



B E I R U T I N S T I T U T E

## **Ethics and Politics: Response to the Plight of Refugees**

Impact of the continued influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon  
on the infrastructure of the country and its Inability to cope  
alone

Policy Paper  
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### **Introduction**

Facing a historical challenge of a high influx of more than a million Syrian refugees into its territory, Lebanon is hovering on the precipice of a system breakdown and should reassess its ability to manage the crisis. The reception by Lebanon of Syrian refugees is unparalleled anywhere in the world. But the originally weak infrastructure is rapidly becoming more tenuous with alarming consequences that need serious and immediate action on both local and international levels.

If the new Lebanese government does not assume strong leadership on this matter, ramifications of the Syrian civil war will likely prove inexorable for Lebanon.

Regional and international actors must pay serious attention to the impact of refugees on the fragile infrastructure of Lebanon as well as to the security threat this poses to the country.

Neither the humanitarian tragedy of the refugees has been met with adequate international response nor has the Lebanese communities' capacity to cope. Tensions between Syrian refugees and the hosting community will grow with the expected prolonged stay of the refugees. 1.2 million homes in Syria have been fully or partially destroyed and it would take 5 to 10 years to rebuild them.

Politicization of humanitarian action is hindering humanitarian aid. Sectarian politicization of humanitarian aid in particular is harming this effort and is



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serving narrow political agendas. Impartial humanitarian aid is questioned and this is consequently curtailing proper financing due to mistrust. Political restrictions on humanitarian aid as well as a donors' pattern of channeling to beneficiaries rather than a pattern based on need assessment compound the problem.

Policing the borders between Syria and Lebanon is an urgent matter that remains unaddressed. A structural framework as well as an action plan are much needed but remain lacking.

Coping is not enough when the crisis is moving exponentially and the ability to react to it is at best moving linearly. These are serious challenges in a dire situation that will lead to a dangerous meltdown in Lebanon if the pattern of neglect and lack of leadership continues.



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### **Recommendations**

To stave off disaster, strategies must be devised and actions must be taken on both local and international levels, proactively rather than reactively.

Infrastructural assistance to local communities must be at the center of such strategies.

Lebanese authorities must promptly devise and implement urgent policies that address the issue as a developmental crisis not only as refugee crisis. Regional and international donors need to define alternative funding means that go beyond humanitarian assistance. They should consider assistance to local communities in Lebanon as an urgent priority.

Identification and prioritization of the needs- such as sanitization, housing, and education etc- would constitute the needed framework of action. Such framework will contribute to devising a national strategic plan and a holistic approach towards security policy. It will also serve as to coordinate humanitarian assistance.

A blueprint that identifies needs and priorities for donors will help curtail some of the haphazardness in the aid given and the areas it is destined to. Liaison among donors is necessary. Transparency is key to securing funding as well as to avoiding overlapping and inefficiency. As important is providing information, organization and a supervision of where aid is in fact extended. Regular evaluative meetings must be held in the field. A network for coordination between international institutions and local civil society is essential.



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Scrutiny of funding is not exclusive to the recipient of aid. It is as applicable to those who pledge it. A mechanism must be created to assess and monitor who pledged, who delivered, and what has actually been dispersed.

What is needed now is beyond humanitarian assistance. Governments and Parliaments must now boost the hosting communities' abilities and provide urgent financial assistance to their infrastructure.

Funds for education, sanitation, housing, and job creation aid have now become imperative for the stability of the country. There is a massive gap between the needs and the capacity in every sector. The infrastructure is simply incapable of providing shelter, healthcare, education etc.

UNICEF and UNHCR should allocate urgent funds to secure schools. There are now over 33,000 Syrian students in the public sector alone and an almost equivalent number in the private sector. Schools simply cannot accommodate this influx because schools are already in a dire state with some about to fall and kill students. Both will and money are required urgently to address this essential and growing problem.

UN agencies must readjust and redefine their tasks towards both the refugees and the hosting communities. A system breakdown will lead to a serious tension already simmering between the hosting communities and the refugees due to competition for job opportunities and resources. The Lebanese hosting communities feel that the UN agencies are supporting the refugees and not supporting them.



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The international community needs to devise new approaches. Arab countries must accept to share the burden beyond the traditional pledges. Ideas such as setting camps on the borders inside the Syrian territory need to be discussed urgently and seriously.

Controversial options such as Lebanon serving as a transient stop for Syrian refugees should not be shunned or automatically dismissed. It is not solely the responsibility of Lebanon to face the haunting challenges arousing from the influx of refugees- expected to multiply with the advent of the fight for Damascus. This is a matter of limited logistical capacity of a country that already faces major security challenges and lives on the edge of sectarian and political abyss. If ignored, this situation could turn the country into breeding grounds for extremism.

Donor countries must be willing to host refugees as part of sharing the burden. A network of host countries should be created. Arab countries, particularly GCC countries, have both the capacity and the ethical responsibility to host refugees from Syria. Nordic countries may wish to limit their aid to funding but they must not shun refugees completely.

Russia should offer to host refugees if they are willing to accept and it should contribute financially to alleviating their agony through UN agencies.

The US should directly increase its support and consider direct developmental aid to the new Lebanese government.

EU countries should spearhead the search for innovative answers to this



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unfolding tragedy of refugees. Pledges must be met. New approaches to draw additional funders should be explored. Urgent actions must be taken. This is no time for contemplating leisurely.

The UN, EU, GCC, and Lebanese authorities must take urgent action through an international conference as called for by the President of Lebanon. Sectarian and political clashes are likely to increase with the advent of the battle for Damascus. This threatens the fragile fabric of Lebanon. It is a serious security matter.

The UN Security Council needs to unify a stand towards the issue of refugees and the internally displaced people. This is an issue that threatens regional peace and security and is at the heart of international humanitarian law. There are serious security and economic implications to the continued absence of an international action on the impact of the refugee crisis on the neighboring countries. The UN Security Council must meet and act urgently.

Nongovernmental organizations, as well as individual contributions to alleviate the plight of refugees, need to be detached from political agendas. This requires critical scrutiny by the UN agencies and by the State in a seriously coordinated mechanism that oversees how funds get dispersed.

New actors in the donor community are needed. A targeted humanitarian action would help reduce the polarization and the tension. Municipalities need sustained tangible support from aid agencies and the central government. They too need to be under scrutiny for transparency in order to widen the net of aid provided to their communities.



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The Lebanese system suffers from massive inefficiency. Allocating responsibility clearly and making decisions promptly will lead to a better management system that would attract old and new donors.

Investing in humanitarian aid inside Syria on both sides of the conflict would reduce the pressure on Lebanon and other neighboring countries and might reduce the influx of refugees. But the political restrictions on humanitarian aid are a major inhibitor to mount a credible humanitarian action. Suspicion and politics that come with aid run deep and hinder independent humanitarian action.

Political support for independent humanitarian action is needed.

Organizations such as the ICRC warn that if they do not get some humanitarian space, they will not have the proper mechanism in place to credibly assess needs and provide neutral aid.





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### **Conclusion**

The lack of engagement of the international community and the lack of visibility of the refugee threat to the security, economic and social infrastructure of Lebanon must come to an end. The reluctance from the Lebanese political fabric to be more articulate in describing the problem compounds fears, suspicions and animosities. Expanding only on the depth of the problem will accelerate the politics of this problem. The celebrated resilience of this country and its ability to cope will soon become a tale of the past if the international community, the GCC countries and the Lebanese authorities do not act wisely and immediately.

### **Note**

The recommendations in this paper are based on an Off-the-Record Exclusive Policy Circle that was held April 3rd, 2013 in Beirut. A high level of local, regional and international stakeholders discussed the humanitarian response to the refugee crisis in the region and specifically in Lebanon.

Raghida Dergham, Beirut Institute's Founder and Executive Director presided over the meeting. HE Peter Maurer, the President of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was the guest of honor; also in attendance were the Lebanese Minister of Social Affairs HE Wael Abou Faour, the Lebanese Minister of Education and Higher Education HE Hassan Diab, the Lebanese Minister of State HE Marwan Kheireddine, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to Lebanon HE Ali Awadh Asseri, the Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to Lebanon HE Inan



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Ozylidiz, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Denmark to Lebanon HE Jan Top Christensen, the Special Coordinator of the UN Secretary- General for Lebanon Mr. Derek Plumbly, the UNHCR's Representative in Lebanon Ms. Ninette Kelley, the Director of Economic Development and Globalization Division at ESCWA Mr. Abdullah El-Dardari, Member of the Lebanese Parliament Me. Ghassan Moukheiber, Former Member of the Lebanese Governemt Mr. Misbah El-Ahdab, the Political Chief Section at the United States of America Embassy to Lebanon Danielle Garbe, the Humanitarian Adviser at the Department for International Development Mr. Jeremy Loveless, the Head of Delegation in Beirut at ICRC Mr. Jurg Montani, the Head of Operations for the Near and MEA at ICRC Mr. Robert Mardini, a representative of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan Embassy to Lebanon Dr. Aref Wraikat and the Secretary General of the Lebanese Red Cross Mr. George Kettaneh.

Beirut Institute plans to hold similar policy circles on the impact of refugees on other neighboring countries.

Beirut Institute policy paper was prepared by Raghida Dergham.

Beirut Institute is a cutting edge independent think tank for the Arab region that is organic, forward looking, solution driven and adamant at achieving a sustainable impact on local and global policy.