

# THE IMPACT OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS ON LEBANON: AN EVALUATION ON THE CASE OF SYRIANS IN LEBANON

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## Abstract

*This study analyzes the impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon in the context of the Syrian influx into Lebanon. The study is based on a field research and interviews that were made in specific regions of Lebanon. The status of Syrians in Lebanon, the place of origin of Syrians, the regions where Syrians have settled, the challenges faced by the Syrians and the attitude of Lebanese people towards the Syrians as well as the impact of the Syrians on the economic and political structure of Lebanon are examined in this study. Syrians live under poor conditions, with shelter, education and healthcare among the main problems that Syrians face in Lebanon. Due to the ongoing influx of Syrians the problems are getting worse. Political instability, a fragile domestic balance of power and insufficient infrastructure are among the reasons that the conditions of Syrians are worsening. Thus, the continuation of economic and logistical assistance by the international community to Lebanon is considered vital because this assistance has significant potential to decrease the tension or to postpone the social crises that might erupt. Nevertheless, even if the economic and logistic assistance continue, the Syrian influx, which is on the rise and which has led to the engagement of Lebanese groups in the Syrian crisis, will continue to negatively influence the domestic political and social structure of Lebanon.*

**Key words:** Syrian Crisis, Lebanon, Refugee Problem, Syrians in Lebanon, Influx to Lebanon

## SURİYE KRİZİNİN LÜBNAN'A ETKİSİ: LÜBNAN'DAKİ SURİYELİLER ÜZERİNE BİR DEĞERLENDİRME

### Özet

*Bu çalışma, Suriye krizinin Lübnan'a etkisini Lübnan'daki Suriyeliler bağlamında analiz etmektedir. Büyük ölçüde Lübnan'ın çeşitli bölgelerinde gerçekleştirilen saha araştırması ve mülakatlara dayanan çalışma çerçevesinde Suriyelilerin Lübnan'daki statüsü, Lübnan'da yerleştiği bölgeler, karşılaştığı sorunlar ve Lübnanlıların Suriyelilere yönelik tutumu incelenmiştir. Ayrıca Suriyelilerin Lübnan'ın ekonomik ve siyasi yapısına etkileri de çalışmada irdelenmiştir. Bu bağlamda Suriyeliler, Lübnan'ın yaşadığı sıkıntılarla doğru orantılı olarak kötü koşullarda yaşamlarını sürdürmektedir. Suriyelilerin karşılaştığı sorunların başında barınma, eğitim ve sağlık sorunları gelmektedir. Siyasi açıdan istikrarsızlık, kurulan yapı ve yetersiz altyapı, Lübnan'da Suriyelilerden kaynaklanan sorunların gün geçtikçe artmasına neden*

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*olmaktadır. Uluslararası toplumun Lübnan'a yönelik ekonomik ve lojistik desteğinin devam etmesi hayati olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Zira söz konusu yardımlar, ülkede giderek artan gerilimi düşürmek veya ülke içinde çıkacak sosyal krizleri ötelemek adına oldukça önemlidir. Ancak söz konusu ekonomik ve lojistik destekler artarak devam etse bile Suriye'den yapıla göçlerin azalmak yerine artarak devam etmesi ve ülkedeki grupların Suriye krizine angajmanı, Lübnan iç siyasetini ve toplumsal yapısını olumsuz etkilemeye devam edecektir.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Suriye Krizi, Lübnan, Mülteci Sorunu, Lübnan'daki Suriyeliler, Lübnan'a Göç Akını

## **Introduction**

The Syrian crisis has negative influences most notably for Syrians but also for neighbouring countries and the whole Middle East. From a humanitarian angle, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq have experienced refugee problems, but it can be claimed that Lebanon has been the most negatively affected country due to the Syrian influx. The estimates made for the numbers of Syrians in Lebanon varies between 1 and 1.7 million. A Syrian population of this size in Lebanon would equal an influx of at least 23 million to Turkey and nearly 100 million to the US. The situation becomes worse when the fragile political balance and insufficient infrastructure of Lebanon are regarded.

As the number of Syrians in Lebanon increases, not only do their living conditions deteriorate but the Lebanese people are also negatively affected. In this regard, tensions have started to emerge, especially in the economic and social dimensions. Since the start of the crisis, the Lebanese government has been pursuing an open-door policy and does not deport Syrians even if they had illegally entered. Additionally, international humanitarian assistance and the work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been facilitated. However, the Lebanon government is hesitant to recognize Syrians—who have become nearly a third of their population as refugees or asylum seekers as well as to set up refugee camps that would ease humanitarian aid. These policies represent one of the biggest obstacles for Syrians since registration would mean receiving aid in a more organized way and the camps would provide better and safer shelter.

This study deals with the humanitarian dimension of the Syrian crisis and focuses on the Syrians in Lebanon. The study is mostly based on field research and interviews that were made in specific regions of Lebanon. The status of Syrians in Lebanon, the place of origin of Syrians, the regions where the Syrians have settled, the challenges faced by the Syrians and the attitude of the Lebanese people towards the Syrians as well as the impact of the Syrians on the economic and political structure of Lebanon are examined.

### **Numbers matter: An Assessment on Syrians in Lebanon**

According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of 18 March 2014, there were 974,434 Syrians in Lebanon, out of which 926,353 were registered by UNHCR and 48,081 were waiting to be registered.<sup>1</sup> However, Lebanese officials and other NGOs stated that the actual number of Syrians in Lebanon is higher than the UNHCR's records. For instance, in an interview with officials from the Ministry of Social Affairs, it was claimed that there are about 1.7 million Syrians in Lebanon, out of which 1.2 million are legally in the country, and approximately 500,000 of whom illegally entered to the country.<sup>2</sup> In addition, some of the local NGOs estimate that there are about 1.25 million Syrians living in Lebanon.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, it should be noted that even UNHCR officials agree that the actual number of Syrians living in Lebanon is greater than their records. According to UNHCR officials, personal concerns, the violent environment in Syria and a hesitation in sharing personal information with local or Syrian authorities are among the reasons why some Syrians prefer to remain unregistered. However, UNHCR officials do not make any estimate for the number of willingly unregistered Syrians in Lebanon.<sup>4</sup>

The actual number of the Syrians cannot be known for two main reasons: The sui generis relations between Lebanon and Syria, and Lebanon's unique political structure. Since the withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon in 2005, Lebanon continues of course to share a 375-km long land border with Syria, and travel between the two countries is made through four official border crossings.<sup>5</sup> There is no visa regime applied between the two countries, and a Syrian citizen who wants to enter Lebanon does not even need to possess a passport. Any Syrian with a valid ID has the right to enter and live up to six months in Lebanon. As a result, before the crisis started in Syria, it had been claimed that there were about 300,000 to 500,000 Syrians living in Lebanon as businessmen, agricultural workers and tourists.<sup>6</sup>

When considering the visa policies of other neighbouring countries, one can easily understand why Syrians mostly prefer going to Lebanon. In the

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<sup>1</sup> For updated data please see, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122> , (accessed on 20/03/2014).

<sup>2</sup> *Interview* with Makram Malaeb, Program Manager of the Ministry of Social Affairs of Lebanon, Beirut, 06/02/2014.

<sup>3</sup> <http://aljazeera.com.tr/al-jazeera-ozel/suriyeliler-lubnana-akin-ediyor>, (accessed on 22/02/2014).

<sup>4</sup> *Interview* with Dominique Tohme, Liaison Officer, UNCHR, Beirut, 06/02/2014.

<sup>5</sup> It was known that, before Syria crisis there were already "unofficial" border crossings that Syrians would illegally enter to Lebanon. For official border crossings please see. [http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/syrian\\_border\\_crossings.pdf](http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/syrian_border_crossings.pdf), (accessed on 02/02/2014).

<sup>6</sup> *Interview* with Makram Malaeb, Beirut, 06/02/2014.

past there was a visa requirement between Turkey and Syria, but a visa exemption accord was signed in 2009 and a visa-free travel regime was established between the two countries. Since then Syrian citizens who possess a valid passport can enter Turkey without a visa and can stay for a period of 90 days.<sup>7</sup> There is also a visa-free travel regime between Syria and Jordan. However, Jordan's visa regime is more restrictive than Turkey's as Syrians who possess a valid passport have the right to stay in Jordan without a visa for a period of only 30 days.<sup>8</sup> Regarding Iraq, a strict visa regime was established after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 with the influx of Iraqis into Syria. Therefore, the easiest crossing for Syrians was Lebanon even before the crisis erupted. Consequently, it was natural for hundreds of thousands of Syrians to consider Lebanon as their first choice since crossing was relatively easy, plus they were familiar with the country and many had relatives in Lebanon. These facts can be regarded as obstacles at the same time in making a definite estimate of the Syrians entering Lebanon. In other words, it's hard to make any assessment on how many Syrians are in Lebanon either for professional reasons or for their safety.

The second reason why the actual number of Syrians in Lebanon is unknown is related to Lebanon's unique political structure. Lebanon has experienced refugee problems in its history. For instance, after the Arab-Israeli war in 1948, thousands of Palestinian refugees came to Lebanon and were moved into camps. According to United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), at present there are some 450,000 Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.<sup>9</sup> Palestinian refugees may be either the victim or the cause of problems but the fact is that they are an important actor in Lebanese politics that cannot be disregarded. Lebanon has hosted Iraqi and Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers as well, but those do not have the same impact as Palestinians. Thus, after the intervention in 1991, the sanctions period and the invasion of 2003 some 100,000 Iraqis migrated to Lebanon and in 2007, there were still some 50,000 Iraqis in Lebanon.<sup>10</sup> It's difficult to estimate the actual number of Iraqis in Lebanon since 77% of them had illegally entered the country. However, according to UNHCR statistics, there were 7,800 Iraqis in Lebanon as of December 2013. Sudanese, both refugees and asylum seekers,

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/suriye-seyahat-edecek-turk-vatandaslarinin-dikkatine.tr.mfa>, (accessed on 02/02/2014).

<sup>8</sup> [http://jordan.visahq.com/requirements/Syria/resident-United\\_States/](http://jordan.visahq.com/requirements/Syria/resident-United_States/), (accessed on 02/02/2014).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon>, (accessed on 22/02/2014).

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.drc.dk/about-drc/publications/?eID=dam\\_frontend\\_push&docID=313](http://www.drc.dk/about-drc/publications/?eID=dam_frontend_push&docID=313); "UNHCR Welcomes Lebanon's Recognition of Iraqi Refugees", <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/newsitem?id=47bc55824>, (accessed on 14/02/2014)

are less than a thousand and their impact on Lebanese political and social structure is relatively lower than the Palestinians and the Iraqis.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, Lebanon's historical refugee experience, combined with its fragile political structure, has made it hard for the Beirut government to pursue a stable refugee or migration policy. This situation has prevented the registration of Syrians at border crossings, not to mention organizing their protection and supplying aid for their basic needs. The government crisis that had lasted 10 months has also played a role in the government not adopting a national plan while the Syrian influx was on the rise. After the resignation of Prime Minister Najib Mikati on 22 March 2013, Lebanese politics focused on the formation of the new government.<sup>12</sup> Even though the problem was resolved on 14 February 2014 with the selection of new Prime Minister Tammam Salam, it's hard to expect that a comprehensive and organized policy will be adopted in the short term.

### **The legal status of Syrians in Lebanon and their challenges**

Lebanon has not ratified the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol. Therefore, it does not to give refugee or asylum seeker status to foreigners even if they came for protection. However, Lebanon has signed several agreements regarding the protection of refugees and has worked in coordination with the UNRWA. Palestinians refugees in Lebanon live in 12 camps under poor conditions, while according to Lebanese law they are not allowed to work in certain sectors whether their refugee status is recognized or not.

When the situation of Syrians in Lebanon is regarded, it is obvious that the government does not officially recognize them as refugees or asylum seekers. The uncertainty of their status is making lives harder for them. Normally, a Syrian with a valid ID has the right to stay in Lebanon for up to six months, and then must either return to Syria or extend his or her residence permit. When leaving Syria a Syrian citizen needs to pay 550 Syrian liras (equivalent to US\$4) at the Syrian border. After staying six months in Lebanon, the residence permit can be extended without going back to Syria and the first extension is made without any fee. In other words, when leaving Syria, a

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<sup>11</sup> Sudanese in Lebanon have attracted attention with hunger strike protests. See. Annie Slemrod, "Sudanese refugees on hunger strike plan to refuse liquids", <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2012/Jul-06/179516-sudanese-refugees-on-hunger-strike-plan-to-refuse-liquids.ashx#axzz2uFKghjxN>, (accessed on 14/02/2014); NourSamaha, "Lebanon's forgotten refugees", Al Jazeera, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/07/201272714143849106.html>, (accessed on 14/02/2014).

<sup>12</sup> **Interview** with Rayan El-Amine, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut, Beirut, 07/02/2014.

Syrian citizen should pay 550 Syrian liras, and then after six months of stay in Lebanon, he or she can extend the residence permit for one more year without any fee. However, for those who want to extend the residence permit by the end of that year, Syrian citizens older than 15 years need to pay 300,000 Lebanese pounds (equivalent to US\$200) and it is here that problems arise.<sup>13</sup> As most of the Syrians in Lebanon cannot afford to pay this amount of money, at the beginning they enter to the Lebanese territory legally, but after one year they continue to stay illegally.

However, it should be stated that not all Syrians have entered Lebanon legally. In this context, the status of Syrians in Lebanon can be classified in five categories. The first group consists of citizens that have both Lebanese and Syrian citizenship, and it is estimated that their number is about 100,000.<sup>14</sup> It can be said that these people enter the country without any problem with their Lebanese passport, and in comparison to other Syrian nationals, they are free to stay, work and travel. The second group consists of those that have come to Lebanon legally and when the residence permit is about to end they have renewed it. The third group consists of citizens that have entered Lebanon legally but because of the fee to extend the residence permit they continue to stay in Lebanon illegally. The fourth group consists of citizens that have entered Lebanon illegally but also have a valid Syrian ID to present in case Lebanese officials ask for documents. The fifth group consists of citizens that have also come illegally to Lebanon but also do not have Syrian ID.<sup>15</sup>

It is difficult to determine how many Syrians in Lebanon fall under each category. Thus the Lebanese government has pursued an open-door policy whether Syrians enter the country legally or illegally. Except for criminal cases, Lebanon has also adopted the principle of non-deportation and they do not force Syrians to leave the country. However, Syrians who are illegally residing in Lebanon and have insufficient funds to cover their basic needs have been faced with some problems due to their status. These problems are closely related to the Lebanese laws on residence, despite their not being implemented. According to the laws, foreigners who are illegally staying in Lebanon are subject to judicial measures and they risk imprisonment or even deportation.

The main challenges facing Syrians living illegally in Lebanon are as follows: limited freedom of movement, legal challenges and difficulty in accessing services.<sup>16</sup> Regarding the limited freedom of movement, Syrians who

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<sup>13</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council, The Consequences of Limited Legal Status for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, December 2013, [http://www.nrc.no/arch/\\_img/9687105.pdf](http://www.nrc.no/arch/_img/9687105.pdf), (accessed on 19/02/2014), s. 16.

<sup>14</sup> **Interview** with Maleq Mohamad Ali, Bayt al Zakat Foundation, Tripoli 08/02/2014.

<sup>15</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council, op.cit. s. 12.

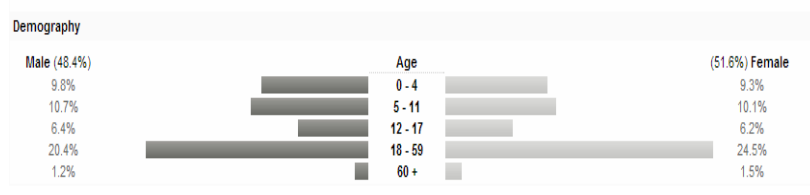
<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, s. 17.

live in rural regions of Lebanon may not be allowed to pass between check points even if they are on their way to UNHCR registration sites. In some cases, they may not be able to earn money since they may not be allowed to travel to another region. In the case of receiving basic services, they again are not allowed to travel to other places. With regard to limited legal challenges, Syrians have limited access to justice for their problems and Syrians that were born in Lebanon may have difficulties in getting the birth certification. In access to the basic services, Syrians have limited access to health care, shelter and education.

**The general trend of the Syrian influx**

The UNHCR has the most systematic and regularly updated statistical data on the Syrian influx into Lebanon. Nevertheless, it must be underlined that the UNHCR data does not include all Syrians in Lebanon due to the reasons mentioned above. There is a difference between the data provided by the UNHCR and the one by the Lebanese government. According to the UNHCR, as of 9 March 2013 there were around 205,419 Syrians in Lebanon; meanwhile according to data provided by the Lebanese government there were 1 million Syrians.<sup>17</sup> According to the UNHCR as on 6 February 2014 there were around 811,594 Syrians registered; but according to the estimates made by Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs officials, there were about 1.7 million Syrians, out of which 1.2 million were legally living and 500,000 illegally living in Lebanon.<sup>18</sup> As can be seen, the differences between the UNHCR data and Lebanese estimates are very significant. That is why even the general trends of influx, place of origin and locations of Syrians in Lebanon are evaluated with UNHCR data, it will be better to consider this data as benchmarks and focus on the general trend rather than the numbers.

**Graphic: Demography of Syrians in Lebanon (as of 3 March 2014)**



*Source:* <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122#>

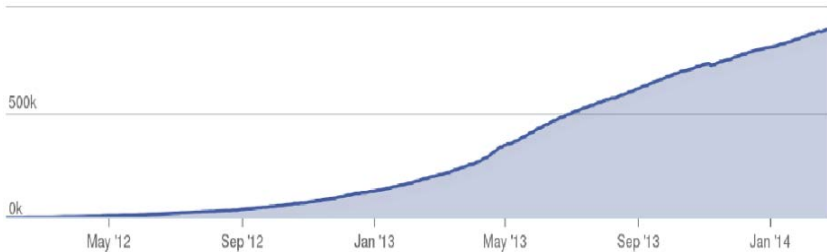
<sup>17</sup><http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>, (accessed on 24/02/2014)

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Makram Malaeb, Beirut, 06/02/2014.

### **An increase in the number of Syrian refugees**

The number of Syrians coming to Lebanon is increasing proportionally with the escalation of the conflict in Syria. For instance, as of 3 December 2011, when the conflict was not covering all of Syria, total number of Syrians in Lebanon was under 4,000 according to the UNHCR, while the UNHCR had registered 7,085 Syrians as of 1 March 2012. The escalation of the conflict began to affect civilians in the period around 1 June 2012, and comparing to the number of Syrians coming to Lebanon in previous periods, one can notice the difference. Thus, Syrians registered by UNHCR as of 1 June 2012 was 17,267, but at the end of August 2012 this increased to 43,670.

#### **The number of Syrians migrating to Lebanon according to UNHCR data**



*Source: Syria Regional Refugee Response, Inter-agency Information Sharing, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>*

The actual increase in the number of Syrians coming to Lebanon started in 2013. According to UNHCR data in Lebanon there were 130,799 Syrians as of 1 January 2013; this increased to 205,419 as of 1 March 2013 and to 423,495 by the end of May. By 31 August 2013, the number of Syrians in Lebanon registered by the UNHCR was 610,916, while at the end of the year the number reached 805,835. According to UNHCR data, as of 18 March 2014, the registered number of Syrians in Lebanon, together with those that were expecting to be registered, was 974,434.<sup>19</sup>

### **Syrians' place of origin**

The Syrians came from areas where the conflict was the most intense. For instance, while the northern parts of Lebanon received Syrians from Hama and Homs, in late 2013 there was an increase in those coming from Aleppo.<sup>20</sup> In interviews with the Ministry of Social Affairs in Lebanon, the UNHCR and foreign and local NGOs it was estimated that Syrians coming to Lebanon were predominantly Sunni Arabs, yet were some Palestinians, Nusayris, Christians

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<sup>19</sup> <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122>, (accessed on 24/02/2014).

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Maleq Mohamad Ali, Bayt al Zakat Foundation, Tripoli, 08/02/2014.



and Druse Syrians also went to Lebanon. However, neither the UNHCR nor any of the NGOs have classified the Syrians by religion or sect.

Normally it can be expected that most of the Syrians came to Lebanon from the bordering regions. However, UNHCR data shows that the general flow of Syrian migration to Lebanon has been both from regions close to the Lebanese-Syrian border and from other regions as well. As of 20 February 2014 the largest group of Syrians in Lebanon were from Homs, a city near the border.

**Table 1: The place of origin of Syrians in Lebanon (20 February 2014)**

Place of origin	Percentage
Homs	24%
Aleppo	18.5%
Damascus	17.6%
Idlib	14.1%
Hamah	7.2%
Daria	6.5%
Al Raqqah	3.8%
Al Hasakah	2.3%
DayrazZaw	1.7%
Others; n/a	4.3%

*Source: UNCHR Registration Trends for Syrians, Statistics as of 20 February 2014, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=4549>*

There are two points that should be addressed here. First, after Homs, it would be expected that the migration flow would be higher from urban and rural areas of Damascus than from other parts of Syria. Nevertheless, according to UNHCR data the number of people coming from Aleppo has been higher than from Damascus and its vicinity. Some 164,105 Syrians have come from Aleppo, while 155,835 have come from urban and rural parts of Damascus.<sup>21</sup>

The second point is that Syrians have travelled to Lebanon from such cities as Aleppo, Idlib, Al Raqqah, Al Hasakah and Latakia. However, those cities are relatively closer to Turkey than Lebanon. Here factors such as sharing the same language and being more familiar with Lebanon were probably among the main determinants in them choosing to go to Lebanon. However, in some interviews it was claimed that the cost factor of crossing the border of

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<sup>21</sup> Of the people coming from Damascus, only one third were from Damascus city centre.

Lebanon or Turkey has also played a considerable role. Normally, Turkey does not charge Syrians from crossing the border. However, after the Syrian opposition gained control of the borders, it was claimed that some were charged US\$30 to leave Syria. As a result, some said that it was cheaper to enter Lebanon than Turkey even though it was farther away.<sup>22</sup>

### **The location of Syrians in Lebanon**

From a logistical point of view, most Syrians in Lebanon have preferred to live in the Lebanese cities that are close to the Syria border or in Beirut, the latter mainly for economic reasons. Apart from this, in the interviews it was discovered that some Syrians have intentionally chosen specific regions for various reasons.<sup>23</sup> For instance, there are the Palestinian refugees that have moved from Syria to Lebanon, with some 504,000 Palestinians living as refugees in Syria in nine camps. Palestinians, especially those from the camps around Hamah, Homs and Neirab, migrated to Lebanon due to the intense fighting and they have preferred to settle in Lebanese Palestinian camps due to kinship ties.<sup>24</sup> According to the UNRWA, about 53,000 Palestinians had migrated to Lebanon from Syria as of 25 February 2014.<sup>25</sup> According to data provided by Rayan al Amine from the Issam Fares Center, 70,000 Palestinians have come from Syria.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, the members of other groups that have migrated to Lebanon are smaller than for Palestinians, and they have settled in specific neighbourhoods in Beirut and other cities. In this context, it has been claimed that Christians have mostly preferred to settle in the Mount Lebanon region and some Armenians have preferred to settle in Baalbeck and Nusayrisin southern Lebanon.<sup>27</sup>

Apart from this, it has been observed that Zahle has the most Syrians in Lebanon per capita. Out of all registered Syrians, 141,639 people have settled in Zahle, with Akkar coming in second with nearly 100,000 Syrians. At the same time 70% of Syrians have settled in northern Lebanon, and some 100,000 Syrians have settled in such southern cities as Suour, Sidon and Bint Jbeil, areas where Hezbollah is more dominant.<sup>28</sup> However, it has been said that

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<sup>22</sup> For instance, Ali, a teenager from Aleppo, calculated the cost for his five-person family as at least US\$150 for Turkey and US\$30 for Lebanon.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Rayan El-Amine, Beirut, 07/02/2014.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Maleq Mohamad Ali, Bayt al Zakat Foundation, Tripoli, 08/02/2014.

<sup>25</sup> Bkz. Flippo Grandi, "Crossroads of Crisis: Yarmouk, Syria and the Palestine Refugee Predicament", 25 February 2014,

<http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/crossroads-crisis-yarmouk-syria-and-palestine-refugee-predicament>, (accessed on 26/02/2014).

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Rayan El-Amine, Beirut, 07/02/2014.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Dominique Tohme, Beirut, 06/02/2014.

<sup>28</sup> UNCHR Registration Trends for Syrians, Statistics as of 20 February 2014,

Syrians, who are mostly Sunni, have not had difficulty in living Hezbollah-dominant areas.<sup>29</sup> However this is not only related to Hezbollah's non-interference with humanitarian aid but also related to the relatively lower rate of migration to the south.<sup>30</sup> According to UNHCR data only 15% of registered Syrians have settled in southern Lebanon.

### **The main challenges facing Syrians in Lebanon**

The main challenges Syrians face in Lebanon can be classified into four categories: shelter, education, health and other social problems. Before examining the challenges, it will be useful to focus on why. One of the most important reasons for such problems is the absence of a systematic policy towards the Syrian because of the fragile political structure peculiar to Lebanon. When the first migration flows began, the Lebanese government did not adopt or implement any specific policy regarding the registration or settlement of Syrians. Since then, the Lebanese government has pursued an open-door policy and, except in some criminal cases, it has not deported any Syrian even if he or she were illegally living in the country. From a humanitarian aspect, this open-door policy is certainly commendable, but not having policies regarding registration or settlement has inevitably caused problems or worsened problems that were already there.

The Lebanese government has a "no-camp policy" regarding Syrians. This policy is closely related to the country's historical experiences. From the First Arab-Israeli War Lebanon has received Palestinian refugees, and at present there are some 455,000 Palestinians mostly living in 12 camps and under poor conditions.<sup>31</sup> Sometimes, these Palestinians can negatively affect the political structure of Lebanon. It is due to this experience, and to concern that the Syrians would be permanent settlers, that the Lebanese government has pursued a no-camp policy.<sup>32</sup>

At the same time, Lebanon's fragile political structure is another reason for its no-camp policy. Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian crisis and that the country had only a caretaker government at the start of the Syrian influx are also reasons why the government has not introduced camps.<sup>33</sup> And even if Lebanon had a stable government that was able to adopt a systematic policy

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<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=4549>, (accessed on 22/02/2014).

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Makram Malaeb, Beirut, 06/02/2014; Interview with Dominique Tohme, Beirut, 06/02/2014.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Rayan El-Amine, Beirut, 07/02/2014.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon>, (accessed on 22/02/2014).

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Makram Malaeb, Beirut, 06/02/2014; Interview with Dominique Tohme, Beirut, 06/02/2014.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with WaleedHazbun, Director of Center for Arab and Middle Eastern Studies, American University of Beirut, Beirut, 10/02/2014.

towards the Syrian crisis, it would not have sufficient resources to implement it. Even before the Syrian crisis Lebanon was facing serious problems regarding public services and infrastructure. For instance, according to a World Bank report, even before the Syrian crisis only 18 hours of electricity was the daily average in Lebanon,<sup>34</sup> while in the rural regions there were places that only had electricity for 12 hours a day.<sup>35</sup> As a result, Lebanon's existing infrastructure problems became more apparent with the Syrian influx.

And lastly the Syrians lack of organizational structure in Lebanon can be considered as a source or a reason why the problems are getting worse. This lack of representation is a problem identified by government organizations and the NGOs that were interviewed.<sup>36</sup> That the Syrians do not live in camps and are spread widely throughout the country makes any organization difficult.

### **Shelter**

Shelter is one of the main problems that Syrians face in Lebanon. The Lebanese government's no-camp policy has inevitably had negative consequences for the Syrians. Syrians coming to Lebanon, be it legally or illegally, are generally settling in regions they were already familiar with or that their relatives had settled in before. If they were not familiar with the country or had no relatives, they generally followed the people they were leaving with and settled near them. According to the UNHCR, there were 215,151 registered Syrian households as of 18 March 2014. More than a half of these were in urban areas, with less than half therefore in rural areas. According to the UNHCR, there are some 1,661 Lebanese villages where Syrians have already settled.<sup>37</sup>

The places where Syrians live can be classified into five categories: houses where only a single family live; houses shared by more than one family; store houses/depots where more than one family live; buildings that are under construction; and tents. Syrians that have sufficient funds to cover their accommodation generally prefer to rent apartments either in Beirut or in northern Lebanon. These people have the best shelter. Those from the second group cannot afford to cover the rent with only their own household so they share rooms with other families. People from this group may have serious social issues depending on the age and sex of the family members.<sup>38</sup> In visits to

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<sup>34</sup><http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/09/24/lebanon-bears-the-brunt-of-the-economic-and-social-spillovers-of-the-syrian-conflict>, (accessed on 02/02/2014).

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Rayan El-Amine, Beirut, 07/02/2014.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with the representatives of NGOs in Tripoli, 08/02/2014.

<sup>37</sup> UNCHR Registration Trends for Syrians, Statistics as of 20 February 2014, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=4549>, (accessed on 18/02/2014).

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Refaat Adef, Bayt al Zakat Foundation, Tripoli, 08/02/2014.

those places, it has been seen that the children had several dermatological diseases. Syrians are living two to three, or even four to five, families together depending on the space available. According to UNHCR data the average number of people in a household is four, and so in each location there can be some eight to 20 people living together.

The average rent varies depending on the number of rooms, size or condition of the place. For instance, the rent for a house with three rooms located in the suburbs of Tripoli is between US\$300-500; while the rent for a house in one of the suburbs of Beirut can be up to US\$600.<sup>39</sup> Families living in apartments or other locations can receive some aid provided by the UNHCR or other NGOs. However, this is not enough to cover rent, not to mention food, education and healthcare costs. To give an example, the UNHCR offers registered Syrians up to US\$30 per person every month, but this is not enough to cover rent even if they live in substandard accommodation.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, although Lebanon does not officially allow Syrians to establish camps, families that cannot afford to pay any rent have no choice but to live in tents. As a result there are some tent settlements in Lebanon where the living conditions are hard. Tent settlements have three characteristics. First, even if Lebanon government pursues a no-camp policy they have not intervened in such tent settlements, and instead the organization of those camps has been left to local authorities. Thus NGOs have been coordinating with local authorities in order to organize aid in those camps. Second, in order to prevent the expansion of such settlements, the Lebanese government limits the number of tents in each camp. Hence, these camps cannot be compared with those of the Palestinian refugees or the camps that hold Syrians in Turkey or Jordan. For instance, one camp in the rural part of the town of Talaabaya near Chtaura consists of 100 tents, with 600 people, while the camp located in el Marj near Bar Elias consists of 40 tents hosting 250. As a result, according to the Ministry of Social Affairs, tent settlements are only hosting about 16% of the Syrians living in Lebanon.

### **Education**

Education is another problem that Syrians face in Lebanon. According to the UNHCR 52.4% of Syrians coming to Lebanon are under the age of 18 and at least 33.5% of them are at the primary and secondary school age. It should be stated that figures provided by the UNHCR differs from those estimated by the Lebanese government. The UNHCR estimates that there are

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Mohamed Hidir Debwes, Syrian Aid and Rescue (SAAR), Tripoli, 08/02/2014; interview with a Syrian named Ali, Beirut, 10/02/2014.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with SAAR, Tripoli, 08/02/2014.

almost 300,000 Syrian children of primary and secondary school age, while Ministry of Social Affairs estimates this figure to be at least 400,000.<sup>41</sup>

The Lebanese government has tried to facilitate access to education and made it possible for Syrians to attend Lebanese since the capacity of Lebanese state schools is inadequate for meeting the needs of Syrians. Thus, according to the UNHCR by the end of 2013 out of the total number of Syrian school-aged children only 27% were being educated in Lebanese state schools. In other words, 73% of Syrian children do not have the opportunity to continue their education.<sup>42</sup> The Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education officials have collaborated with UNICEF and the UNHCR to expand the capacity of state schools; however, the reality is that more than half of Syrian children will not be able to get basic education due to lack of capacity. This situation poses serious risks for Syrian children who cannot attend primary school, a situation that Rayan el Amine defines as creating a Syrian “lost generation”.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, it should be noted that the negative effects of a lack of education would occur in the long term.

Even for the Syrian children who are among the 27% that can enter Lebanese schools there are still some problems due to the characteristics of the education system. In Syria, primary and secondary education is only in Arabic, while in Lebanon either English or French, along with Arabic, is used, especially in science and mathematics courses. Syrian students who attend Lebanese schools will have a lot of difficulty since they mostly have no knowledge of English or French.<sup>44</sup> As a result, according to UNHCR and Save the Children research, most Syrian children have had to be placed in a lower level of classes than they should be. Besides, in order to attend a Lebanese school a Syrian child has to wait until the start of the registration period. This means that even if there is sufficient capacity to attend school, the child may still have to wait for the registration period, which could take up to six months to a year.<sup>45</sup> In order to overcome those problems, some NGOs are trying to offer classes using the Syrian curriculum in the urban areas where Syrians are more settled. However, it should be noted that only some Syrian children can take advantage of this.

On the other side, in terms of higher education Syrian teenagers face fewer problems than those who are in primary and secondary education. The

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Makram Malaeb, Beirut, 06/02/2014.

<sup>42</sup> UNHCR, Education Monthly Update, December 2013, <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=4431>, (accessed on 15/02/2014).

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Rayan El-Amine, Beirut, 07/02/2014.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Mohamed Hidir Debwes, Tripoli, 08/02/2014.

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.irinnews.org/report/96053/lebanon-syria-no-school-today-why-syrian-refugee-children-miss-out-on-education>, (accessed on 15/02/2014).

Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Lebanon has opened the doors of state universities to Syrian university students as they have done for the primary and secondary education. It can be said that adapting to the Lebanese university system is easier for Syrian university students than those in primary and secondary school since the Syrians tend to prefer to enrol in departments where lessons are taught in Arabic. However, from a logistical and economic point of view, Syrian university students can still face difficulties in finding a suitable university/department in the neighbouring region or it may be difficult to attend regularly to the courses since they may have to work to generate income.

### **Health**

Health issues for Syrians in Lebanon can be classified into four main categories: Problems related to access to public healthcare services, problems with pregnancy and new borns, problems of chronic diseases and problems in cases of emergency and surgery. The capacity of Lebanese healthcare facilities and the Lebanese healthcare system is the main cause of problems. In fact, thanks to the changes made by the Lebanese government, Syrians have the same rights regarding healthcare as Lebanese.<sup>46</sup> However, the healthcare system in Lebanon is primarily based on the private sector and state healthcare facilities operate with private sector practices. That is why Syrians and Lebanese have to pay some percentage of their treatment both at the primary health care level, but also at the secondary and tertiary levels. The UNHCR and some NGOs are already providing aid for Syrians' primary healthcare. However, their financial support is not enough to cover total costs. For secondary and tertiary level healthcare, the costs are much higher. In addition, although healthcare is free of charge, the capacity of Lebanese health facilities is insufficient to serve such an influx.<sup>47</sup>

Most Syrians in Lebanon need primary healthcare due to their poor living conditions and lack of proper nutrition. Newborns, infants, pregnant women and the elderly are particularly more vulnerable to disease. Maternal and infant mortality rate is still significant despite the collaboration efforts of UNHCR, WHO and the Lebanese Ministry of Health. Additionally, according to interviews with representatives of NGOs that are working in the healthcare field, it was noted that there has been difficulties in finding medicine and in treating some Syrians, particularly those who have chronic diseases.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Makram Malaeb, Beirut, 06/02/2014.

<sup>47</sup> UNHCR, Lebanon RRP5 Update, December 2013,

<http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=4316>, (accessed on 15/02/2014).

<sup>48</sup> Interviews with Islamic Medical Association and Bayt al Zakat Foundation, Tripoli, 08/02/2014.

However, since Syrians in Lebanon have spread across of the country, it has become logistically difficult to coordinate access to healthcare services. This situation is especially problematic in rural regions. It has been stated that because of the difficulties in access to healthcare services, some Syrians have established their own healthcare facilities, with the assistance of NGOs, in Bekaa and in Syrian territory near the border.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, there is another point that should be discussed regarding the health problems Syrians face in Lebanon, and that is the corruption in the health sector. In interviews with international organizations and NGOs it was claimed that certain medicines and medical equipment that were bought in order to be used for Syrians have been sold on the black. Another issue that was raised in the interviews was that some surgeons, whether to develop their own surgical skills or to earn more money, have conducted unnecessary procedures.

### **Other social problems**

Along with shelter, education and health issues, Syrians in Lebanon experience other social problems, such as multiple marriages, early marriages and prostitution. In some cases, multiple marriages and early marriage have been seen as a way to improve living conditions for the women but also sometimes for the whole family. Although the interviewees frequently mentioned these problems, there is no data or statistics available detailing their effect and their impact on Lebanese society.

### **Lebanese attitudes towards Syrians**

During the field research and the interviews, it was claimed that in the first phase of the Syrian influx, the Lebanese people welcomed them and had hospitable and inclusive attitudes towards the Syrians. For instance, Sheikh Halid Zarur, owner of the Tarik Irtika Radio Channel broadcasting from Tripoli, said that US\$150,000 was donated by Lebanese.<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, some Lebanese started to benefit from the Syrian influx. For example, depots or storehouses that are now being rented by Syrians normally had been previously empty or rented at a lower price. However, since the Syrian influx Lebanese owners have started to raise rents, not to mention the prices of the apartments. Also, before the Syrian influx Lebanese employers had to pay a minimum wage of a Lebanese employee. But with the Syrians, the same employer can pay the same wage for not one employee but for two or three Syrian employees. As a result with the Syrian influx rental prices and the

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Darul Zahra Foundation, Tripoli, 08/02/2014.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Sheikh Halid Zarur, Tripoli, 08/02/2014.



unemployment rate have started to increase. More and more Lebanese are coming to believe that they are suffering because of this.

In some villages and towns the number of Syrians has almost reached the number of Lebanese living there. To give an example, the town of El Marj near Bar Elias had a population of 16,000 before the Syrian crisis. Today there are some 13,000 Syrians settled there more are still coming. According to the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs, Syrians outnumber Lebanese in 30% of Lebanon's rural area.<sup>51</sup> This has led to an increase in tensions with the locals.

Rayan el-Amine has claimed that the main cause of tensions between Lebanese and the Syrians is economic and social rather than political.<sup>52</sup> This can be seen as unemployment was mentioned by the most of the interviewees. Moreover, it has been observed that low-income Lebanese particularly criticize the social aid given to the Syrians. Tensions over this have been generally low but they have the potential to increase. For instance, some Lebanese have reacted by pretending to be Syrian so that they can have the same social aid as Syrians. In addition, according to NGOs, funding for aid for indigent Lebanese had stopped with the Syrian influx, and this is the main reason for the tensions with low-income Lebanese. In order to decrease these tensions, it has been argued that about 20% of the aid given by the international organizations is allocated to deliver social aid to indigent Lebanese.<sup>53</sup> In addition, there are some serious risks. For example, through social media, some Lebanese have threatened to protest the arrival of the Syrians or employers that are hiring Syrians, including saying that their stores will be attacked.<sup>54</sup>

It can be said that the reaction towards Syrians has not been politically motivated—at least up until now. But it is hard to claim that reactions have not been affected by the Lebanon's political division. In interviews with representatives of the UNHCR, Ministry of Social Affairs and other NGOs it was said that no significant problems have been reported regarding the settlement of Syrians in southern Lebanon, which is under Hezbollah influence. Although officials claim that there is no intervention in the south by Hezbollah and Amal, in one interview an NGO representative claimed that there have been impediments for aid convoys and that even some aid trucks have been seized at Hezbollah checkpoints. The burning down of a Syrian tent settlement by the locals in the village Qsarna near Zahle can also be considered a reaction to the Syrians.<sup>55</sup> However, it's hard to claim that these attacks have been

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<sup>51</sup> Interview with Makram Malaeb, Beirut, 06/02/2014.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Rayan El-Amine, Beirut, 07/02/2014.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Mohamed Hidir Debwes, Syrian Aid and Rescue, (SAAR), Tripoli, 08/02/2012.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Zaher Sultan, Lebanese-Turkish Association, Tripoli, 08/02/2012;

<sup>55</sup> Al-Akhbar, "Lebanese Burn Down Syrian Refugee Camp", 02/12/2013, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/17783>, (accessed on 15/02/2014).

systematic and politically motivated. There are some more than 140,000 Syrians living in Zahle, and it is hard to make a generalization with the burning down of one 400-persons tent settlement. Nevertheless, due to economic and social problems, the possibility of such attacks spreading should not be underestimated.

The rare involvement of Syrians in criminal cases has been an important factor in decreasing tensions between the Syrians and Lebanese. According to Ministry of Social Affairs' officials, there have been more problems between Syrians themselves, rather than between Syrians and Lebanese.

It could be argued that since Syrians are in Lebanon for personal safety reasons, they are reluctant to become involved in criminal activities. According to Mohamed Nouredin, Syrians' non-involvement in criminal activities, especially in southern Lebanon, is related to their auto-control mechanism. Nouredin states that Syrians are reluctant to have any problems with locals in the south since the area is under the influence of Hezbollah. As a result if there were any problems a Syrian would not only risk his or her own safety but also that of all the Syrians living in that area. That is why even when there are no legal measures Syrians do not walk in the streets in the evening after a specific time.<sup>56</sup>

An interesting fact is that even in the north of the country, which is a mostly Sunni-populated area, a considerable section of the population has negative attitudes towards the Syrians that have settled there.<sup>57</sup> This is partly due to their relatively low living conditions. Moreover, it should be noted that there are more Syrians in the north than in the rest of Lebanon. However, this can be considered as proof that the attitude of the Lebanese towards the Syrians is not politically driven. Research by the Norwegian Fafo Institute for Labor and Social Research also confirms these findings. According to research conducted in May 2013, the attitude of the Lebanese towards Syrians is outlined in seven findings:<sup>58</sup>

1. *A majority fears sectarian conflict and new civil war,*
2. *People believe that the Syrians are taking Lebanese jobs and depressing wages,*

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with Mohamed Nouredine, Director of Center for Strategic Studies, Beirut, 10/02/2014.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Makram Malaeb, Beirut, 06/02/2014.; Interview with Rayan el-Amine, Beirut, 07/02/2014.

<sup>58</sup> Mona Christophersen, Cathrine Moe Thorleifsson and Åge A. Tiltnes, *Ambivalent Hospitality: Coping Strategies and Local Responses to Syrian Refugees in Lebanon*, Summary of Poll Findings, Fafo Report 2013:48, <http://www.faf.no/ais/middeast/lebanon/91369-poll-finding-English.pdf>, (accessed on 17/02/2014).

3. *Most Lebanese think that Syrian refugees are supported financially to an unfair degree,*
4. *The view that one would rather not have Syrians as close neighbors,*
5. *The perception that the UN should establish refugee camps for Syrians,*
6. *Most think that the border should be better policed, and more than half consider that Lebanon should not receive more refugees,*
7. *High trust in the Lebanese Armed Force.*

### **The impact of Syrians on Lebanon's economic and political stability**

Even though the social and economic problems stemming from the Syrian influx have not had any real impact in the short run, it has definitely negatively affected Lebanon's economic and political stability. While the number of Syrians in Lebanon can be considered low, it makes sense to make a relative comparison. The total population of Lebanon is 4,130,000, and the numbers of Syrians in Lebanon means that 30% of the total Lebanese population is now Syrian. This is equivalent to approximately 23 million Syrians coming to Turkey or more than 95 million Syrians in the US.

The Lebanese government cannot play an active role due to the unstable political structure in the country, and this was a problem even before the crisis. Almost all of the interviewees emphasized this before focusing on the impact of the Syrians on the country. Lebanon, which is one of the most active countries in terms of economy and trade, has been directly affected by the crisis in Syria. According to the World Bank's *Lebanon: Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Syrian Conflict*, in the period between 2012-2014 Lebanon's GDP annual growth rate dropped by 2.9%, while at the same time 170,000 Lebanese were pushed into poverty and the unemployment rate doubled over the same period.<sup>59</sup>

However, any negative impact of Syrians in Lebanon, particularly in the political and sectarian dimensions, will be felt more in the long term. Although the reaction towards Syrians today has been economic and socially motivated, it should not be ignored that there is the possibility that this can gain a political dimension. For example, in his speech on 25 May 2013, Hasan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, confirmed that Hezbollah is playing a role in Syria. The day after this confirmation, the firing of rockets to the south of

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<sup>59</sup> See World Bank, *Lebanon: Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Syrian Conflict*, Executive Summary, September 2013.

Lebanon could be seen as another way that Lebanon has been affected by the crisis in Syria.<sup>60</sup>

It can be said that political tensions in Lebanon will increase when Hezbollah's engagement in Syria likewise increases, and that Hezbollah sees the issue as a matter of survival. For instance, the recent suicide attacks, which are rare in Lebanon, may be linked to Hezbollah's involvement in Syria. In 2013 there were eight bomb attacks, including the suicide attacks that killed nearly 100 Lebanese and wounded hundreds. Most of these attacks were against Hezbollah targets and the Iranian embassy in Beirut. However, there were attacks against the Sunni community, Hezbollah's opponents, including one on 15 August 2013 in Tripoli. Regarding the attacks aimed at Sunnis, some thought they could have been conducted by the Assad regime and Mukhabarat, even though there has been no evidence. The only thing that can be considered positive is that there was no proof that the Syrians in the country were involved.<sup>61</sup> However, with the increase in the number of Syrians, and with the recent the developments in Syria, there would be a risk of some Syrians' involvement in such attacks. For example, arrest of Syrian Nidal Sweidan, supposedly one of the al Nusra Front commanders by the Lebanese army can be considered as one of the signs of this risk.<sup>62</sup>

The possibility of more political instability in Lebanon, plus the Syrian crisis and the current influx, it can be said that all groups feel threatened and insecure.<sup>63</sup> In such an environment, there is an increased possibility of conflict which would include radical elements. Some Syrians may become involved in such conflicts. Moreover, there are risks of radicalization and retaliation if the Syrians are attacked by Lebanese groups. Plus, the fact that the Lebanese-Syrian border is not strictly controlled would make it quite easy for radical Syrian groups to move into Lebanon. It is not yet clear how long the Syrians will stay in Lebanon, but it is clear that such decisions will depend on developments in Syria. Therefore, if the Syrians stay for too long, some may not return even after the crisis has been resolved since they will have become adapted to living in Lebanon. In this case, Lebanon's delicate balance among confessional groups would be negatively affected since most Syrians in Lebanon are Sunni.

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<sup>60</sup> Ali Hashem, "Nasrallah on Syria: 'This Battle Is Ours' ", Al Monitor: Iran Pulse, 26 May 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/05/nasrallah-hezbollah-syria-speech-rockets.html#>, (accessed on 17/02/2014).

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Makram Malaeb, Beirut, 06/02/2014.

<sup>62</sup> Rakan al-Fakih and Youssef Diab, "Army arrests a Nusra Front commander in Arsal", Dailystar, 27/02/2014, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Feb-27/248645-army-arrests-a-nusra-front-commander-in-arsal.ashx#axzz2uqePwexy>, (accessed on 28/02/2014).

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Waleed Hazbun, Beirut, 10/02/2014.

## **Conclusion**

The Syrian crisis obviously negatively affects Syrians, but it also impacts neighbouring countries and the whole Middle East. From a humanitarian angle, Turkey, Jordan and Iraq have all experienced a refugee problem, but it can be said that Lebanon has been the most negatively affected country due to the Syrian influx. According to the UNHCR's estimates, the registered number of Syrians that had come to Lebanon by the end of 2014 was 1.5 million. However, taking into account the number of unregistered Syrians the total would be above 2 million. In this case, Lebanon would host Syrians that are nearly equal to half of its population. That is why the issues mentioned above are expected to become more important. Moreover, an escalation of the conflict in Syria, especially in the region of Damascus, would cause a new wave of refugees that would drastically increase the number of Syrians in Lebanon.

Regarding the problems of Syrians in Lebanon, it should be stated that the problems of shelter, education and health care will continue and become worse. The problems of shelter and healthcare have the potential to increasingly negatively affect the Syrians in the short term. At the same time, the participation of Syrians in the Lebanese labour market, a requirement to earn enough to survive, inevitably increases tensions between the Lebanese and Syrians. These tensions may remain local; however, they have the potential to spread and turn into collective reaction and punishment.

The mid- and long-term effects of the issues related to education that the Syrians in Lebanon face will be more negative than any short-term problems. That more than half of the Syrians in Lebanon does not have access to education means that there will be a Syrian lost generation. This generation could create problems in Lebanon depending on how long they stay, and would also be a problem for Syria after their return. One of the worst parts of this problem is that its negative outcomes cannot be prevented and that it is irreversible.

Personal safety was the main reason for the Syrian influx to Lebanon. However, some of these challenges have superseded such concerns. As a result, economic problems, poor living conditions and the lack of healthcare may cause some Syrians to return early. Although there is no data to support this, it has been claimed that some Syrians that did not act with the opposition and were not involved in military campaigns against the regime have already returned to Syria. The decision to return is partly due to the expectation of their having better living conditions in Syria, or some families may prefer to live in their own country even though the living conditions are the same.

Focusing on government policies, having a caretaker government since March of 2013 was one of the main obstacles for Lebanon to pursue an effective policy towards the Syrian influx. That's why creation of a new

Lebanese government in February 2014 can be considered a positive step. The new government's regulations about the Syrians may decrease tensions. For instance, it is expected that the new government may build some camps, particularly in regions where tensions are on the rise. However, considering their historical experiences, it can also be expected that any government would prefer to limit the scale of the camps in order to prevent a permanent stay of the Syrians. In this case, tensions in a specific region may decrease but there will still be problems in other regions.

Consequently, from a humanitarian angle, Lebanon has been the most negatively affected country by the Syrian influx. It is not just the Syrians who are negatively affected but also the Lebanese government and people. Political instability, a fragile domestic balance of power and insufficient infrastructure are among the reasons why there have been problems with the conditions of Syrians in Lebanon. As a result, a continuation of economic and logistical assistance by the international community is vital. This assistance can decrease tensions or postpone any social crises that might erupt. Nevertheless, even if the economic and logistic assistance continues, the Syrian influx, which is increasing and not decreasing, and the engagement of Lebanese groups in the Syrian crisis will continue to negatively influence the domestic political and social structure of Lebanon.

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