangements due to their illegal status, poor financial situation or restrictions on their mobility that confine them to particular areas. To counter tenure insecurity, the housing literature has discussed measures such as written lease agreements that clarify the terms of exchange (e.g. duration, timeline for increasing rent, costs of services), specify the conditions of the agreement and thereby save both parties from misunderstandings and possible abuse. In these circumstances, the fact that the OFC shelter modality entails a written contract that is overseen by the organization providing the OFC support and is often registered at the municipality introduces a practice of accountability that could produce positive ripple effects. The written contract templates would help reduce conflict between landlords and tenants by clarifying the terms of the exchange, improving communication and providing a sense of security after the OFC period ends.

While valuable, these contracts are not foolproof, since the absence of an actual clear body or agency for refugees to resort to in case of violations weakens any agreement. In most cases, when a conflict occurs, refugees seek the help of the international NGO in charge, particularly the local field officer or area coordinator, to address the issue. This is all the more alarming because even international NGOs, which require contractual agreements with landlords, are not consistently able to secure compliance if and when a landlord decides that they want their apartment earlier, or if neighbours complain because of noise or nuisance. Moreover, surprisingly, a considerable percentage of surveyed refugee households were unaware of the protection they gained from these contractual agreements. According to our findings, 80 per cent of OFC recipients did not know how long the OFC duration was, more than half of the respondents did not know when or if their rent would increase and the vast majority responded 'I don't know' to whether the landlord had the right to increase the rent or not. Furthermore, when OFC beneficiaries in the three localities were asked if they had a lease agreement, 87.2 per cent of households in Amayer said 'yes', compared to 67.9 per cent in Bar Elias and only 33.3 per cent in Minieh. Given that all OFC beneficiaries have to sign a lease agreement with their landlord under the supervision of the respective organization, this discrepancy might be attributed to the fact that the surveys were not consistently conducted with the head of the household. In many cases, the interviewed person (mother, eldest son or daughter) did not know if there was a written agreement between them and the landlord. This was particularly evident in the cases where several families lived in the same house. This underlines a grave need to better communicate housing rights under OFC to refugee families and provide them with adequate information, as well as legal and counselling services when needed.

In exchanges conducted outside the OFC programme, the housing situation for refugees is considerably more challenging. The percentage of households that had a written lease agreement was as low as 2.5 per cent for those who were previous OFC beneficiaries or had never been recipients of OFC assistance. This is in line with other studies that have investigated land and housing markets for vulnerable groups in Lebanon, including Syrian refugees (UN-Habitat and UNHCR 2014, 2018; Fawaz 2009). These studies have consistently found that market exchanges rest mostly on ad hoc agreements between tenants and landlords, often without specified terms, and with very little information for the transacting parties. Indeed, the collected data from surveys, FGDs and KIIs confirmed that agreements between landlords and tenants are often oral. This leaves leeway for misunderstandings among transacting parties on several core components. For example, the duration of the rental period, the possibility of raising or lowering rental fees and the inclusion of services are rarely clarified beforehand, which puts refugees at an increased risk of abuse and exploitation. While this is unfair for refugees, landlords prefer the flexibility of not having contracts at all. This enables them to evict the tenants any time they want the apartment back, even if it is just to rent it out to a higher bidder.

Despite insecure contracts, the majority of survey respondents reported that they did not feel threatened by eviction as long as they could pay the rent on time. Tenure insecurity among interviewed households was mostly related to the inability to pay the rent. In such cases, evictions occurred without any of the required legal steps, such as pre-notification, leeway, official notice and municipal police enforcement (UN-Habitat and UNHCR 2018). Instead, their application rested on the profile of the landlord, their proximity to the tenant and whether they were able to implement the eviction. Indeed, when refugees were asked who they felt most threatened by when it came to evictions, most non-, current and previous OFC beneficiaries pointed to their landlords (81.8 per cent, 40 per cent and 86.7 per cent respectively).

The OFC programme's biggest advantage may thus be to build a healthy relationship between the landlord and the tenant by setting the terms of their interaction and exchange. This relationship may be carried over once the OFC period ends. According to this study's findings, all OFC beneficiaries agreed that having been on OFC before shifting to renting reduced the risk of tensions with the landlord arising from their inability to pay rent. Yet, in some cases, the absence of continuous supervision from the municipality or the organization implementing the OFC programme allowed landlords to take advantage of the refugee beneficiaries. For example, in Bar Elias, 34 per cent of current OFC beneficiaries reported threats of eviction. During the focus group discussions, one of the participants said:

The landlord asked me to leave the house four months before the OFC contract end[ed]. He said that he want[ed] to tile the floors and plaster the walls because he was moving in shortly. When I contacted the organization, they managed to have me relocated to another house where I finished the last four months of my OFC contract. (Respondent 6, Bar Elias, FGD with OFC beneficiaries, October 2018)

In all three localities, refugees (whether benefiting from OFC, having previously benefited from the programme or never having benefited from it) agreed that having a lease agreement would make them feel safer and more protected from eviction. However, many said that going through the process of a written lease agreement would be inconvenient to them. 'We would have to pay extra fees for the notary and the municipality, and we simply can't afford that', said one of the participants (Respondent 7, Minieh, FGD with OFC beneficiaries, November 2018).

Landlord–Tenant Interaction

A valuable long-term positive impact of OFC is the positive relationship that developed between landlords and tenants in many cases. Who are the landlords? In the early stages of the programme, landlords who applied to the organization to enrol in OFC had at least built the ground floor structure and added a skeleton for the second floor (walls and ceiling) of the housing units they looked to complete. They typically did this either for their own use or for the benefit of one of their family members. KIIs with landlords revealed similar trends across all three areas. The majority of property owners are small-scale landlords who 'typically rent out rooms within their houses and/or additional apartments developed as extensions of their homes to lower income groups' (UN-HABITAT and UNHCR 2018). This provides important indications of the positive economic impacts of OFC on host communities, since the small scale of apartment ownership will secure the redistributive impacts of the intervention.

However, as the Syrian crisis extended, larger investors were encouraged to participate in housing production, particularly following the increased demand for housing and the implementation of the OFC shelter modality. For example, one of the landlords in Bar Elias who owned a building with eight apartments and eight garages told researchers that he had bought the land in 1995 but only started to build in 2013, after he learned about OFC. He was hosting fifteen Syrian families (all previous OFC beneficiaries) at the time of the survey. Another landlord who owned a six-apartment building had bought his land in 2007 and started building the first floor in 2010. He later added two additional floors with the support received through the OFC programme. During the interviews, most landlords insisted that their primary goal was not to enter the rental market

but to benefit from the OFC assistance in order to build houses that could be used by their children and family in the future. The OFC programme was a chance for them to speed up the building process as it deferred some of the building costs. In Minieh, an interviewed landlord said that one of his children was getting married soon and that he was planning to evict the Syrian family once the OFC contract was over. However, some landlords, mainly those who owned several housing units, said that they would continue to rent their apartments to refugee households, thus benefiting from rental fees.

It is important to note that the long-term familiarity between landlords and tenants was likely to appease landlords and encourage more flexibility (e.g. lower rent, more leniency regarding delays in payment). Although almost all Syrian refugee households reported a backlog of payment of one to two months, landlords tended to be understanding of the financial situation of the families and many allowed tenants greater leeway until they could pay back their rent. This could also be attributed to the fact that at the time of the interviews, housing demand had stabilized, and many landlords did not expect to find clients easily if they evicted their current tenants. They also knew that they might never be able to recover the rent if they evicted the tenants, so they hoped for an improvement that would compensate at least some of their losses. One of the landlords in Bar Elias said that tenants asked him to lower the rental fees because they were unable to pay, which he did. 'The market is stagnating now, and no one can afford paying rent', he added (Landlord 3, Bar Elias, KII with landlords, October 2018). Similarly, in Amayer, one of the landlords noted:

> I rented my house to Syrian refugees. At first, they were living under the OFC programme. After the twelve-month contract ended, they rented the house for USD 200 per month. However, they could not pay this amount and asked me to lower the price, so I asked them to pay LBP 200,000. After a while, their mother got sick, so I stopped asking them for rent. They have been living in my place for the past two years without paying rent. (Landlord 4, Amayer, KII with landlords, November 2018)

Solidarity with the plight of refugees was higher in Amayer, where strong social and familial ties connect Lebanese and Syrian families. The mayor of Amayer confirmed: 'The locals feel that they are helping by providing Syrian refugees with housing units to live in and at the same time making additional income by renting out these units'. Thus, 'eviction rates in the nearby area of Wadi Khaled are very low in general, about 3 per cent', argued the mayor. 'People think of Syrians as neighbours and they feel ashamed to ask them to leave, even if they can't pay the rent. They are afraid to be shamed by the community', he added (mayor of Amayer, Amayer, KII with mayors, November 2018).

Future Housing Plans: Affordable and Adequate Housing

In its current form, OFC does not extend conditions or elements for the long-term rental of the unit. This limits its impact to the twelve-month rent-free period. However, if located within a wider range of humanitarian programmes that provide debt relief and legal assistance and raise awareness of what happens after, OFC could provide an effective and sustainable shelter approach. It could also be an entry point for regulating the market: it could help set a rate for rentals and develop a contract template, making it easier for refugees and landlords who want to enter into a transparent contractual agreement.

Most refugees in Lebanon do not have a clear idea of the housing landscape and the options they could benefit from. This is critical because reliance on housing affordability (in terms of cost–income ratios) outside of 'deprivation' standards can mask very poor housing conditions where affordability is met at the cost of low physical standards of decency, overcrowding, and poor security of tenure, safety or accessibility. OFC sets a precedent, as it requires a certain level of upgrading and guarantees housing for a year at no cost. As such, it provides a direly needed relief from housing costs to families that are paying well above their means to secure shelter. This relief happens with standards that seem to satisfy the refugees' expectations – albeit within a limited time span.

By comparing the conditions of current OFC recipients with those of households that previously benefited from OFC, we found that the financial relief afforded by OFC was restricted to the period of the agreement (typically one year, although sometimes the same household moves to another shelter supported through OFC). This is mainly because households who benefited from OFC were still struggling to pay off debts accumulated over the past years and were therefore unable to use the saved money to invest in a new enterprise. Moreover, refugees faced the end of OFC with apprehension, with about half of them predicting that they would be unable to cover the rent of the unit they were occupying at the market rates of their localities. The majority of refugee households predicted that after OFC, their situation would go back to how it was before they benefited from the assistance. Although rental fees in the three areas had been relatively stable in 2018, work opportunities were dwindling and consequently refugees often found it impossible to cover their expenditures. Looking at the detailed figures by locality, we find that 41.5 per cent of OFC beneficiaries in Bar Elias said that they did not know what they would do once their OFC contracts ended. About half (48.1 per cent) said that they would consider negotiating with the current landlord to rent the same unit they were living in at an affordable price. The rest (9.4 per cent) said that they would have to move in with relatives because they predicted an inability to pay rent. Similarly, in Amayer, 48.6 per cent did not know what they would do after the end of their OFC

contracts, 22.9 per cent said that they wanted to have a new contract with the landlord so as to rent the same unit they were living in once the OFC period ended and 28.4 per cent planned to move in with their relatives or friends. As for Minieh, 80.3 per cent of participants said that they wanted to renew their OFC contracts and 19.7 per cent planned to move in with relatives. Many interviewed refugees hoped that they would be able to secure another OFC contract after the one-year period.

An Environmental Cost to OFC

One of the main overlooked implications of OFC is that it may contribute to urban sprawl and consequently environmental deterioration if agreements occur within the context of 'exceptions to planning', like those that dominated refugee settlement in Lebanon. Indeed, and more generally, the low level of involvement of public Lebanese agencies, coupled with the massive inflow of refugees, generated an environment in which settlement was conducted informally.

In the three studied areas, it was evident that the housing production process was facilitated through unofficial municipal building permits.[14] These exemptions bypass the official permitting requirements, which require all buildings to secure permits approved by the municipality and the Lebanese Directorate General of Urban Planning in compliance with zoning and building regulations. Such exceptions, which have also been recurrently adopted in periods of elections and in the aftermath of large-scale disasters, allow builders to violate existing urban and building regulations, and they consequently reduce the possibility of managing urbanization spatially and environmentally (Fawaz 2016). These developments have a particularly negative impact on agricultural fields, where natural waterways and continuous landscapes are a necessity. Previous illegalities that date back to the civil war paved the way for much wider facilities during the refugee crisis. They made it easy for these lands to obtain so-called 'municipal permits' 'that allow higher surface investment rates without the proper infrastructural networks' (Dabaj et al. 2021: 175).

These arrangements had significant implications, for example in Amayer, which had already witnessed a large wave of urbanization since the onset of the crisis. It is undeniable that the OFC programme, particularly in overlooking any permit process, which is left to the landlord, has precipitated this development activity. The mayor stated:

> Before 2011 and the implementation of the OFC programme, people wouldn't build houses unless they [could] fully afford to do that. However, after the introduction of the OFC programme, everyone was encouraged to build, even if the money they [had] could only get them a ground/first floor, because they would then offer to put their house under OFC and receive further assistance

that would enable them to finish their houses with fewer expenses. (Mayor of Amayer, Amayer, KII with mayors, November 2018)

According to the mayor, Amayer has fourteen thousand inhabitants, among whom are six thousand Syrian refugees and eight thousand Lebanese nationals. Before the Syrian refugee crisis, there was no rental market in the area, save for a few workers. Housing units built by landlords were usually reserved for personal or familial use. The mayor noted that one NGO, Save the Children, had upgraded three hundred houses in Amayer, but he had no exact record of other NGOs that had operated in the area.

Similarly, in Bar Elias, new building activities had sprung up in response to the arrival of Syrian refugees, and they became 'the dominant mode of producing a city' (Dabaj et al. 2021: 167). Syrians moved to Bar Elias in high numbers from 2011 and developed social and familial networks. This increased the demand for housing and commercial units. This demand, in turn, influenced locals to build and rent as an additional source of income. As a result, Bar Elias witnessed an accelerated process of urbanization (Dabaj et al. 2021), some of which extended to agricultural lands.

Conversely, the municipality of Minieh had issued one thousand construction authorizations between 2018 and 2019. However, the mayor stressed that those were not linked to the OFC intervention and were mostly for personal use. 'The OFC affected the construction rate in the area in only a limited way', he said (mayor of Minieh, Minieh, KII with mayors, November 2018). The area witnessed an important wave of development between 2008 and 2019, allowing for the construction of fifteen-storey buildings. The mayor argued that urbanization in the area was not directly linked to the Syrian crisis, and that it dated back to an earlier period. It is however likely that urbanization was precipitated by the recent crisis.

It is important to reiterate that the accelerated urbanization process facilitated by these investments and arrangements carries with it severe environmental costs: facilitating urban sprawl and the destruction of fertile land, increasing the contamination of underground water tables and reducing the control of locally elected planning authorities over the territories they are supposed to manage. Therefore, it is essential to peg any OFC intervention to further planning that takes environmental costs into consideration when authorizing units to avoid encouraging the development of sprawling building stocks that have huge negative environmental externalities.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that emerging humanitarian housing provision modalities such as the OFC programme may have a positive influence on shelter provision for refugees. These new practices have sometimes been

described as responding to 'demands that are fueled by humanitarian practices as well as interventionist policies that expand real estate market trends' (Dabaj et al. 2021: 175). Yet, in this case, the OFC programme has worked through the market for unfinished buildings or apartments and benefited both the Lebanese owners and the Syrian tenants. Indeed, in many areas, participating in housing production by providing land or unfinished building structures for NGOs to use presented a great economic benefit for Lebanese land and property owners. This chapter confirms earlier assessments identifying the positive impacts of this modality in improving refugee–host community relations (Boano and Astolfo 2020).

This chapter further contributes to the current knowledge about the housing situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and, more generally, about refugee trajectories in the context of a protracted refugee crisis, particularly in relation to shelter acquisition. The findings should feed into the formulation of responses, whether in the form of targeted interventions or broader developmental policies. The results show that the absence of an adequate framework of shelter provision and the laissez-faire manner in which housing transactions take place between actors in highly differentiated social positions have very negative implications for the refugee community. Data indicates that while temporary, the OFC arrangement contrasts with existing market conditions, creating a different possibility for refugees to consider. Moreover, the fact that at least 50 per cent of refugees in each of the three localities stayed in the same house after OFC ended confirms that the programme could be widening the stock of affordable housing for the refugee population that it targets. This can inform policymakers and other actors in the shelter sector about the current operations of the housing market.

Furthermore, the findings highlight the need for a shelter approach that is broadened beyond the measurement of deficits to outline stakeholders' roles and conditions in order to provide new directions for organizations, academics and policymakers to address the question of refugee shelter, and consequently to formulate a different set of strategies for responses. The chapter carries further academic significance since it draws attention to the impact of legality on refugees' situations in host countries, especially in cases where aid is dwindling, leaving vulnerable population groups in a precarious situation. The results reported in this chapter also aim to raise public awareness about the implications of the absence of affordable housing programmes and the current restrictions that refugees face in Lebanon, as well as the limited ability of Syrian communities to access adequate shelter. Thus, the shelter approach should be based on an evolving, planned and monitored incremental assistance. It should target effectiveness, sustainability and vulnerability and at a larger scale stabilize the housing market. Further research is required to understand the benefits of coupling the OFC shelter modality with a mechanism of debt relief. This could contribute to

breaking the debt cycle and redirect some of the savings attendant to OFC to longer-term investments in human capital.

The OFC programme is seen as a costly intervention for humanitarian organizations to maintain, particularly since its impact remains limited to the twelve-month rent-free period. However, the programme's strongest asset lies in its 'mutual benefit' approach, which makes it appealing for both hosts and refugees (NRC 2018). This brings forward social and legal opportunities that can be explored beyond direct economic ones. Indeed, the OFC programme could be an entry point for regulating the market: it could help set a rate for rentals and develop a contract template, making it easier for the refugees and landlords who want to enter into a transparent contractual agreement. This requires further coordination and transparency between municipalities and implementing organizations when it comes to the process of landlord and refugee selection. These will be the next challenges for the humanitarian community.

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Notes

1. Informal tented settlements (ITSs) are land lots rented out directly or indirectly by owners in areas of 50–100 m^2 in which refugee families develop tents incrementally into shelters. While they spatially resemble a 'camp' in their configurations, ITSs differ in that access to shelter essentially depends on the regular payment of rent through a private transaction between refugee households and private landowners.
2. Substandard accommodation is often comprised of unfinished and dilapidated housing structures, including converted garages and shops. Such housing structures lack basic amenities, privacy, protection and hygienic conditions.
3. The Inter-Agency Shelter Sector Working Group that brought together a large number of local and international humanitarian organizations was co-led by the UNHCR and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA). It has been instrumental in alleviating the suffering of Syrian refugees.
4. The UNHCR co-leads the National Shelter Working Group, which included twenty-three organizations in 2015, among them international and local organizations. The main implementing partners for the occupancy free of charge (OFC) shelter modality were the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and Save the Children.
5. The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan is a joint plan between the Government of Lebanon and its international and national partners, which aims to respond to the impact of the Syria crisis through medium-term, multi-year planning.
6. The vulnerability indicator highlights the presence of a high number of vulnerable Syrian refugees and poor Lebanese within the cluster.
7. The survey covered the socio-demographic characteristics of the household, the livelihood conditions and the housing situation. It also inquired about future housing plans and the relationship with the host community.
8. Non-OFC beneficiaries were considered a control group. The inclusion of a control group helps assess the differences in levels of vulnerability, resilience and livelihoods that could be attributed to the OFC shelter intervention.
9. The surveys were conducted in 2018, when the Lebanese pound was still pegged to the US dollar. All USD and LBP figures in the chapter refer to the same rate

of pegged conversion by which USD 1 = LBP 1,500. At the time of writing the chapter, the LBP has lost over 200 per cent of its value and the rate today is USD 1 = LBP 94,000.

10. The rent prices indicated in this chapter reflect the data collected in 2018. However, it is important to note that at the time of writing, rent prices in Lebanon have significantly increased due to the currency crisis, the resulting economic depression and hyperinflation. As a consequence, many refugees, who primarily receive their income in Lebanese pounds, now have to allocate a larger portion of their earnings to rent. It is worth mentioning that the minimum monthly wage remains at LBP 675,000, which is equivalent to a meagre USD 7.

11. In this chapter, a housing unit refers to a room, a kitchen and a toilet. A single apartment can be divided into two to three housing units.

12. In these modalities, the units' structures have to already be in place.

13. The exact modality, particularly concerning the involvement of municipal authorities, is not consistent across all NGOs or localities. Field findings showed that the implementation of the contract was inconsistent. Moreover, other research found that OFC contracts were only recorded in Bar Elias after the municipality demanded their implementation – mostly to recover the municipal rental fee that was not being paid and support some of the costs of servicing (see Fawaz et al. 2018).

14. This regulation allows municipalities to issue 150 m² construction permits under exceptional circumstances to property owners.

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Syrian Refugees in Urban Turkey

Between Migration Policies and Realities

Ahmet İçduygu and Souad Osseiran

Introduction

For many years, refugees were associated with refugee camps established as an emergency response to mass migration and emergent needs, but the past two decades have witnessed an increased number of refugees settling in urban settings. With this shift towards cities, scholars and policymakers alike are focusing more on various topics concerning refugees in urban areas (Kobia and Cranfield 2009; Crisp et al. 2012; Ward 2014; Marfleet 2007; Rees 2020; Taruri et al. 2020). According to the most recent UNHCR estimates, there are over 70.8 million refugees and IDPs worldwide, and of those 61 per cent are living in urban settings, ranging from metropolises to peri-urban areas (UNHCR 2019). Scholarship on urban refugee populations has focused on multiple issues, such as access to shelter, employment and education, as well as health services. In parallel, scholarship on displacement has witnessed a gradual shift towards developing humanitarian policy to address the specificities of urban refugees (Zetter and Deikun 2010; Landau 2014). This recognition has encouraged international and national organizations, as well as state and non-state actors, to develop methods to access urban refugees and ways to implement refugee-focused interventions in urban settings (Zetter and Deikun 2010; Kobia and Cranfield 2009). Ur-

ban refugee presence has also gradually given rise to questions and debates about cities as inclusive spaces and the ways that humanitarian responses must change to address urban refugee concerns (Brandt and Earle 2018; Brandt and Henderson 2018).

This chapter will discuss the case of Syrian urban refugees[1] in Turkey. It begins by presenting an overview of the past decade, examining how urban refugee settlement emerged in the Turkish context to highlight the ways that this settlement was the result of both deliberative policies and spontaneous realities. In the process, it discusses changes in the Turkish government's approach to refugees in general and to Syrian refugees since 2011, thereby raising globally relevant questions about the future of urban refugee policy development.

Urban Refugees in Turkey: The Population That Was Not

Syrian refugees' current situation as urban refugees must be understood not only in terms of the policies implemented in response to their displacement, but also in light of Turkey's approach to other, prior, asylum seekers and refugees. In contrast to previous mass migrations to Turkey, the Syrian case is distinguished firstly by most of the refugees self-settling and by the overwhelmingly urban nature of their settlement.

While a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Turkey maintains a geographical limitation on the Convention whereby only asylum seekers from Europe are considered refugees. Asylum applicants from elsewhere are granted conditional refugee status based on the five bases specified in the Convention and are expected to be resettled to third countries. For many years, Turkey did not have a law governing migration or asylum, and the introduction of Turkey's first Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) in 2013 (it was adopted in 2014) upheld the geographical limitation and signalled the transition of existing practices into law (Çiçekli 2016).

Since the 1990s, the Turkish government has implemented a policy of assigning asylum seekers to satellite provinces (urban or peri-urban areas) across Turkey, and away from major cities such as Istanbul, Ankara or Izmir, and this policy continued with the adoption of the LFIP. The policy was designed to reduce pressure on services in major cities by directing asylum seekers and conditional refugees to smaller cities and provinces. The regulations also aimed to ensure the visibility and immobility of asylum seekers and conditional refugees, through such measures as requiring them to appear before the Provincial Directorate for Migration Management (PDMM) in their respective city on a regular basis or restricting their access to services to the province of their registration. Asylum seekers' access to

rights and services are outlined in the LFIP of 2013, but asylum seekers' experiences have varied depending on the province they are assigned to and their ethnic background and religion, among other factors (Leghtas and Sullivan 2016). Due to this policy of assignment to and relative containment in satellite cities, as well as the perceived temporary nature of asylum seeker presence, urban refugee policies for major cities – or even for the majority of urban contexts in Turkey – were underdeveloped or non-existent.

When the first Syrian nationals fleeing the war crossed the border in March 2011, the Turkish government referred to those entering as 'guests' and announced that it was implementing an open border policy enabling those fleeing the violence to seek refuge in Turkey (İçduygu 2015). Since this was a mass migration that was perceived to be short-term, the state established refugee camps in border provinces to host Syrian refugees fleeing the violence (AFAD 2013b). While 'guest' is not a legal status, the government had used it in previous instances of mass migration to Turkey, particularly in the case of Iraqi nationals in 1991 (İçduygu and Bayraktar Aksel 2022). The government subsequently announced that Syrians arriving in Turkey seeking protection would be under the temporary protection of the Turkish state. In 2014, the Temporary Protection Regulation was released, which outlined Syrian refugees' rights, obligations and access to healthcare, education, social security support and the labour market (İçduygu and Şimşek 2016). Later in 2016, the Regulation on Work Permits for Foreigners under Temporary Protection was issued, which outlined the rules governing the labour of Syrian refugees as well as the process for them to be granted work permits (Figure 7.1). The policy and legal mechanisms to govern the Syrian refugee influx were developed over time and in a changing environment, legally, socially and in terms of Turkey's foreign policy, thereby influencing processes and everyday realities. Due to this ad hoc-ness and the continuous changes, Baban et al. (2021) refer to these dynamics as creating a 'precarious' status and presence for Syrian refugees in Turkey.

As will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter, urban contexts in Turkey have been at the centre of Syrian refugee migration. Existing research highlights the ways in which national-level policies concerning refugees have been implemented at the local level mainly through a discussion of specific urban case studies (Woods 2016; Woods and Kayalı 2017; Betts et al. 2021). Alternatively, studies have examined the role and significance of different urban actors, such as local municipal actors, community leaders or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in facilitating refugees' access to registration and services and influencing their local integration (Üstübici 2020; Betts et al. 2021). Betts et al. (2021) compare the approaches of mayors in key refugee-hosting cities in Turkey and Lebanon to identify the extent to which mayors as individuals affect the implementation of policies for refugees at the micro-level. Other research highlights the

'multiscalar' nature of the response given the involvement of international actors such as the European Union or International NGOs (INGOs) along-side national NGOs in implementing municipal or NGO projects and ac-tivities for refugees (Güngördü and Bayırbağ 2019; Danış and Nazlı 2019).

Examining the intersection of migration and urban planning, Güngördü and Bayırbağ (2019) discuss the challenges that Syrian refugee migration to Turkey presents in terms of urban planning. Their research provides a historical view, tying the current urban policy situation to prior internal (rural–urban) migrations to metropolises in Turkey to argue that the exist-ing urban policies have created a situation of increased competition over scarce resources for lower-income host community members and refugees. They argue that going forward, it is necessary to develop urban policies that account for refugees as part of the urban fabric, as well as the mobile nature of different urban populations. Continuing with a focus on the local or micro-level, Haliloğlu Kahraman (2021) examines Syrian refugees' satis-faction with living spaces in Ankara, providing insights that can contribute to developing urban policies that account for refugees' urban shelter needs. However, as a case study limited to a single district, this research demon-strates the need for more comprehensive and large-scale studies concerning urban living conditions and needs. Tangentially relating to both urban poli-cies and politics of space, research has been carried out examining the inter-action between refugees and host community members, especially in urban districts hosting high numbers of refugees (Altiok and Tosun 2018; Üstübici 2020). Relying on different approaches to analyse host–refugee engage-ment, these studies highlight that coexistence within urban settings must be considered in the development of urban policies for refugees and focused on issues of integration. While the current literature provides insight into various dimensions of urban refugee presence, there remains a gap in terms of overall discussion of urban refugee policies in Turkey. This chapter seeks to address this gap by discussing the changes in the policies towards Syrian refugees and examining the intersection of Turkey's policies towards Syrian refugees and the urban directedness of their settlement.

Syrian Refugees: Becoming Part of the Urban Population

At the start of the influx, the Turkish government began establishing refugee camps to host incoming Syrian refugees (Figure 7.2). As of May 2014, there were around 220,000 Syrian refugees housed in twenty-two camps in prov-inces neighbouring Syria, with another 515,000 registered urban refugees (Kirişçi 2014). The number of camps increased to twenty-six by 2016, but no more camps were established subsequently. Indeed, the Turkish govern-ment initially expected that all Syrian refugees would remain in the camps,
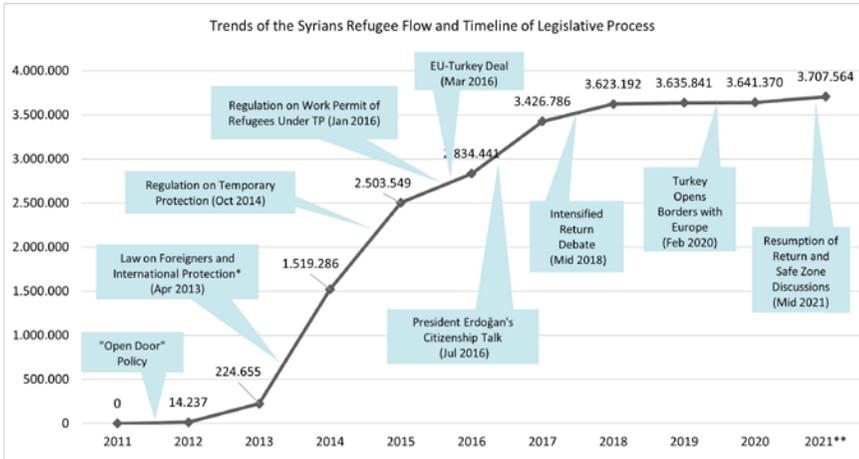
Figure 7.1. Number of Syrian refugees registered under Temporary Protection in Turkey since 2011. © Ahmet İçduygu.

Source of data: Presidency of Migration Management (PMM).
  * The passage of the LFIP was motivated by Turkey's efforts to align its laws with EU accession requirements initiated prior to the Syrian influx.
** As of 2 September 2021.

on the basis that the war in Syria would end quickly and only around a quarter of a million refugees would flee to Turkey. These assumptions influenced the planning and preparation for the arriving refugees. However, with the protraction of the war and its worsening in its third year, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey gradually rose (Figure 7.1).[2] Due to the limited camp capacities, many Syrian refugees began settling in urban areas, mostly in cities neighbouring the Syrian border, thereby distinguishing this refugee presence as a predominantly urban one (Erdoğan 2020: 29).

Analysing the changes in the camp and urban refugee population since 2011 shows that the number of refugees living in camps gradually increased from 8,000 in 2011 to a little over 280,000 in 2015. In 2014, camps hosted 14.3 per cent of the total Syrian refugee population in Turkey; the percentage decreased to 8.7 per cent in 2015, to rise slightly in 2016 to 8.9 per cent, only to decrease once again to 6.9 per cent in 2017. Meanwhile, the number of out-of-camp refugees increased rapidly (Figure 7.2). Since 2017, the government has sought to gradually close all the refugee camps in southern Turkey (European Commission 2016). The number of refugees living in camps slowly decreased from a little over 250,000 in 2016 to only 53,130 in 2021. There are currently only seven camps in operation, hosting 1.54 per cent of the current refugee population in Turkey, and the process to empty the camps continues (PMM 2021).
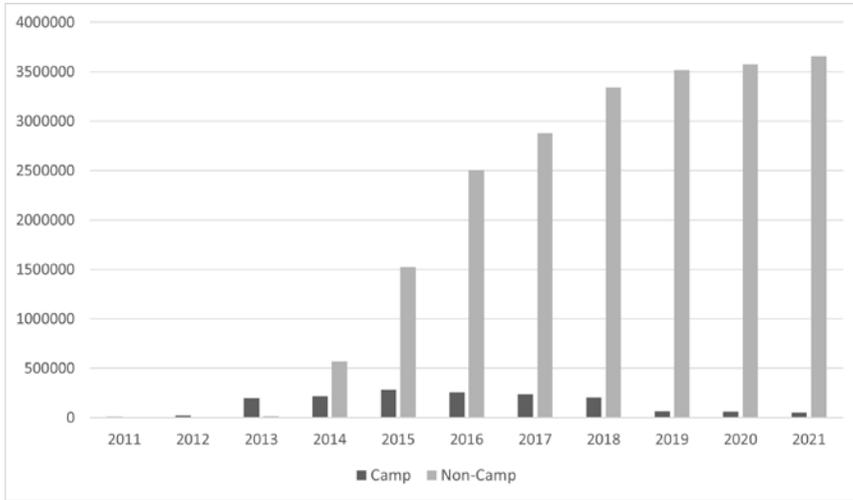
Figure 7.2. In-camp and out-of-camp Syrian refugees since 2011. © Souad Osseiran.

Source: İçduygu and Altiok (2020) and PMM (2021).

Out-of-camp Syrian refugees favoured settling in urban settings in southern provinces such as Kilis and Gaziantep, in other metropolitan areas such as Istanbul or Izmir, or by following their connections and networks to other cities and provinces across Turkey (Erdoğan 2017: 10). While the geographical distribution of Syrian refugees is a key issue, the percentage of refugees present with respect to citizens is of equal importance in many provinces and districts (Erdoğan 2020). In provinces such as Kilis, Syrian refugees currently represent 74.9 per cent of the population, while in Istanbul, which hosts the highest number of refugees, registered Syrian refugees represent only 3.5 per cent of the total population registered as living in the province (Figure 7.3). Urban infrastructures, services and provisions are all affected by the increase in service users. However, the higher percentage of refugees relative to citizens in certain provinces also raises concerns about issues of coexistence, social acceptance and cohesion in urban settings.

Examining the variation in the number of refugees registered in specific provinces supports the hypothesis that refugee mobility within Turkey, or spontaneous movement, was possible during certain periods of time. However, this mobility never negated the fact that state actors would (and did) intervene to govern or control urban refugee presence and mobility at different moments, as will be explored later in the chapter. The distribution of refugees in certain provinces highlights that there was a gradual shift over time (Figure 7.3), with refugees registering or moving their registration to
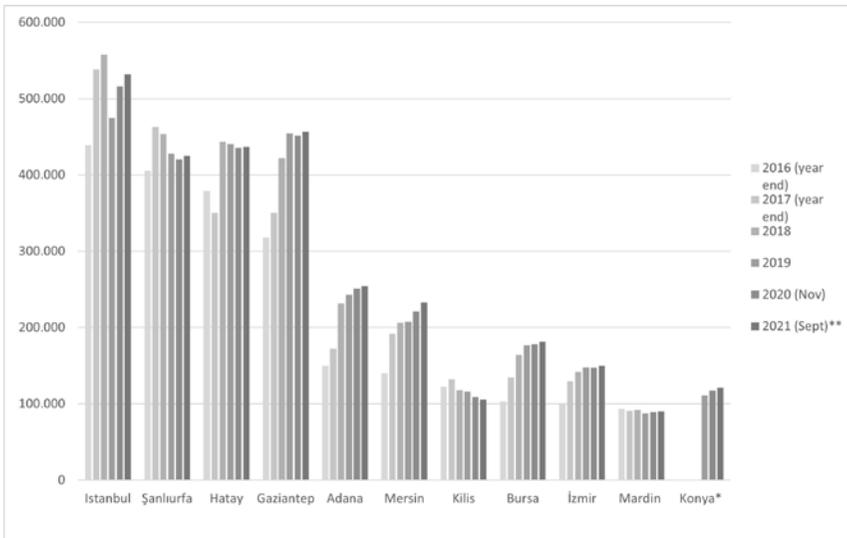
Figure 7.3. Provinces hosting the highest number of Syrian refugees since 2016. © Souad Osseiran.

Source: İçduygu and Altiok (2020).
 * Figures for Konya for 2016, 2017 and 2018 are unavailable.
** PMM website 2 September 2021.

provinces in western Turkey. According to Erdoğan (2020: 29), the cities of Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara alone host 'more than 20% of Syrians under Temporary Protection . . . 13,39% of all registered Syrians live in Istanbul'. The period before 2017 can be described as one of spontaneous mobility, with registration practices and regulation implementation gradually playing catch-up to refugees' agential moves.

The figures concerning registered refugees simultaneously provide insight into the geographical distribution of refugees across Turkey while also disguising certain refugee movements within the country. In the face of refugee movement within Turkey, the government began instituting different measures to contain refugee mobility from 2016 onwards. In 2017, registration in the border provinces was halted, thereby forcing refugees crossing the land border to go to other provinces to register (European Commission 2018). In the same year, registration in and transfer of registration to Istanbul were halted. In the face of these measures to contain refugees 'in place', some refugees registered in provinces close to Istanbul such as Bursa, Yalova or Kocaeli, but lived in Istanbul, and others chose to live in Istanbul (or other major cities) without registration or access to services (ibid.: 31). Restricting refugee movement between provinces served as part of mechanisms to govern refugee presence and mobility.

This recognition of refugee mobility also highlights the ways that registration figures disguise dissonance between, on the one hand, the number of refugees living in a province and the estimated need for services, and registration figures on the other. As such, certain southern provinces such as Hatay or Şanlıurfa have a high number of registered refugees, but research indicates that there is a difference between the numbers registered and those actually living in a given province (Erdoğan 2020; Turper Alışık et al. 2019). Similarly, in the case of Istanbul, over 530,000 Syrian refugees are registered as of September 2021 (PMM 2021); however, the actual number of Syrian refugees living in the city is estimated to be higher. The urban nature of the Syrian displacement and the relatively high level of refugee mobility within Turkey serve to support the argument that refugees' urban presence for the most part was accepted by state actors, but this did not preclude state intervention at specific moments due to the rise in public tension or to achieve certain objectives with respect to refugees' mobility. The following section explores in more detail governmental policies regarding the mobility of 'urban refugees' in Turkey.

Syrian Refugees in Cities: Between Mobility and Immobility

Over the years the distribution of Syrian refugees across Turkey changed, with a gradual shift from a high concentration in the southern border provinces to a larger-scale distribution across the country, especially in key metropolitan cities in western Turkey. Refugees' networks, perceptions of job opportunities and a desire to migrate to Europe among other considerations influenced their mobility within Turkey. Observing the changing governmental policies with respect to the refugee population over time alongside the registration numbers offers certain insights into the ways that this refugee influx unintentionally became an urban issue (Figures 7.1 and 7.2). It also highlights the ways that priorities concerning refugees' visibility and mobility emerged, and continue to arise, with respect to specific events.

For different cities across Turkey, the arrival of Syrian refugees presented key challenges for governmental, local and NGO actors in terms of providing refugees with access to education, healthcare and social security support. As the initial years of the displacement (2011–14) were marked by a discourse of temporariness and expected imminent return, refugee mobility within Turkey was largely allowed (Baban et al. 2021). While state actors focused on providing services to the refugee camps established in the border provinces, Syrian refugees who settled in urban areas in the southern provinces or major cities faced uneven support and ambiguity surrounding their access to services. The perceived temporariness of their presence influenced

their access to rights such as healthcare or education, as the government relied on ad hoc measures and short-term policies. Government officials even referred to this period as one of 'temporary permanence' for Syrian refugees due to the lack of long-term policies and clarity over their future in Turkey (Uzun 2015). According to Korkut (2016), officials' approaches were built around specific 'discursive' frames rather than concrete programmes or long-term migration policies. In addition, the then Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) was established only in 2014, which also influenced state actors' ability to respond to the refugees' presence and their dispersal in urban areas.[3]

The years 2014–16 witnessed a rise in government efforts to systematize policies concerning refugees' access and presence. As Erdoğan (2017: 18) remarks, in 2014, the then DGMM began a campaign to register out-of-camp Syrian refugees. Primarily focused on the border provinces, these efforts then extended to other provinces in Turkey. They were followed up by a second campaign in 2016, led by the DGMM, to verify the registration of Syrian refugees under Temporary Protection (European Commission 2018: 29). In the second campaign, refugees were expected to register their address at a local civil registry office (or Nüfüs office), submit proof of their address registration to the PDMM and undergo a pre-registration phase before being registered as persons under Temporary Protection. The increasing emphasis on ensuring the visibility of the refugee population in terms of geographical location filtered into humanitarian and aid efforts, as access to many services is dependent on registration.

The period 2016–19 witnessed the narrowing of the scope of activities provided by INGOs and NGOs assisting Syrian refugees in Turkey (Osseiran et al. 2018). Key governmental institutions gradually took over the management and support of refugees' education and health, as well as the provision of social support. The increasing institutionalization of services was accompanied by a growing emphasis on fostering social cohesion through various initiatives and projects. Concurrent with the increased efforts to foster inclusion has been rising xenophobia in public opinion against Syrian refugees. Tensions in urban areas escalated in some districts of the major cities of Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara (International Crisis Group 2018). The rising tensions were accompanied by the shift towards policies to restrict the mobility of Syrian refugees between provinces.

The Temporary Protection Regulation (2014) outlines that registered refugees can only access services in the province of their registration, with the exception of primary healthcare and emergency hospital services. While it is possible for Syrian refugees to move their registration, since 2016 several provinces have moved to stop or temporarily halt all transfer processes (European Commission 2018: 31). As mentioned above, many Syrian refugees still moved between provinces; however, their access to services is restricted

due to their movement and state actors can return them to their province of initial registration. The year 2019 witnessed the governor of Istanbul calling on all Syrian refugees registered in other provinces to return to those provinces or face forceful removal (Erdoğan 2020). Similarly, unregistered refugees were given a deadline to leave the province and head to other provinces where registration for Syrian refugees is possible. At the time of writing this chapter, a similar process has been initiated in Ankara following the Altındağ incidents.[4] These measures aim to placate negative Turkish public opinion about Syrian refugee presence, enforce the Temporary Protection Regulation stipulations concerning registration and reduce Syrian refugees' mobility within Turkey. With the protraction of the refugees' presence, state actors then shifted towards implementing measures that curtailed refugee mobility within Turkey.

Case Study: Syrian Refugees in Istanbul, Changing Dynamics and Policies

Istanbul has occupied a pivotal position as a migrant- and refugee-receiving city, as well as a transit node for migrants and refugees seeking to continue their migration to Europe (Biehl 2012). According to Erdoğan (2017: 29), it was estimated that in 2016 one million non-citizens were living in Istanbul alone; of those, Syrian refugees represent but a portion. Many Syrian refugees fleeing the conflict favoured Istanbul due to the work opportunities it provided, its housing opportunities and possible prior ties or connections to other Syrians or Turkish citizens living in the city; and for some, Istanbul was the destination to make connections to achieve onward migration to Europe (Kılıçaslan 2016; Osseiran 2016).

The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality is formed of thirty-nine local municipalities, and Syrian refugees are dispersed across these districts with varying concentration. Syrian refugees have settled on both the European and Asian sides of the city, although there is a higher concentration on the European side. Even in the ten districts hosting the highest number of refugees, there is variation in terms of concentration and a higher percentage of refugees are located on the European than the Asian side of the city (Table 7.1 and Map 7.1). In 2020, the district hosting the highest percentage of Syrian refugees with respect to the overall registered population was Esenler (7.84 per cent), followed by Sultangazi (7.52 per cent), Bağcilar (6.62 per cent), Zeytinburnu (6.59 per cent), Esenyurt (6.44 per cent), Fatih (6.38 per cent), Başakşehir (5.07 per cent), Küçükçekmece (4.87 per cent) and Avcılar (4.55 per cent) (Table 7.1). On the Asian side, the only district to make the top ten was Sultanbeyli, where 5.95 per cent of registered residents are Syrian refugees (Table 7.1). Aligning with global trends with respect to urban

Table 7.1. Top ten districts in Istanbul based on number of Syrian refugees under Temporary Protection (2016 and 2020).

District	Number of Syrians (TP), 2016	Percentage of Syrians (TP) in population (%) in district for 2016	Number of Syrians (TP), 2020	Percentage of Syrians (TP) in population (%) in district for 2020
Küçükçekmece	38,278	5.02	38,452	4.87
Sultangazi	31,426	6.02	40,415	7.52
Fatih	30,747	7.33	25,303	6.38
Esenyurt	29,177	3.92	61,693	6.44
Bağcılar	27,645	4.97	48,829	6.62
Zeytinburnu	25,000	8.63	18,689	6.59
Başakşehir	26,424	7.48	23,841	5.07
Esenler	22,678	4.93	34,992	7.84
Sultanbeyli	20,192	6.27	20,444	5.95
Avcılar	19,554	4,59	19,859	4.55

Source: Erdoğan (2017) and Erdoğan et al. (2022).

refugees, Syrian refugees tend to settle in lower-income or working-class neighbourhoods, closer to work opportunities (Map 7.1). In the case of Istanbul, several of the main districts with higher concentrations of Syrian refugees are known to have been reception districts for internal migrants over the years (Kılıçaslan 2016; Balcioglu 2018; Üstübici 2020; Genç and Özdemirkıran-Embel 2019).

The higher concentration of refugees in specific districts with respect to the overall population registered in the area, which includes citizens and registered non-citizens, highlights that specific neighbourhoods have been favoured by Syrian refugees (Table 7.1 and Map 7.1). Comparing the changes in concentration of refugees with respect to the overall district population between 2016 and 2020 in the ten districts mentioned above indicates that certain districts witnessed changes while the percentage of refugees remained constant in others. Some districts witnessed a rise, such as Esenyurt, from 3.92 per cent (2016) to 6.44 per cent (2020), and Esen-
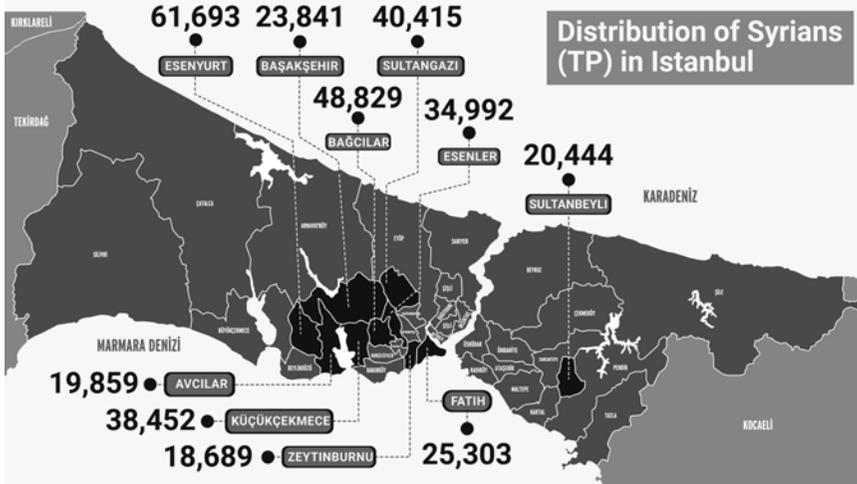
Map 7.1. Map of the top ten districts in Istanbul based on the number of Syrian refugees under Temporary Protection (2016 and 2020). © Ahmet İçduygu and Souad Osseiran.

ler, from 4.93 per cent (2016) to 7.84 per cent (2020), while other saw a decrease, like Fatih, from 7.33 per cent (2016) to 6.38 per cent (2020), and Zeytinburnu, from 8.63 per cent (2016) to 6.59 per cent (2020). The variations indicate the circulation of refugees within the city over time, with some refugees moving away from initial areas of arrival such as Fatih or Zeytinburnu to other areas due to better housing conditions or work opportunities. Alternatively, as in the cases of Küçükçekmece or Sultanbeyli, the number of refugees registered increased slightly, but the ratio with respect to the overall population decreased, indicating that perhaps more Turkish citizens have chosen to move intothe area. The increased concentration in certain districts highlights that refugees represent a visible segment of the population, impacting the urban fabric of the city in different ways.

In the earlier phase of displacement, Syrian refugees coming to Istanbul were incorporated in an ad hoc manner into the urban fabric. Refugees settled in districts based on their connections, rents and the availability of economic opportunities (Balcioglu 2018: 10). Several of the districts favoured by refugees are known to be more conservative or religious, although they offer a poorer 'quality of life' (Erdoğan 2017; Balcioglu 2018). Certain districts, such as Küçükçekmece or Bağcılar, are also known for their high number of ethnic Kurds, highlighting the influence of kinship or ethnic ties on the choice of district (Kılıçaslan 2016; Osseiran 2016). Kavas et al. (2019) indicate the impact of the presence of other Syrian refugees and businesses on choice of residence. In addition, the existence of work opportunities

that can be taken up easily without Turkish language skills was also a a factor in the choice of place of residence. Labour-intensive sectors with high rates of informality served as an easy initial entry point into the job market for the majority of refugees coming in this earlier period. Various research highlights the incorporation of Syrian refugees into certain sectors such as the garment industry and construction in Istanbul and other major cities (Danış 2016; Uysal and Volkan 2020). Other sectors, such as tourism and small- and medium-sized enterprises, also witnessed a high incorporation of Syrian refugees with different forms of capital (linguistic, financial, social, etc.) who found a niche in Istanbul catering to Syrian refugees (in the restaurant sector, bakeries, etc.) and incoming tourists from Arabic-speaking countries (Baban et al. 2021). As of 2016, Syrian refugees under Temporary Protection can be granted work permits according to the regulation governing their labour; however, the number of those with work permits remains low and Syrian refugees continue to work informally in many sectors and provinces (İçduygu and Altiok 2020; Pinedo Caro 2020).

While coming to Istanbul presented certain opportunities, it also gave rise to various challenges for refugees and local public officials in the early years of the displacement. Refugee families faced challenges of how to register their children in schools and identify what educational opportunities were available. For refugees and state actors alike, access to healthcare was (and is) another key issue of concern, both from a public health perspective and for refugees with chronic or war-related conditions.

With respect to education, related research shows that as Syrian refugees anticipated they would soon return to Syria, many Syrian families were reluctant to send their children to Turkish schools (Çelik and İçduygu 2019). Under Turkish legislation, registered asylum seekers or foreign nationals with residence permits can register in public schools. Alternatively, if children did not have this status, they could be registered in the school as guests. As guests, they would be unable to obtain a diploma, but could attend classes. Due to the ambiguities about these processes, the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) issued a circular (No: 2014/21) on 'Education Services for Foreign Nationals' to provide guidance for provincial education directorates and public schools on how to deal with refugee students in 2014 (İçduygu and Şimşek 2016). At the same time, Istanbul and other provinces, with high numbers of Syrian refugees, witnessed the formation of schools referred to as Temporary Education Centres (TECs). TECs were run by Syrian teachers who taught a modified version of the Syrian curricula in Arabic (Osseiran et al. 2018). In 2016, the government of Turkey implemented plans to close the TECs and to integrate Syrian students into the national education system (European Commission 2018).

In the case of healthcare, under the Temporary Protection Regulation, Syrian refugees can access healthcare free of charge under the national

health insurance with the same coverage as citizens. At the start of the influx, Syrian refugees' access to free healthcare was limited to the border provinces, but in 2013, access was extended to all Turkish provinces (AFAD 2013a). Despite the regularization of access mechanisms, refugees and public officials continued to face challenges due to language, lack of knowledge of the Turkish public healthcare system and increased pressure on the health sector. In 2016, the Ministry of Health (MoH) launched the Sihhat project, funded through the Facility for Refugees in Turkey (FRiT). As part of the Sihhat project, the MoH established Migrant Health Centres (MHC) gradually in various provinces with a high number of Syrian refugees. A total of 178 MHCs have been established across Turkey, and they are distinguished by the fact that they employ Syrian healthcare professionals, doctors and nurses to provide primary healthcare services. Istanbul currently hosts thirty-seven MHCs for Syrian refugees and foreigners (Istanbul Health Directorate 2021). The MHC locations are assigned based on the number of refugees registered in a district. Providing health services in Arabic aims to reduce barriers to primary care, increase access to vaccination, improve maternal and infant health and decrease pressure on emergency hospital services. Simultaneously, the MHCs prompt concerns about a parallel system developing for Syrian refugees and the implications that this may have for the public health system overall and in terms of integration and local attitudes towards refugees.

As noted earlier, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality is formed of thirty-nine local municipalities, and these have been involved to varying degrees with the refugee populations living in the respective districts. Based on the Municipalities Law (Law No. 5393), municipalities can provide support and services to residents registered in their area, but the phrasing raises ambiguity about whether refugees or migrants can be considered within the scope of the law or not (Coşkun and Yilmaz Uçar 2018; Rottmann 2020). Coşkun and Yilmaz Uçar (2018) conducted research with municipal actors in five key districts in Istanbul, including three that hosted a high number of Syrian refugees at that time, namely Bağcılar, Sultanbeyli and Esenyurt. They argue that while the central government prefers to maintain control over migration issues, the Syrian mass migration has resulted in local actors playing central roles in 'implementing migration policies' (ibid.: 104). According to Erdoğan (2017: 77), municipalities' decisions to provide services specifically for refugees varied between districts depending on financial, legal and political considerations. The variation in part indicates a lack of coordination or centralized decision-making by which municipalities might play an active role in refugee-related activities or programmes. Certain municipalities moved to establish infrastructure to offer support, information or services to refugees, as well as to support social cohesion efforts, while

others chose to disengage from the refugee population within their district. As Güngördü and Bayırbağ (2019) explain, a given municipality's willingness to engage with refugees living within its district was also affected by the funding available to it, since municipalities were not granted extra funding for providing these services. In response, some municipalities such as Şişli, Sultanbeyli and Zeytinburnu connected with NGOs – and INGOs in some cases – to fund projects to provide services such as Turkish language courses or psychosocial support to refugees (ibid).

Following the EU–Turkey deal (2016), through the FRiT, the funding arriving to Turkey has been used to upgrade existing infrastructure in Istanbul and other provinces to increase capacities in order to better deal with the refugee presence. The EU–Turkey deal also signalled a shift in the approach to the refugee presence. While prior to the agreement, Syrian refugees' return was upheld as the most likely scenario, the post-2016 period witnessed increasing moves to promote social cohesion and integrate Syrian refugees into Turkish society (İçduygu and Şimşek 2016). NGOs and civil society organizations moved to develop projects focused on social cohesion. Various measures such as transitioning Syrian school-aged students into the national education system, increasing the scale and support for free Turkish language classes and increasing vocational training and employment-focused programmes and the like (European Commission 2018) are examples of this shift. Perhaps one of the principal indicators of the shift towards accepting the likelihood of Syrian refugee long-term presence was the announcement to grant three hundred thousand Syrian refugees Turkish citizenship (İçduygu and Şimşek 2016). According to İçduygu and Altiok (2020), the measure appeared to signal that the Turkish government was accepting that many Syrian refugees would settle in Turkey permanently. At the level of policy and planning, the adoption of the 'National Strategy on Harmonization and the National Action Plan' outlines further possibilities to organize engagement between refugees and host communities (PMM 2018).

The year 2019 marked a subsequent shift with respect to the Turkish government's approach to Syrian refugee presence. Amid rising xenophobia and negative public opinion, in Istanbul and elsewhere in Turkey, 2019 witnessed the discourse of 'return' emerging once again at both the local and national levels (Rottmann 2020). The discourse of 'return' was accompanied by military activities in northern Syria aimed at securing part of the area to enable refugees' safe return (İçduygu and Altiok 2020). Decisions at the international level concerning the regime in Syria and the future of Syria continue to influence and affect any discussion on a future of safe return, thereby affecting the presence and futures of Syrian refugees in Turkey.

At the provincial level, the negative public opinion concerning refugee presence within the host society resulted in the government implementing

certain components of the Temporary Protection more strictly than they might have otherwise. On 22 July 2019, the governor of Istanbul issued an order for all Syrian refugees registered in other cities or who were unregistered to leave the province or face the consequence of forced removal (Amnesty International 2019; Erdoğan 2020). The deportations of some refugees from Istanbul at the time resulted in anxiety among the Syrian refugee community about their future in Istanbul. For many, it signalled the time to return to the province of initial registration, while others remained in the city with a continued lack of access to education, healthcare and the like.

In early August 2021, after a Turkish citizen was killed during a fight with Syrian refugees in Altindağ district in Ankara, Turkey faced another wave of xenophobia against Syrian refugees, as well as against other migrant and refugee groups. The incident was followed by Turkish citizens attacking Syrian refugees' businesses and places of residence in Altindağ district, highlighting that negative attitudes to the urban refugee presence were on the rise again. Moreover, these negative attitudes have coexisted with continued discussions about the possibility of establishing a safe zone in northern Syria to enable the return of many Syrian refugees. Following the events in Altindağ, the Ankara PDMM announced that it was closing registration to any incoming Syrian refugees applying in Ankara and was calling on all Syrian refugees registered in other provinces to return to their province of first registration.[5] Ankara thus followed Istanbul and other provinces in reacting to increased tensions by containing refugee presence and mobility. These recent events and state actors' responses highlight the ways that refugee-related policies in Turkey emerge as a reaction to events and public debates about the refugee presence. In addition, the policies demonstrate the ways that mobility and movement emerge as continued sites of struggle.

Conclusion

Syrian refugees in Turkey present a novel case study given the coexistence of diverse realities within a single space. Reflecting on the case of Syrian urban refugees in light of existing global debates on urban refugees more generally underscores how humanitarian interventions can be implemented in urban settings in the process of developing a migration management system. For Turkey and other countries, concerns over refugee visibility, local actors' ability to cope with the sudden increase in the population, the need to develop urban policies that account for refugees, and other issues continue to be relevant.

Examining the case of Syrian urban refugees in Turkey illustrates the ways that ad hoc policies and refugee agency intersect. The Turkish gov-

ernment's migration response to Syrian refugees shifted over time from a more ad hoc approach, based on refugees' anticipated temporary presence, to a more systematic approach with an understanding of the need to register refugees and accept the possibility of longer-term presence. To return to the question posed in the introduction to this chapter, the case of urban Syrian refugees is a combination of ad hoc policies and spontaneous realities. The refugee response demonstrates that interventions in urban settings concerning health, education and social security are possible. These efforts are contingent on comprehensive documentation and registration processes as well as the involvement of multiple actors at different levels. However, the effectiveness of interventions in facilitating social cohesion or inclusion of refugee populations remains a distinct concern. As many refugees have settled in lower-income districts alongside Turkish citizens, competition over the limited available resources – jobs, housing and the like – indicates the need for urban policies that account for diverse and rapidly changing populations and needs. The rising tensions in urban areas in the south of Turkey, in Istanbul and most recently in Ankara highlight that further efforts are needed beyond merely ensuring service provision. Urban refugee policies must be developed that account for the possible longer-term integration of refugees and the impact of their presence in cities. As we write this conclusion, the incidents in Altindağ district in Ankara and their ramifications demonstrate the continued ad hoc nature of policies responding to rising tensions between host and refugee communities. In addition, policies to immobilize refugees emerge as a tool to contain the refugee presence and alleviate public concerns in the host society.

Based on the current situation and dynamics, it is possible to argue that the near future may witness further public discussions about refugee return and the continuation of negative attitudes towards refugee presence. In addition, cities may experience increasing segregation, with citizens moving out of districts with perceived high percentages of refugees. These possible realities present a challenge for policymakers, municipal actors and urban residents going forward.

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Notes

1. While the legal status granted to Syrians seeking protection in Turkey is 'Persons under Temporary Protection', the authors favour the use of 'Syrian refugees' in this chapter.
2. While the figures here concern registered refugees, some Syrian refugees remain unregistered, and it is difficult to estimate their exact number.
3. Since the time of writing, the Directorate General for Migration Management (DGMM) has become the Presidency for Migration Management (PMM). The change to status occurred upon the Presidential Decree issued on October 29, 2021 (Official Gazette, 2021). PMM and DGMM are used in the text as relevant.
4. See Ankara Province Directorate for Migration Management (2021).
5. Ibid.

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8

Refugees and the Urban Fabric

Palestinian and Syrian
Settlement Patterns in Jordan

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Kamel Doraï

Introduction

The urban geography of Jordan has been profoundly transformed by the
long-term settlement of forced migrants on its soil. Whole neighbourhoods
in Amman have built up around the Palestinian refugee camps that are now
an integral part of the Jordanian capital. The Palestinian experience largely
determines the way that Jordanian authorities construct and implement pol-
icies related to the arrival of new refugee groups. Local authorities fear a
repeat of the situation they have experienced with the Palestinians, which in
the Syrian case could result in the permanent settlement of a large number
of Syrian refugees in the kingdom, which would bring along with it potential
political and security troubles. In 2012, Jordan faced a mass arrival of Syrian
refugees, and the Jordanian authorities decided to open camps close to its
border with Syria. The decision to open refugee camps was partly related
to the fact that Jordanian authorities wanted to give visibility to the Syrian
refugee crisis and to attract funding from the international community (Ali
2021). Nevertheless, this camp policy concerned only a limited proportion
of the Syrian refugees. As 91 per cent of Jordanians live in urban areas
(World Bank n.d.), most of the refugees also settle in the main cities of the
kingdom. For example, the Azraq camp was opened in April 2013 to ac-
commodate up to 130,000 people, when the number of refugees arriving

Table 8.1. Growth of Syrian refugees in Jordan (2013–21) and the percentage living outside camps.

Date	Urban/Rural	In camps	% outside camps
13/03/2013	130,502	158,766	**45.2**
31/12/2013	448,558	127,796	**87.9**
04/01/2015	523,001	100,337	**83.9**
19/01/2016	519,653	115,671	**81.8**
05/01/2017	514,251	141,148	**78.5**
02/01/2018	516,072	139,552	**78.7**
13/01/2019	545,542	126,009	**81.3**
05/01/2020	531,432	123,260	**81.2**
31/08/2021	540,815	129,822	**80.6**

Source: UNHCR 2023.

in Jordan was very high. Today the camp is mostly empty. According to the UNHCR, in August 2021 only 43,000 refugees lived in the camp. The majority of Syrian refugees, therefore, settle in urban areas whenever they have the opportunity, where employment opportunities are better and it is easier to resume a 'normal' life. Out of a total of 670,000 registered Syrian refugees, fewer than 130,000 are camp dwellers, meaning that more than 80 per cent of the registered Syrian refugees are settled outside camps (Table 8.1) (UNHRC 2023). While Jordan is facing economic difficulties in an unstable regional environment, assessing the specific effects of the Syrian presence is difficult. Nonetheless, the chapter points towards a few significant conclusions.

I will first present an overall picture of settlement patterns of refugee groups in urban areas. Second, I will discuss some key outcomes of this process. Third, based on this analysis, the chapter will contribute to going beyond the overly simplistic dichotomy between urban refugees and camp dwellers in temporary settlements, exploring the role of refugees in the urban fabric at different scales. Since the 1970s, studies on refugee populations have produced a large number of categories to describe their movements and their modes of settlement, such as urban refugees, refugees in camps, self-settled refugees and so on (Black 1991; Kunz 1981; Rogge 1977; Zetter 2007). Since the end of the 1980s, a growing number of studies have focused on the issue of refugees in urban areas, with particular emphasis on the prob-

lems of protection and access to services, often in comparison with the situation in refugee camps (Agier 2002; Al-Qutub 1989; Jacobsen 2004; Malkki 1995). Most of the refugees have experienced settlement in different spaces (camps, cities, temporary tent settlements) throughout their exile in Jordan. These different settlement spaces are not disconnected; several forms of complementarity exist and links are developed between refugees and host communities. The role of asylum regulation towards Syrian refugees in Jordan and its evolution over time are also central to understanding the current geography of asylum in northern Jordan. Based on fieldwork between 2014 and 2017, this chapter will explore the different aspects of settlement patterns in Jordan.

Refugees' Settlement and Urban Research: From Camps to the Urban Fabric

The modes of settlement of refugee populations in cities are increasingly treated as such; recent studies have focused on them in the Middle East (Al-Sharmani 2003; Grabska 2006; Le Houérou 2007), in Africa (Pérouse de Montclos 2001; Jacobsen 2004) and in Asia (Beaujard 2008; Connór 1989). Despite the diversity of the situations observed, these studies show that refugee movements are part of their reception areas, and that the end of conflicts or violence does not systematically lead to the return of the entire population. The modes of settlement therefore tend to be long-lasting and deeply modify large parts of cities in the Global South. The different situations analysed in the literature, whether in Cairo, Khartoum, Monrovia, New Delhi or Peshawar, all point to the importance of forced migration in urban development and its articulation with other forms of migration, such as rural exodus.

Refugee settlement in urban areas is an old phenomenon that began in the contemporary Middle East in the second half of the nineteenth century with the settlement of the Circassian Muslims and Jewish groups, and later on the Armenians (Chatty and Finlayson 2010). Since 2000, it has become a growing field of research in the social sciences (Fábos and Kibreab 2007). This increased interest is partly due to the UNHCR's implementation of a new settlement policy. The UNHCR first issued a document in 1997 that set up a new approach to refugees' settlement, taking into account the necessity of developing assistance to and protection for urban refugees. Due to criticisms regarding the UNHCR approach and following the mass Iraqi refugee displacement across the Middle East after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, the UNHCR in September 2009 adopted a new urban refugee policy (UNHCR 2012). It aimed at providing urban refugees with

similar protection and assistance as those living in camps receive. The experience with Iraqi refugees in the Middle East was partly used as a model for the development of UNHCR strategy-setting priorities: registration of refugees, protection, assistance, access to services and development of durable solutions (Crisp 2017). Syrian refugees in Jordan today benefit from that experience. More recently, a partial shift occurred in UNHCR policy, taking the 2009 urban refugee policy as a model and extending some of its principal objectives in refugee camps, as stated in a 2014 document issued by the UNHCR (2014: xx).

> The Policy on Alternatives to Camps refocuses attention on refugees living in camps and extends the principal objectives of the urban refugee policy to all operational contexts. The urban refugee policy noted that it is usually taken for granted that camp-based refugees will receive indefinite assistance if they are unable to engage in agriculture or other economic activities. The policy on alternatives to camps challenges this assumption and calls for UNHCR to work decisively toward the removal of obstacles to the exercise of rights and achieving self-reliance, with a view to making what UNHCR historically called 'care and maintenance' programmes increasingly rare exceptions.

The camp should no longer be considered a temporary space where refugees only receive assistance, but can be considered a form of urban space where refugees develop self-reliance and recreate their social world in exile (Marx 1990). One example in Zaatari camp is the distribution to refugees of visa cards credited with a monthly amount and the opening of a supermarket in the camp, where refugees can choose and buy products instead of only receiving food assistance in boxes. These practices had first been developed in the urban context and then were transferred in the camps.

The classical distinction between *refugee camp dwellers* and *urban refugees* is mainly an operational one produced by international organizations. In protracted situations, refugee camps, conceived as temporary structures, tend to develop into makeshift cities. This categorization has to be differentiated from the evolution of refugee camps and from the practices developed by the refugees themselves. The ways that refugees transform their environment, as well as the constraints they face, are crucial to analysing the urbanization process of camps. In the analysis of refugees' settlement in the Middle East, there is a need to go beyond the distinction between camp and city, and to develop a broader reflection on the urban fabric generated by forced migration; as Michel Agier (2016: 463) wrote, 'camps anticipate new urban environments'. From temporary settlement spaces, camps have become real neighbourhoods integrated into the working-class outskirts of the cities that host them (Doraï 2010). Be it in urban spaces or in urbanized refugee camps, refugee groups contribute to the urban fabric, and have acquired

by their practices a 'right to the city' (Lefebvre 1967). Lefebvre's conception of the 'right to the city' is that the dwellers retain the ability to produce their spaces without conforming to the dominant modes of spatial production, to participate in reshaping the existing norms and forces in which space is being produced within the capitalist order, rather than being themselves engulfed in its modes. In this sense, refugees settling for the long term in their host countries participate in the production of urban spaces and are actors of this production, sometimes in ways that conflict with state policies and urban regulation. They develop a form of appropriation through access, occupation and use of urban spaces. They produce spaces that meet their needs as urban dwellers. Dwelling can then be defined as a set of practices that an individual associates with places (Lussault 2003). This means that by dwelling, refugees contribute to the production of urban spaces.

Armenian refugee camps, like the Sandjak camp in Bourj Hammoud in the eastern suburbs of Beirut, and Palestinians camps have today been in existence for several decades. Today, these camps differ little from their immediate urban environment, and the morphology of urban camps in the Near East is very far from the classic image of the refugee camp, as a result of their long-term settlement. 'To what extent can practices that were designed for the purposes of survival and the extension of often highly precarious forms of life offer a touchstone for other alternative imaginings of cityness?' (Vasudevan 2015: 339). Refugee camps, over time, can thus be considered a type of urban structure that combines different temporalities: a temporary perception of exile, related to the precarious legal status of refugees in their host countries and the temporary character of refugee camps, and a durable de facto settlement in protracted conflict that can be analysed as 'an alternative urban life' (ibid.: 342).

Refugee Crisis, a Driver of Urban Change in Jordan

Refugees' settlement has been one of the main drivers of urban development in Jordan since the emergence of the Hashemite kingdom. Amman and its suburbs grew in different stages with the arrival of migrants who settled in the capital, helping redefine the socio-economic structure of the city and its geographical morphology. From the Circassian communities, considered to be the first inhabitants of Amman, to the Palestinian and Iraqi refugees and the current Syrian groups, Amman has been deeply transformed. But this phenomenon is not limited to the Jordanian capital: other cities have gone through a profound urban change due to the settlement of refugee groups. Mafraq in the north and Azraq in the north-east have faced dramatic urban change since the arrival of Syrian refugees in 2011.

Amman, a City Growth Driven by Asylum and Migration

Migrants and refugees' settlement process in contemporary Jordan is central to understanding the urban growth of the main cities of the Hashemite Kingdom, and more specifically Amman (Ababsa 2011). Amman was settled by several waves of Circassian migrants who created different neighbourhoods beginning in 1878. Later on, they contributed to the development of other cities in different parts of Jordan such as Jerash, Naour, Sweileh and Rusaifeh. If their migration was organized by the Ottoman immigration commission, 'Ottoman documents show that even though the Commission was in place and the policy for the settlement of Circassians in Bilâd ash-shâm might have been clear, the actual process of settlement was often disorganized' (Shami 1996: 309). According to Vladimir Hamed-Troyansky (2017), Amman was first considered a Circassian refugee settlement by Ottoman authorities in the late 1800s, before it was turned into a district centre in 1914 and thereafter considered to be an urban space.

The settlement of Palestinian refugees in 1948 and 1967 contributed further to the urban development of Amman. In 1918, Amman's population was less than 5,000 inhabitants, with an urban area less than half a square kilometre. When in 1921 Amman became the capital of Transjordan, its population was estimated at 10,500. In the early 1940s, before the arrival of Palestinian refugees, the population was around 45,000, and the city extended over an area of some 2.5 square kilometres by 1947. In the early 1950s, Amman's population more than doubled and reached around 100,000 inhabitants (Alnsour 2016). Since their arrival in 1948, refugee camps have deeply transformed eastern neighbourhoods and gradually became part of the city (Hanania 2014). Middle- and upper-class Palestinians also settled in more privileged areas.

Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, nearly 200,000 Palestinians left Kuwait because they were opposed to the Iraqi occupation and to escape the conflict. Another 20,000 Palestinians were expelled by the Kuwaiti authorities following the conflict in 1991 (Radi 1994). The involuntary return of Palestinians from Kuwait to Jordan had a significant impact on Jordanian society, given the numerical scale of the phenomenon (Van Hear 1995). That event contributed to the transformation of entire neighbourhoods of west Amman. Most of the returnees were well off and rented or bought apartments and villas in the most privileged locations of Jabal Amman.

More recently, refugee groups have also settled in Jordan. From the 1990s, and then after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, hundreds of thousands of Iraqi refugees arrived in Jordan, and some of them settled in Amman (Chatelard et al. 2009). Jordanian authorities decided not to open refugee camps in order to avoid the emergence of new pockets of poverty and to limit the possibility of political organization on its territory. These

Iraqis were thus all labelled 'urban refugees' (Chatelard and Doraï 2009). A large proportion of the Iraqis who arrived after 2003 had an urban background and belonged to the middle class. They settled in western Amman, and opened many shops, restaurants and travel agencies. Others, from less privileged backgrounds, settled in the eastern popular suburbs of Amman, and faced difficulties accessing the labour market (Twigt 2016).

The failure to resolve the Palestinian question, resulting in the continued presence of the camps since their creation in the early 1950s, along with the urban settlement of more recent refugee groups, strongly influences the current processing of new refugee flows both regionally and within Jordan. The reluctance of authorities in host states to open refugee camps is partly due to their fear that the refugees will settle on their land for the long term, as has been the case with Palestinian refugees.

Syrian refugees who settle in urban areas differ from those settled in refugee camps mainly in terms of their greater socio-economic diversity. Syrians living in refugee camps generally originate from disadvantaged social backgrounds and have few previous connections with Jordan. They do not have social capital to gain the support of Jordanian citizens who could become their *kafil* (an Arabic term for sponsor). They also come from rural areas and therefore often have more difficulty settling in urban spaces. Many refugees from Zaatari camp tried to live in an urban setting, but many were forced to return to the camp because they could not support themselves and their families. Despite the UNHCR's implementation of an assistance policy in urban areas, it is easier to access aid in the camps. In the Zaatari refugee camp, we find mainly Syrians from southern Syria and more particularly from the Daraa region.

Several political innovations have been tested in Jordan in cooperation with foreign humanitarian organizations in the field of access to housing for Syrian refugees outside the camps. Myriam Ababsa (2020: 32) notes that

> since 2011 the Norwegian Refugee Council has been leading innovative operations in the field of housing for refugees in urban areas, in Lebanon and Jordan. Originally designed as an aid for the construction of new housing (second floor, small houses, additional rooms) amounting to 3,900 JD in exchange for free accommodation for Syrian refugees for a period of 12 to 18 months (966 apartments created in 2013–2015), the program evolved in 2016 to consist of the renovation of housing already rented by Syrians, in order not to move them from district to district.

More generally, as noted in this report, the construction sector in Jordan has benefited from the massive influx of refugees into the country. The policy discussed by Ababsa above was implemented to develop alternatives to camps and to promote better integration of Syrian refugees into their host communities. Refugees' settlement becomes part of a broader process of ur-

ban transformation. It aims to facilitate the access, both of poor Jordanians and refugees, to affordable housing in the long term.

Urbanization, State Control and New Urban Practices

Refugees play a relatively important role in urban development, particularly in informal settlements. They also develop specific relationships with host societies, based on the supposedly temporary nature of their settlement. The massive influx of forced migrants into certain areas (such as towns and villages in northern Jordan) brings about significant changes for the host societies at the local level. According to Ababsa (2019: 74), 'compared to the local population, Syrian refugees represent 37.8% of the population in the governorate of Mafraq (207,923 out of 549,948 individuals according to the 2015 census), and 19.3% of that of Irbid governorate (343,207 out of 1.77 million inhabitants)'. These refugees are particularly located in urban areas of the northern governorates. For example, Mafraq, the city close to where Zaatari camp is located, has been deeply transformed by the nearby population of Syrian refugees. It is estimated that between eighty and a hundred thousand Syrians live in Mafraq, and that constitutes around half of the city's total population (Wagner 2018). Other cities such as Ramtha, close to the Syrian border, or Irbid have also witnessed important influxes of Syrians. In 2014, following this mass arrival and due to the development of informal tent camps, control measures for refugees in urban areas were implemented. Jordanian authorities dismantled 125 informal tent camps set up in the Jordan Valley, in the Mafraq governorate and in the suburbs of Amman (Ababsa 2015).

Despite the effects of the Jordanian authorities' control, the settlement of Syrian refugees has transformed entire neighbourhoods, mostly in relation to the development of commercial activities. The practices developed by Syrian refugees in urban spaces have deeply changed cities. In this sense, the example of Mafraq is significant. This small town in northern Jordan has long been a stopover town on the road linking Amman to Syria. Since the arrival of large numbers of Syrians, the city centre has undergone significant commercial development, becoming a commercial centre in connection with the Zaatari camp located a few kilometres away (Sqour et al. 2016). Zaatari camp depends on the city of Mafraq and neighbouring villages to ensure the supply of its internal market with various products (food, building materials, etc.). Most of the consumer goods found in the camp are brought in by Jordanian traders. Most of the time these goods are brought into the camp informally. The camp, and its seventy-five thousand inhabitants, have therefore strongly contributed to the development of trade in connection with Mafraq. The presence of many international aid organiza-

tions has also contributed to modifying the urban landscape. Moreover, it is the very practices of the city that have been transformed. Syrians are used to utilizing public spaces in groups at different times of the day, which has contributed to making the city's streets real spaces for meeting and socializing. We are witnessing a transformation of the city quite similar to those seen in the Zaatari camp with the emergence of shopping streets, which play an economic role but also a role in the reconfiguration of modes of sociability in exile. These urban practices tend to make the presence of refugees in the city visible, although it should be noted that certain categories of refugees, such as young men without a work permit, often adopt strategies of being invisible in the public space because they risk deportation to one of the Jordanian refugee camps or to Syria (Wagner 2017).

Héloïse Peaucelle (2020) highlights quite similar phenomena in the transformation of downtown Irbid. That city has undergone significant changes in connection with the arrival of the Syrians, whether in the old city centre, in the train station area or in the university area. Commercial spaces have developed with the settlement of the Syrians in the city. Irbid has seen its urban development accelerate. The city's practices have also evolved, giving Syrians significant visibility in the city's souk and around University Street. The city is also witnessing real estate investments that are contributing to the transformation of the urban landscape. The purchasing of apartments in Irbid, despite having increased sharply after 2011, is nevertheless part of older logics of commercial practices between Syria and the north of Jordan (Lagarde and Doraï 2017). The urban agglomeration has also expanded further east in the direction of the city of Ramtha with the installation in the industrial zone of factories relocated from Syria by Syrian entrepreneurs. The best known is the Al Durra food factory. 'In January 2020, the factory in the Ramtha Industrial Zone employed 500 workers, including 150 Syrians, and planned to expand its activity' (Peaucelle 2020).

The agglomeration of Amman, which hosts 28 per cent of the Syrian refugees living outside the camps (Al-Tal and Ghanem 2019), has also undergone significant transformations in two distinct types of neighbourhoods. West Amman, and more particularly the neighbourhoods around the university, have hosted many refugees with an urban background from the educated middle and upper classes, which corresponds to the social background of the Jordanian inhabitants of this area. Commercial activities have also developed there, as was the case in nearby locations with Iraqi refugees who arrived a few years earlier. It should also be noted that Syrian refugees of Circassian and Chechen origins have established connections through cultural and educational associations with corresponding Jordanian ethnic groups. The spatial distribution of refugees in the city has indeed most often been based on social class belonging, which largely determines the financial capacities of the refugees. Syrian refugees are therefore found

in the working-class neighbourhoods east of the capital, but also in the more distant outskirts where rents are lowest, such as Palestinian refugee camps and neighbourhoods where the state has developed social housing for the poorest Jordanians. In neighbourhoods where informal urbanization is present, floors built with apparent concrete breezeblock have been added above dwellings to be rented out to Syrians. The Syrian presence has therefore contributed to modifying the urban landscape and densifying the city.

The settlement of refugees sparks a number of debates regarding the pressure placed on the rental market, the overall rise in prices, the loss of safety in certain areas, labour market competition and so on. In the case of Jordan, the region has not escaped a more global phenomenon that typically stigmatizes the large-scale influx of refugees (Hyndman 2000). In some border areas, such as the north-west of Jordan, the effects of the settlement of a very large number of refugees have in fact had important consequences for local populations, even if it is the poorest and most marginalized populations that are paying the price of increased pressure on the rental market. In some neighbourhoods, rents have risen significantly and are difficult to afford for the poorest households, while some services such as schools and medical care have also been affected. According to the UNHCR (2020), 133,000 Syrian children were enrolled in public schools in Jordan in 2020. In municipalities with a high number of Syrians, the schools have had to transition to a system in which classes are held in two shifts. Jordanian pupils usually attend school in the morning and Syrian refugee children in the afternoon.

Economic Integration of Syrian Urban Refugees

Urban settlement of Syrian refugees has contributed to their economic integration both in formal and informal markets. Following the Jordan Compact in 2016, the Jordanian government has developed a policy to promote the employment of Syrians in Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZs). 'While innovative, the Compact will not upset the status quo by creating Syrian competition with Trans-Jordanians for employment' (Ali 2021: 189). The work permits that are delivered concern segments of the labour market where Jordanians are not represented and that are already occupied by migrant workers such as Egyptians. At the beginning of the implementation of the programme, Jordan announced a three-month suspension of legal proceedings against refugees working without a permit in order to give their employers time to regularize their situation. Of a total of two hundred thousand expected work permits, only 38,756 were issued during 2020, quasi-exclusively for male workers (93.2 per cent). Nearly half of them were in the agriculture sector (46.1 per cent), 18.9 per cent were in the construction sector and 10.4 per cent in manufacturing (Ministry of Labour 2020). This rel-

atively low number of work permits can be explained both by the difficult economic situation in Jordan and the importance of the informal sector. Jordan's labour market is segmented according to national affiliation. Migrants are generally relegated to manual and low-skilled jobs in the domestic work, construction, agriculture and hospitality sectors that Jordanians are reluctant to do. The labour market has only been opened in limited economic sectors. Jordanian legislation generally only authorizes the employment of foreigners on the condition that it compensates for a lack of qualifications or human resources within the Jordanian labour force, in certain sectors and according to pre-established quotas (al Husseini 2021).

This has led to increased competition in certain sectors of the labour market (mostly daily workers employed in the construction sector or agriculture). Unemployment rates among Jordanians, for example, rose significantly between 2011 and 2014 – the period during which most of the refugees arrived in Jordan – increasing from 14 per cent to 22 per cent, with young men particularly affected (Stave and Hillesund 2015). However, it is difficult to determine what part the refugees' presence has played in this increase (IRC 2016). It should also be noted that many of the jobs in question were taken by other migrant groups such as Egyptians, who were affected by the Syrian crisis. Moreover, the presence of refugees has had positive effects for the host country thanks to investments made by Syrian entrepreneurs who have relocated part of their activities to the industrial areas of Jordan. International aid, while it does not cover the full costs of the refugee presence, also helps to develop certain sectors of activity (such as NGOs) and stimulates demand for consumer goods and equipment.

At a local scale, some economic activities have been developed by small entrepreneurs benefiting from the presence of qualified Syrian manpower. During fieldwork carried out with Myriam Ababsa, I analysed the effects of the settlement of Syrian refugees in Sahab, an industrial city on the outskirts of Amman. The municipal team there tried to develop an active approach to the integration of Syrians after 2011, for example by teaching Jordanian and Syrian children in the same classes at school, while in other cities refugee children are taught in the afternoon without the Jordanian students. Syrian refugee entrepreneurs who fled from the city of Hama in 1982 settled in Sahab and developed industrial activities there. In 2011, we witnessed a similar phenomenon and various types of activities developed at the initiative of Syrian entrepreneurs. The presence of skilled Syrian workers has also contributed to the development of economic activities through investments by Jordanians who seize new opportunities. For example, we visited a textile factory, which combined weaving and clothmaking. A Jordanian investor, who had a store in downtown Amman, developed his business with the presence of skilled Syrian garment workers from Aleppo. He set up a workshop in the basement of a building, with the families of the workers

living upstairs. This activity remains informal, the workers do not have work permits and the factory is not registered. The costs of regularization are too high. This activity is still tolerated by local authorities because it helps to provide employment for refugees and to generate profits for the entrepreneur. In addition, skilled Syrian workers trained Jordanians in weaving and dressmaking. We have here the combination of economic activity and housing in the same space. This example shows the potential complementarities between host populations and refugees, and the benefits of settling the latter in urban spaces. Syrians often find employment in other sectors of activity, such as in the catering sector, in stonecutting or as daily workers in the construction sector.

But the mass arrival of Syrian refugees in the labour market has also exacerbated competition with Syrian workers who were working in Jordan before 2011. Their situation has also seriously deteriorated. Some used to have the status of migrant workers, some of them with recognized professional qualifications, and following 2011 became refugees in competition with an increasing number of their co-nationals. They have had to face a significant increase in the cost of living (the cost of renting their accommodation), which has often been accompanied by a drop in their wages. A young Syrian I met in the Zaatari camp in November 2014 had become a refugee in 2011 even though he had been settled for several years in Irbid, Jordan. He was working as a carpenter for a Jordanian employer and earned 400 dinars a month. He was renting an apartment in Irbid for 100 dinars a month. The arrival of a high number of refugees from 2012 resulted in increased competition in the labour market. In some regions, the presence of a workforce seeking employment, with no other resources to fall back on, has driven down wages. The young Syrian's employer offered to give him permanent work in exchange for a cut in wages. At the same time, his rent rose sharply. No longer able to cope with the rising cost of living combined with a considerable loss of income, he decided to settle in the Zaatari refugee camp where the accommodation was free and where he received humanitarian aid. Although this is merely an example, it illustrates that the impact of the Syrian crisis have been felt among migrant populations already present in Jordan.

The Jordan Compact enabled the Syrian refugees to access the official labour market and their economic integration, while limiting their social integration by keeping in place their temporary residency status. Syrian refugees can be deported to one of the refugee camps, and especially Azraq camp, by Jordanian authorities, without any possibility to get out of the camp, as they fear being sent back to Syria (Reporters without Borders 2021). Refugee camps can turn into de facto detention camps for Syrian refugees. The security approach developed by the Jordanian authorities therefore involves an urban dimension in the reception of Syrian refugees who

can facilitate their own economic integration while keeping refugee camps open to isolate certain categories of refugees from Jordanian society.

The Camp and the City:
The Urbanization Process of Syrian Camps in Jordan

The situation concerning Syrian refugees since 2011 has partly reoriented Jordanian settlement policy (Turner 2015). Unlike Lebanon, which takes in a higher number of refugees, Jordan has opened refugee camps in the north of the country in an effort to channel incoming flows.[1] While the three main Syrian refugee camps in Jordan contain only 20 per cent of the total number of Syrians, most of the refugees have passed through transit camps on the border with Syria. These camps were established along with the gradual closure of the western border between Syria and Jordan. They enable the Jordanian authorities to carry out security checks before allowing the refugees to enter their territory. Waiting times in these camps vary according to refugee profiles. If accepted, the refugees are then sent to one of the three settlements. If they have a Jordanian *kafil* they can settle elsewhere in the territory.

If most of the refugees in the region settle in cities – and are de facto urban refugees – refugee camps gradually also become part of the city. While most of the Palestinian or Armenian camps are now part of the city that hosts them, more recent camps are also becoming urbanized. As Diana Martin (2015: 13) notes concerning Beirut, 'The explosion of informal settlements made villages around the capital become the natural extension of its centre while refugee camps, not isolated any longer, began touching the city. As informal settlement mushroomed, the "misery belt" became the threshold where the camp and the city met. So while biopolitical imaginations may depict the camp as an isolated space, well demarcated and impermeable, this does not reflect the reality on the ground.'

Camps and cities can no longer be considered as two separate and distinct entities. Jordanian authorities, in collaboration with international actors, decided to improve the socio-economic and housing situation in the camps by integrating them into the urban planning of the capital. Indeed, refugee camps tend to become similar to poor neighbourhoods (Destremau 1996; Hart 2000). The difference between Palestinian refugee camps and poor areas is becoming blurred. Jabal Natheef is for example not an official UNRWA camp, despite mostly inhabited by Palestinians. The refugees live in a camplike situation while being integrated de jure into the city (Arini 2014). For example, Jabal Hussein, a Palestinian refugee camp in Amman, has been integrated into the urban planning strategy developed by the municipality (Oesch 2014). This policy is partly linked to the protracted situa-

tion of the Palestinian camps in Jordan, but is also being used as a strategy to integrate Palestinian refugees who are citizens of the kingdom.

The Syrian refugee camps in Jordan, like Zaatari, have undergone rapid and in-depth changes in their structure. In a certain sense they have developed a form of urban life, similar to what Palestinian camps have experienced. Baqa'a camp, which is one of the largest Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, was built in a remote area and has developed since then into an urban centre (Alnsour and Meaton 2014).

Zaatari camp, opened in July 2012 in northern Jordan, a few kilometres from the city of Mafraq, is the most telling example. Upon its creation, this camp had all the characteristics of a humanitarian space created to respond to the massive arrival of Syrian refugees on Jordanian territory. Tents are set up along an orthogonal plan to accommodate families who settle there (Doraï and Piraud-Fournet 2018). Humanitarian organizations are developing their facilities there to assist the refugees (medical clinics, schools, food distribution centres, etc.). But very quickly, the Syrian refugees reorganized their living space.

While the camp is partially disconnected from its Jordanian socio-economic environment, the morphology of this space is changing. The lack of connection with its close geographical environment pushes the Syrians to develop, with their own resources and limited contributions from outside, their own economy. To ensure their livelihoods, the Syrians themselves develop commercial activities inside the camp (Dalal 2015). At the entrance to the camp, a shopping street has developed. Officially named Souk Street, it is called 'Champs-Elysées' by the inhabitants. The homes have all been transformed into stalls selling basic products (groceries, bakery goods, fruit and vegetables, etc.), into telecommunications or handiwork stores, but also into small restaurants, hairdressers, jewellery stores, clothing stores and so on. This street has therefore become, beyond a source of income activity, a space of sociability where refugees meet and walk around as in a commercial area of a city. This shows that Syrian society is rebuilding itself as best it can in exile; even shops renting wedding dresses have appeared. As the refugees' exile develops into a long-term one, services are being developed in the camp to adapt to their needs. There are also street vendors who offer coffee, tea or sandwiches. This commercial street has extended into another perpendicular street. Throughout the camp, small stalls have been set up in front of homes to sell food products.

This myriad of very small businesses generates meagre income that complements the aid provided by international organizations and provides an activity for refugees deprived of employment. As the camp spreads over a large area, districts distinct from each other are developing. At the beginning they were numbered sections following the spatial extension of the camp at the rate of the new arrivals. Step by step, refugees reorganized and gathered in groups in order to recreate forms of neighbourhood and prox-

imity similar to those they experienced in Syria before their exile. These forms of gathering make it possible to recreate, to a certain extent, a fragment of Syrian society in exile. Livelihoods are therefore recreated around family members who were able to find refuge in the camp and relatives from the same neighbourhoods or villages in Syria. Most often, informal associations are emerging, and traditional forms of music, for example, are played by small groups of refugees. The camp therefore becomes a space of life and sociability; this is a consequence of the forced exile and the absence of alternative solutions.

In this sense, the exile of the Syrians today can be considered similar to that of the Palestinians several decades earlier. The camp is therefore a unique space that is developing. On the one hand, the camp is perceived as a space of confinement and waiting, where precariousness reigns and where dependence is strong vis-à-vis international aid. The refugee status is fully felt by the inhabitants, for the most part forced into inactivity. The rules governing construction are very restrictive, and the Syrians cannot build permanent housing in the camps. They live in prefabricated homes that they can rearrange. The housing units are undergoing rapid degradation due to the rather difficult climatic conditions in northern Jordan. The camp is therefore the very symbol of the tension in which the refugees are caught, between the precariousness of material conditions and confinement on the one hand, and the desire to rebuild an *urban* life in exile on the other.

This space thus becomes a real centrality, the embryo of urban life, where Syrians develop and recreate social life. We are therefore witnessing a reconfiguration of the camp space, conceived by humanitarian organizations as an intervention space. It is transformed by its inhabitants who try to recreate there a space of sociability in exile. If most often the camps are in the city, as is the case with the Shatila camps in Beirut or the Wahdat camps in Amman, the city also emerges in the camp. By becoming urbanized, however, the camp does not disappear. The urbanization process is based on the recreation of a social space by the refugees and allows the emergence of spatial practices that contribute to the urban fabric. However, the camp retains certain specificities, as a symbol of the forced exile of refugees and a segregated space with specific regulations imposed by host states and international organizations.

Conclusion

Amman is often depicted by observers as not being a city. Indeed, the Jordanian capital is totally different from old Middle Eastern cities such as Aleppo, Damascus or Tripoli. This might be related to the fact that contemporary Amman is rather a young city, and that it has been largely built by refugees and migrants from different origins. Jordan has a long history of

refugee settlement. It has chosen at different periods of its history to open refugee camps or to settle refugees in urban areas. In both cases, the protracted nature of refugees' settlement has led to the development of urban spaces. Urban dynamics are tightly related to the arrival of forced migrants from the Middle East, Palestinians, Iraqis and Syrians. As Romola Sanyal (2012: 640) notes, 'The city is a contested concept that has been debated amongst scholars for a long time. Till now, there seems to be little consensus on what constitutes a city – which perhaps makes it suitable as a complex geography to compare with a camp. In particular, debates on urban poverty and informality are useful in thinking through the evolving socio-spatial relations in refugee spaces.'

This last decade, the decision by Jordanian authorities to implement urban renovation of informal neighbourhoods including certain refugee camps has contributed to the blurring of the distinction between camps and urban areas. Jordan has experienced in parallel two different forms of urbanization: urban growth (related to rural migration, natural growth, and migrants and refugees' settlement) and refugee camps' urbanization, contributing to redefining what a city is in these spaces.

Coming back to Lefebvre's definition of the right to the city, it is perhaps through the analysis of urban practices and the emergence of new sociabilities that new urban forms emerge, linking refugees, migrants and host communities. These are neighbourhoods where pilgrims, refugees and migrant workers mix, develop and inscribe parts of the cities in transnational circulation. Increasingly diverse populations mix, coexist and give rise to new urban identities marked by a cosmopolitanism 'from below'. The very identity of some neighbourhoods has been sharply transformed by the arrival of large numbers of migrants and refugees. These transformations do not occur without tensions, and the presence of foreign newcomers is seen by some as an intrusion into an area historically marked by a particular group. However, at the micro-local level, new forms of interaction and solidarity have emerged, based on neighbourhood relations, belonging to a common ethnic or religious group or economic complementarity. These interactions contribute to redefining the boundaries of groups, as Fredrik Barth (1969) defines them, such as citizens, foreigners, migrants and refugees in these new contexts of cohabitation. Michel Agier (2004) invites us to reflect on the consequences of humanitarian interventions on the resulting forms of categorization, and more particularly on the notion of citizenship of which refugees are deprived. Humanitarian governance generates new categories of analysis. Notions such as resilience or self-reliance (often used by international organizations and NGOs) contribute to blurring the limits between humanitarian assistance and development, tending to place refugees, and their specific treatment, in a kind of normality.

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Notes

1. Turkey and the Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq had also opened camps along their borders with Syria. Across the region, less than one-fifth of refugees live in the camps.

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Part III

Global Policy Approaches

9

Refuge in Syria

Where Duty Outweighs
Human Rights-Based Approaches

Dawn Chatty

Introduction

Iraqis, as modern citizens, have been moving into and out of Syria since
the foundation of the states of Iraq and Syria in the wake of the Paris Peace
Conference at the close of the First World War. Despite Wilsonian aspira-
tions for self-determination, the League of Nations agreed to the carving up
of Greater Syria (*Bilad al-Sham*) into British and French colonial mandates.
The lines drawn by Mark Sykes defining the contours of British-mandated
Iraq and French-mandated Syria within Greater Syria separated a signif-
icant number of families, businesses and other interests across national
borders, but the horizontal social ties and economic networks remained.
During times of upheaval and political crises, the frontiers were often fuzzy
and politicians from both states often crossed the borders to escape per-
secution or death in one country or the other.[1] In the 1980s and 1990s,
Damascus was a place of political refuge for numerous political elites from
around the developing world, including Iraqis such as Nuri al-Malik, the
prime minister in the post-Saddam Hussein era from 2006 to 2014, and Iyad
Allawi, the interim prime minister from 2004 to 2005 and vice president
from 2014 to 2015.

Over the hundred years or so of the existence of the modern nation state
of Iraq there has been a steady trickle of Iraqis going into exile or seeking
asylum in Syria and the other modern states that were previously part of

Bilad al-Sham. That trickle became a steady flow in the 1980s and 1990s under Saddam Hussein's harsh dictatorship and eventually became a massive flood in the mid-2000s. Why did this come about and what kind of reception did the Syrian state lay out for their Iraqi 'guests'? Was it in alignment with the international humanitarian aid regime's response to this crisis? How was it different and what can be learned from this case study of temporary guesthood and competing notions of refuge and refugees?

In this chapter, I first give a brief overview of the widespread but often ignored history of displacement within the region in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the deterritorialized nature of belonging in the then Ottoman empire and its *millet* system. I go on to describe the perplexing elements of the contemporary Iraqi humanitarian crisis that was unleashed in the aftermath of the Western build-up to destroy 'weapons of mass destruction' in Iraq in 2003. This is followed by a discussion of the willingness with which Syrian society allowed Iraqis to integrate and to make themselves 'at home' without assimilating or letting go of their Iraqi identity. These social norms and practices can thus be regarded as continuities in duty-based approaches to hospitality for the stranger that emerged from and were encouraged in late Ottoman responses to mass influx. When, a decade later, Syrians were forced to flee their country, to neighbouring states, they also largely self-settled in urban centres and were dutifully regarded by their hosts as temporary guests or workers. As these norms and social acts are at variance with standard practices in the international refugee regime, are there lessons to be learned regarding duty-based and human rights-based approaches to refuge and asylum?

Mass Influx and Asylum in the Ottoman Empire

Contrary to much popular thinking, the organized response to mass influx of forced migrants was not a twentieth-century invention, but rather emerged much earlier. The nineteenth century Ottoman empire, in the course of its six wars with Tsarist Russia, witnessed wave after wave of forced migrants entering its territory from its borderlands. In most cases these forced migrants had little time to prepare for their exile and often travelled with little more than the clothes on their backs and whatever they could pile onto their oxcarts. Their survival on the road depended on the kindness of local people and municipal authorities as they made their way south. Many died on the road from starvation or disease. Over time, these expulsions were accompanied by local Ottoman civil society organizations to assist and resettle the forced migrants. Local towns and cities opened their mosques and churches to shelter and feed the exiles. But as the sheer scale of the mass influx became clear, a centralized organization became necessary.

In 1857, in response to the more than five hundred thousand forced migrant Muslim Tatars from the Crimea entering the empire, the Ottoman Sublime Porte promulgated a Refugee Code (also translated from Ottoman Turkish into English in some texts as the Immigration Law). Responding to the urgent need to provide shelter and food for those expelled initially from the Crimea but also from other borderland regions with Russia, the Ottoman government set out swiftly to disperse and integrate its forced migrants. Those 'immigrant' families and groups with only a minimum amount of capital were provided with plots of state land to start life anew in the Ottoman empire in agricultural activity. Families who applied for land in Anatolia and Greater Syria were exempted from taxation and military conscription for twelve years. Ottoman reformers were eager to see the largely depopulated Syrian provinces revived by these new migrants after several centuries of misadministration, war, famine and several pandemics of plague (Shaw and Shaw 1977: 115).

As rising requests for plots of state land came in from forced migrants and potential immigrants, the Ottoman authorities set up a refugee commission (the Ottoman Commission for the General Administration of Immigration) in 1860 under the Ministry of Trade. The following year it became a separate public authority (Shaw and Shaw 1977: 115). The Commission was charged with integrating not only the Tatars and Circassians fleeing from lands conquered by the Russians north and west of the Black Sea, but also the thousands of non-Muslim immigrant farmers and political leaders from Hungary, Bohemia, and Poland, Cossacks from Russia and Bulgarians from the Balkans seeking refuge (ibid.: 116). The Ottoman approach to the forced migrants was both instrumental – reviving agriculture and tax farming – and politically astute, as it sought to manage local political conflicts along the margins between pastures and agricultural land with Circassian and Chechnyan settlements.

Deterritorialized Belonging and Social Duty of Hospitality

What was remarkable about the Ottoman empire was the way that its organizing ethos was not based on territorial rootedness but rather on religious affiliation. Belonging was tied to social places rather than physical spaces. In other words, belonging in this region of the Eastern Mediterranean, until the end of the Second World War, was based on recognition of the superiority of Islam in the empire, alongside a tolerance of the *Ahl-il-Kitab* – its Jewish and Christian communities. The latter was not just derived from religious tenets, but emerged also from economic and political realism. European nineteenth-century economic and political interests in the Christian

and Jewish communities in the Middle East, as well as Ottoman principles of self-governance for these ethno-religious groups, resulted in the mid-nineteenth-century Ottoman reforms that formally legislated the establishment of protected communities, *millets*, whose religious and social affairs were organized from within the structure of the church or synagogue.[2] It was the legacy of these *millets* that shaped the way in which the migrants (forced and voluntary), exiles and other dispossessed peoples of *Bilad al-Sham* (Greater Syria) would be successfully integrated without being assimilated into the fabric of the modern societies and cultures of the Levant. These new states – Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Palestine – continued to maintain the legacies of the *millet* in their formal legislation as well as in social practices; here, social norms and concepts of duty were prioritized in providing refuge to those in need (Chatty 2013).

With the end of the First World War, the largely successful, multicultural and religiously plural Ottoman empire was rapidly dismantled. However, despite the forced migrations of millions of ethno-religious minorities (as well as Muslim majorities from the Balkans), which saw an entire empire on the move, the legacy of the deterritorialized aspects of belonging tied to the Ottoman ethno-religious *millets* laid the foundations for later elaborations of forced migration integration based on kinship ties, economic networks and notions of social and religious duty. These movements were mainly circular and back and forth between relations, co-religionists, colleagues, customers and creditors between the modern Arab successor states carved out of Greater Syria. This movement and horizontal fluidity were first recognized in the contemporary humanitarian aid regime, particularly the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), with the arrival of forced migrants from Iraq in Syria. With identity and security based on family, lineage and ethno-religious *millet*s, movement did not represent a decoupling, or deracination, but rather a widening of horizontal networks of support and solidarity that stretched throughout the former Arab provinces of the Ottoman empire (*Bilad al-Sham*). Relatives, close and distant, had already been spread over a wide region far beyond the confines of the modern Iraqi nation state and could be called on for support, shelter and security when needed.

Notions of hospitality, generosity and the worthiness of the guest in augmenting individual and family honour are fundamental to an understanding of many societies and cultures. They are particularly characteristic of the Arab world, where notions of modernity are mixed with those of custom and customary principles of behaviour and action. Hospitality and generosity encompass notions of dignity, respect, protection and security. The family, the lineage, the social group and the nation's reputation are, in many ways, hostages to correct behaviour with a guest or stranger; inappropriate behaviour might lead to disrespect, danger and insecurity. Thus, in Syria,

Iraqis were welcomed as temporary guests. And as long as they behaved as was required of a guest, they were treated as nationals and allowed to go about their business of settling in, setting up businesses or engaging in circular migrations in and out of Iraq without risk of detection or labelling as 'refugees' or 'forced migrants'.

Contrary to the dominant discourse on hospitality in the West and in humanitarian aid settings, where asylum seekers are placed in the middle ground between mere biological life and full social existence in detention centres and refugee camps (Agamben 1998), the notions of hospitality and generosity in Syria and the neighbouring Arab states of Jordan and Lebanon have made it nearly impossible for the governments and civil society to adopt the 'bureaucratic indifference' to human needs and suffering so common in the international humanitarian aid regime. Syria, as with most countries of the Middle East, has no domestic asylum laws, largely because asylum is deeply rooted in notions of individual, family and group reputation. The nation is regarded as the home, and the head of the family is sovereign of the state. The nation becomes a house in which hospitality can be offered and received. The collective memory of a number of forced displacements over the past few centuries means that yesterday's guest is readily acknowledged as today's neighbour (Zaman 2016: 131). In this sense the host is thus someone who has the power to give to the stranger (generosity) but remains in control (Derrida 2000). Providing hospitality (or asylum) in this region is seen as increasing the individual's, the family's and the nation's reputation for generosity. Thus, customary law, social norms and a moral positioning to treat the stranger as guest do not require national legislation to be implemented, and the setting up of international humanitarian refugee camps becomes problematic, if not repugnant.

Becoming Iraqi

Understanding why Iraqis have been trickling and then flooding out of Iraq for decades requires a brief review of its modern history. The Kingdom of Iraq emerged from the Paris Peace Conference at the close of the First World War. In keeping with the secret wartime negotiations of the Sykes–Picot Agreement, the Allied parties entrusted the League of Nations, which they established, with awarding British administration over the Kingdom of Mesopotamia in 1919. This region between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers consisted largely of the former Ottoman cities and hinterlands of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul, which the British troops had invaded at the onset of the First World War. Upon the awarding of this mandate to Great Britain, the Iraqi population immediately rose up in a massive and violent protest, called the Great Iraqi Revolt of 1920. Gertrude Bell, a leading figure in the

creation of the Iraqi state, had predicted that the Iraqi people would favour benign British rule (Burgouyne 1961: 104).[3]

Many of the elite, urbanite, tribal leaders and former Ottoman army officers in Baghdad initially rejected this colonial imposition and fanned the flames of uprising. After all, the other British wartime agreement – the Hussein–MacMahon Accords of 1915 – had promised the Arabs their own kingdom, of which Mesopotamia would be an integral part, if they rose up in revolt against the Ottomans. They had upheld their part of the agreement, as witnessed by the triumphant entrance into Jerusalem and then Damascus of the conquering forces of General Allenby and those Arabs who had fought with Emir Faysal and T. E. Lawrence. The Kingdom of Syria was thus created in 1918, and officially declared in March 1920, but was defeated by invading French troops in July of the same year. The betrayal of the Hussein–MacMahon Accords was seen as profound, and violence rapidly spread throughout the mandated territory, forcing the British to bring in more troops from India to quell the uprising.

By 1921, much of the urban elite of Baghdad and leaders of the major Sunni Bedouin tribes acquiesced to British rule (Dodge 2003), and a plebiscite was held to arrange for the deposed King Faysal of the short-lived Kingdom of Syria (1918–20) to be made King of Iraq. His brother, Abdullah, was made Emir of the British-mandated territory of Transjordan in the same year.[4] However, matters did not run smoothly. Opponents of the mandate were exiled, and Shiite and Kurdish communities were sidelined. Massive uprisings continued, and by 1922, the British decided to supplement and partially replace their mechanisms of control from ground troops to Royal Air Force bombers (Dodge 2006). The continuous air bombardment of villages and towns, as well as of fleeing Bedouin and their herds of camel and sheep, made for a theatre of 'shock and awe' in its time. One elderly tribesman speaking to a Special Forces officer in 1924 remarked, 'There are only two things to fear: Allah and *Hakumat al tayyarrat* [government by aircraft]' (Dodge 2003: 131). In 1925, Leopold Amery, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, wrote in his memoirs that the Royal Air Force was the backbone of the whole of the British occupation. 'If the writ of King Faysal runs effectively through his kingdom, it is entirely due to the British airplanes . . . If the airplanes were removed tomorrow, the whole structure would inevitably fall to pieces . . . I do not think there can be any doubt about that point' (ibid.).

By the middle of the 1920s the British had turned to some of Iraq's ethno-religious minorities to help them police this unruly state. They relied heavily on the Assyrians (a Christian minority) to make up the country's gendarmerie – a branch of the armed forces responsible for internal security. Neutral throughout most of the First World War, the Assyrians later took the side of Great Britain and made up the Iraqi Levies (or Assyrian levies)

under the command of British officers. After a decade of unrest, constant civil disturbances and unsuccessful efforts to subdue dissident factions of Iraqi people, Britain declared Iraq unmanageable. It admitted that it could not turn the three former Ottoman provinces of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul into a 'modern democratic state' and returned its mandate to the League of Nations in 1932. But it maintained a military presence in the country as well as several political advisors. The Assyrians, who had worked closely with the British, were the most vulnerable to reprisals. Thus, the first massive wave of forced migrants from Iraq in the 1930s was the Assyrians who fled Iraq for Syria, Lebanon, Turkey and the West. The Assyrians who did not flee the country tended to gravitate to the north of the state, a region roughly coterminous with the ancient state of Assyria. The newly independent Kingdom of Iraq then commenced consolidating its will over the population by either sending individual politicians into exile or moving entire communities from one part of the country to another.

Finally, in 1958, a coup took place that ended the monarchy and saw a wave of 'royalists' flee the country. The Iraqi king and his family were executed along with those who were not quick enough to flee. Those who escaped the country made their way to Jordan where they were welcomed by the Jordanian Hashemite king Hussein. The new 'republican' state leadership in Iraq continued the practice of dispossession and eviction on a larger and wider scale. Misconduct of an individual politician could result in an entire tribe or clan being exiled. The steady movement out of the country throughout most of the twentieth century then gained momentum after 1978 when Saddam Hussein came to power. His despotism and unpredictable actions caused many of the country's social elite to leave the state. The decade long Iran–Iraq War in the 1980s increased the outmigration from the country. But it was the aftermath of the First Gulf War and the sanctions imposed by the West in 1991 that saw a steady stream of Iraqis (hundreds of thousands) leaving the country to escape increasingly desperate circumstances.

By 2003 reports indicate that there were over three hundred thousand Iraqis settled in Jordan. In Syria, Lebanon and Egypt it is likely that there was a similar population of Iraqi exiles, totalling about two hundred thousand. The presence of nearly five hundred thousand Iraqis in the region prior to 2003 was felt in business and in the arts. These were largely educated, middle- or upper-middle-class urban professionals. They formed solidarity networks for newcomers, helping to re-anchor recent arrivals without resorting to international aid. They were largely invisible to humanitarian assistance regimes, as they did not seek formal recognition, but rather relied on Arab notions of hospitality and traditions of giving asylum to settle and create new lives for themselves, all the while reinforcing pre-existing social, political and economic networks across the borders of the Arab states.

Iraq and Weapons of Mass Destruction

In November 2002 the United Nations Security Council voted unanimously to back an Anglo-American Resolution (No. 144) requiring Iraq to reinstate United Nations weapons inspectors. This measure marked a key step in the race towards a war that began five months later, when US air strikes launched 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' on 20 March 2003. In the intervening five months, a series of assessments from the humanitarian aid regime suggested that military action might displace more than a million people within Iraq and across its borders. The United Nations Agency for Refugees (UNHCR) and numerous international and national non-government agencies (IGOs and NGOs) hurriedly prepared to receive large numbers of Iraqi refugees in Jordan, Syria and Iran. They negotiated the establishment of reception centres and camps, stockpiled food, pre-positioned non-food items and prepared for the transfer of further materials through ports in Jordan and Turkey. Yet, six months after the March invasion, few Iraqis had fled their country. None had fled into Iran, a few hundred had registered in Syria and some two thousand had arrived in Jordan. It seemed that the international aid community had misjudged. Camps were dismantled, pre-positioned food and other items were removed and the international aid regime sat back (for more details see Chatty 2003).

Then, three years later in 2006, governments and international agencies were caught off-guard as hundreds of thousands of largely educated middle-class urban Iraqis fled their homes, seeking to escape a collapse in social order manifested in a complete lack of security and deadly sectarian violence. Although estimates varied widely, between one and two million Iraqis travelled to Jordan and Syria, settling largely in the cities of Damascus, Aleppo and Amman. Others moved to Cairo and Istanbul. By 2008 the number of Iraqi applicants for asylum in states of North America and Europe was more than double the total of both the second (Somalia) and third (Russian Federation) largest source countries combined (UNHCR 2009a).

In the states neighbouring Iraq, the UNHCR and other international non-government organizations raced, once again, to set up reception centres and to provide emergency aid and measures for protection in an environment where international legal protection to asylum seekers and refugees was unknown. Despite concerted effort by the UNHCR, Iraqis were not appearing at UNHCR offices to register as refugees. An existential threat to the UNHCR – no refugees, no mandate – resulted in the agency taking innovative steps to find and register Iraqis. A mobile registration programme was designed and implemented with UNHCR staff moving about the urban neighbourhoods where they knew there was a strong Iraqi presence to encourage people to register. Yet, by the end of 2011, fewer than two hundred thousand Iraqis out of an assumed 1.2 million had been registered with the

UNHCR in Syria. Clearly there was a significant disparity in perceptions among the displaced Iraqis and the international aid regime regarding the solutions to their plight. For the United Nations, durable solutions consisted of voluntary return, local integration or third country resettlement. The displaced Iraqis had different ideas of how to manage their exile. These same practices would be repeated by displaced middle-class Syrians in neighbouring states a decade later. Would the UNHCR learn from this experience?

Iraqi forced migrants now constitute one of the largest refugee populations worldwide. Nearly five million Iraqis have been displaced after the Western military invasion to remove Saddam Hussein from power in 2013, and by the sectarian breakdown and insecurity that followed (al-Khalidi et al. 2007). Approximately two million are labelled as refugees because they have crossed international borders and 2.8 million are designated as internally displaced people (IDPs) within their own country. Sectarian and ethnic violence is the dominant characteristic of this displacement. The un-mixing of neighbourhoods has rendered internal displacement a semi-permanent feature within Iraq, while those who have crossed international borders show little inclination to return except in very small numbers (Marfleet and Chatty 2009). Today Iraq is far from stable, and the Iraqi government has not been able to create the conditions for successful return of either refugees or IDPs. The bombing of Iraqi churches in 2010 and thereafter also gave rise to further outmigration as Iraq's Assyrian Christians – numbering nearly half a million – came to be increasingly targeted by insurgents. Many made their way to the Christian neighbourhoods of Hassakeh, Qamishli and Damascus, where they found a measure of security under the Syrian government's determination to protect the ethno-minorities in the country. Despite the armed conflict, escalating violence and terror being felt in Syria since 2021, return movement to Iraq has been limited and is unlikely to morph into significant return to central Iraq.

Most of Iraq's forced migrants fled to Syria, with a smaller percentage to Jordan, Lebanon and Egypt. Evidence, so far, from Syria and the other countries suggests that the tolerance of their host governments will continue, even if begrudgingly, in part because of the generous response at the local level among neighbours and hosting families (see Chatty and Mansour 2012). Often unwilling to return and largely unable to emigrate to the West or to Europe, Iraq's refugees are in a perilous situation: the largely Sunni Muslim and Christian (Assyrian) Iraqis are not welcome back to the newly created 'democratic', but Shiite-controlled, Iraqi state that emerged with the backing of the United States.

Iraqis have caught the Western humanitarian aid regime off-guard: first, with their refusal to flee at the beginning of the 2003 invasion of their country, second in their mass flight as the country descended into sectarian violence, ethnic cleansing and anarchy in 2006 and thirdly in their reluctance

to register with the UNHCR as refugees. In both Syria and Jordan, Iraqis were not regarded as refugees by the host governments, partially because neither country was a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. More importantly, both Syria and Jordan regarded Iraqis as their 'brother Arabs' and categorized them as temporary guests, as do Lebanon and Egypt. Their reception and protection in these countries of sanctuary depends upon social norms and customs, social networks and kinship ties rather than any mechanisms of international refugee law.

Many of the Iraqis seeking asylum were from the educated, professional and middle class. A number managed to escape with savings, which helped to ease their transition into urban centres. Previous waves of migrations during earlier decades meant that some Iraqi social networks were already in place in the host countries. The residual cultural memory of the *millet* system of the Ottoman empire, which gave minority or religious communities a limited amount of power to regulate their own social group's affairs, meant that Iraqi arrivals in these cities were generally tolerated, if not actively comforted. Also, memory of the pan-Arab aspirations dating back to the end of the First World War in the region meant that Iraqis were seen as temporary guests and 'Arab brothers'.[5]

In April of 2009 the UNHCR surprisingly declared that security in Iraq had improved to the extent that people displaced from most regions of the country should no longer be viewed as refugees. It began to formally prepare for the imminent return of 'large numbers' to Iraq. The facts on the ground, however, were that Iraqis kept their distance; the majority refused to come forward. Some Iraqis feared involuntary repatriation to Iraq if they registered with the UN agency. Others said that they feared returning to a country where the mixed ethno-religious communities and the legacy of Ottoman tolerance had been wiped away. The targeting of Christians, particularly Assyrian and Mandaean communities, towards the end of the first decade of the new millennium clearly pointed to the continuing 'unmixing' of peoples in Iraq even under the 'democratically' elected government of the newly created state. The general consensus is that Iraqis have fled their country 'as a consequence of a conflict in which they have no stake but of which they were made victims' (ICG 2008: 1).[6] Compounding the real threats of violence and a deadly rise in sectarian terrorist acts, countless publications emphasize the widespread impoverishment of people within Iraq after years of sanctions as an important factor prompting outmigration. Sassoon (2009; see also Marfleet 2007) highlights the dramatic decline in the numbers of doctors, academics, professionals and artists, who had been targeted and censored as groups, and who later ended up unemployed, thus choosing exile over continued suffering.

Iraqis Redefine Migration in Search of Homes in Urban Syria

The Iraqi displacement crisis reached a critical stage a year or two into the rapidly growing violent conflict in Syria after the Arab Uprisings of 2011.[7] International humanitarian interest in Iraq had begun to decline. Yet the lack of security, continuing civil conflict and economic uncertainty alongside a muted 'return' policy by the current government have made it unlikely that there will be a mass Iraqi return any time soon. More likely, Iraqi exiles, refugees and displaced people will remain in neighbouring states like Syria under increasingly difficult circumstances. As their savings diminish and their circular migrations into and out of Iraq to make money or collect rents become more precarious, it is likely that Syria will become the site of permanent 'temporariness' and the base for irregular and long-distant migrations to keep in contact with family who have scattered over the face of the earth.

> My brother is a naturalized American, and my mother needs a few more months to get it [American citizenship]. My brother and sister are in Canada. My uncles are in Michigan, USA. My other uncle is in Australia; my cousin is in Denmark. I keep in touch with all of them. If I am offered resettlement, I don't think I will resettle, I don't think I will take it because I am not married. And I am here with my father who is an old man. For me I think I will remain here in Syria for now [with my father]. (Samira, Damascus, 2011)

Iraqi refugees in Syria are urban-based and largely from Baghdad. This is hardly surprising, given that much of the sectarian violence in Iraq has occurred in the mixed Shiite and Sunni areas of Baghdad and other urban centres (Harper 2008). Although Syrian government records do not record religious affiliation of Iraqis entering the country, the documents of the Syrian offices of the UNHCR suggest that 57 per cent are Sunni, 20 per cent are Shiite and 16 per cent are Christian, with 4 per cent being Sabaean-Mandean (al-Khalidi et al. 2007). The Iraqis on the whole are well educated and constitute what was Iraq's professional middle class. A large proportion of them are relying on personal savings and remittances from Iraq, though some have managed to secure employment, both formal and informal, in Syria. But many undertake risky, if brief visits to Iraq to keep their businesses operating, collect pensions and food rations or check in on elderly relatives who have refused to flee. This circular mobility is an important coping strategy for Iraqis and at first baffled the international humanitarian aid regime, which had previously regarded 'refugeeness' as a one-way road (to resettlement).

Entry into Syria has never required a visa from any Arab country, and Iraqis make full use of this 'anomaly' in international border control. It was only during a brief period between 2008 and 2010 that a more stringent

visa regime was imposed, partially at the request of the Iraqi prime minister al-Maliki, who wanted to see more control on movement into and out of Iraq (Amnesty International 2008). By 2011, the visa regime was relaxed again, and a one-month visa could be taken by Iraqis at the Syrian border then renewed in-country. This 'open' or tolerant visa regime has challenged the classical definition of a 'refugee' being completely removed from their home country. When reports from Iraq seem to suggest a reduction in targeted violence, a greater surge in circular migration re-emerges. With the reduction of violence in Iraq, there is increased movement of Iraqis who return home for some specific reason: to check on relatives, to sell their assets, to collect their pensions or to assess the security situation first-hand. Some Iraqis use this circularity of movement to find the optimal conditions for themselves and their families. One Iraqi left Iraq for Jordan and then decided to go back to Iraq to try to live there. Then he fled to Lebanon a year later. Further down the line, he left Lebanon, fearing he would be picked up by the security services as he had no papers. Now in Syria, he does not need papers, but he needs to keep his head down.

> Iraq changed; it changed for the worse, not for the better . . . . I am trying to forget that Iraq is my country so that I don't ever go back. This is how I am thinking. Because honestly, I cannot live there [in Iraq] any more. (Mahmoud, Damascus, 2011)

International Aid and Learning Lessons from Syria

Humanitarian aid agencies need refugees to operate. So, when Iraqis did not come forward in the expected large numbers to register for assistance from the UNHCR in Syria, the agency faced a serious crisis, if not an existential one. With no previous experience of working in Syria and with a government that had never had to struggle to assert its sovereignty vis-à-vis the international aid regime, it was not surprising that clashes of policies, social norms and culture occurred as international actors struggled to set up a meaningful presence in the country (Hoffmann 2016). Without refugees to provide protection to, many a humanitarian aid organization's own mandate would come under scrutiny.[8] It can be argued that the experience in Syria with this nearly totally middle-class, urban displaced Iraqi population was the impetus and, indeed, the push that made the UNHCR rethink and rewrite its policy towards urban, self-settled refugees, seeing them no longer as 'irregular' as per its 1997 policy, but rather as 'bona fide' self-settled refugees (UNHCR 2009b). Or maybe the agency was independently considering updating its previous position regarding the self-settled refugee as somehow irregular and outside the 'legal' framework of its mandate. What-

ever the background, the UNHCR revised its policy and its programmes in view of the Iraqi response to displacement in Syria and in view of the demands of the Syrian government that all aid to Iraqis had also to be extended to needy Syrians. In addition to its concerted effort to create mobile teams to seek out Iraqis to register with itself, it also created Syrian and Iraqi refugee volunteer teams to provide support in local hosting community centres and community 'drop-in centres' for Iraqi and Syrians. Muna was one such UNHCR volunteer:

> In our apartment building there are Syrians, Palestinians, Iraqis and Somalis. Our relationship with them is all good. We don't bother them, and they don't bother us, and we are in good communications with each other. We help each other. There is an Iraqi neighbour who was a housewife with four children, two boys and two girls. One day her husband went out to work, it was informal, as Iraqis are not supposed to work, and she received a phone call that her husband had died. Imagine, she had no one. She did not believe it and thought that it was a joke. She went to the hospital and there he was, dead. So, I helped her as a neighbour and an Iraqi. We were able to get funds to bury him through friends and the UNHCR. And she stayed for one month after that, waiting for him to come back every day at 8 p.m. I started dropping by every day at that time because she would get into a hysterical fit. But thank goodness she recovered after a few months and life goes on. Of course, she is grieving inside. That is what neighbours are for. (Muna, Damascus, 2011)

International aid agencies are tied to the conditions that donor countries impose. For Syria, this resulted in difficult barriers between the host community and the displaced Iraqis. With US sanctions, as well as conditions that its funds not be used to assist the Syrian population, Iraqi volunteers with the UNHCR expressed their discomfort at not being able to assist the Syrians living around them in the community:

> I also worked with an organization called Compassion [Mahabba]. Several years ago, Syrian university students came to run a survey and I worked [with] them. We did the survey not only for Iraqis but Syrians too. We saw so many cases of destitute Syrians. We went back and asked the UNHCR to allow Syrians to come to our drop-in centres. You see, I was defending Syrians. But the organization told us that they cannot do it because they have specific criteria. (Samira, Damascus, 2011)

Despite these formal restrictions, many international aid agencies and even the UNHCR eventually began to accept discrete Syrian participation in their activities. By 2011 it was not unusual to see Syrians coming to these centres for language classes, computer access and other activities.

Between 2005 and until 2012, Syria was a haven and a refuge for over a million displaced Iraqis. And while some Iraqis have now been compelled

to move on in response to the increasing instability and armed conflict in Syria itself, a sizeable percentage of the two hundred thousand Iraqis registered with the UNHCR as of 2011 continue to receive assistance in the government-controlled areas of Syria (UNHCR 2014). More recent reports suggest that the numbers have dropped by 30–40 per cent (UNHCR 2022). Many Iraqis who remain in Syria belong to minority Christian groups such as the Assyrians and are 'protected' by the state. Up until the present, no mass exodus of Christian Arabs, Assyrians or other ethno-religious Syrians has fled government-controlled areas, although there is a steady outflow as minority Christian individuals and families succeed in their secondary migration aspirations, generally to Europe. Despite the brutality of the Syrian conflict and the extraordinary menace of the so-called Islamic State (IS), with its imported sectarian extremism, Syria remains a place of refuge and sanctuary. Providing asylum to the stranger is a clearly defined ideal in Syrian society, and one which is generally acted upon.

> I am from Baghdad, the capital; I came in 2008 and have not gone back to Iraq since. The situation there [in Baghdad] has changed by 180 degrees. From what I hear and see the situation is hard. When we were in Baghdad there was no sectarianism. Since I came here [to Damascus] I felt safe. I always say this; and I always mention it when in meetings [with international humanitarian aid staff]: Syria has provided the Iraqi people more than any other country. Syrians have hosted us, they have given us residency permits and they have made us feel safe. There is cooperation between people. There are no problems here. We have felt safe up to now and we hope things do not change. (Samira, Damascus, 2011)

Across the country, in urban neighbourhoods, towns and villages, Syrians have opened their homes to fellow Iraqis and Syrians displaced by the conflict in nearby areas. As Zaman (2016: 5) identifies, a United Nations interagency survey conducted in 2013 in fifty-two neighbourhoods in the city of Aleppo found that of half a million Syrians registered as internally displaced, nearly 60 per cent of them were hosted by local charities and families. This local response to provide for the stranger is not surprising given the importance of sanctuary and generosity in Arab society. And despite the public emphasis on the Syrian Red Crescent and international agencies in the Western press, most of the humanitarian work at the local level in Syria is organized and managed by local grassroots organizations.

Many of these voluntary groups have been complemented by the dynamism of humanitarian initiatives run by the Syrian diaspora and the wider Muslim solidarity groups that have brought humanitarian help from the Middle East and Europe. The Iraqi crisis mobilized these small, fragmented, informal charitable associations and local religious organizations for Mus-

lim and Christian alike. Many had been responding previously to the crisis by focusing on the destitute and needy of the country. With the Iraqi crisis, many new groups and networks have been formed in response to local suffering (see Slim and Trombetta 2014). The director of the Middle East Council of Churches in Damascus was interviewed by Zaman and confirmed this conflation of religious with social and moral duty: 'As Syrian citizens, we have a duty to support and help the government indirectly and to alleviate, let us say, the burden and the tension; otherwise we would see people on the street starving, and this would affect our society . . . . We believe it is not only the responsibility of the humanitarian agencies but also the churches' (Zaman 2016: 160).

Such outpourings of local-level charity, compassion and support, as well as familiarity with social ideals and customs, have led many Iraqis to see their places of abode and their neighbourhoods in a familiar and familial light. Displaced Iraqis in Damascus have expressed recognition of familiarity, neighbourliness and homelike spaces in the community. Some of these have been recognized and elaborated on by agencies of the international aid regime, such as the establishment of a cohort of 'volunteer' Iraqis who seek out and assist new arrivals. As Zaman (2016:133) argues, Syria can be conceptualized as a familiar space for Iraqi forced migrants, wherein cultural practices including religious ones are sustained and realized through social and kin networks and mediated through new urban settings. In the context of Iraqi exiles in Damascus, their cultural practices can be seen as an 'emplacement' strategy in which everyday experiences of Iraqis and their engagement with religious practices are recalibrated as a practice of conviviality. And a form of quiet religious activism in the neighbourhood mosques and informal Quranic study groups for men and women has grown, perhaps because of government disinterest (Pierret 2013). Much the same occurred in Iraq under the secular dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. Thus, for Iraqi refugees these practices are important, as they affirm Damascus as a familiar space.

When we consider Iraqi displacement and forced migration to Syria, we need to conceptualize Syria as a familiar receiving space where Iraqis can belong rather than a space of isolation and alienation (Chatelard 2011). The same holds true for the major urban centres of the Levant. Damascus is perfectly described by Ulf Hannerz (1996: 13) as a city that has especially intricate internal goings on and simultaneously reaches out into the wider world. It is a city that brings the home out into the neighbourhood and refreshingly makes community ties as important as familial ones. For Iraqi refugees, the Damascene popular 'admonition' to make neighbourly ties equally important as domestic ones guarantees that the stranger or temporary guest will find comfort and ease from their distress (Zaman 2016: 145).

Damascus (and Syria in general) has occupied an important interstitial place in the region. It is where ideas, people, symbols, language, music and goods have met for centuries from the Middle East and wider world. Iraqis arriving in Damascus find themselves at home in the city and its residential quarters, as they already possess an understanding of the city and share its cognitive space.

> [If] you speak to someone who is fairly comfortable [in Syria], has work and a home – he doesn't give Europe a second thought. Do you know why? He tells you that he can go to the mosque and pray at his convenience. He can hear the Adhan [call to prayer] as a Muslim. When it is Ramadan, he feels that it actually is Ramadan and the same for 'Eid. In Europe you cannot feel that it is Ramadan, 'Eid or another occasion. Isn't this something that affects a person? A Muslim is affected by such things. (Mu'tasim, quoted in Zaman 2016: 153)

Conclusion: Displaced Iraqis and Syrians, the Comfort of Home and Lessons Learned

Iraqi exiles have regularly confounded the Western-based system of humanitarianism. Iraqis did not flee their country when expected to in 2003, nor have they returned at the rate assumed after 2011, when Syria descended into violent armed conflict. They have eschewed the holding centres and containment camps set up for them on barren borderlands and have instead sought refuge and hospitality from their Arab hosts in populous localities and urban centres in Syria (as well as Jordan). The Iraqi rejection of camps as a response to asylum has caught the international community off-guard and has since resulted in a significant and major rethink at the UNHCR and other refuge agencies as to how to deal with displaced, middle-class professionals who do not want to enter refugee camps. Only a few years ago, refugees who evaded camps were 'criminalized' for such acts. However, I would argue that largely because of the Iraqi crisis, in 2009 the UNHCR was forced to reconsider its policies and issue new guidelines to address the bureaucratic requirements for effectively dealing with and protecting self-settled, urban refugees. Furthermore, Iraqi circular migration became a matter of some concern, as traditionally within UNHCR policy guidelines a refugee's return to their place of origin (even if only temporarily) ended their refugee status. Among Iraqis, this policy needed to be reconsidered and revised. Post-2011, when Syrians were displaced by the armed conflict in their own country, they followed the same patterns of movement that Iraqis had previously. They avoided refugee camps in the neighbouring states, preferring to self-settle in urban centres where many had pre-existing kinship ties and social and economic networks. The same norms of duty and

hospitality that the world saw in Syria were enacted in Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan. And the significance of circularity of movement was also made clear.

The history of Syria as a host state has had a significant impact on how Iraqi exiles and their hosts have been able to reject the contemporary Western notion of the separation of the stranger or asylum seeker from the rest of society. These acts have a resonance and clarity with the historical context of the late Ottoman era and its system of *millet* communities spread far and wide over the Arab provinces. With the collapse of the Ottoman empire and the imposition of British and French mandates in the post-First World War years, migration, forced and voluntary, has characterized the region, creating widespread and large-scale networks of families, lineages and tribes across postcolonial borders.

The considerations of social capital, networks and alliances then became significant when Iraqis came to deciding the time, the place and the route to flee. In addition, notions of hospitality and refuge operated at the individual and community level – not by government decree. The granting of hospitality was seen not only as a public good but also an act that enhanced the host's reputation. These social and ethical norms underpinned the success of Iraqi self-settlement and local community hosting in Syria. They were later played out again when displaced Syrians sought refuge in neighbouring states.

Humanitarian aid policy needs to be responsive to local contexts and lessons need to be learned. The Iraqi case in Syria (as well as Jordan) was a precursor to the way that displaced Syrians were received in neighbouring states where, again, duty outweighed a human rights approach to asylum. These lessons from Iraq and later from Syria need to be learned and not regarded as in some way *sui generis*. Indications are that, indeed, the humanitarian aid regime has learned from these experiences. Self-settlement of refugees in urban and peri-urban areas of host countries has become recognized as acceptable, as has the greater involvement of the local hosting community both in the provision of care and in the sharing of opportunities. Even circular migration to check on family and businesses in countries of origin has come to be tolerated as an acceptable act among refugees, even those registered with the UNHCR.

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Notes

1. For example, Michel Aflaq, the Syrian political philosopher who was a major player in the founding of the Syrian Ba'ath Party, went into exile in Iraq in the mid-1960s and became an important figure in the Iraqi Ba'ath Party.

2. Within the Ottoman *millet* system, Muslims, for example, might be ethnically and linguistically Turks, Arabs, Kurds, Albanians, Bosnians, Circassians or others. Jews might be Sephardic, the descendants of those who had been given refuge, or Mizrahi, Bukhari or Oriental Jews. The Christians were mainly Orthodox and might identify as Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians (in the Balkans) or Arabs (in Palestine and Syria). The individual *millet* community self-governed its internal affairs. Intercommunity relations gave rise to a broad range of social networks far beyond the specific geographical territory of the immediate community, especially among the professional and commercial classes.

3. In much the same way, the US president George Bush and British prime minister Tony Blair's advisors had expected the Iraqi people to welcome British and American troops with flowers and sweets in 2003.

4. The British were awarded the southern region of *Bilad al-Sham*, Palestine, under the League of Nations mandate. On the overthrow of King Faysal of Syria in July 1920 by French troops, he was given a consolation prize by the British and installed as the King of Iraq. Another of his brothers, Prince Abdullah, arrived in Ma'an in November 1920 and was recognized by the British as the Emir of Trans-Jordan and added to their British-mandated territory.

5. Popular uprisings against British and French colonialism commenced in the 1920s with the Arab Revolt and continued for decades thereafter. The Arab nationalism expressed in contemporary political parties such as the Syrian National Party (*Hizb Al Qawmi Al Surie*) and the Ba'ath Party (*Hizb Al Ba'ath*) are the ongoing political expressions of that desire to remain united in a Greater Syria or unified Arab state (Provence 2005; Neep 2012).

6. The reference here is to the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was unprovoked in the minds of many Iraqis. The search for weapons of mass destruction was a Western construction later shown to be an empty goal.

7. The interviews in this section were conducted by me between March and May, 2011 in Damascus, Syria.

8. Hoffmann clearly articulates this dilemma in her description of the first few international humanitarian aid organizations permitted to enter Syria in the mid-2000s. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) saw Iraqis in Syria as troubled and in desperate need of the world's attention, victims of sexual violence and in need of psychosocial trauma counselling. The Danish Refugee Council, furthermore, regarded the Iraqis in Syria as being in great difficulty due to their illegal status and the notion that criminality and prostitution of their young women had created resentment with local hosting community. These assumptions were just that; they were not derived from any empirical studies. Rather they emerged from the imaginings of the international humanitarian aid workers (Hoffmann 2016: 103–5).

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10

The Syrian Emergency and Its Impact on the Evolution of Global Refugee Policy

Jeff Crisp

Introduction

The word 'unprecedented' is one of the most familiar in the humanitarian vocabulary. When a new emergency breaks out, when a famine looms or when significant numbers of refugees begin to leave their own country to escape from a crisis, it can almost be guaranteed that a succession of aid agencies and media commentators will suggest that the situation is 'unprecedented', that the new disaster is 'the worst in the world' and that the humanitarian operation launched in response is 'the most complex' ever witnessed.

Such observations have become tediously familiar, often betraying a very limited knowledge of humanitarian history. They also appear to be driven by a desire more to attract international attention and raise funds than to promote a better understanding of emergency situations in which many lives are at risk. As such, they should generally be avoided. In the case of Syria, however, there is indeed some justification for describing the country's decade-long refugee and displacement emergency as being unprecedented, the worst in the world and one of the most complex of recent years.

First, the Syrian crisis was unusual in terms of the speed with which it erupted and the number of people it affected. In the first few months of the nonviolent uprising against the Assad regime, very few Syrians felt the need to abandon their homeland. But as the Syrian military sought to suppress

the protests and armed resistance to the regime began, refugee numbers skyrocketed. By early 2015, some four million people had fled the country.

While the speed of refugee departures subsequently fell, in large part because neighbouring and nearby states closed their borders to Syrians who were trying to escape the turmoil, the overall number has continued to climb. By the time of completing this article (August 2022), at least 6.6 million Syrians were living abroad, with a similar number displaced within the borders of the country. Another five million people in Syria remained in their usual place of residence, but were in need of humanitarian assistance in order to survive.

Second, the Syrian refugee emergency has been characterized by its broad geographic scope. In the early days of the armed conflict, the majority of refugees fled to the neighbouring and nearby states of Egypt, Iraq (including the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in the north of the country), Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey. Those who had the skills, resources or connections to do so also took up residence in more distant places such as Armenia, the Gulf states and Sudan, although they were often not recognized or registered as refugees in those locations.

The scope of the situation expanded substantially in 2015–16, when large numbers of Syrian refugees who had initially fled to Turkey began to move into the European Union, usually via the Aegean Sea, the Mediterranean Sea and by land through the Balkans. Their purposes in doing so varied: to find better employment and educational prospects than were available in Turkey; to benefit from the greater freedoms, security and social support systems that existed in Europe; and to reunite with family and community members who were already to be found there.

Taking most of the world (and particularly the EU) by surprise, the westward and northward movement of exiled Syrians triggered another large-scale refugee and migrant movement, involving people from fragile, war-torn and authoritarian states in West Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and South-West Asia. This 'mixed migratory movement', as it became known, involved well over a million people in total and affected countries throughout the Mediterranean rim, including Cyprus, Italy, Libya, Malta, Morocco and Spain.

A third important characteristic of the Syrian emergency is to be found in the serious consequences it has had for the three host countries admitting the largest number of refugees. Lebanon, for example, a country with a fragile economy and political system, and still recovering from its own protracted conflict, has a Syrian refugee population of well over a million, and has one of the highest ratios of refugees to citizens anywhere in the world.

While the number of Syrian refugees in Jordan is somewhat smaller, at around 650,000, one must also take account of the fact that this resource-scarce country also has a Palestinian refugee population of some two million.

While Turkey has a more robust economy and infrastructure than either of these two countries, it has also admitted the largest number of Syrians – over 3.5 million – the world's largest refugee population.

Fourth, and in large part because of its unusual speed, size and scope, the Syrian refugee emergency has demanded an exceptional response from the international community. While it is impossible to calculate the full cost of that response, given the number of different actors contributing to it and their inconsistent reporting methods, there is no doubt that the level of funding required for Syria has been, in a word, unprecedented. It has also been growing. Looking at the UN alone, the organization appealed for USD 5 billion in 2013, a record figure at the time. By 2017 that figure had increased to USD 7 billion, and in April 2021, the UN informed the international community that it required USD 10 billion for its Syria operation.

Finally, the Syrian refugee situation has been characterized by its long duration and intractable nature, often to the surprise of the refugees themselves. Interviewing Syrians throughout the Middle East in early 2013, the author of this article heard that many had left their homeland in the expectation that the Assad regime would be quickly overthrown and that they would then be able to go home (Crisp et al. 2013). But on a second visit the following year, such optimism had diminished, and many refugees were resigning themselves to a lengthy period in exile (Grisgraber and Crisp 2014). Indeed, it was this realization that prompted so many to move on to Europe, where their longer-term opportunities in life appeared to be so much better.

There is, however, nothing exceptional about this. Refugees often flee to other countries with a limited understanding of what the future might hold for them. And as demonstrated by the experience of refugees such as the Afghans, Palestinians, Sahrawis and Somalis, it is by no means unusual for refugee situations to persist for decades without being resolved.

Given the geopolitical forces at play in Syria, the level of destruction and human rights violations that the country has experienced and the reluctance of other states to grant displaced Syrians any kind of permanent residence, none of the traditional solutions to refugee situations – voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement – currently appear to be viable. The most recent surveys indicate that some 90 per cent of Syrian refugees in the Middle East are unable to meet their basic needs. And while they hope to return home eventually, they have no immediate plans to repatriate (UNHCR 2021).

The Syrian refugee situation has, therefore, been an exceptional and even unprecedented one in the ways set out above. It has also been an extremely important one in terms of its implications for the international refugee regime as a whole, as well as the way in which states, the UN and other stakeholders perceive and respond to mass movements of people. The following sections of this chapter examine those consequences in more detail.

The Global Policy Agenda

Refugee issues have featured prominently in international affairs since the days of the League of Nations, when Norwegian diplomat and explorer Fridtjof Nansen was appointed as the body's High Commissioner for Refugees. It is not difficult to explain why such an appointment was considered necessary. Large-scale and cross-border movements of people are by definition the concern of more than one state. They often represent a threat to national and regional security, and can be exploited by states in the pursuit of their foreign policy objectives. While the League of Nations is generally thought to have been a failure, most notably in its inability to prevent the rise of fascism and the outbreak of the Second World War, the organization actually did a great deal to lay the foundations for the modern international refugee protection regime.

Following the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, the international community became preoccupied with a new succession of refugee crises: Palestine and the Indian subcontinent in the late 1940s; Hungary in the 1950s; Bangladesh and Pakistan in the 1970s; Afghanistan and Indo-China in the 1980s; Iraqi Kurdistan and the Balkans in the 1990s; and an almost uninterrupted sequence of refugee emergencies throughout the African continent.

By the standards of previous decades, the years 2000–10 were relatively uneventful in terms of major refugee movements, the main exception being the exodus from Iraq following the US-led invasion of the country and collapse of the Saddam Hussein regime. Indeed, with a limited number of cross-border emergencies to deal with, the UNHCR was able to expand its engagement with other humanitarian issues during this period, such as the plight of internally displaced people, the situation of migrants who did not meet the criteria for refugee status but who were nevertheless in need of protection, and the issue of population movements prompted by the process of climate change.

The outbreak of the Syrian refugee emergency in 2012, the rapid speed and massive scale with which it subsequently developed and the simultaneous movement of asylum seekers to Europe from other parts of the world came as a shock to the international system. States, the UN and other stakeholders were all convinced that the world was confronted with what was often described as a 'global refugee crisis'. The issue of mass movements of people was catapulted to the very top of the global policy agenda, and a rapid succession of initiatives were taken in an attempt to address the issue more effectively.

In September 2016, the UN General Assembly hosted a high-level summit to address the question of large-scale refugee and migratory movements, which led to the establishment of the New York Declaration on this issue.

At the same time, and after many years of inconclusive discussion, the International Organization for Migration, an intergovernmental agency, finally became a member of the UN system.

After two years of consultation and negotiation, in December 2018, the UN established two Global Compacts, one on refugees and the other on 'safe, orderly and managed migration', both of which set out key objectives and principles for future responses to the cross-border movement of people. A year later, the first Global Refugee Forum (GRF) was held in Geneva, a multistakeholder gathering of some two thousand people, intended to support the implementation of the Global Compact on Refugees and its accompanying plan of action, the CRRF or Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (Minski 2021).

The UNHCR, which played a central role in these initiatives, has been particularly (and predictably) enthusiastic about them. According to statements made by the organization, the Global Compact on Refugees and CRRF constituted 'a gamechanger', 'a paradigm shift', 'a milestone for global solidarity and refugee protection' and even 'a minor miracle'. As for the Global Refugee Forum, it was said to be 'a unique opportunity to put in place the elements needed to accelerate our transformation of the global response to refugee flows' (Crisp 2020: 365).

There is a degree of validity in such statements. The Syrian refugee emergency, both in the Middle East and Europe, had stretched the international humanitarian system to the limit and revealed the need for states and other stakeholders to give more thought and attention to the issue of forced displacement. And it was undoubtedly an achievement for the UN to build a broad international consensus around the Global Compacts and to reaffirm the importance of the 1951 Convention, at a time when the refugee and migration issue had become a highly toxic one, both between and within states.

While there is nothing very new in the CRRF, which is essentially a restatement of the objectives that the UNHCR has pursued throughout its seventy-year history, one could legitimately argue that it provides a valuable opportunity to mobilize a new degree of political and material support for those outcomes.

At the same time, recent efforts to revitalize the international community's approach to the refugee issue have some important constraints and limitations. The Global Compact on Refugees, for example, is a non-binding and aspirational document that lacks specific targets and measurable objectives. It does not address the issue of internal displacement, despite the fact that some fifty million people now fall into this category, twice as many as the number of refugees under the UNHCR's mandate.

While it has much to say about the material support that refugees and host communities should receive, the Global Compact is a lot more reticent

on key protection issues such as the right to seek asylum and the principle of non-refoulement, which prevents refugees from being returned to countries where they and their liberty would be at risk.

More seriously, there is a substantial and growing gap between the principles that states endorsed by signing up to the Global Compact and the way that they act in practice. Despite the lofty sentiments expressed in New York and Geneva, governments throughout the world are building new fences and barriers on their borders, with the explicit aim of obstructing the arrival of asylum seekers. They are also pushing refugee boats away from their shores, holding refugees in detention and using intimidatory tactics to promote the premature and unsafe repatriation of exiled populations.

In the Global North, the Global Compact has not stopped the world's most prosperous states from pursuing a systematic strategy of externalization, whereby the governments of poorer countries are provided with financial and other incentives to block the onward movement of refugees (Crisp 2019). And while many countries in the Global South have volunteered to act as 'pilot countries' for the implementation of the CRRF, there is a strong suspicion that some have done so primarily as a means of leveraging additional humanitarian and development aid from the international community. Will their commitment to the initiative be maintained if such expectations are not met? Tanzania, for example, withdrew from the CRRF once it became clear that the country's involvement in it would require it to accept loans, rather than grants, for refugee-related projects.

Similar observations could be made with respect to the Global Compact on Migration, which was less widely endorsed than its refugee counterpart. It contains, for example, very specific principles with respect to the reception facilities that should be provided when refugees and migrants first arrive in a country. And it commits states to cooperate in the establishment of search-and-rescue operations that can minimize the loss of refugee and migrant lives at sea. But these components of the Compact have been systematically ignored by the EU in its response to new arrivals in the Mediterranean region.

Although it could not have been foreseen at the time when the Global Compact, CRRF and GRF were conceived, the COVID-19 pandemic has posed a very significant threat to these initiatives. The coronavirus provided a perfect alibi for states that wish to close their borders to refugees or repatriate those they have already admitted. It has reduced the level of overseas aid available and diverted it to new priorities. In the words of the High Commissioner for Refugees, 'with the world mobilizing to combat the spread of COVID-19, many countries are rightly adopting exceptional measures, limiting air travel and cross-border movements. I am increasingly worried by measures adopted by some countries that could block altogether the right to seek asylum' (Grandi 2020).

Three years after the establishment of the Global Compact on Refugees, the outcomes of this initiative appear to be somewhat modest in nature, and certainly not as 'game-changing' as the UNHCR suggested that they would be in 2018. In the words of the first comprehensive evaluation of the Compact's implementation, a 'lack of political will and leadership is challenging the achievement of more equitable and predictable responses to forced displacement . . . Efforts to bring more diverse donors and governments to the table have yet to produce tangible results. It remains unclear if refugees, their host communities and host countries can count on increased or more predictable support' (Norwegian Refugee Council 2021).

Urban Settlement and Support Strategies

As well as pushing the refugee issue to the top of the global policy agenda and promoting the introduction of a developmental approach to displacement, the Syrian emergency has acted as an important catalyst to the settlement and support strategies employed to meet the needs of refugees.

Large-scale refugee assistance programmes in the Global South began in the 1960s, when large numbers of people in Africa and Asia were displaced by wars of national liberation and postcolonial political violence. At that time and for the next four decades, those programmes conformed to a common model.

When refugees arrived in a country of asylum, they were accommodated in camps and discouraged or even forbidden from leaving them. The UNHCR raised funding from donor states to pay for the establishment of those camps and, with its humanitarian partners, to provide the refugees with dedicated services in areas such as shelter, food supply, education and healthcare. As already stated, such 'care-and-maintenance' programmes served the purpose of providing refugees with minimal levels of support, but did not allow them to establish independent and sustainable livelihoods.

Relieved of much of the financial burden of supporting the refugees on their territory, host states generally agreed to allow them to remain until such time as it was possible for them to repatriate on a voluntary basis. As a quid pro quo for such tolerance, the UNHCR refrained from advocating for refugees to exercise basic rights such as freedom of movement or the ability to access land or join the labour market. Nor did it press those states to give refugees the option of naturalization, thereby allowing them to benefit from the solution of local integration.

This approach to refugee settlement and support became increasingly unsustainable in the early years of the twenty-first century. First, the persistence of armed conflict and human rights violations in countries of origin made it increasingly difficult for refugees to return to their own countries.

In the 1990s, dubbed by the UNHCR 'the decade of repatriation', around a million refugees were able to go back to their homes each year. By the 2010s, that figure had dropped by some 80 per cent.

Second, refugees who found themselves in what became known as 'protracted refugee situations' experienced increasingly difficult conditions of life. Once the emergency phase of a refugee operation was over, donor interest waned and moved to the next new crisis. As a result, the quality of the services provided to refugees actually deteriorated over time, rather than improving.

Third, in such circumstances, refugees had little incentive to take up residence and remain in camps. Increasingly, and despite the official restrictions placed on their mobility, they began to move to urban areas, where income-generating opportunities could be found in the informal sector of the economy, and where the lifestyle, although usually hard, was more normal and natural than that of a camp.

Kenya, for example, pursued an official policy of 'strict encampment', but by the mid-2000s, some seventy-five thousand refugees had made their way to Nairobi. For some, moreover, that was just the beginning of a much longer journey, involving irregular migration to South Africa, where the job prospects and wages were better, or moving to the Global North by means of the UNHCR's refugee resettlement programme.

At the same time, countries in the Middle East, wanting to avoid the many problems that had arisen in relation to Palestinian refugee camps in the region, now adopted alternative approaches to other groups of refugees. Thus Lebanon and Syria, which admitted large numbers of Iraqi refugees in the mid-2000s, allowed the new arrivals to take up residence in the place of their choice rather than obliging them to live in camps, as did Egypt, a country with a growing population of refugees, both from Iraq and from the Horn of Africa.

In the early 2000s, these developments encouraged the UNHCR to re-examine its long-standing settlement policy, which had been essentially designed to keep refugees in camps and dissuade them from moving to capital cities and other urban areas. This proved to be a highly contentious issue within the organization, with some staff members arguing that no change of approach was needed, as it was logistically easier to support refugees if they were concentrated in specific locations, and suggesting that refugees who were allowed to gather in urban areas might well constitute a security threat (Crisp 2017).

While the UNHCR remained deadlocked on this issue for several years, it was resolved in the second half of the 2000s, when a new High Commissioner, Antonio Guterres, insisted that the UNHCR could not pursue a strategy that denied refugees one of their basic rights, namely freedom of

movement. Urbanization, he also pointed out, was a 'global mega-trend', and the organization could not expect refugees to be excluded from it.

Guterres consequently convened a multistakeholder meeting to examine the issue of urban refugees, ensuring that a new UNHCR policy statement was released at the time of the gathering. The new policy, launched at the end of 2009, stood in stark contrast to the one it replaced, asserting (rather bravely for a UN document) that refugees had the right to live outside of camps, even if that was not consistent with the position of the host government (UNHCR 2009).

The relevance and timeliness of the new policy was demonstrated very clearly less than three years later, when refugees began to leave Syria in substantial numbers. Significantly, none of the countries to which they fled (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey) insisted on confining refugees to camps, while the government in Beirut pursued a systematic 'no camp' policy that required the new arrivals to take up residence in urban areas or in small and self-established 'informal settlements' in peri-urban and rural settings. At least 80 per cent of the Syrian refugee population in the Middle East now live outside of camps.

This experience with Syrian refugees encouraged the UNHCR to go even further in its settlement thinking, introducing, in 2014, a 'policy on alternatives to camps', which stated that the organization would 'avoid the establishment of refugee camps, wherever possible, while pursuing alternatives to camps that ensure refugees are protected and assisted effectively and enabled to achieve solutions'. It also committed the UNHCR 'to work decisively toward the removal of obstacles to the exercise of rights and achieving self-reliance, with a view to making what UNHCR had historically called "care-and-maintenance" programmes increasingly rare exceptions' (UNHCR 2014: 6).

As that quotation suggests, the UNHCR's new approach to refugee settlement is intimately connected to a change in the way that the organization seeks to support refugees in material terms. While recognizing that in the early days of a refugee influx it might sometimes be necessary to provide refugees with emergency shelter and other relief items, the organization now functions on the principle that it is more effective, efficient and dignified for displaced people to be assisted with cash or vouchers, and even better if they can support themselves by means of wage labour and other income-generating activities. Needless to say, with humanitarian budgets under enormous and growing pressure, donor states have been fully supportive of this new orientation.

The movement from relief items to cash and from aid to livelihoods predates the Syrian emergency. Cash transfer programmes for refugees began to make an appearance in the 1990s, most often in the context of voluntary

repatriation programmes when refugees needed access to funds to pay for their transport and themselves at home.

In the 2000s, such programmes gained a broader acceptance in the humanitarian community, in part because of a successful pilot programme for Iraqi refugees in Jordan, facilitated by the fact that the new arrivals were perceived to be financially literate and that the country could offer a relatively sophisticated banking system that allowed eligible refugees to withdraw cash assistance securely with the use of ATM cards and iris-recognition technology. Since that time, cash transfers have become an increasingly common feature of humanitarian assistance programmes, with the Syrian refugee emergency response playing a particularly important role in that respect.

Unfortunately, the multiplicity of countries and aid agencies involved in that response make it impossible to calculate the total amount of cash that has been distributed to Syrian refugees since the beginning of the emergency in 2012. To give just one example, the UNHCR's current 'multi-purpose cash assistance programme' (MCAP) helps around thirty-three thousand of the most vulnerable Syrian refugee families in Lebanon to meet their basic needs. Recipients have access to cash by means of an ATM card and PIN number that can be used at almost any bank across the country.

Each month, the families receive a text message from the UNHCR, informing them that their card has been loaded with an amount equivalent to USD 175. In 2018, the MCAP programme injected around USD 65 million into the Lebanese economy, a significant amount in a country whose economy has been seriously disrupted by the conflict within the borders of its eastern neighbour.

On the basis of its experience in Lebanon and other countries hosting Syrian refugees, the UNHCR has introduced cash transfer programmes for refugees in some sixty countries around the world, and now provides more assistance in this way than it does through the provision of relief items.

With respect to refugee livelihoods, many host states in the Global South have been reluctant to give refugees the right to work, believing that they would compete with citizens in the labour market, undercut their pay and drive up national unemployment rates. At the same time, such states have acted on the assumption that refugees who are allowed to work, earn an income and enjoy a reasonable standard of living would be more likely to remain on an indefinite basis and less willing to return to their own country, even if it was safe for them to do so.

In recent years, however, the neglected issue of refugee work rights and employment has found a much more prominent place on the international humanitarian agenda, a trend reflected in the growing number of organizations, studies and advocacy activities dedicated to this issue. As one commentary on this issue explains, 'the more recent efforts towards enabling refugees to contribute to the economy of host countries and to achieve

greater self-reliance have been triggered by the response towards the Syrian crisis. . . . Receiving significant support from the international community, countries like Jordan have shifted their policy towards refugees, opening up access to employment by providing a quota of work permits' (Zetter and Ruaudel 2018: 6).

The settlement and support strategies that have been reinforced by the international community's experience with Syrian refugees are clearly progressive in nature, providing them with greater dignity, freedom of choice and an ability to develop their human potential in ways that were simply not possible in the days of camp-based care-and-maintenance programmes. The question is whether they can be adopted on a global scale and to what extent they will achieve their intended objectives.

Some caution is required with respect to three specific issues. First, some refugee-hosting states continue to have a preference for camps, believing that refugees can be more easily monitored, assisted and repatriated if they are kept in a controlled environment. Thus, Bangladesh has insisted on the establishment of large camps (unfortunately surrounded by barbed wire) to accommodate the eight hundred thousand Rohingya refugees who arrived from Myanmar in 2017.

In similar vein, in April 2021, the government of Malawi issued a decree stating that all refugees who had left the country's single (and overcrowded) refugee camp in Dzaleka should return to it within fourteen days, as they represented a threat to national security and to local businesses. Such considerations will undoubtedly serve to constrain the implementation of the UNHCR's policy on alternatives to camps.

Second, the attempt to provide refugees with formal job opportunities also seems likely to run into resistance from some host states and may not prove as successful as expected even in countries that are amenable to this approach. In Jordan, for example, an agreement has been established whereby Syrian refugees are provided with job opportunities in a number of special economic zones (SEZs), in exchange for which the companies concerned are granted preferential access to EU markets and concessional loans from the World Bank.

But as the author of this article has written elsewhere, this arrangement, known as the Jordan Compact, 'has attracted a great deal of international attention and a high degree of enthusiasm, with its proponents suggesting that the SEZs could provide hundreds of thousands of jobs for Jordanians and Syrian refugees. In practice, however, its achievements have been modest' (Crisp 2020).

While the Jordanian government, the EU and the World Bank have all delivered the commitments they made under the terms of the Compact, by March 2019, the thirteen companies approved to participate in the programme were employing just one thousand people, only 28 per cent of them

Syrians. Rather than rushing for jobs in the SEZs, the refugees, most of them from rural areas, have lacked the skills, experience and motivation to work in factories, especially as they can earn at least as much money (if not more) in a shorter period of time by means of casual work in the construction and hospitality sectors.

While a similar initiative has been mooted for Ethiopia, its chances of success are also limited, not only by the violence that has flared up in the country, but also because Ethiopia has very low labour standards, offering pay and conditions that provide a weak incentive for refugees and locals alike to pursue the option of wage labour.

Finally, while cash-based assistance has a multitude of advantages over large-scale relief programmes, it might not be a globally viable approach. Does every refugee-hosting country, for example, have the infrastructure to distribute currency in a secure and reliable manner? Will local markets always respond effectively to the purchasing requirements of refugees, supplying them with goods at the volume required and at the right price and quality?

In addition, one might ask whether aid agencies can be persuaded to dispense with all the airplanes, fork-lift trucks, lorries and food distribution points that are emblematic of emergency operations and are employed so extensively to market and brand their relief programmes to donors and the public. That might not prove easy. As a senior humanitarian worker was heard to remark during an emergency in Afghanistan, 'let's fly in a plane load of food. It will be complicated and incredibly expensive. But it will look great on TV.'

Developmental Approaches

> There is a need to ensure coordination between the assistance provided by UNHCR and the development programmes which other United Nations organs are able to provide. UNHCR cannot take on a task which is not within its purview and involve itself in development matters that involve not only refugees, but also the indigenous population of the countries where our programmes exist. It is imperative that development agencies grant top priority to requests from countries and regions in which there are refugees. (Aga Khan 1967)

Those were the words of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in 1967, pointing out the limitations of a strictly humanitarian approach to the refugee issue and calling for more attention to be given to the developmental dimensions of human displacement. For the next fifty years, the UNHCR made repeated efforts to put these principles into practice.

In the 1960s and 1970s, for example, the organization formulated the notion of 'integrated zonal development', a concept used to describe area-based programmes intended to support both the emergency and longer-term needs of the residents (both refugees and local people) of areas affected by mass influxes. In the 1980s, similar principles were adopted in a joint venture between the UNHCR and UNDP known as 'refugee aid and development' (Crisp 2001).

In the late 1990s the UNHCR prioritized the issue of humanitarian–development linkages again, cooperating this time with the World Bank in an initiative known as the Brookings Process. And with a new High Commissioner in place, in the early 2000s, the organization launched the concept of Development Assistance to Refugees, 'a holistic approach to linking development to relief assistance and addressing both the needs of refugees and the host population' (UNHCR 2002).

While these successive initiatives had some limited and sporadic achievements to their credit, their outcomes generally failed to meet the UNHCR's hopes and expectations. The kind of partnerships the High Commissioner in 1967 dreamt of failed to materialize, and refugees continued to be supported by humanitarian assistance programmes. Such programmes barely enabled exiled populations to survive in their country of asylum, let alone to thrive and to contribute to that state's development.

There were several reasons why the developmental approach to refugee programming failed to take off during this five-decade-long period of experimentation. First, humanitarian and development actors tended to function in very different ways. Refugee agencies such as the UNHCR generally worked in emergency mode and without a great deal of planning. Their primary concern was protection, an issue that often resulted in a problematic relationship with host governments, while their preferred operational partners were large international NGOs.

By way of contrast, development organizations such as UNDP worked closely with the government and ministries of the state in which they worked, adopting long-term and area-based approaches in which programme and project implementation was relatively slow. Such agencies were not generally experienced in (or comfortable with) human rights issues and were not accustomed to working with NGOs.

Second, there was often a degree of suspicion between the two groups of agencies. Humanitarian actors felt that their development counterparts lacked urgency and were too eager to maintain a harmonious relationship with governments. For their part, development organizations considered the UNHCR to be too possessive of refugees and of refugee issues generally.

Rather than involving them from the very beginning of refugee operations, they felt that the UNHCR only turned to development actors when

they became trapped in protracted refugee situations and were looking for an exit strategy. In the World Bank particularly, the UNHCR's interest in cooperation was often thought to be based on the financial resources that the former organization could bring to the partnership. All of these issues were compounded by the fact that the staff of humanitarian and development organizations tended to have different skill sets, contrasting organizational cultures and little opportunity to switch between one sector and the other.

Third, and most fundamentally, the implementation of the 'relief-to-development' approach was obstructed by a conflict of interest between host and donor states. Host countries were eager to mobilize additional support from the donor community, an objective that could be facilitated by engaging development actors in programmes targeted at areas accommodating significant numbers of refugees. But they did not want refugees to remain on their territory for longer than necessary, and certainly did not want them to become citizens of their state.

By way of contrast, donors regarded the developmental approach as an investment in long-term solutions, and as a means to avert the need for them to support expensive and unproductive care-and-maintenance programmes that went on for years or even decades on end. If refugees were unable to return to their country of origin because of continued armed conflict or human rights violations there, then they should have the opportunity to settle in their country of asylum, integrating there and contributing to its economy.

Because of its speed and scale, its impact on geopolitically important but fragile host states such as Jordan and Lebanon and its heavy demands on humanitarian funding, the Syrian refugee emergency put the issue of developmental approaches to refugee support back on the international agenda in a very emphatic manner. In the words of an evaluation prepared by the author of this article in 2013, 'there is a growing recognition that traditional humanitarian responses will not be sufficient to address this crisis. This will require the immediate engagement of development actors' (Crisp et al. 2013).

Echoing that recommendation, in 2017 the World Bank acknowledged that 'the Syrian refugee crisis has galvanized attention to one of the world's foremost challenges: forced displacement', and underscored 'the importance of humanitarian and development communities working together in complementary ways to support countries throughout the crisis' (World Bank 2017). More generally, as pointed out in a 2021 report produced by the Migration Policy Institute, 'initially sparked by the Syrian crisis, partnerships between host and donor countries, international institutions, civil society, and the private sector have brought about innovative strategies to meet the needs of both refugees and host communities' (Migration Policy Institute 2018).

After decades of discussion and experimentation, therefore, the Syrian emergency appears to have finally convinced the international community of the need to pursue a developmental approach to refugee situations. The World Bank has played a particularly important role in this effort, creating dedicated funding channels for countries with large numbers of refugees, and establishing a joint data centre with the UNHCR in order to gain a better understanding of the socio-economic dimensions of displacement.

While significant progress has been made, some questions remain to be answered. First, will the additional support now available to host countries be sufficient to mitigate the substantial pressures that large refugee populations exert on their economy, society and infrastructure?

Lebanon, for example, does not seem to think so and has made no secret of its determination to have its Syrian refugee population repatriated as quickly as possible, despite the fact that conditions in that country are by no means amenable to safe and voluntary return. Similarly, Bangladesh has been reluctant to accept development funding in relation to the one million refugees from Myanmar living on its territory, believing that to do so would be to acknowledge that the refugees are there to stay indefinitely.

Second, will the new approach prove to be a viable one in countries such as the Central African Republic or Chad, where refugees are to be found in areas that are seriously lacking in developmental potential, or a state such as Ethiopia, where armed conflict is leading to large-scale destruction? Until the end of 2020, Ethiopia had been seen as a prime candidate for the developmental approach, with an ambitious plan to establish special economic zones where refugees and local people would be able to find work and learn new skills. But that initiative has been seriously set back by the civil war in which Ethiopia has now been engulfed.

Third, despite all the talk of cooperation, humanitarian and development actors may well find it difficult to work smoothly with each other, given that they continue to function with different priorities, time frames and partners. The UNHCR, for example, has taken steps to revise its planning and programming process so as to facilitate the longer-term approach required if it is to pursue developmental objectives. But at heart, the organization remains one that is oriented towards emergencies, the protection of a specific group of people and the provision of humanitarian assistance.

In terms of policy, therefore, the Syrian emergency has had an important impact on the international community's approach to the refugee issue, bringing the World Bank into the displacement discourse and forging a broad consensus around the need to complement immediate humanitarian relief with programmes that provide sustainable support to refugee-populated areas. In terms of operational practice, however, considerable progress remains to be made. In the words of the 2021 Global Refugee Compact evaluation cited earlier, 'based on currently available data, it is still impossible

to know if refugees, their host communities and host countries can rely on more medium to long-term development financing rather than just short-term humanitarian assistance' (Norwegian Refugee Council 2021).

Conclusion

Almost a decade since the eruption of the Syrian refugee emergency, the prospects for its resolution remain bleak. Very few of the exiled Syrians in host states such as Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey have the opportunity of being resettled to third countries such as Australia, Canada, the USA or member states of the EU. And the governments of those host states are unwilling to contemplate the indefinite presence and eventual integration of those refugees. Some of the Syrians have been able to find their own solutions by moving in an irregular manner to Europe, but increasingly restrictive border controls have made such movements extremely difficult, a trend exacerbated in 2021 by the Taliban takeover in Kabul and the EU's fear that the bloc will be confronted with a massive new influx of Afghan refugees.

As a result of this impasse, the international community has been confronted with another major policy issue, namely the circumstances under which the return of a refugee population to their country of origin can be actively facilitated or promoted. In the Syrian context, repatriation is a solution that appeals to a number of different stakeholders.

It would satisfy host states that are concerned about the impact that the refugees are having on their economy, infrastructure and security. It would be welcomed by donor states who have grown weary of funding such a large and long-standing refugee situation. It would be of enormous interest to the Syrian government and its allies, Russia and Iran, as the return of the refugees would legitimize the Assad regime. And for the UNHCR, it would confirm the organization's ability to provide solutions for refugees, thereby strengthening its international reputation and ability to compete in the international humanitarian marketplace.

At the time of writing, however, large-scale refugee returns to Syria do not appear to be imminent. While conditions in countries of asylum have become progressively more difficult, especially in Lebanon, a country that is in crisis itself, very few Syrian refugees have been willing to take the risk of returning to a country where human rights violations are still rampant, where the livelihood opportunities are so scarce and where so much property has been either destroyed or seized by the state.

After some initial interest in supporting repatriation, donor states, led by the USA under President Biden, have become more cautious in doing anything that would support the political objectives of the administration in Damascus and its supporters in Moscow and Tehran (Human Rights Watch

2021). And while the UNHCR has sought to cultivate good relations with Assad and to increase the scale of its activities in Syria, the organization has stuck to its traditional position that if refugee returns are to take place, they must be safe, voluntary and dignified in nature.

Such principles are, however, under substantial strain, not only in the Syrian context, but also with respect to Rohingya refugees from Myanmar in Bangladesh, Somali refugees in Kenya and Afghan refugees in Pakistan, all of whom are under pressure to repatriate. Increasingly, when refugees return to their country of origin, they do so because life no longer seems to be viable in their countries of asylum, rather than as a result of direct physical coercion.

Looking to the future, it seems most likely that most Syrian refugees will remain within the Middle East region, the vast majority of them living in urban areas and alongside host populations, eking out an existence by means of the assistance they receive from humanitarian organizations, coupled with whatever livelihood opportunities they are able to find. As their time in exile becomes more prolonged, and with a growing number of their children having been born and brought up in countries of asylum, their presence may begin to assume an air of permanence, especially if the Assad regime maintains its grip on power. But true integration in its legal, economic and social sense is likely to prove elusive.

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11

Strategic Caution and Tactical Innovation

UNHCR Responses to Changing Patterns of Displacement

Astri Suhrke

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Introduction

The limitation of the international refugee regime in relation to the needs of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons, as well as the global inequities in the distribution of long-term refugee populations and the costs this imposes on low- and middle-income countries in the Global South, are widely recognized. Viewed from a historical perspective, however, it is also readily evident that the international refugee regime has demonstrated considerable capacity for adaptation and innovation. To better understand this often-neglected aspect, this chapter focuses on the dynamics of adaptation and innovation via a key institutional actor in the regime – the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Special attention is given to protracted refugee situations of the kind that have developed in the Middle East as a result of the Syrian conflict.

The limitations of the international refugee regime must be noted at the outset. The regime has three general features that impose severe constraints on the UNHCR, the UN refugee agency mandated to protect and assist refugees worldwide (Suhrke and Garnier 2018). First, the regime is state-centric. That is, key decisions regarding protection and assistance of refu-

gees are made by national governments as well as authorities on the subnational level. The UNHCR can plead and prod, but the final decision lies with the states (Betts 2009). This makes for a structurally fragmented regime. Second, the regime is normatively diverse. National governments develop policies in relation to their understandings of their national interests. Humanitarian concerns informed by the UNHCR assessments of vulnerability and need for protection and assistance are factored in to varying degrees, but these are circumscribed by the political dimensions of most refugee movements insofar as they arise from man-made and often deeply political conflicts over the nature of state and society, or relations among states. Political factors thus introduce systemic instability, but also some structural bias in the collective international response. In some periods, for instance, recipient state responses to mass outflows were heavily influenced by foreign policy interests. The classic example here is from the Cold War period, when Western states established broad resettlement programmes for persons fleeing communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and later in South East Asia and Cuba, designed to demonstrate the superiority of the Western political system over communist ones (Zolberg et al. 1989). Refugee populations that offer no similar political advantages for rich and powerful states typically have had to rely on other and less adequate forms of assistance.

Third, the UNHCR has very limited financial autonomy. The agency has almost no core funding, and must raise money for its global operations mostly through voluntary contributions. Funding comes primarily from a small group of states in the form of annual contributions, as well as in response to ad hoc appeals issued by the agency during the year to support refugee emergencies. Most of the funding is earmarked for particular refugee populations or purposes, and it is never enough.

To illustrate, let us look at data for 2013 – in the early phase of the emerging refugee crisis. In this year, the agency reported USD 3.16 billion in revenue, of which almost all (USD 3.11 billion) was from voluntary contributions (UNHCR 2014a: 13). There was a large shortfall – the revenue covered about 61 per cent of the agency's budget for that year. Slightly over half (52 per cent) of the voluntary contributions came from three donors: The United States, Japan and the European Union. The US contribution was singularly important, totalling USD 1 billion, or one-third of the total, far ahead of the next two – from Japan (USD 252 million) and the European Union (USD 213 million). The remaining donors in the top-ten category were, with the exception of Kuwait, all European countries. The contribution of each hovered around the USD 100 million mark. Altogether, only ten governments accounted for 82 per cent of virtually all the agency's revenue. Five years later, at the height of the Middle East refugee crisis, the imbalance was even more marked. Ten countries provided 93 per cent of the agency's revenues (Türk 2018: 577).

The agency's position on urban refugees adopted in 1997 illustrates well the consequences of such limitations. By the mid-1990s, the increasing flow of 'irregular movers' from the then 'Third World' into urban areas of Western Europe and parts of the Soviet Union had become a 'matter of concern' to the agency. While the number of those recognized as entitled to UNHCR support represented only 2 per cent of the agency's global caseload, they absorbed a disproportionate amount of its budget, estimated at 10–15 per cent. The agency felt the pressure from European donors already weary of supporting major refugee inflows caused by the Balkan wars. 'Donors have become increasingly selective in terms of the programmes they support', the UNHCR noted. 'They . . . show little enthusiasm for long-term care and maintenance of urban cases, including upper secondary and tertiary education' (UNHCR 1997: 5). Budgetary realities led the agency in 1997 to adopt a new policy towards urban refugees, starting with a restrictive definition. An 'urban refugee' was now defined as a person with an urban background. Persons not fitting this criterion would be discouraged from seeking assistance in urban areas, and programmes would be tailored accordingly (UNHCR 1997).

The agency expected the new policy to mean 'a more restrictive approach to the provision of care and maintenance assistance' for urban refugees, and signalled that it would be accompanied by 'a more active approach to durable solutions, including containment of future irregular movements' (UNHCR 1997: i). It was a blunt presentation of a policy whose restrictions were anomalous in the UNHCR's history. It also came to be viewed within the organization as unjustifiably restrictive, a point that the agency obliquely recognized when introducing a more liberal policy towards urban refugees in 2009 (UNHCR 2009).

Operating in a charged political environment, but hamstrung by very limited financial autonomy, the UNHCR has developed a distinct organizational culture that blends strategic caution with tactical innovation. As one analyst puts it, the tendency is to 'duck and cover' when required, and to update agency practices for a changing world when the storm has passed (Betts 2018: 625).

Strategic Caution

Overall strategic caution has marked the organization's attitude to legal issues of protection. Attempts to introduce structural reforms of the international regime typically generate organizational apprehension that doors might open for a discussion of the 1951 Convention (as amended by the 1967 Protocol) and the obligations incurred by state signatories. Fearing that legal amendments would narrow state obligations towards asylum seekers

and refugees, the UNHCR's first line of defence has been to ensure that the substantive elements of the Convention are kept off the table.

In line with this strategy, the organization responded cautiously to an international initiative in the mid-1990s led by legal scholars to introduce structural reforms that would promote global sharing of the financial costs and legal responsibilities for refugees (Hathaway 1997). A plan for responsibility-sharing later introduced by the UNHCR was more modest. The aim was to negotiate special agreements with individual recipient states to complement the 1951 Convention (UNHCR 2003). The initiative was called Convention Plus to emphasize that the mechanisms would be additional to and legally distinct from the Convention. The 1951 Convention was not to be touched.

A similar caution was evident more than a decade later when the refugee crisis in the Middle East and South West Asia made European governments in 2015 call for reform of the international refugee regime. Three years of subsequent discussion culminated in the 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (discussed more fully below), and a similar compact on international migration. Throughout the process – which involved national consultations and deliberations with a wide range of stakeholders on a global scale – the UNHCR generally leaned towards a conservative stance. The agency sought to exclude from the discussion matters pertaining to the Convention as a matter of policy. The answer to the challenges posed by the contemporary refugee situation 'does not lie in draconian measures or revisiting the international refugee protection regime, which has proven to be good law', a high-ranking UNHCR official concluded (Türk 2018: 576).

In the Compact discussions, the UNHCR never challenged head-on the dominant position in the North that structural reforms should focus on assisting countries receiving refugees in the South. Low- and middle-income countries had long hosted the majority of the world's refugees and they continued to receive more. Reforms that would redistribute the refugee population more evenly on a global basis, and reflect the stronger economic capacity of the North, had long been advocated in the South. These demands had gone nowhere, and the same discursive pattern emerged during the Compact discussions. Given the political climate in Europe and the US at the time, the UNHCR assumed (probably correctly) that redistributive proposals would find little support, might provoke a backlash among the agency's principal funders (all in the North) and conceivably could reopen a discussion of Convention issues. Even the modest wording on resettlement when the final text reached the UN in 2018 provoked opposition from the United States (Türk 2018: 580). Thus, the agency's fall-back position was one of strategic caution.

In a longer historical perspective, it is clear that strategic caution has not prevented tactical innovation. Innovation has at times appeared as part of the agency's response to an immediate crisis, but it has also been by design

and developed through consultations with states and aid organizations in a carefully choreographed process.

Tactical Innovation

UNHCR innovations are associated with assertive high commissioners who have been willing to take political risks, stand down the cautious, conservative thinking embedded in the organization and discern opportunities in an unfolding crisis.

An early example, lauded by Gil Loescher (2017: 81) as 'perhaps the clearest example of UNHCR's exercise of power in its early history', is the decision in 1957 by High Commissioner Auguste Lindt to provide emergency assistance to some eighty-five thousand Algerians seeking refuge in Tunisia and Morocco during the war of national liberation against France.[1] The Tunisian request provoked a strong protest from France. As the French government saw it, Algeria was a part of France, and this was an internal French matter. Coming from a permanent member of the Security Council, the French objections carried weight in the UN system. Lindt noted, however, that the UNHCR had just assisted a massive flow of Hungarians who had escaped Soviet repression of the 1956 uprising. Failure to assist other refugees would make the organization appear partial and lose global support, he argued; he was not a commissioner for refugees only from communism in Europe.

Lindt's persistent efforts won him sufficient support in the UN system to assist the Algerians. The mission set a powerful precedent for widening the agency's geographic scope. In two successive resolutions (1959, 1961), the General Assembly affirmed the worldwide responsibility of the UNHCR and authorized the agency to take action as needed without requiring further empowering resolutions. This was the basis for the agency's steadily expanding role to protect and assist refugees from the often violent decolonization struggles in Africa and later in Asia (Loescher 2001).

Another refugee crisis, this time in Europe in the early 1990s, led to the innovative use of a legal mechanism for protection. The High Commissioner, Sadako Ogata, urged European states to admit refugees from the war in the former Yugoslavia by granting them temporary protection status. While not entirely new – the concept had been used for displaced persons in Africa – it was the first time the UNHCR promoted temporary protection as a formal solution. It was a balancing act between humanitarian needs and the reluctance of European states to admit large numbers of refugees, and the mechanism worked reasonably well to mitigate the immediate crisis. Yet the concept introduced uncertainties about the meaning of protection that made it problematic from a legal perspective (Luca 1994). As such, it

cut a bit too close to the core of the UNHCR's legal culture, and the agency did not adopt it as a standard instrument of refugee management. Instead, the High Commissioner recognized temporary protection as a 'pragmatic tool' at certain times when states were faced with 'humanitarian crises and complex or mixed population movement, particularly in situations where existing responses are not suited or adequate' (UNHCR 2014b: 1).

Innovation by Design

The line between innovation as an ad hoc response to crisis and innovation by design may be thin, but the agency's efforts to bring attention to the underlying causes of mass outflows fit the concept of a policy design. The so-called 'root cause' debate started in 1980, sparked by a political crisis in (West) Germany when the number of asylum seekers jumped from sixteen thousand in 1977 to over one hundred thousand in 1980. Most came via Berlin, which offered an open door to West Germany to persons from then 'Third World countries' who had entry permits to East Germany and could freely proceed to West Germany by crossing from East to West Berlin (Zolberg et al. 1989: 280). An alarmed (West) German government mobilized supporters in the United Nations to obtain a General Assembly resolution in December 1980 that called for international cooperation to 'avert new flows of refugees' (UN General Assembly 1980).

Averting amounted to preventing, which of course collided head on with the UNHCR's mandate to protect and assist refugees. A creative move by a former High Commissioner, Sadruddin Aga Khan, contained a plan to avoid the collision. He urged the wider UN and its members to address underlying causes of refugee flows, including aid programmes to troubled regions, early warning systems to identify and monitor potential crises and dispatch of special UN representatives to mediate in conflict spots (Aga Khan 1981). The 1981 plan and two major follow-up reports (ICIH 1986; Lee 1987) placed the High Commissioner's Office at the centre of the UN debate on how to address mass outflows with more than just offering palliative care.

The shift to a 'root cause' focus elevated refugee policy to the 'high politics' of security within as well as among states, brazenly leapfrogging the principle of sovereignty in an apparent 'transformative shift' in the language of humanitarianism in the UN system (Barnett 2010: 80). Recognizing the sensitivity of the UNHCR's position, the three High Commissioners who followed Sadruddin approached the matter with some caution. By contrast, Sadako Ogata, a former professor of political science who served as High Commissioner from 1990 to 2000, developed the 'root cause' argument as a matter of 'preventive protection' (UNHCR 1991). Her embrace of the approach created controversies among legal scholars and left a lasting imprint

on the discourse in the UN, the wider aid community and the academic literature. As High Commissioner, Ogata recognized that addressing 'root causes' without endangering the integrity of the UNHCR's mandate – and its support for a state-centric system – required caution. She therefore used the softer tools of discursive pressure and alert presence by monitoring and high-profiling causes of forced displacement in debates in the UN system, in the agency's Executive Committee of states and organizations and in bilateral talks with states.

Development-Oriented Refugee Policy

Another major innovation by design was the promotion of development assistance targeting refugees and displaced persons. Its most elaborate, early expression was the UNHCR's initiative in 2002–5, mentioned above, called Convention Plus.

Convention Plus

The UNHCR had already in the 1960s supported rural settlement schemes for refugees from wars of decolonization. Subsequent waves of post-independence violence produced massive displacement, mostly to areas near the conflict zones. In many cases, especially in Africa, protracted refugee situations developed with no clear prospect of either return or third country resettlement. As host governments highlighted the sharp inequities in the global distribution of forcibly displaced persons, the UNHCR and its NGO aid partners searched for new ideas to assist both refugees and the host communities. By the late 1980s, 'development-oriented assistance' was widely advocated in the humanitarian community as a means of addressing protracted refugee situations and the related, much-discussed gap between relief and development (Crisp 2001). Implementation was another matter.

In 2002, the High Commissioner, Ruud Lubbers, put forward an ambitious plan for greater responsibility-sharing to the agency's Executive Committee. The starting point was the present structural inequities in the international refugee regime. 'From 1997-2001, developing countries hosted some 66% of the global population of concern to UNHCR; the share of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) alone amounted to almost 35 per cent' (UNHCR 2003: 6). To address this imbalance, Lubbers's team proposed a threefold scheme: more resettlement from 'developing countries' to countries with greater capacity to receive refugees, better management of secondary movement of displaced persons, and targeting development assistance to host countries to aid refugees and refugee-impacted areas (Zieck 2009). The scheme was called Convention Plus.

The language of responsibility-sharing in a general sense was widely accepted. Central elements of the Convention Plus proposal had been vetted by the UN General Assembly in a previous UNHCR document (*Agenda for Protection*), but when it came to specifics, and above all, binding commitments, states were holding back. After three years of discussion by the UNHCR's Executive Committee and related stakeholders, and supportive position papers from a newly established Development Plus Unit in the UNHCR, the process ended in 2005 with only one non-binding memorandum called the Framework of Understanding (on resettlement), and not even that in the other two areas (UNHCR 2005). A close observer later concluded that the initiative had been 'doomed to fail' (Zieck 2009: 387).

The failure to reach even a joint statement on principles in the key area of targeted development assistance for refugees – pillar three of the plan – reflects long-standing issues that remain highly relevant today. The basic idea of pillar three was that countries hosting large refugee populations would receive aid earmarked for development programmes in the affected areas (UNHCR 2006b). While targeting primarily refugees, the programmes would generate economic activities that would benefit both the refugees and the host communities. The host state, donors, aid organizations and the UNHCR would develop the programmes together. The host state would integrate the programmes in its national development plans. Importantly, donors would finance the programmes as commitments additional to existing aid to the host country.

Throughout the process the UNHCR had made considerable effort to outline the concept in detail and explain its rationale. The first step was to recognize that the needs of refugees were rarely factored into national development plans, the agency argued. The refugees were not part of the hosting governments' political constituencies, and the governments expected international aid organizations to take care of their humanitarian needs. Dependent and idle populations on long-term relief carried huge humanitarian and economic costs, however. Integrating these populations into national development and giving them rights would realize their economic potential and turn them into an asset, whether they stayed or returned to their country of origin (UNHCR 2003).

While the logic seemed compelling, actual and potential host countries were not persuaded. They feared that money earmarked for refugees would not in fact be additional but would eat into existing aid flows, that national authorities would not have control over the funds, that the process would entail additional conditionality on aid, and – perhaps most importantly – that programmes would enable the refugees to remain indefinitely. In other words, targeted development assistance would be a back door to local integration – one of the three conventional 'durable solutions' to displacement. In the refugee discourse of poor or middle-income developing countries,

this was not sharing of responsibility for refugees, but rather only a tweaking of existing principal forms of sharing whereby the North paid and the South hosted. It did not seem to matter that the UNHCR had anticipated the objections by distinguishing between what they called DAR programmes (Development Assistance for Refugees) and DLI programmes (Development through Local Integration). Although the programmes appeared substantively similar, the UNHCR maintained that DAR did not preclude the refugees from return or resettlement in third countries, but rather prepared them for it.

The co-chairs' summary of the discussion on pillar three was offered 'as a means to inform future discussions' (UNHCR 2006b: 1). And there the process ended. It seemed a limp final chapter to Lubbers's ambitious project, accentuated by the High Commissioner's sudden resignation for unrelated reasons. All was not lost, however. The agency's work on pillar three had left an inventory of concepts, papers and guidelines that became lodged in the discursive infrastructure of refugee assistance. Here were model agreements among hosting governments, donors and aid organizations that outlined rights and obligations for the parties to development-oriented programmes for refugees and host communities. Operational guidelines for DAR programmes had been drafted, including the appropriate information management systems to assess the 'gender differentiated impact of possible activities, [and the] potential of refugee hosting areas', and to gain 'a better understanding of the coping mechanisms and livelihood strategies employed by women, men and children in both the refugee and local populations' (UNHCR 2003: 11, par. 52). Data that could link the skills and knowledge of refugees to local productive activities would be shared by the parties to the agreement. In mid-2006, the agency put it all together in a handbook for planning, implementing and assessing development assistance for refugees, complete with glossary, references and links to relevant websites (UNHCR 2006a). The concept was ready to be rolled out, although its actual roll-out had to wait for nearly a decade.

The New York Consensus

Not until the refugee crisis of 2015–16 did the international community turn its collective attention to the need for reforms in the international refugee regime. Starting in the UN General Assembly in 2015, this was the process noted above that culminated in September 2018 in a Global Compact on Refugees (with a companion Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework) and a similar compact on migration.

It was the result of another carefully choreographed, stepwise process designed to produce a global consensus on a politically sensitive and controversial subject. A resolution in the UN General Assembly in December

2015 (70/539) placed the subject of 'large movements of refugees and migrants' on the agenda of the high-level opening session of the UN General Assembly that would take place in September the following year. In the meantime, the Secretary-General prepared a 'comprehensive report' setting out background material, analysis and proposed recommendations (UN 2016). The report provided the basis for a lengthy and detailed resolution adopted at the meeting, called the New York Declaration (UN General Assembly 2016a). The text was then submitted to a two-year global consultative process coordinated by the UNHCR. The revised text, called the Global Compact on Refugees, was submitted to the General Assembly at its opening session in September 2018 and approved by all 193 members (UN 2018).

The Compact is descriptive as well as prescriptive. Principles and practices designed to promote greater sharing of burdens and responsibilities for refugees are elevated to the status of collectively accepted norms and 'best practices'. Key principles are formulated with verbs used in the imperative form common to UN resolutions ('we will'), as in 'resources *will* be made available to countries faced with large-scale refugee situations relatively to their capacity' (UN 2018: par. 32, italics added). The Compact is in this sense a statement of 'political will and . . . ambition', as the UNHCR makes clear in its introductory note (ibid.: iii). The text is not legally binding. The commitments of what states 'will' do are further modified by subordinate clauses referencing the varying capacities and different legal systems of states.

Given the wide differences in how state governments respond to uninvited population flows, it is hardly surprising that the Compact is a document of modest change (Aleinikoff 2018). The sections discussing the three traditional durable solutions – resettlement, repatriation and local integration – are comparatively brief. They do not signal significant changes in existing practices, nor do they place new obligations on states. A much larger part of the document deals with procedures for ways to support countries that receive large inflows or have long-term refugee populations. This section reads as an affirmation of the aspirations laid out in the UNHCR's position papers for pillar three of Convention Plus, turned into declaratory policy by the imperative 'will'.

Since most hosting areas are in low- and middle-income countries adjacent to areas of armed conflict, as the Compact acknowledges, responsibility-sharing means financial transfers from North to South. The relatively more prosperous states and international development actors will contribute resources to help refugees and hosting areas not only to meet immediate needs, but to go further. They will provide development assistance to prevent receiving areas from plunging into deeper poverty and conflict, and to utilize the potential of refugees to become self-reliant. The needs of refugees

will be integrated in national development plans. Additional, stable and flexible financing will be provided to promote resilience among refugees as well as the hosting communities.

A realist reading of the Compact would see it as designed to contain refugees in the areas where they first arrived and discourage so-called secondary movement, such as travelling, on foot or otherwise, onwards to Europe. The Compact recognizes this point obliquely. It assures states that the emphasis on building resilience among refugees and in the host communities is not local integration by stealth. Building resilience, it claims, does not diminish, but rather complements the possibilities for achieving other durable solutions in the future (UN 2018: par. 64).

New Mechanisms of Support

When the UNHCR's earlier Convention Plus initiative had stalled, its supporters hoped it would still have some influence as a norm-setting exercise for future discussion of reform and as an inventory of good practices (Betts and Durieux 2007). In some measure, this happened. Much of the Compact text is recognizable from earlier discussion on the use of development assistance to mitigate refugee situations. The UNHCR had played an important and innovative role by refining and placing this debate on the table in Geneva in 2002. Ten years later, when powerful Northern states took the debate to a new level in the UN system, key principles and ideas for mechanisms of assistance could be taken off the shelf.

Once the process was underway in the UN, the UNHCR played an important role in drafting key documents (the Secretary-General's 2016 report and the New York Declaration) and by coordinating the global consultations leading to the final text adopted in 2018. The Compact text itself was nestled in the annual UN resolution on UNHCR operations put before the UN General Assembly. The agency's standing in New York was probably further strengthened when Antonio Guterres took over as UN Secretary-General in January 2017; he came fresh from the UNHCR, where he had served as High Commissioner for ten years.

While steering clear of radical reforms, the UNHCR inserted provisions for organizational follow-up mechanisms in the Declaration and the Compact to encourage gradual change and ensure that the world of states would remember the New York consensus. One mechanism, called the Global Forum, was a meeting designed to keep the momentum and mobilize resources for the refugee policy framework annexed to the Compact. The first meeting held in 2019 gathered some three thousand participants from states, development actors, international organizations, NGOs and refugee activists. Pledges of funding were made and information about good practices shared. States promised inclusive national policies, 'for example,

to support "out of camp" policies, strengthened asylum systems, refugees' access to work and financial services, and the inclusion of refugees in national and local development plans and national systems for education and health' (UNHCR 2020). Another mechanism was networks of situation-specific support organized on a regional basis by the UNHCR at the request of states, called Support Platforms. By late 2019, regional platforms had been established for Central America and Mexico, the Horn of Africa and Afghan refugees. A 'Global Academic Interdisciplinary Network' was launched to build knowledge in relation to the Compact.

A more tangible outcome was the Joint Data Center of the World Bank and the UNHCR that opened in Copenhagen in 2019. With a mandate from the New York Declaration and initial pledges of USD 25.6 million, the Center had a broad statistical mission to collect and analyse primary micro-data on forcibly displaced populations and their host communities, build a statistical base on statelessness and strengthen national statistical capacities in sending and receiving countries.

While the effects of these follow-up operations depended heavily on the continued commitments of states, the increasing engagement of the World Bank signalled that a development-oriented refugee policy was safely embedded in the international refugee regime. The World Bank and the UNHCR had cooperated more closely in the years leading up to the Compact, marked by a joint publication in 2017. A landmark report, *Forcibly Displaced*, made a detailed, strong case for a development-oriented policy to address protracted situations of forcible displacement (World Bank 2017). The policy had several elements: development actors needed to engage, concessional finance for low- and middle-income countries hosting large refugee populations should be made available and the efficiency of humanitarian assistance must be increased through sustainable and cost-effective solutions. The aim was to improve the resilience of refugees as well as to support the host communities by stimulating economic activity. A burden would be turned into a win-win solution, the report concluded.

The report was part of a broader, emerging consensus at the time. The UN Secretary-General had in 2015 appointed a high-level panel to recommend ways to improve humanitarian funding. A panel of high government officials and representatives of the corporate world delivered its report in January 2016, in time for the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May that year. Its recommendations foreshadowed those in the World Bank–UNHCR report: (i) improve funding to low- and middle-income hosting countries, (ii) establish joint programming of humanitarian and development aid to promote resilience among refugees and the affected local population and (iii) integrate displaced persons in national development with adequate support from the international community (High-Level Panel 2016). The panel specifically called for change in eligibility criteria for ac-

cessing World Bank grants to allow middle-income countries such as Jordan and Lebanon that were hosting 'millions of Syrian refugees' to benefit. The panel also noted that funds in the Bank's   Crisis Response Window – a programme under its soft-loan mechanism – should be at least tripled.

Additional Funding

Even before the Compact was signed, the World Bank had stepped up with special funding for developing countries hosting large numbers of refugees. Grants totalling USD 2 billion were made available to low-income countries in the new 'refugee sub-window' of the IDA facility for 2017–20. Middle-income countries that did not qualify for IDA money could draw on a new concessional facility, the Global Concessional Funding Facility, whereby Bank funds were offered to unlock additional donor money. Established in 2016, the facility had soon provided USD 1 billion to support projects for refugees and marginalized communities in Jordan and Lebanon. By the end of 2018, the total concessional and special grant money made available to these two countries had reached USD 2.5 billion. When the UNHCR surveyed the total financial pledges for refugees and hosting countries made in support of the Compact in late 2018, it came to a grand total of USD 6.5 billion (Türk 2019: 580). That was several times the agency's regular annual budget.

The extra funding came with conditionality to improve the rights of refugees to work and move outside camps, and to access social services. Infrastructure projects were designed to benefit both refugees and local communities, for instance improved water, waste and electricity in communities with large refugee populations, road construction offering employment, and expanded social services (health and education). Of the first ten countries that signed up for projects under the IDA 'refugee-window', all but one was in Africa, with the geographic outlier being Bangladesh, with its huge influx of refugees from Myanmar. Independent analysts found that the additional finance generally had been used successfully to improve the policy environment, but that stricter conditionality to leverage rights in return for funding should come with the next replenishing of IDA (2021–23) (Post et al. 2019).

The UNHCR involvement in a programme launched in Jordan was more controversial, partly because it was larger, served as a potential model for other countries hosting long-term refugee populations and invited closer scrutiny that exposed the fundamental dilemmas embedded in such schemes. Established in London in 2016 with support from the UK and other European countries and later replicated elsewhere in the Middle East, the 'Jordan Compact' involved transfer of grants and concessional loans to Jordan, in return for which the Jordanian government gave Syrian refugees educational and employment rights. The core of the agreement was employment of refugees in special economic zones, whose products were given preferential market access in the European Union. This was expected to

encourage further investment, hence the claim that the scheme would turn a refugee crisis into a development opportunity.

The scheme was partly developed and given a measure of intellectual legitimacy by two well-known Oxford scholars (Betts and Collier 2017). Yet there were obvious drawbacks. The Jordan Compact was negotiated without input from the refugee community, and the zones were often far from where the refugees lived. The factory work matched the skills of only some refugees, and the wages were non-negotiable (Barbelet et al. 2018; Huang and Gough 2019). Viewed in a political economy perspective, the scheme appeared to be an exploitative extraction of surplus from a captive labour force that had few alternatives of employment or place of residence. Viewed in a realist perspective on the international refugee regime, it appeared to be a mechanism that made long-term presence in the hosting country more acceptable and thereby justified limited admission or resettlement to third countries. The end result was to solidify global inequities and reduce the refugees' choice of where to live and ability to control their lives (White 2019: 113–14).

As the development dimension of refugee policy moved to the forefront, the UNHCR was pulled into close cooperation with a set of powerful and resource-rich actors. The USD 2 billion in grants from the World Bank's new 'refugee window' was a huge addition in the eyes of the UNHCR; in the World Bank's total IDA funds it was small money (USD 82 billion for fiscal years 2021–23). It made for an uneven bargaining relationship, accentuated by the UNHCR's dependence on external development expertise. The development–refugee nexus was nevertheless an opportunity for the agency to leverage refugee rights (of mobility, work and access to social services) as a condition for additional funding to the hosting governments. Analysts cite the introduction of greater legal protection measures attached to projects in Ethiopia, Pakistan and Chad as early indications of success (Huang and Post 2020), although fuller assessments remain to be done.

The UNHCR adjusted institutionally by establishing relations with the development assistance sections of donor ministries in addition to the humanitarian sections with which they had traditionally worked. Cooperation with other development banks and the OECD and DAC also increased. An evaluation in 2020 of the agency's engagement in humanitarian–development cooperation found that, although the new approach had not been fully internalized in the organization, the development dimension had become an integral part of its work (Steets and Lehman 2020).

Conclusion

A fundamental weakness in the international refugee regime as codified after the Second World War was the absence of principles, let alone more specific instruments, for the sharing of responsibility for the world's ref-

ugees. The parties to the 1951 Convention (and the 1967 Protocol) only accept responsibility for asylum seekers appearing on their doorstep. Except for some refugee flows closely connected to the interests of the large powers, geographic proximity to conflict has been the primary distributive mechanism. Secondary movements and large-scale, organized resettlement to third countries have been limited and appear in retrospect as exceptional events.

For all parties to the regime, the obvious inequities of this distributive system have been a matter of much anguish, sharp political disputes and some efforts of reform. For the UNHCR, it has raised particularly difficult dilemmas. The agency's main funders are a handful of the world's richest states, which – apart from in exceptional circumstances – prefer most of the world's refugees to remain where they have long been concentrated, that is, in the poor or middle-income countries in the South. The discourse on responsibility-sharing has consequently focused on the sharing of monetary costs, rather than sharing by giving refugees greater options to resettle in third countries. Host communities in the South have been reluctant to sign on to schemes for redistributing costs, however, suspecting that this will open the door to long-term presence of displaced persons on their territory.

To navigate this complicated political landscape, the UNHCR has combined strategic caution with tactical innovation. The cautious part involves refraining from advocating reforms that might alienate its key financial backers or invite discussion on the legal texts underpinning the regime (on the assumption that any change would be to the detriment of refugees). Yet the agency has also shown itself adept at seizing opportunities to promote incremental change, innovate and creatively adjust, whether as a response to crisis or by design. Tactical flexibility has been a mark of the agency's history since it was established in 1950, although mostly one embraced by proactive High Commissioners and even then circumscribed by the constraints imposed on a humanitarian agency operating in a state-centric system without financial autonomy.

The limits of the UNHCR's innovative power were demonstrated by the contrast between the Geneva process on Convention Plus (which fizzled out) and the New York consensus (supported by states and development banks). The need to accept compromises that were less than ideal in terms of refugee law and the human rights of refugees was evident in the agency's promotion of other controversial initiatives (notably 'temporary protection') and a humanitarian-development scheme that improved the living conditions of refugees but reduced their control of their lives in a more fundamental sense (the special economic zones in Jordan). In the end, the agency's defence of pragmatism would come to rest on the claim that any realistic alternative would be worse.

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Notes

1. The agency had previously assisted only European refugees. The Eurocentric nature of the international refugee regime was reinforced by the provision in the 1951 Convention, which (until amended by the 1967 Protocol) limited the obligations of its state signatories to refugees from events occurring in Europe before 1951. The UNHCR, however, was established by a UN General Assembly resolution. Its mandate was defined by that body, and the agency's statutes contained no temporal or geographical limitations.

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Global Frameworks for Urban (Displacement) Response

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Introduction

Some years back, before Beirut was hit by successive cataclysmic events, including the port explosion, the COVID-19 pandemic and an economic and political crisis that led the city and country into the abyss in which it currently finds itself, the 'only' crisis affecting the city was the Syrian refugee crisis. Those who know Lebanon of course know that this was far from the truth in a country with layered pre-existing challenges, yet the humanitarian coordination system was activated as a response to the Syrian refugee influx. At the time, despite the economic consequences of the war across the border, there were signs of optimism and prosperity in a city that had been grappling with the aftermath of the civil war for decades. The Ferrari shop, overlooking the Martyrs' Square, frequently sold cars with engines too big for Beirut's traffic jams; luxury brands like Channel, Dior and Prada all had flourishing shops; and the construction of high-end apartment towers overlooking the Mediterranean was non-stop, with apartments being bought by overseas buyers. In this largely privatized downtown area, people's use of 'public' space was increasingly regulated, while in the poorer neighbourhoods on the fringe of the city, areas were densifying inwards and informally extending upwards. Some of the inner-city neighbourhoods best known for their vibrant restaurants, nightlife and cultural scenes emerged during the same years. The nightlife caused a Saturday rush hour around midnight from the city centre towards Mar Mikhail – one of the most vi-

brant neighbourhoods at the time. The inequality between the downtown neighbourhoods inhabited by an ultra-rich minority and the less well-off outer city grew.

The conflict in Syria led to the influx of more than a million Syrian refugees to Lebanon, the majority of whom found shelter in the largest cities, Beirut among them. While the government imposed strict regulations on Syrian refugees' access to work and a no-camp policy to 'avoid a repetition of the Palestinian experience' (Carnegie Middle East Center 2018), many economic sectors and the growing wealth in the country were highly reliant on the Syrian workforce. Meanwhile, vulnerable Syrian households settled where they could find affordable housing, often in neighbourhoods housing poor Lebanese, Palestinian and migrant households (UN-Habitat 2021a) such as the impoverished and informal or semi-informal neighbourhoods surrounding the city centre. Syrians were, like other residents, subject to a housing market with a significant and rising mismatch between supply of high-end apartments and demand for lower-end housing, with minimal or lacking access to basic services and tenure security as a result. Whatever wages the breadwinners of the families could collect from construction work or the service sector were rarely enough to meet the needs of their dependents.

The evolution of events since has removed any doubt: Beirut and Lebanon are in a state of crisis. In October 2021, 98 per cent of Syrians lived in poverty, while some 80 per cent of Lebanese had fallen under the poverty line. The downtown areas in Beirut remain highly affected by the massive explosion that hit the capital on 4 August 2020. Yet at the start of the Syrian refugee crisis, Beirut was somehow both in a crisis and not. While there were signs of a worsening of the situation looming on the horizon, Lebanon was still regarded as an upper-middle-income country by international institutions, limiting its eligibility to various forms of international aid. The influx of Syrians added stress to underlying historic, social and economic factors, with unequal effects across the city. Being defined as a refugee crisis in turn guided what could or could not be done as part of the response. So, while Lebanon was indeed regarded as a middle-income country, the situation was one of high fragility, with a response that was slow to adapt to the multifaceted challenges refugees, migrants and host populations faced. The situation illustrated, in many ways, the extremes of crises in cities of the twenty-first century, where inequalities, contrasts and contradictions manifest through interlinked (dysfunctional or ineffective) systems. This meant that the capacities to absorb shocks were asymmetric across Beirut, with implications for the national economy and governance.

This chapter examines the evolution of global approaches and tools designed for urban response. Beirut is part of the bleak statistics of crisis-affected cities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The experiences from the region and beyond will be used to discuss the application

and appropriateness of such emerging approaches and tools, and their intersection with the humanitarian response system, national and decentralized governments, and formal and informal city systems.

The Emergence of an Urban-Focused Crisis Response: An Urbanization of Humanitarian Crises

Over the last decade, conflicts, natural hazards, environmental disasters, climate change impacts and large-scale displacement have increasingly unfolded in cities. The Haiti earthquake in 2010 and the distinct urban nature of the ensuing crisis represented a critical juncture for humanitarian response (Earle 2020). The crisis, which hit the capital Port-au-Prince and particularly affected informal settlements, led to a mobilization of international funding not seen since the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami (Gill et al. 2020). Unlike in most previous large-scale responses, the humanitarian actors were now inserted into a highly urban context with pre-existing systems, actors, chronic poverty and inadequate housing and service provision. The situation challenged a humanitarian response system tailored to operating in camp and rural settings, structured according to sectors, where the initial phase of lifesaving assistance (such as supplies of material, food, health, water and sanitation, and shelter) was gradually replaced by more service-oriented support (e.g. livelihoods, basic services and housing). The Haiti crisis response made it evident that there was a need to revise this relief model.

In the same year as the Haiti earthquake, the Arab Spring erupted. Here too, cities were the centre stage of events. Many urban areas were directly impacted by conflict, including cities in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and Libya. It was in Iraqi cities, for example, that the events propelling the country into years of conflict converged. This included the seizure of strategic cities by ISIS and the subsequent battles to regain control, with large-scale displacement from and to urban areas. In early 2011, the conflict in Syria broke out and continued to increase in intensity in the years that followed. This resulted in wide-ranging damage and destruction of Syrian towns and cities, as well as large-scale displacement towards and between cities.

In the highly urbanized MENA region, countries such as Lebanon and Jordan have more than 90 per cent of their population living in urban areas. For the 5.5 million registered Syrian refugees living in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt, the share is 95 per cent (3RP 2021), while 84 per cent of the 6.9 million internally displaced Syrians live in cities (OCHA 2022b). This accentuates many challenges faced by humanitarian actors. Displacement remains one of the most daunting challenges in the region, and response efforts to this form of urban crisis and additional compounding shocks require urban-specific approaches.

The Humanitarian Response Architecture is Slow to Change

Lessons from humanitarian crises over the last decade led to a growing recognition at the global level that the humanitarian system required a revamp and a change of working modalities. This resulted among other things in the Global Compact for Refugees and the Grand Bargain on 'the New Ways of Working', a commitment first made by eight UN agencies and the World Bank, led by the former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, to 'meet people's immediate humanitarian needs while at the same time reducing risks and vulnerabilities' (World Humanitarian Summit 2016). The Global Compact and the Grand Bargain acknowledged both that prominent challenges (and opportunities) in humanitarian response are now in cities and that local authorities have a central role to play in response. The shift was also prompted by unprecedented pressure on the humanitarian system globally and demand for a cost-efficient response that would bring about relief with impact that corresponded to the scale of needs on the ground.

However, urban emergencies are yet to be raised to the forefront of humanitarian coordination. While the humanitarian response system has undergone reforms and changes, in practical terms not much has changed since it was first conceived in Africa in the 1960s. Urban response remains fragmented, and the current clusters system is in essence based on a non-urban way of thinking. The experience from Haiti underscores how slow this change is: despite the response largely being considered inefficient, with few lasting outputs and a long list of identified failures, organizations that were part of the Haiti response ten years prior reported that they would respond in similar ways had the crisis happened today. Illustrating this, many of the issues identified following the Haiti response seem to recur in new urban emergencies.

Adopting a Cluster Approach to Urban Settings

The 'cluster approach' structures the coordination of humanitarian response under several clusters (e.g. Shelter, Livelihoods or Health), with a clear delineation of agencies' responsibilities according to their respective mandates and associated sectors. While its foundation was set in the UN General Assembly resolution 46/182 in 1991, the Humanitarian Reform Agenda of 2005 introduced the cluster approach as a means to enhance 'predictability, accountability and partnership' in humanitarian response (OCHA 2021). Shaped by the 'traditional' humanitarian response settings, the cluster system is designed to respond to camp or rural settings. Simplified, this system is structured to ensure provision of services under the respective clusters in the *absence* of systems, while the increasing frequency of response in urban

or out-of-camp settings means responding to the needs of displaced and crisis-affected urban residents in localities *where systems exist.*

The challenge of adapting cluster approaches to respond in cities is two-fold. Firstly, the cluster system is rigged for short-term interventions, while urban crises are protracted and require longer-term support and planning. That means that even (in theory) short-term interventions should support medium- and longer-term efforts. Instead, humanitarian response has largely maintained repetitive, short-lived relief that benefits a targeted number of beneficiaries, without linking this to systems that can support people over time. An illustrative example here is water trucking repeated over months or even years in lieu of repairs or extension of water networks. Several factors, including red lines among donors in conflict settings and political preference for return rather than integration, are contributing to this. Secondly, cluster interventions usually do not account for the market dynamics in cities. Emerging models, such as minor repairs to housing units against rent freezes or reductions and tenure contracts, may be less suitable in large cities. In market economies, reduced rent in exchange for investment in upgrades is only feasible if the landlord receives more in support (investment in upgrades) than they are required to reduce the rent. This can quickly become expensive in a demand-driven, low-cost housing market. Real estate speculators usually do not have a problem securing new tenants in such markets. This means that minor fixing of windows, doors, bathrooms and so on that does not lead to noticeable improvements in overall standards might not be attractive as an alternative to maintained income from rents. It should be noted that one of the successful examples of the humanitarian community adapting to the changing realities of their response environments has been the testing and roll-out of unconditional cash support. This is allowing displaced and other vulnerable populations to prioritize how to spend their funds, across the various priorities set by various humanitarian sectors such as shelter, education and food, while also contributing to local markets.

Efforts have been made to support knowledge exchange and guidance within clusters on how best to respond in urban contexts. Examples include the 'Urban Displacement & Outside of Camp' desk review conducted by the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) cluster, which also initiated an Area-Based Working Group under their global cluster. Further, the global Shelter Cluster established a Settlements Approaches in Urban Areas Working Group, which produced a Settlements Approach Guidance Note. While these initiatives have demonstrated an initial concerted engagement by humanitarian agencies to try to understand what responding in cities means, the core element of such engagements – cities – somehow became secondary in these guiding documents.

In places where there is an ambiguity in the type of crisis situation (e.g. refugee or humanitarian emergency or environmental disaster) and the cri-

sis does not 'fit' into the structure and leadership of the global humanitarian system, an agreement must be reached between the inter-cluster coordinator and the UNCHR refugee coordinator on whether the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) cluster or the UNHCR cluster system should be utilized (OCHA and HCR 2014). In Lebanon, the overlap of different types of response led to a decision at the highest levels of the UN on who should lead the response. While in the end it was agreed that the UNHCR should lead, the discussion has impacted the response to this day, and only intensified as the situation in the country rapidly deteriorated.

Evolution of Global Urban Crisis Approaches

Area-Based Approaches

To address the urbanization of humanitarian crises, international organizations (among others within the Global Alliance for Urban Crises and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's cluster system) started to develop unified tools and approaches and sought to establish mechanisms that would enhance adequate, timely and at-scale responses in cities. Several of these global approaches and tools were tested, or partially initiated, in the response to the crises in the MENA region.

A commonality among these urban-specific approaches is that they are geographically targeted, multisectoral, participatory (Parker and Maynard 2015) and multistakeholder (Urban Settlements Working Group 2019). Examples include settlement approaches, place-based approaches and neighbourhood approaches (Sanderson 2019). Using the umbrella term 'area-based approaches', such approaches have been adopted by a growing number of actors. Their application has largely focused on the neighbourhood level, but they are also used to describe a city-based entry to response, for instance with the emergence of 'urban recovery frameworks' and the adoption of camp management tools to urban settings. While these approaches to an extent have supported humanitarian actors in tailoring their programmes and coordination to urban settings, the uptake and institutionalization of area-based approaches within the global response system remain modest.

Urban Profiling

A starting point for many area-based approaches is profiling. The lack of reliable, up-to-date, granular and comparable data continues to be a critical barrier to designing and tailoring urban response. Without even basic information, such as reliable population data, planning and coordination

is difficult. Urban profiling seeks to fill such knowledge gaps and inform programming. The development of city and neighbourhood profiles as multisectoral and spatial assessment tools has been one notable contribution. Such profiles span both rapid and in-depth analysis (e.g. damage assessments and urban functionality studies). Compared to traditional humanitarian needs assessments, profiling tools are generally more time-consuming. This entails trade-offs in terms of reliability, comparability and how fast data can be produced to inform time-sensitive humanitarian responses.

UN-Habitat has been at the forefront of developing urban analysis products, in particular in the MENA region, including in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Libya and Somalia (UN-Habitat 2021b). This has contributed to contextually adapted profiling tools and a substantial quantity of urban analysis. In Lebanon for example, UN-Habitat started developing tools for city and neighbourhood profiling in 2014 to respond more effectively to the refugee crisis. The profiling was intended as contextual urban analysis, building on existing methodologies, to map neighbourhoods and inform intervention strategies between different partners including local authorities, service providers and responding organizations (Bergby 2019). The first city and neighbourhood profiles were launched in 2015 at the tail end of extensive advocacy to convince the humanitarian system that the Syrian refugee crisis was indeed an urban crisis. A key message was that humanitarian needs analysis was done in a manner that to a degree masked the urban reality of the crisis. Early shelter reports showed that most Syrian refugees had found shelter in apartments, non-residential buildings and unfinished structures. Yet, in the first years of the response, the focus remained limited to needs in rural 'informal tented settlements' and shelter repairs outside of the main urban areas. This was arguably in part due to donor policies – the expectation of direct beneficiary support, with what that meant in terms of visibility and showcasing of donors, agencies' branding on tents and so on, rather than promoting systems' or services' enhancement. UN-Habitat's urban profile initiative was therefore an important contribution to nuancing the picture and making evident the impact of the displacement crisis on Lebanese cities. The neighbourhood profiling was eventually set up as a joint project between UN-Habitat and UNICEF.

With the development of urban profiling tools and as the awareness on urban needs grew in Lebanon, the focus on area-based and neighbourhood-based response tools also grew. However, agencies continued to carry out their own assessments to identify needs that responded to their mandates, focus and available funding, and that had potential to support their fundraising strategies. This led to situations where agencies assessed the same neighbourhoods and came up with separate 'area-based plans'. As such, despite the recognition of area-based data collection (and response), implementation of such data collection contradicted the overall ambitions of

area-based approaches, in which activities are streamlined across actors and used to promote multistakeholder engagement under a shared plan.

Moreover, profiling has usually been concentrated in highly disadvantaged areas of cities. While this is essential to identify needs and crisis impacts among groups of concern, including access to services, housing, local businesses, livelihoods and more, this does not provide a holistic understanding of interlinkages and variations across the city. Identification of potential strategic entry points for city-level interventions, such as enhancing primary infrastructure networks and service delivery, are thus likely missed. Beyond foregoing strategic and cost-efficient efforts on a city level, this also limits the overall understanding of intra- and inter-city variations in needs. The skewed conception and narrative of the city that emerges from only mapping selected (vulnerable) areas may contribute to a politicization of funding and further underpin segregation between different areas or target groups in the city, with potential ramifications for social cohesion and stabilization.

Following the 2020 port explosion in Beirut, extensive efforts were made by humanitarian actors, local authorities and the army to coordinate damage assessments and to elaborate a system for clear spatial delineation of areas to be assessed by partners. This system mainly pertained to initial damage and needs assessments focused on a few sectors, where more detailed assessments and profiling followed the initiatives and respective funding of some agencies. For example, Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), in partnership with the American University of Beirut's (AUB) Urban Lab, conducted joint profiling exercises for affected neighbourhoods, while UNDP conducted a study and undertook a strategy development for the Karantina area (a severely affected area with a large Syrian population next to the port). The focus on certain heavily damaged neighbourhoods further detracted attention from the overall crisis impact on other poor neighbourhoods and the city at large. Particularly, certain neighbourhoods surrounding the inner city with a large share of vulnerable households, including many refugees, were suffering from the economic impact of successive crises and the loss of jobs in the city centre, yet were not considered in many of the assessments, including profiling (UN-Habitat 2021a).

Integrating Area-Based Approaches in Urban Crisis Response

A key barrier to the advancement of holistic and area-based approaches in crisis response is the slow mobilization of agencies around approaches as shared across sectors and actors. In Lebanon, the increased attention to urban-specific challenges led to the formation of a neighbourhood task force under the Shelter Working Group to discuss what area-based approaches would mean at the sub-city levels. This led to a formulation of guidelines

with minimum standards for certain sectors.[1] While the neighbourhood scale was included in the first Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) 2015–16 (United Nations and Government of Lebanon 2014) and guidelines were incorporated in the Shelter WG's plans and adopted, in some form, by a handful of agencies and sectors, the guidelines were never fully endorsed as an inter-sector approach. Being developed and pushed through the shelter sector, area-based response was considered by some to be mandate-specific (i.e. UN-Habitat-owned) or mostly relevant for the built environment and shelter sectors. This made it difficult to secure support from the UN Country Team (UNCT) and Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) for any holistic plans to address the compounded crisis impact on cities.

The importance of multisector and multistakeholder approaches in urban response is typically not reflected in country response plans. Most response plans do not distinguish between urban and rural areas in the situational analysis and for the sake of funding requirements, even in highly urbanized contexts and despite most refugees settling in cities. In the MENA region, the Regional Response Plan has been set up as a strategic platform for humanitarian and development partners responding to the Syria crises, covering Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt. Despite urban areas serving as the backdrop for the issues discussed in the plan, the implications of the urban dimension for the regional efforts are not specifically mentioned in the Regional Needs Overview (3RP 2021).

In Lebanon, several plans have been developed in recent years to guide crises responses.[2] With the 2020 blast response in Beirut, the UN, European Union and World Bank initiated the Reform, Recovery, and Reconstruction Framework (3RF) for coordination. The 3RF involved many of the same actors who are part of the Syrian refugee response, though with separate working groups. Renewed efforts were also made to elaborate an updated version of the neighbourhood approach. However, in most part the efforts led to a reinvention of the same ways of working. Within the already over-crowded and competitive relief environment, actors were admitting to being 'frameworked out'. This made integration of urban approaches within existing humanitarian and governmental plans difficult. With the Syrian refugee response already active for eleven years and with over two years since the 2020 blast, alignment of coordination systems and identification of unified objectives and actions were still slow. As a result, few actors coordinated through comprehensive (spatial) plans even when responding in the same area. Further, local authorities were not involved or capacitated to lead in the efforts, while many of the active organizations are yet to be part of any of the response plans or coordination systems of either the government or the international system.

Evaluations suggest the value of area-based approaches. While the LCRP has a sectoral set-up, more than half of the best practices identified in the

review of its five years of implementation were based on multisectoral approaches (Julian Murray Consulting and Annabella Skof Consulting 2021). This underscores the importance of continuing to integrate cross-sectoral analysis, strategies and planning in all response plans.

Urban Recovery Framework

In recent years, UN-Habitat and other organizations have spearheaded efforts to develop a comprehensive area-based approach to urban response called the 'Urban Recovery Framework' (URF). The URF seeks to respond to natural and man-made disasters in cities, addressing both systemic and governance issues and affected population needs. Applied in conflict or crisis settings, the URF is described as 'an enabling institutional and policy framework and related programming to support resilient urban recovery at scale, and the renewal of the social contract' (UN-Habitat 2022). The URF is designed to work as a scalar approach linking neighbourhood and city-level interventions with national-level policies and considers strategic interventions across 'absorptive, adaptive, and transformative phases' (ibid.). It further places emphasis on community perspectives and participatory processes that put local authorities and communities at the forefront of urban recovery efforts. The approach is intended as a practical guide to bridge humanitarian and development interventions and to reduce siloed workstreams by advancing the 'New Ways of Working'. The URF embeds urban profiling and analysis as a starting point, followed by inclusive and participatory recovery planning, implementation and monitoring.

The URF is still in the early stages. It is currently being tested in Syria, and key elements are being implemented in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and other countries. The methodology has not yet been institutionalized with humanitarian response plans, UN Strategic Frameworks or UN Development Assistance Frameworks, and remains an initiative promoted by some select agencies. Currently, the advancement of the URF is reliant on project funding through agencies and there is limited funding readily available to initiate new URFs in response to emerging crises. This limits the extent to which frameworks such as the URF can function as a coherent urban recovery approach between 'all' responding agencies in an urban crisis setting.

The Global Alliance for Urban Crises

The launch of the Global Alliance for Urban Crises ('the Alliance') during the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 was a key initiative for progressing urban response modalities. Acknowledging that urban contexts require multisector and multiscalar responses anchored across global to local levels,

the Alliance was established as a community of practice, bringing together humanitarian agencies, local governments, donors, built-environment professionals and academics, counting close to hundred member organizations. The objective of the Alliance is to promote tailored urban response approaches and coherence among responders and better alignment between humanitarian and development capacities and funding, and to leverage non-traditional partners including the private sector. Since its inception, the Alliance has furthered the discourse on urban crisis response approaches, including through the development of several knowledge products,[3] and has been important in bringing together a broad set of stakeholders at the global level. A challenge for the Alliance is that it does not have a permanent secretariat and dedicated funding and therefore has been unable to ensure regular and frequent activities or to operationalize agreed principles and methodologies at the country and local levels.[4]

The Role of Local Authorities

Local authorities have, as primary duty bearers, a key role to play in responding to the needs of residents and displaced populations in crisis situations, and in strengthening systems and resilience over time. Despite the increased financial burden on local authorities and the added pressure of influxes of displaced (who are usually not accounted for in municipal budget allocations), aid has not been traditionally channelled through local authorities. Red lines and concerns over collaboration with local (and national) authorities on the part of international actors may contribute to this. Nevertheless, with the evolution of urban crisis response and the focus on localization, international assistance has increasingly been connected with local authorities to promote cost-efficiency and support longer-term commitments and alignment with development agendas (Paragas et al. 2016).

Local authorities, for their part, have become more present and articulate in global discourse on how the international community and donors can support them. Several city networks have emerged that connect cities and municipalities and their elected officials and technocrats for exchanges of experiences and approaches. Interestingly, while humanitarian and 'urban' agencies often underline the 'uniqueness' of a given context, local authorities have emphasized the importance of exchange between cities facing similar challenges (MMC 2021). City networks include the Mayors Migration Council (MMC), the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group (C40), 100 Resilient Cities/Rockefeller Cities, Mediterranean City-to-City Migration (MC2MC) and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG). UCLG in particular has become important, representing more than 240,000 towns, cities, regions and metropolises, as well as 175 local and regional govern-

ment associations (UCLG CGLU 2021) across the world. Perhaps to an even larger extent than humanitarian actors, these networks have a role in unlocking funds to enable local authorities to innovate and pilot, such as the MMC's Global Cities Fund (MMC 2021).

As response actors increasingly turn to local authorities to partner on urban response modalities, collaboration often happens with the same selected municipalities. Municipalities that are part of international networks appear to be relatively resourceful or to have a concrete entry point. Across networks, there are thus some 'usual suspects' in a position to attract more attention and thereby support, while not necessarily representing the most vulnerable populations or the municipalities most in need of such support. Such select engagement is also observed in cities made up of several municipal entities. In Lebanon for example, there are over 1,100 municipalities (UN-Habitat 2021a) in a country of 10,452 km^2 (CAS n.d.). Beirut alone encompasses thirty-one municipalities (UN-Habitat 2021a).[5] While services such as solid waste management are indeed managed by the municipalities, the size of the municipalities allows neither for sound waste management plans nor efficient resource spending. Also, most small Lebanese municipalities do not have any full-time staff. In the response to the Syrian refugee crisis, international organizations supported municipalities with various equipment and vehicles to support service delivery and mitigate social tensions. Oftentimes, municipalities were approached one by one, without a shared plan with all response actors' input. Usually, the equipment was not incorporated into fleet management plans, resource plans and so on, and no one sought to optimize by sharing equipment across several municipalities. At a regional level this meant that municipalities were over-equipped in some domains (e.g. garbage trucks), yet still under-resourced to operate these in an efficient manner (Bergby 2019). This system could be beneficial for municipalities who could put forward their priorities to several actors in parallel. Recognizing these issues, actors such as UN-Habitat shifted some support to Unions of Municipalities (UoMs). This only partially resolved the service delivery on a systems level, however, as UoMs do not necessarily cover a whole city and usually focus only on certain interventions; at the same time, supporting UoMs also contributed to the 'favouritism' of certain municipalities.

Influx of Humanitarians and Do-Gooders

A common denominator in urban crisis settings has been the proliferation of response actors. Unlike in camp situations, regulating or controlling the high number of actors and their activities in urban crisis settings is challenging. When a crisis hits, a significant increase in the number of active actors is

usually observed, including many new actors and their employees who may not have worked in the specific context before. Experience demonstrates that the time required for new actors to establish themselves, including setting up systems, networks and programmes, is costly and that such actors are ineffective and more likely to have unintended negative consequences.

In the absence of a systemic application of tailored urban response approaches, agencies operating in cities mainly initiate collaboration for projects with a limited number of stakeholders, independently of overall coordination structures. Collaboration therefore means greater reliance on a history of partnering, trust-building and a conducive institutional environment. Based on personal experience, collaborations often come about due to personal relationships rather than resulting from formal agreements on a global level or mechanisms for implementation at an operational level. Protocols for engagement in urban crises and general guidance are often not specific enough or sufficient to regulate or 'design' partnerships. Key decisions and insight are only available to those on the 'inside' and must usually be acquired over time. Building partnerships and securing institutional memory thus requires on-the-ground presence over time. With the influx of actors, short-term assignments for international experts, and local expertise and knowledge threatened by brain drain, poor coordination and collaboration are major barriers for effective urban crisis responses.

Among the central issues that emerged in the Haiti response was exactly the lack of coordination among the multitude of actors. This added to other issues such as the failure to involve local authorities, the uneven distribution of investment and the fact that multisector, participatory planning on a neighbourhood level using available (albeit large) funding was not enough to secure sustainable impact (Gill et al. 2020). While some issues were specific to the crisis, others were not new, but rather heightened. Already prior to the earthquake, Haiti was called the 'republic of NGOs', with more than ten thousand NGOs operating in the country and the second highest NGO per capita density in the world (Edmonds 2013). After the earthquake, it is believed that this figure rose dramatically, but with little reliable tracking to confirm the number of organizations. However, as a pointer, six hundred actors were enlisted in the Health Cluster alone within a month of the earthquake (Binder 2013). Concerns over corruption and a lack of trust in national authorities were reasons for channelling aid through NGOs rather than through government entities. This contributed to a competitive market for NGOs that constrained the ability to unify efforts under common objectives, and importantly led to limited investment in local service provision and a severe dependency on NGOs for services. With the close to USD 14 billion disbursed in aid since the 2010 earthquake (MGAE 2022), one could argue that there has been ample opportunity to support enhancement of infrastructure and services, yet the deficient response to the 2021 earth-

quake suggested otherwise. Similar patterns, with response actors working independently from the government and coordination systems, have been reported in other urban crises, such as in Tacloban, the Philippines, after Typhoon Haiyan in 2013 (Paragas et al. 2016; Archer 2017).

In the first years of the Syrian refugee crises in Lebanon, internationally coordinated relief efforts were scaled up to around one hundred agencies and approximately two thousand employees (Little 2016). Adding to this were countless smaller and larger national or local NGOs, faith-based organizations and community groups. The response was, as mentioned above, initially coordinated by the UNHCR alone, while UNDP and the government eventually became co-leads to ensure both governmental anchoring and due consideration to stabilization efforts. The 4 August 2020 blast brought a new inflow of aid actors, from local to international, privately initiated to donor funded. Despite the number of actors in the response and the funding coming from traditional and non-traditional funders, the response was slow. However, the role taken by civil society in Beirut and Lebanon in the aftermath of the explosion shows the enormous potential of local stakeholders as leading actors in urban response. It confirms that they – together with local authorities – are often the first to respond. The rapid mobilization of civil society meant that international support and diaspora remittances could be channelled directly to these efforts early on, unlocking capacities for immediate response at scale. Yet in the first months of the blast response these efforts were largely independent and without coordination. For civil society actors, the international response was mostly unreachable, with a sense that local capacities were being overlooked or efforts duplicated.

Given security constraints and lack of access, the urban response in conflict contexts usually does not involve the same inflow of external actors. Nevertheless, various national and local actors outside of the coordination structures and diverse funding sources (e.g. through diaspora) may contribute to a situation where a large share of response activities still take place outside of both government and internationally led aid coordination and recovery planning. In the first weeks of the Ukraine conflict, for instance, inflow of private aid through self-organized networks was delivered to the border crossings or to local partners in the neighbouring countries. One consequence of not having a clear organization of aid delivery was that it did not always address the most urgent needs. One example of this was supplies of clothes and equipment that arrived only to pile up on the roadside.

The Funding Predicament

In an environment of global funding deficits and increasingly protracted crises, response efforts are premised on making difficult choices and priorities.

Immense needs and limited funds require urban response to deliver with value for money, considering sectoral and institutional costs of operations and opportunities of scale, to secure the highest possible impact. The size of appeals for the refugee component for Syria-crisis-affected countries in the region is USD 5.83 billion, with 28.6 per cent funded (OCHA 2022a). The funding shortfalls are particularly pronounced in urban areas that receive the largest share of refugees. While the needs cannot realistically be addressed through funding alone, multi-year, flexible funding may go some way in providing cost-effective relief. Less 'clear-cut' crisis situations, such as countries with middle-income status, pose particular challenges for funding. Accounting for more than half of the humanitarian funds appeals in 2015, middle-income countries have considerably higher cost metrics relative to other crisis contexts, yet applied response and funding models are the same across countries (Scott 2015). In the main Syrian refugee host countries, which classify as middle-income, most of the funding comes from humanitarian, not development, funds. This limits opportunities to address systemic failures or support resilience.

In Beirut, the downward spiral of events after the blast has severely impacted the national economy and has been a driver of subsequent large-scale emigration of Lebanese residents. With the national-level impact of the crisis, any sustainable improvement of the situation is dependent on economic recovery at scale. It can be argued that beyond addressing immediate needs, the current focus on household-level and small- and medium-sized business will have little impact on the overall crisis situation or potential for recovery (UN-Habitat 2021a). Sustainable response results are premised on supporting economic activities and basic and social services enhancement at the systems level and on mitigation of further risk exposure contingent on, among other things, environmental management and clean energy transition. So far, flexible funding allowing for such transitional planning has not been unlocked.

Conclusion

Fall 2021 in Beirut. On Saturday evening, Gemmayze Street, famous for its nightlife, was left completely dark during one of the now frequent power cuts. The distant lights from a single car slowly approaching served as a disheartening reminder of the now long-gone excitement of people in the queue of cars on their way to a night out. Lebanon experienced yet another crisis – an energy and fuel crisis, the last of a series of recent events with detrimental effects – as the Lebanese pound plummeted. For many shops, workshops, restaurants and bars, the energy crisis was the final blow in their struggle to stay afloat in the wake of the explosion, the downturn

in the economy and loss of customers. In a country that relied on private diesel generators to supplement unreliable power supply and alleviate daily power cuts, the fuel shortage meant that even for those who had access to funds, operating businesses was difficult. An exodus of educated and more well-off Lebanese, coupled with the many residents who had fallen under the poverty line, meant that the middle class had practically vanished from Lebanon. Gone also were those who would invest in new ventures. In the neighbourhood bars in Beirut, young Lebanese have shifted the conversation from their entrepreneurial ideas and ambitions for the future to a conversation about when and how the 'move' away from Lebanon will take place. For many this will mean leaving Lebanon for good.

Crisis situations change over time. And as the saying goes, misfortunes rarely come alone. In many cases, crises are made up of compounding shocks. The global trend is towards increasingly urban, protracted and complex crisis situations. While the world is watching the war unfold in Ukrainian cities, Beirut and Lebanon serve as disconcerting examples of what protracted urban crises may entail, and the progression, application and appropriateness of emerging urban-specific approaches and tools to address urban crises. In Beirut, new shocks added to or reinforced the effects of previous shocks, with ripple effects across the country. Over time, response actors have worked hard, with renewed determination following each shock, to ensure better adapted ways of addressing the crisis. The Beirut blast response thus took place within a country and city where area-based tools had already been piloted, trialled and tested over years, and where holistic and area-based responses had been discussed among partners at a strategic, high level. Yet the revamped guidance for a neighbourhood approach suffered from low institutional memory and a common tendency towards reinventing the wheel. The recent application of urban response approaches has remained geographically targeted at the sub-city level, based on agencies' funding and mandates. Rather than addressing pre-existing vulnerabilities from the refugee crisis across the city and beyond in the blast response, responders mainly focused on the most physically affected areas. The response has only to a lesser degree been cross-sectoral, participatory and – importantly – multistakeholder.

The application of urban-specific approaches has, as described in this chapter, only been partially realized and the process has been slow and filled with hurdles. Lessons to date suggest that the advancement of area-based approaches with improved data and analysis tools is only a first step towards agreeing on a shared vision and process for interventions among actors. Without an institutionalized, urban-adapted response architecture, global frameworks for urban response fall short of providing clarity and guidance at a systemic level. A hard-to-change humanitarian response system, originally conceived to work in rural and camp settings characterized by an absence of

systems, is a primary challenge. Factors such as funding shortfall, inequitable support of local authorities, a vast number of existing and new response actors with widely different and sometimes competing mandates, incentives and financing, and actors being 'frameworked out' are also contributing. To support better urban response, urban emergencies must be raised to the forefront of humanitarian coordination, and urban-specific analysis and programming must be integrated into response plans and funding appeals. Formulating guidance for such efforts requires allocation of time and resources across agencies. Promising initiatives include the Urban Recovery Framework and the Global Alliance for Urban Crises, but work remains to anchor these within the established response architecture and the donor community. Without taking into consideration lessons learned to date – both what works and what does not work – there is no guarantee of arriving at a better result.

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Notes

1. Bergby was co-lead of the Shelter WG in Lebanon at the time and coordinated this work.
2. The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) was developed in 2016 with a new iteration released in 2021 (GoL and United Nations 2021) to guide the response; the United Nations Strategic Framework in 2017 to guide the United Nation's work (United Nations 2017); and the 3RF in 2020 following the Beirut explosion (World Bank et al. 2020).
3. These include 'Urban Profiling for Better Responses to Humanitarian Crises' (Global Alliance for Urban Crises 2019d), 'Urban Displacement from Different Perspectives' (Global Alliance for Urban Crises 2019c), the 'Protocol of Engagement between Local Governments and Humanitarian Actors' (Global Alliance for Urban Crises 2019a) and the 'Urban Competency Framework for Humanitarian Action' (Global Alliance for Urban Crises 2019b).
4. A systemic review was carried out by the authors on behalf of the Alliance in 2019, with interviews conducted among response actors in Uganda, Somalia, Tu-

nisia, Libya and Lebanon, as well as HQ global-level interviews, which showed that many interviewees, including individuals working for Alliance member organizations that are actively engaged at the global level, were not aware of the Alliance or the knowledge products it produced to support member organizations at an operational level.

5. This definition is based on the continuously built-up area of Beirut, which functions as a city.

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