‘I WANT A SAFE PLACE’

REFUGEE WOMEN FROM SYRIA UPROOTED AND UNPROTECTED IN LEBANON

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than 7 million people who campaign for a world where human rights are enjoyed by all.

Our vision is for every person to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion and are funded mainly by our membership and public donations.

© Amnesty International February 2016
Except where otherwise noted, content in this document is licensed under a Creative Commons (attribution, non-commercial, no derivatives, international 4.0) licence.
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/legalcode
For more information please visit the permissions page on our website: www.amnesty.org
Where material is attributed to a copyright owner other than Amnesty International this material is not subject to the Creative Commons licence.
First published in 2016
by Amnesty International Ltd
Peter Benenson House, 1 Easton Street
London WC1X 0DW, UK

Index: MDE 18/3210/2016
Original language: English

amnesty.org

Cover photo: *A woman walks through a poor neighbourhood of Beirut with a high concentration of refugees from Syria, July 2013. (Photo by Spencer Platt/Getty Images)*
© Spencer Platt/Getty Images

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

CONTENTS

Executive summary 5

Methodology 9

Refugees from Syria in Lebanon 11

The refugee crisis in numbers 11

Refugee women who head their households 13

Lack of resettlement places 15

Resettlement of refugee women 16

The Lebanese context 17

Political pressures and disagreements 17

Increasing hostility towards refugees 18

Additional difficulties faced by Palestinian refugees in Lebanon 20

Loss, struggle and determination 21

Relevant international human rights law and standards 22

The right to non-discrimination 23

Barriers to regular status for refugees in Lebanon 25

Increasing restrictions 25

Lack of valid residence permits 25

The impact of an invalid residence permit 26

The struggle to survive 29

Inadequate support for refugees 29

Unwanted dependency 32

Exploitation in employment 33

Inadequate housing 36
Unaffordable rent and poor living conditions 36
Insecure tenure and threats of evictions 39
Economic, social and cultural rights 42
Obligations on Lebanon to request and utilise international support 43
Obligations on the international community to provide assistance 44
Sexual harassment and risks of exploitation 45
Sexual harassment and risks of violence in public spaces 45
Offers of 'help' come with unwelcome conditions 47
'Help' conditional on marriage 50
Impact of harassment and fears of harassment on women 51
Inability to seek redress 52
Women's rights 54
Conclusion and recommendations 56

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Syrian refugee women and Palestinian refugee women from Syria face risks of serious human rights violations and abuses in Lebanon, including gender-based violence and exploitation. Those who are heads of their households are at particular risk.

Over four million people have fled Syria since the start of the crisis in 2011 with more than 1 million fleeing to Lebanon. This means that about 25% of the country's population are refugees from Syria and Lebanon has more refugees per capita than any other country in the world. Of the 1.06 million Syrian refugees in Lebanon at the end of 2015, 53% are children. Women over 18 years of age make up almost 26% of the refugee population and 21% are men over 18. Lebanon also hosts over 44,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria.

One fifth of Syrian refugee households in Lebanon are headed by women. For Palestinian refugees from Syria, women head almost one third of households. Some refugee women who are heads of their household in Lebanon are widows, some are divorced and some have husbands who have either stayed in Syria or have sought asylum in other countries. Others have husbands who are missing, forcibly disappeared or detained in Syria.

Amnesty International carried out research in Lebanon from 15 to 26 June 2015 and from 30 September to 16 October 2015. The organization met with 77 refugee women (65 Syrian women and 12 Palestinian refugee women from Syria). The organization also held meetings with UN agencies, lawyers and international and national NGOs and wrote to the government requesting its response to some of the findings. Amnesty International has changed all names of refugee women to protect their identity.

At the start of the crisis in Syria, Lebanon, to its credit, largely operated an "open border" policy, allowing refugees to enter the country. This has now changed. In January 2015 the government introduced onerous new criteria for refugees to renew their residence permits. The UN reported that 61% of Syrian refugee households had invalid residence permits in July 2015 and 86% of Palestinians refugees from Syria had invalid permits in March 2015.

Without a valid residency permit, refugees from Syria are considered to be in breach of Lebanese law. This exposes them to the risk of a range of human rights violations, including arbitrary arrest, detention and deportation, inability to seek redress from the authorities if they are a victim of crime due to fear of arrest, limitations on movement, inability to register births and marriages and difficulties in accessing services such as education or health because of fear of crossing checkpoints. Such fear of checkpoints was common among refugee women interviewed by Amnesty International. A Syrian woman, "Mouna", who lives in the Bekaa Valley, said: "Having a valid permit would give us higher morale and we would feel more psychologically comfortable in moving around. We would feel like any other residents of the country. I wouldn't be afraid of checkpoints."

Refugee women struggle to meet the high cost of living in Lebanon and, in particular, to find sufficient money to buy food and to pay rent for their accommodation. The UN-led humanitarian response is grossly underfunded. In response to the shortage of funds, the UN

has cut the numbers of refugees receiving its support and the amount of assistance provided to refugees. It estimated in September 2015 that 70% of Syrian refugee families were living below the Lebanese national poverty line of US$3.84 per person per day. About one quarter of refugee women interviewed by Amnesty International had had their monthly financial support for food from the UN stopped in the past year. Those still receiving the payment had seen the amount reduce substantially. This caused them increased financial difficulties.

Refugee women who were working or who had tried to find a job reported underpayment or non-payment of wages. "Hanan", a Palestinian refugee from Syria, said: "There is exploitation by employers. They know we will agree to whatever low wage they offer because we are in need. They will offer a job for a very low wage and you wouldn't agree if you weren't in need." Another Palestinian woman, "Asmaa", described how her daughter experienced sexual harassment by her employer: "My daughter worked in a store. The manager harassed her and touched her. That is why I don't let my daughters work now".

The government does not permit new refugee camps to be built on its territory so refugees live across the country, mainly in rented property or in informal settlements. Housing is in short supply and often overcrowded and of poor quality. Refugee women worry about being unable to pay the rent and possible eviction. "Iman", a Syrian woman, said, "I have to save every penny I have and deprive the children of clothes, food and other things in order to save money to pay the rent for the house. The moment you don't have the rent, the owner of the house will evict you."

Amnesty International heard repeatedly from refugee women about sexual harassment they experience in public spaces. Refugee women living in different parts of Lebanon spoke about instances of Lebanese men making inappropriate sexual advances towards them while they were going about their daily lives. In some cases, men offered financial or other assistance to refugee women in exchange for sex. In other cases men threatened them, including with weapons. Women reported sexual harassment by police officers, government office employees in charge of renewing residence permits, employers, neighbours, bus and taxi drivers and strangers in the street.

Refugee women heads of household told Amnesty International about targeted harassment they had experienced from men who knew they did not have a husband or other adult male relative living with them in Lebanon. "Fatima", whose husband has been missing since 2012, said that when she tried to register her children in school a man had offered to help her with the paperwork. However, he then phoned her several times a day asking her to go out with him. Since then she has been approached regularly by men in her neighbourhood who know her husband is missing. She described a typical approach: "He will say, 'If you need a ride to any place, I'll take you.' I assume in the coming days that he will ask me for more… When I [tell them] that I am still searching for my husband and that my children are waiting for their father, they tell me to quit searching and say that my husband is probably dead."

Refugee women consistently cited their lack of valid residence permits as a key reason why they were unable or unwilling to report harassment and threats to the Lebanese authorities. One woman, "Hala", said, "Of course I wouldn't feel safe [to go to the police] because I don't have a valid [residence] permit and they would ask for a valid permit whenever I walked into any police station."

Another woman, "Maryam", told Amnesty International that she had to report the death of a relative to the police. Police officers recorded her personal details and those of her sister. She said: "After a while the police would pass by our house or would call us and ask us to go out with them. It was the same three police officers who took our report. Because we don't have legal [residence] permits, the officers threatened us. They said that they would imprison us if we didn't go out with them."

Half of the population of Syria has had to flee their homes due to the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis in the country. Around 250,000 people are estimated to have been killed. Government forces and non-state armed groups have committed war crimes, other violations of international humanitarian law and gross human rights abuses with impunity. Government forces have carried out bombings (some indiscriminate and some targeting civilian areas), prolonged sieges of civilian areas resulting in starvation, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention and torture and other ill-treatment. Non-state armed groups have indiscriminately shelled and besieged predominantly civilian areas. In addition the armed group calling itself the Islamic State (IS) has carried out direct attacks on civilians and perpetrated numerous unlawful killings, including of captives.

Amnesty International recognizes that more than 1 million people from Syria have sought refuge in Lebanon, placing a heavy strain on the country's resources, infrastructure, services, including housing, education and health care, and security. The international community has failed to provide adequate funds to support refugees from Syria in the main host countries. The UN estimates that 10% of refugees from Syria living in the main host countries meet their criteria of "vulnerable" and need to be resettled to a third state. Despite this, the numbers of refugees being resettled remains low. Refugee women may be considered for resettlement under any of the "vulnerability criteria" used by the UN, including the category "women and girls at risk". Submissions under the "women and girls at risk" category amounted to just 7% of total submissions of refugees in Lebanon. Published figures on resettlement in the other UN categories do not include a breakdown by gender, which makes it difficult to assess the extent to which refugee women are being resettled by states.

Lebanon has not ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention) or its 1967 Protocol, the main international legal instruments for the protection of the rights of refugees. However, Lebanon is bound by customary international law and by other international human rights instruments that apply to refugees and non-refugees alike, for example, the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

Non-discrimination on grounds including sex, gender, race, religion, ethnicity and nationality is a core provision in all international human rights instruments. Lebanon, as a state party to the CEDAW, is obliged to amend or repeal laws which discriminate against women and to ensure equality in practice. The right to non-discrimination on the basis of gender applies to all women and girls within the jurisdiction of the state, whether or not they are citizens of the state.

Under the ICESCR, Lebanon is obliged to take steps to realize the rights in the Covenant progressively and to ensure that everyone in the state has at least minimum essential levels

of each right, including food, shelter, education and health. Where states do not have the resources to meet this requirement, they are obliged to seek assistance from the international community.

A fundamental principle of refugee protection is international responsibility sharing in order to reduce the impact of mass refugee influxes on host countries. Each state should contribute to the maximum of its capacity. The international community is obliged under the ICESCR to ensure that their assistance is provided in a manner consistent with human rights, including prioritizing the most marginalized, ensuring the minimum essential levels of economic, social and cultural rights and guaranteeing equality and non-discrimination.

The failure of the international community to provide adequate funding has forced the UN to reduce the support it provides to refugees leaving refugees living significantly below the Lebanese poverty line. In addition, unjustifiable new criteria and high costs for refugees to renew their residence permits introduced by the Lebanese government means that far fewer refugees have a valid permit. This combination of pressures has resulted in a climate in which refugee women from Syria, especially those who head their households, are at risk of violence, harassment and exploitation and are unable to seek redress from the authorities.

- The international community must substantially increase financial contributions to the UN Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan and ensure that the UN response has full funding early in 2016 in order to avoid the damaging cuts to refugee support that occurred in 2015.

- States must increase the number of resettlement and humanitarian admission places for refugees from Syria who are currently hosted in Lebanon and other neighbouring countries so that the 10% of refugees from Syria who UNHCR consider the "most vulnerable" (approximately 450,000 people) are resettled by the end of 2016. States must ensure that resettlement programmes are in line with UNHCR criteria and accept refugees in accordance with UNHCR's "vulnerability criteria", including refugee women heads of household whose husbands are forcibly disappeared or who are unable to demonstrate their whereabouts.

- The government of Lebanon must ensure that all refugees from Syria can renew their residency in Lebanon until there is a fundamental change in circumstances in Syria that means it is safe for them to return. To this end, it should remove obstacles to residency renewal, including the fee of US$200.

- The government must ensure that refugee women and girls are protected from gender-based violence and other human right violations and abuses and are able to seek redress without fear of negative repercussions due to their invalid residence permits.

METHODOLOGY

Amnesty International carried out research for this report in Lebanon from 15 to 26 June 2015 and from 30 September to 16 October 2015. The organization met with 77 refugee women, of whom 65 were Syrian and 12 were Palestinian refugee women from Syria. It conducted interviews in Beirut, Mount Lebanon, the Bekaa Valley and southern Lebanon. The women were between 18 and 56 years of age; 54 out of the 77 women were in their twenties and thirties. One 15-year-old Syrian girl joined one of the focus group discussions. The majority of the women (54 out of 77) were married. Sixteen women were widows, two were divorced and six were not married. Of the women whose husbands had died, one was aged 18 and six were in their twenties. The interviewees came from a number of different parts of Syria including Damascus, Homs, Aleppo, Hama and Deraa. The majority had arrived in Lebanon during 2012 and 2013.

The organization also held meetings with the UN Refugee Agency (the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR), the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) [1], lawyers, international NGOs working with refugees in Lebanon and with national NGOs and civil society organizations, including both those working on women's rights and on refugee issues. This report is based on these interviews, a review of relevant national and international law and other desk research relating to the situation of refugees in Lebanon. Amnesty International wrote to the government of Lebanon on 16 December 2015 requesting further information and clarification on some of the issues raised in the report. As of time of publication, the organization had not received a response from the government.

In this report Amnesty International uses the phrase "women heads of households" to describe refugee women who are living in Lebanon without a husband (the traditional head of household) or other adult male relatives and who assume the role of head of household. They are not necessarily recognized as head of household or as guardians of their children under Lebanese law.

All refugees from Syria – women, men and children – experience difficulties associated with

[1] The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was created in 1949 to provide assistance to Palestinian refugees. These refugees and their descendants fled their homes in what is now Israel between late 1947 and the first half of 1949 to escape the violence linked to the creation of the state of Israel and the Arab-Israeli war of 1948; others became refugees in 1967 when Israel occupied territory, including in Gaza and the West Bank. Under international law, Palestinians who fled or were otherwise forcibly displaced from their homes and land in Mandate Palestine – and their descendants – have the right to return. However, they have not been able to exercise this right and remain refugees. See Amnesty International, *Israel and the Occupied Territories/Palestinian Authority: The right to return: The case of the Palestinians*, (Index: (MDE 15/013/2001), 29 March 2001, available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE15/013/2001/en/

their displacement and being refugees in Lebanon. Amnesty International has previously reported on barriers in access to health care for refugees from Syria in Lebanon, on denial of protection to Palestinian refugees from Syria and on legal restrictions imposed by the government of Lebanon on refugees from Syria.[2]

Amnesty International thanks all the Syrian refugee women and Palestinian refugee women from Syria who generously gave up their time to speak to the organization and share their experiences of displacement and life as refugees in Lebanon. All names used in this report have been changed in order to protect refugees' identity. Amnesty International also thanks the staff of the NGOs who shared their expertise with the organization.

Refugee women interviewed by Amnesty International, October 2015, Bekaa Valley, Lebanon. © Amnesty International

[2] Amnesty International, *Agonizing choices: Syrian refugees in need of health care in Lebanon*, (Index: MDE/18/001/2014), May 2014, available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE18/001/2014/en/; Amnesty International, *Denied refuge: Palestinians from Syria seeking safety in Lebanon*, (Index: MDE/18/002/2014), July 2014, available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE18/002/2014/en/; Amnesty International, *Pushed to the edge: Syrian refugees face increased restrictions in Lebanon*, (Index: MDE/24/1785/2015), June 2015, available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/1785/2015/en/

REFUGEES FROM SYRIA IN LEBANON

'Before, Syrians in Lebanon had dignity. Now, after the crisis, Syrians all just walk with our heads down.'

"Leila", Saadnyal, Bekaa Valley[3]

THE REFUGEE CRISIS IN NUMBERS

Over 4 million people have fled Syria since the start of the crisis in 2011.[4] Lebanon hosts over 1.06 million Syrians who are registered with UNHCR.[5] This means that Lebanon has more refugees per capita than any other country in the world.[6]

In April 2015 the government of Lebanon instructed UNHCR to deregister all refugees who had entered Lebanon after 5 January 2015, the date when new government regulations that restricted the number of Syrians entering Lebanon came into force. On 4 May 2015 the government of Lebanon instructed UNHCR to stop all new registrations of Syrian refugees.[7] This means that 2,626 individuals whose registration UNHCR was forced to suspend, and all those who have arrived since, are not included in the total figure of refugees in Lebanon as recognized by UNHCR.[8] Without UNHCR registration, most refugees are unable to access

---

[3] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 6 October 2015, Saadnyal, Bekaa Valley

[4] UNHCR, *Syria Regional Refugee Response, Inter-agency information sharing portal*, last updated 19 January 2016, available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php

[5] UNHCR, *Syria Regional Refugee Response, Inter-agency information sharing portal*, Lebanon, last updated 31 December 2015, available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122

[6] UNHCR, *Syrian Refugees, Inter-agency regional update*, September 2015, p. 2, available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=9617

[7] UNHCR, *Inter-agency coordination, Lebanon, protection sector mid-year dashboard*, June 2015, p. 2, available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=9236. See the chapter "Barriers to Regular Status for Refugees in Lebanon" for more information about government restrictions on refugees entering the country.

[8] UNHCR, *Syrian Refugees, Inter-agency regional update*, May 2015, p. 4, available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=8905

financial and other support.

According to UNHCR data, 53% of all Syrian refugees in Lebanon are children (27.1% boys and 25.9% girls). Women over 18 years of age make up 25.9% of the refugee population and 21% are men over 18.[9]

The government of Lebanon has a long-established policy of not permitting new formal refugee camps on its territory. This is because it maintains that Lebanon cannot be a country of permanent settlement.[10] Refugees from Syria live throughout Lebanon in over 1,700 localities.[11]

Before the start of the crisis in Syria in 2011, there were around 500,000 Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA in Syria and about 450,000 in Lebanon.[12] Assistance and protection of Palestinian refugees come under UNRWA's mandate. Palestinian refugees cannot obtain assistance from UNHCR in areas where UNRWA operates. This includes Lebanon.

UNRWA figures show that there are over 44,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria living in Lebanon in 12,735 households. Just over half the Palestinian refugee population from Syria are women and girls. The population pyramid is typical for the region showing that a large proportion of the population are children under 15 years old.[13]

Approximately half of Palestinian refugees from Syria live inside Lebanon's 12 officially recognized Palestinian refugee camps, established in 1948 and 1967. The other half live outside the camps, mainly in informal Palestinian settlements known as "gatherings".[14]

---

[9] UNHCR, *Syria Regional Refugee Response, Inter-agency information sharing portal*, Lebanon, last updated 30 November 2015, available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122

[10] UNHCR, *Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: Government Policy and Protection Concerns*, March 2015, available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014_2019/documents/droi/dv/94_restrictedbriefingnote_/94_restrictedbriefingnote_en.pdf?_sm_au_=iVV1P20SrFjf6v2R

[11] UNHCR, *Refugees from Syria: Lebanon*, March 2015, p. 2 available at: https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=8649

[12] Figures from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), available at: http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/syria and http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon. Jordan, Gaza and the West Bank also host Palestinian refugees.

[13] UNRWA, *Profiling the Vulnerability of Palestine Refugees from Syria Living in Lebanon 2015*, pp. 11-12, http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/final2_6_october_final_version-_profiling_the_vulnerability_of_prs_in_lebanon_-_assesment.pdf

[14] UNRWA, *Syria Regional Crisis, 2015 Syria crisis response, progress report*, May 2015, available at: http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2015_syria_crisis_response_progress_report.pdf and http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work

Syrian refugees have also moved into Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. The additional population has increased overcrowding and worsened conditions.

REFUGEE WOMEN WHO HEAD THEIR HOUSEHOLDS

The UN reports that one fifth of Syrian refugee households are headed by women. For Palestinian refugees from Syria, women head almost one third of households.[15] Some refugee women who are heads of their household in Lebanon are widows, some are divorced and some have husbands who have either stayed in Syria or have sought asylum in other countries. Others have husbands who are missing, forcibly disappeared or detained in Syria.[16]

Amnesty International has documented in detail the widespread use of enforced disappearance and detention in Syria.[17] The Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR) has documented 58,148 names of civilians who were subjected to enforced disappearance[18] between March 2011 and August 2015. The majority of those documented as forcibly disappeared are men (around 90%). Only 4% are women. Children make up 6%. Given fears of family members about the consequence of speaking out, the total number of those subjected to enforced disappearance is likely to be higher. Amnesty International has identified three common profiles of individuals who have been targeted for enforced disappearance since 2011: peaceful opponents of the government, individuals considered disloyal to the government and family members of individuals wanted by the government.[19]

A significant proportion of the men who have been subjected to enforced disappearance are likely to be married, with their enforced disappearance or detention resulting in women living without their husband. Of the 54 married women interviewed by Amnesty International, six said they knew that their husband had been detained by the government in Syria; however, few knew the location where their husband was being held and none had information about

---

[15] UNHCR, *Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2015*, December 2015, p. 12, available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=10006. UNRWA reports that 29.66% of 12,735 Palestinian refugee from Syria households are headed by women. UNRWA, *Profiling the Vulnerability of Palestine Refugees from Syria Living in Lebanon 2015*, pp. 11-12.

[16] Amnesty International interviews with refugee women from Syria and with NGOs working with refugees, June and October 2015, Lebanon.

[17] Amnesty International, *Between the prison and the grave: Enforced disappearances in Syria,* (Index: MDE/24/2579/2015), November 2015, available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/2579/2015/en/

[18] The International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED) sets out three core elements for an enforced disappearance: 1. There is an arrest, detention, abduction or any other form of deprivation of liberty. 2. That conduct is carried out by agents of the state or by persons or groups of person acting with the authorization, support or acquiescence of the state. 3. The conduct is followed either by a refusal to acknowledge the deprivation of liberty or by concealment of the fate or whereabouts of the disappeared person, which places them outside the protection of the law.

[19] Amnesty International, *Between the prison and the grave: Enforced disappearances in Syria,* (Index: MDE/24/2579/2015), November 2015, pp. 13-15 & 26.

his health condition or whether he was still alive. Another nine women said that their husband was missing. Six women said their husband had either moved to another part of Lebanon for work, was still in Syria or had travelled to Europe.[20]

FAMILY LAW IN SYRIA AND LEBANON

Family laws in both Syria and Lebanon discriminate against women. Each country has numerous personal status laws based on religious denomination. Most personal status laws in Syria and Lebanon treat women as inferior to men within the family. Religious courts rule on family matters.

Social customs and ideas attributed to certain interpretations of religious beliefs place men in a position of power within the family. In Syria separate personal status laws regulate the family affairs of the Sunni, Shi'a and Alawite Muslims, Christians and Druze, who together make up the overwhelming majority of the population. Lebanon also has multiple personal status laws, all based on the religious customs of the different religions recognized by the government.[21] Family law in both countries places a man as the head of the family and grants him power and rights over his wife (or wives in some instances) and children.

Under Syrian personal status laws a woman is a 'custodian' of her children, responsible for fulfilling the basic needs of her children such as nutrition, and the children's father is their 'guardian'. The guardian is responsible for providing for his children financially, and for taking major decisions concerning the children's lives such as those relating to education, medical treatment, travel and consent for marriage. Under Syrian law, if a child's father is dead or absent (for example through enforced disappearance, detention or leaving the family), guardianship passes, not to the child's mother, but to the father's father or the father's brothers. In the event that there is no other guardian available, the mother of a child may apply to a Shari'a court to be appointed as a 'trustee' of the child. This would give her responsibility for some aspects of the child's life (such as financial affairs and travel) temporarily until a male guardian becomes available. However, she does not have the legal authority to make other decisions that a guardian could make, such as those relating to consent for marriage.[22]

Similar provisions on 'custody' and 'guardianship' exist in the multiple religious laws operating in Lebanon, administered by religious courts which are subject to little or no oversight by the state.[23] All religious personal

---

[20] Amnesty International interviews with refugee women from Syria, June and October 2015, Lebanon.

[21] CEDAW, *Third Periodic Report of Lebanon*, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/LBN/3, July 2006, pp. 14-16, available at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fLBN%2f3&Lang=en and Human Rights Watch, *Without Protection: Women's Rights under Lebanese Personal Status Laws*, January 2015, p. 1, available at: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/lebanon0115_ForUpload.pdf

[22] Amnesty International, *Submission to the 58th Pre-Sessional meeting of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Syrian Arab Republic*, September 2013, pp. 3-4.

[23] CEDAW, *Third Periodic Report of Lebanon*, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/LBN/3, July 2006, pp. 85-94 and Human Rights Watch, *Without Protection: Women's Rights under Lebanese Personal Status Laws*, January 2015, p. 3.

status laws in Lebanon (except for the Armenian-Orthodox personal status law) grant the right of guardianship of a child to the father. In some confessions, including the Sunni one, whose followers make up the majority of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, guardianship in the absence of a child's father does not pass to the child's mother but instead is granted to another male member of the father's family.[24]

LACK OF RESETTLEMENT PLACES

"The international community must act or it has contributed to killing this generation."

"Rima", Majdel Anjar, Bekaa Valley[25]

UNHCR estimates that 10% of Syria's refugees in the five main host countries (Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt) meet its definition of "vulnerable" and are in need of resettlement to a third country.[26] Refugees whom UNHCR consider "vulnerable" include those with serious medical needs, survivors of torture and other forms of ill-treatment, unaccompanied children, and "women and girls at risk", among others. UNHCR uses the category "women and girls at risk" for women and girls who "face particular protection problems related to their gender". They may have suffered from a range of protection problems, including abuses that fall under the category of torture. Their protection problems and threats are compounded by their gender and require a specific response.[27] Resettlement plays a key part in ensuring protection of these refugees. For some refugees, resettlement is needed because their "life, liberty, safety, health or fundamental human rights are at risk in the country where they sought refuge".[28]

In 2014 UNHCR requested states participating in resettlement programmes accept an increased number of refugees from among those then living in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey.[29] Given the scale of the refugee crisis in the region, this still only amounted to 1% of the total number of refugees living in those countries.[30] In 2014 UNHCR sent the details of 21,154

---

[24] CEDAW, Third Periodic Report of Lebanon, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/LBN/3, July 2006, pp. 92-94 and Human Rights Watch, *Without Protection: Women's Rights under Lebanese Personal Status Laws*, January 2015, pp. 66 and 70.

[25] Interview with Amnesty International, 6 October 2015, Majdel Anjar, Bekaa Valley.

[26] UNHCR, *Refugees from Syria: Lebanon*, March 2015, p. 5 available at: https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=8649

[27] UNHCR, *Resettlement Handbook*, 2011, pp. 261-262, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/3d464e842.html

[28] UNHCR, *Resettlement Handbook*, 2011, p. 4, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/4a2ccf4c6.html

[29] In 2014 only 29 states participated in resettlement programmes whereby they agreed to admit refugees identified by UNHCR into their country. UNHCR, *Refugee Resettlement: Trends 2015*, June 2015, p. 53, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/559e43ac9.html

[30] The report also notes "While these countries hosted other refugee populations including Iraqis, the majority were Syrians: 95 per cent of refugees in Jordan, 99 per cent of refugees in Lebanon, 98 per cent of refugees in Turkey". UNHCR, *Refugee Resettlement: Trends 2015*, June 2015, p.16.

Syrian refugees it considered in urgent need of resettlement to participating states.[31] A total of 7,318 of those Syrian refugees (35%) were living in Lebanon.[32] Full figures for 2015 have not yet been published; however, by the end of the year UNHCR had submitted the cases of 13,312 Syrian refugees currently living in Lebanon to states participating in resettlement programmes.[33]

Palestinian refugees, both those who are long-term residents of Lebanon and those who have fled from Syria to Lebanon since 2011, are excluded from UNHCR's resettlement programme because UNRWA is responsible for supporting them. However, UNRWA has no mandate to resettle refugees to third countries. Palestinian refugees from Syria are conscious of their exclusion from resettlement and the impact this has in limiting their options for legal travel. One Palestinian woman told Amnesty International:

"My son drowned in the sea while trying to travel [to Europe]. His widow isn't eligible for resettlement because she's Palestinian. She has five children, four daughters and one son. The eldest is 10. Who will look after them? Usually they [the UN] take these humanitarian cases but because she is Palestinian she can't travel."
"Haifa", Mar Elias, Beirut[34]

RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEE WOMEN

Refugee women may be considered for resettlement under any of the "vulnerability criteria" used by UNHCR, including the category "women and girls at risk".[35] UNHCR identifies one person to be the main applicant and their immediate family members are included for resettlement along with the main applicant. Refugee women may be identified as the main applicant, for example if they have specific medical needs or they are a survivor of torture, or they may be included in a case where their husband, or their child is the main applicant.

States' resettlement programmes should accept those refugees identified by UNHCR as meeting their "vulnerability criteria". Many refugee women, particularly women heads of household, are likely to be among those most in need of resettlement. However, a lack of data, disaggregated by gender, and the confidential nature of resettlement programmes, means that it is difficult to assess many aspects of resettlement of refugee women.

---

[31] UNHCR, *Refugee Resettlement Trends 2015*, June 2015, p. 12.

[32] UNHCR, *UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2016*, June 2015, p. 54, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/558019729.html

[33] Email correspondence between UNHCR and Amnesty International, 15 January 2016. In addition, UNHCR submitted the cases of 5,000 Syrian refugees to the Canadian "Humanitarian Transfer Program".

[34] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 8 October 2015, Mar Elias, Beirut.

[35] The other categories are "persons with legal and/or protection needs, survivors of torture and/or violence, medical needs, family reunification, children and adolescents at risk and lack of foreseeable alternative durable solutions". UNHCR, *Resettlement Handbook*, 2011, p. 37.

Figures on resettlement published by UNHCR do not include a breakdown by gender to show the numbers of men and women who are the main applicant in each resettlement category. This makes it difficult to assess the extent to which refugee women are being resettled in categories other than "women and girls at risk".

According to UNHCR figures for 2014, UNHCR in Lebanon submitted 441 individuals (applicants and their dependents) in 159 cases under the "women and girls at risk" category. It does not specify whether these cases all relate to Syrian refugees. Submissions under the "women and girls at risk" category amounted to just 7% of total submissions of refugees in Lebanon, and is under the global average of 12.6% for all 2014 "woman and girls at risk" submissions.[36]

The published figures also do not show how many refugee women heads of household are resettled under the "women and girls at risk" category or under any other categories.

Amnesty International received reports from several sources that refugee women who are heads of their household and who do not know, or are unable to prove, the fate or whereabouts of their husband (cases considered to be "incomplete families") have difficulties being accepted by states for resettlement, possibly due to states' not wanting a situation in which a woman's husband is found later and applies for admission to the state through family reunification. The sources reported that the resettlement process is more straightforward for women living with their husband ("complete families") and women heads of household who have documentary proof of the location and fate of their husband.

The resettlement submissions process is a confidential one between UNHCR and resettlement states and as such it is difficult for Amnesty International to verify the situation independently. However, the organization considers these sources to be credible.

States have the power to control admissions by non-citizens to their territory within limits imposed by their obligations under international law. Resettlement states frequently claim that their resettlement programmes are designed to help the "most vulnerable" refugees. Many refugee women heads of household, including those unable to prove the location of their husband, are likely to fall into the category of "most vulnerable". If refugee women heads of household whose husbands are among those who have been subjected to enforced disappearance or who are unable to document the fate or whereabouts of their husband are being disadvantaged in the resettlement process, some of the "most vulnerable" refugees may be being excluded from the protection that resettlement provides.

THE LEBANESE CONTEXT

POLITICAL PRESSURES AND DISAGREEMENTS

Disagreements between the main political parties in Lebanon are long-standing and often have serious repercussions on the ability of the government to function effectively. For example, the post of President has been vacant since May 2014 because political disagreements have prevented the election of a successor. Political disagreements have also

[36] UNHCR, *UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2016*, June 2015, p. 56.

prevented provision of basic services and a solution being found to a waste disposal crisis which has led to street protests over the build-up of rubbish on the country's streets since July 2015.

The conflict in Syria has had a serious impact on Lebanon with cross-border shelling affecting particularly the north of the Bekaa Valley. Fighters from the military wing of Lebanon's Hizbullah have been active in supporting Syrian government forces inside Syria. The IS claimed responsibility for a suicide bomb attack in the Beirut suburb of Burj al-Barajneh on 12 November 2015 which killed around 40 civilians. The attack was among the deadliest in Beirut since the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990.

The large number of refugees from Syria hosted by Lebanon has put a severe strain on the country's infrastructure, economy and security and there has been a significant failure on the part of the international community to provide sufficient and effective support to Syria's neighbours who have received the vast majority of refugees.[37] The consequences of this will be examined in the chapter titled "The struggle to survive".

INCREASING HOSTILITY TOWARDS REFUGEES

"There is no future for us here in Lebanon. Everyone here blames every problem on the Syrians."

"Hiba", Saadnyal, Bekaa Valley[38]

At the start of the crisis in Syria, Lebanon, to its credit, largely operated an "open border" policy, allowing refugees to enter the country. This started to change in August 2013 when the government imposed restrictions on the entry of Palestinian refugees from Syria. In May 2014 the government effectively closed the border to all Palestinian refugees from Syria.[39]

Initially the restrictions did not apply to Syrian nationals; however, this changed in October 2014. The Council of Ministers in Lebanon established a policy that expressly stated the government's intention was to reduce the number of Syrians present in Lebanon; alleviate the burden placed on the people and economy of Lebanon as a consequence of hosting Syrian refugees; and enforce Lebanese law to protect Lebanese nationals in all fields of work, among other things.[40] From January 2015, Syrians have only been able to enter Lebanon if they

---

[37] UNHCR notes that although numbers of people from Syria applying for asylum in European countries is rising, that figure accounts for only 10% of all refugees from Syria. See http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php

[38] Amnesty International Focus group discussion on 6 October 2015, Saadnyal, Bekaa Valley.

[39] Amnesty International, *Denied refuge: Palestinians from Syria seeking safety in Lebanon*, (Index: MDE/18/002/2014), July 2014, available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE18/002/2014/en/

[40] The Council of Ministers includes the Prime Minister, the Minister of Social Affairs, Minister of Interior and Municipalities, and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Immigrants. Minutes of the Council of Ministers meeting as seen by Amnesty International dated 28 October 2014. The media also issued statements in October following a decision reached by the Lebanese cabinet. For example: *Daily Star*, "Lebanon cabinet votes to stop accepting Syrian refugees", 23 October 2014, available at:

fulfil specific criteria.[41]

Some refugee women told Amnesty International that they had experienced hostility and verbal abuse from government officials. "Reem", a 28-year-old Palestinian woman, said that officials at a government office abused the refugees who were trying to renew their documents. She said: "They treated us inhumanely. They called us donkeys and said, 'God gave us a big burden which is the Syrians'. They would hold us by the neck to make us move to the back of the queue".[42]

UNHCR reports that the initial good relationship between refugees from Syria and their Lebanese hosts has started to fray.[43]

Some refugee women interviewed by Amnesty International talked about being hosted by Lebanese people when they first arrived or of Lebanese people allowing them to live rent free. One 28-year-old Syrian woman, "Hiba", said "Since I arrived in Lebanon with my husband, we have been hosted by a wealthy Lebanese family and they don't charge us rent. When my parents also arrived, we asked permission from the family for my parents to stay in the house with us and they agreed."[44]

However, other women interviewed by Amnesty International spoke of hearing hostile comments from their Lebanese neighbours and feeling unwelcome. "Huda", a 27-year-old Syrian woman living near Chtaura, Bekaa Valley, said "We hear a lot of talking and bad words from the Lebanese people who are saying that 'you Syrians are a big burden on the country' and 'there are more of you than the original residents of the country'."[45] Another Syrian woman, "Iman", who lives in Shatila, Beirut, said:

"We hear assaults all the time. Some people accuse us and say 'Syrians take job opportunities', 'you corrupted the country, our country' etc. We hear verbal harassment most of the time. Back in Syria, if anyone verbally harassed me, I would be able to argue with them and everyone [who heard what was happening] would support me but here, it's the

---

www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Oct-23/275075-refugee-crisis-tops-lebanon-cabinetagenda.ashx

[41] There is a category relating to displacement; however, it only refers to "exceptional" humanitarian cases as determined by the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs. Amnesty International, *The global refugee crisis: A conspiracy of neglect*, (Index: POL/40/1796/2015), June 2015, p. 13, available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol40/1796/2015/en/

[42] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 8 October 2015.

[43] UNHCR, *Refugees from Syria: Lebanon*, March 2015, p. 3, available at: https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=8649

[44] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 6 October 2015, Saadnyal, Bekaa Valley.

[45] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 12 October 2015, Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

opposite. I can't argue and no one would support me."[46]

ADDITIONAL DIFFICULTIES FACED BY PALESTINIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

Lebanon hosted a sizeable population of Palestinian refugees before the conflict in Syria forced Palestinian refugees from Syria to seek safety in Lebanon.[47] Most of the 300,000 Palestinian refugees[48] living in Lebanon before the Syrian crisis had lived there all their life. They make up approximately 10% of the population of Lebanon but do not hold Lebanese citizenship.

Palestinian refugees who are long-term residents in Lebanon and registered with UNRWA face restrictions on their rights. This includes their right to work. Palestinian refugees remain subject to laws regulating the work of foreigners even if they have never lived outside Lebanon. They are required to have a work permit which must be renewed annually and they are prohibited from working in approximately 20 professions.[49] Since Palestinian refugees are not citizens of any state, UNRWA highlights that they are "unable to claim the same rights as other foreigners living and working in Lebanon".[50]

UNRWA provides some services at Palestinian refugee camps but conditions are generally poor and the camps are dilapidated and overcrowded.[51] UNRWA notes that Lebanon has the highest percentage of Palestinian refugees living in poverty. The poor living conditions of long-term Palestinian refugees in Lebanon has been exacerbated by the influx of refugees from Syria (including both Palestinians and some Syrian refugees) who have moved into the camps.

---

[46] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 15 October 2015, Shatila, Beirut.

[47] For more information about the situation of Palestinians in Lebanon see: Amnesty International, *Exiled and suffering: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon*, (Index: MDE 18/010/2007), October 2007, available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/MDE18/010/2007/en/

[48] Although 449,000 Palestinian refugees are registered with UNRWA in Lebanon, the figure living in Lebanon is closer to 300,000 because many are believed to have left the country. Amnesty International, *Exiled and suffering: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon*, p. 2.

[49] This includes any profession which requires membership of a union. Occupations from which Palestinians are excluded include being a lawyer, doctor, pharmacist and engineer. See http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon See also: Association Najdeh, Right to work campaign, available at: http://www.association-najdeh.org/english/work1.htm and Palestinian Human Rights Organization, Joint NGO submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review, Lebanon, 2015.

[50] http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon For more information on exclusion of Palestinian refugees from property ownership see: Norwegian Refugee Council, *No Place Like Home: An assessment of the housing, land and property rights of Palestinian refugee women in camps and gatherings in Lebanon*, 2013, available at: http://www.nrc.no/arch/img.aspx?file_id=9687247&ext=.pdf

[51] http://www.unrwa.org/where-we-work/lebanon and Amnesty International, Exiled and suffering: Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, October 2007.

LOSS, STRUGGLE AND DETERMINATION

Refugees in Lebanon, including the women interviewed by Amnesty International, have experienced trauma and loss. Many have seen relatives die. Many have relatives or friends who have been forcibly disappeared and they have no idea about their fate. Many have experienced bombing. They have had to make the difficult decision to leave behind their homes and everything they knew in order to seek safety.

Refugee women interviewed by Amnesty International, both Syrians and Palestinians from Syria, repeatedly compared their quality of life in Syria before the crisis started with their quality of life as refugees in Lebanon. Their sense of loss was clear:

"We drink water from the well and it causes kidney problems. I can't afford to buy bottled drinking water. I can't go the doctor because the cost of living here is very high. Back in my country I was not accustomed to such things."
"Leila", Saadnyal, Bekaa Valley[52]

Palestinian refugees from Syria who moved to the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon found a difficult environment. The Palestinian refugee camp of Yarmouk in Damascus was a dynamic suburb of the city before the crisis. Palestinians living there were integrated into the city and many owned businesses. When they arrived in the Palestinian camps in Lebanon they found already overcrowded camps with no government-provided services. Palestinian refugees who are long-term residents in Lebanon are generally poorer than Palestinian refugees from Syria were at the time they first left Syria.[53]

"Rouba", a 50-year-old Palestinian woman from Yarmouk, Damascus, arrived in Shatila camp, Beirut, in 2012. She said: "Back in Syria we were living like other citizens. I came to Lebanon and had to go from the top to the bottom [of society]. Sometimes we feel like we are not living. I feel like I am not living."[54]

Another Palestinian woman, "Asmaa", contrasted the situation in Lebanon and Syria before the crisis saying: "Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are suffering more than us. I came here [to Lebanon] and changed my mind about how I thought they were living. In Syria I used to have the right to work. Schools and medicine were free."[55]

Despite all the losses they have experienced, the refugee women whom Amnesty International met are resilient, and are determinedly doing their best to support themselves and their families under very difficult circumstances. "Iman" is a 41-year-old Syrian woman who arrived in Lebanon in 2011. She is a widow and has seven children aged between 11 and

---

[52] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 6 October 2015, Saadnyal, Bekaa Valley.

[53] Amnesty International meetings with staff of organizations working with Palestinian refugees, June 2015.

[54] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 25 June 2015, Shatila, Beirut.

[55] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 25 June 2015, Shatila, Beirut.

21. She said: "Two of my sons are 20 and 21. They got married here [in Lebanon]. Both of them now have little babies. It is very difficult for them to afford things like diapers, milk and clothes for the babies. So I work and help my children and my grandchildren".[56] Another Syrian woman, "Amira", aged 40, said: "Most families depend on women. Women are working outside the house but also working in the house and it's too much for them. It's not safe for women to walk around on the streets. Despite all of this women are working because she is the one the family depends on."[57]

"Hasna", aged 32, lives in the Bekaa Valley with her children, parents and sisters. She told Amnesty International:

"I used to bake bread and sell it to people. Then I came to [an NGO centre] and started learning English and haircutting. Afterwards I started working in embroidery, but it's not enough to pay the rent but it helps with paying for other things. I re-registered in school because I'm planning to finish my studies. I'm in the baccalaureate class. My husband is a detainee [in Syria] and I don't know if he will come out alive so I need to support my children and find a decent job".[58]

"Rima" is a 24-year-old Syrian who was a student in Damascus. She told Amnesty International: "I want to obtain my degree and finish what I started. Syrians don't just care about eating and drinking – we also have big ambitions. Our society is collapsed right now. No one knows its needs more than us."[59]

RELEVANT INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS LAW AND STANDARDS

Lebanon has not ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention) or its 1967 Protocol, the main international legal instruments for the protection of the rights of refugees. It does not have specific legislation or regulations in place to ensure that the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers are respected, protected and fulfilled and the government has long maintained that Lebanon cannot be a permanent country of asylum.[60] However, Lebanon is bound by customary international law and by other international human rights instruments that apply to refugees and non-refugees alike.

Lebanon has ratified a number of the main UN human rights instruments, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). There are

[56] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 15 October 2015, Shatila, Beirut.

[57] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 6 October 2015, Majdel Anjar, Bekaa Valley.

[58] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 12 October 2015, Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

[59] Interview with Amnesty International, 6 October 2015, Majdel Anjar, Bekaa Valley.

[60] UNHCR, *Factsheet*, September 2011, http://www.unhcr.org/4c90812e9.pdf

relevant provisions in all these instruments that protect the rights of refugee women.

THE RIGHT TO NON-DISCRIMINATION

Non-discrimination on grounds including sex, gender, race, religion, ethnicity and nationality is a core provision in all international human rights instruments.

Lebanon, as a state party to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, is obliged to amend or repeal laws which discriminate against women and to ensure equality in practice. The right to non-discrimination on the basis of gender applies to all women and girls within the jurisdiction of the state, whether or not they are citizens of the state.[61] The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which monitors state compliance with the Convention, has underlined:

"States parties bear the primary responsibility for ensuring that asylum-seeking women, refugee women, women nationality applicants and stateless women within their territory or under their effective control or jurisdiction, even if not situated within their territory, are not exposed to violations of their rights under the Convention, including when such violations are committed by private persons and non-State actors."[62]

Under the ICERD the government is obliged to prohibit discrimination based on "race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin"; however, it provides for the possibility of distinguishing between citizens and non-citizens.[63] The Convention does not apply to legal provisions relating to matters of "nationality, citizenship or naturalization" provided those provisions do not discriminate against any particular nationality.[64] However, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), which monitors compliance with the ICERD, has stated that "differential treatment based on citizenship or immigration status will constitute discrimination if the criteria for such differentiation, judged in the light of the objectives and purposes of the Convention, are not applied pursuant to a legitimate aim, and are not proportional to the achievement of this aim".[65]

---

[61] CEDAW, General Recommendation 28 on core obligations of state parties under Article 2 of the convention, CEDAW/C/GC/28, 2010, para 12, available at: http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=CEDAW/C/GC/28&Lang=E

[62] CEDAW, General Recommendation 32 on the gender related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women, CEDAW/C/GR/32, November 2014, available at: http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=CEDAW/C/GC/32&Lang=E

[63] International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), GA res. 2106 (XX), 21 December 1965, Article 1.1 and 1.2, available at: http://ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CERD.aspx

[64] ICERD, Article 1.3.

[65] CERD General Recommendation 30 on discrimination against non-citizens, CERD/C/GC/30, August 2004, para 4, available at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCERD%2fGEC%

The restrictions that the government of Lebanon imposes on all Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (whether long-term residents or Palestinian refugees from Syria), including restrictions relating to employment, housing and health, contravene international law. Most recently CEDAW expressed concern about Lebanon's restrictions on the right to work for Palestinian refugee women and recommended that the government "review and amend its labour laws to ensure Palestinian refugee women's right to work, namely by providing them with access to the labour market".[66]

Some refugee women are employed by NGOs to do traditional embroidery which is made into items such as wallets or purses and sold. © Amnesty International

---

2f7502&Lang=en

[66] CEDAW, Concluding Observations on Lebanon, CEDAW/C/LBN/4-5, paras 39-40, available at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fLBN%2fCO%2f4-5&Lang=en

BARRIERS TO REGULAR STATUS FOR REFUGEES IN LEBANON

INCREASING RESTRICTIONS

There are increasing restrictions imposed by the government of Lebanon on refugees from Syria. In January 2015 the government introduced new criteria for all Syrians applying to renew their residency permits. The procedures are now so onerous and expensive that it is extremely difficult for people to meet the requirements.[67]

The government of Lebanon introduced restrictions on Palestinian refugees from Syria earlier than it did for Syrian refugees. Palestinian refugees from Syria started being denied entry to Lebanon from August 2013 and began to have more difficulties in renewing their residence permits from around May 2014. [68] There are no officially published guidelines on the process for Palestinian refugees from Syria to renew their residence permits. Two international NGOs working with refugees noted that there is "some indication that they [Palestinian refugees from Syria] may renew their residency in theory but, in practice, there are very few instances where [they] are able to do this".[69]

LACK OF VALID RESIDENCE PERMITS

UNCHR estimates that the percentage of Syrian refugee households without valid residence permits rose from 9% in January 2015 to 61% in July 2015.[70] Of the 66 Syrian refugees interviewed by Amnesty International, 56 said they did not have a valid residence permit. This was mostly because their permit had expired and they had been unable to meet the cost or conditions to renew it; however, some had entered Lebanon irregularly and had never had

---

[67] Barriers to renewing residency include cost, difficulties in obtaining a "housing pledge" from their landlord, difficulties in finding a Lebanese sponsor or having to make a 'pledge not to work' and showing adequate funds to support themselves. For full details of the restrictions see: Amnesty International, *Pushed to the edge: Syrian refugees face increased restrictions in Lebanon*, (Index: MDE/24/1785/2015), June 2015, available at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/mde24/1785/2015/en/

[68] Amnesty International, *Denied refuge: Palestinians from Syria seeking safety in Lebanon*, (Index: MDE/18/002/2014), July 2014.

[69] Norwegian Refugee Council and International Rescue Committee, *Legal status of refugees from Syria: Challenges and consequences of maintaining legal stay in Beirut and Mount Lebanon*, June 2015, available at: https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=9682

[70] UN Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon, *Protection Sector, Monthly Dashboard July 2015*, available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=9508

a residence permit. Five women had valid residence permits and the other five did not say.[71]

A survey of 828 families of Palestinians from Syria conducted in March 2015 by the Tatwir Centre for Studies found that the residence permits of 85.7% of the families had expired and another 12.8% had permits that were due to expire at the end of April 2015, and noted that by the time the study was published, 98% of Palestinian refugees from Syria would not have a valid residency permit.[72] Of the 12 Palestinian refugee women from Syria interviewed by Amnesty International, two had valid residency permits at that time. Of the valid permits, one was due to expire in October 2015 and the other was valid until December 2015.

THE IMPACT OF AN INVALID RESIDENCE PERMIT

"Having a valid permit would give us higher morale and we would feel more psychologically comfortable in moving around. We would feel like any other residents of the country. I wouldn't be afraid of checkpoints."

"Mouna", Chtaura, Bekaa Valley[73]

Without a valid residency permit, refugees from Syria are considered to be in breach of Lebanese law. This exposes them to the risk of a range of human rights violations, including arbitrary arrest, detention and deportation, inability to seek redress from the authorities if they are a victim of crime due to fear of arrest, limitations on movement and difficulties in accessing services such as education or health because of fear of crossing checkpoints.[74] In addition, without valid residency permits refugees are unable to complete administrative processes to register marriages or births of children. Reluctance to seek help from public authorities, in particular the police, is discussed in the section titled "Inability to Seek Redress".

Fear of crossing official checkpoints and being detained by the authorities due to invalid residence permits was widespread among the refugees throughout Lebanon who spoke to Amnesty International.[75] The government of Lebanon operates checkpoints across the country, for example on main roads leading to the different provinces in the country and in the vicinity of Palestinian refugee camps. Some are permanent and others only operate at night or when there is a known security threat. The military operate some checkpoints and

---

[71] Interviews with Amnesty International, Lebanon, June and October 2015.

[72] Tatwir Centre for Studies, *Needs Assessment of Palestinian Refugees from Syria: Survey Results*, 2015, pp. 14-15 and p. 26. Also cited by UNRWA: http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/final2_6_october_final_version-_profiling_the_vulnerability_of_prs_in_lebanon_-_assesment.pdf

[73] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 12 October 2015, Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

[74] Amnesty International, *Pushed to the edge: Syrian refugees face increased restrictions in Lebanon*, (Index: MDE/24/1785/2015), June 2015.

[75] Amnesty International interviews with refugee women, June and October 2015, Beirut, Mount Lebanon, Bekaa Valley and South Lebanon.

others are run by the police.

Organizations working with refugees said that refugee men were more likely to be detained by the authorities than women. Organizations providing legal support to refugees in detention confirmed that the vast majority of their clients were men.[76] The refugee women interviewed by Amnesty International said that men were more likely to be asked for documents at checkpoints and detained if found to have invalid residence permits. However, some women said that they knew of women who had been detained, and fear that they could be stopped means that refugee women are restricting their movements, as are refugee men.

"Rima", a 24-year-old Syrian woman, was forcibly disappeared in Syria by the authorities. "I was detained for 10 months [in Syria]. No one knew where I was," she said. She told Amnesty International that while in detention she was subjected to torture. "Rima" thinks she was detained because she was helping distribute medical aid to displaced people in her local area. Following her release from detention in March 2014, she fled to Lebanon. She told Amnesty International that she is frightened of travelling around in Lebanon and afraid of going to the authorities to try to renew her expired residence permit: "I don't trust anyone because I was a detainee in Syria. I think a thousand times before I go out". She would like to be able to finish her university degree but said she is unable to enrol without a valid residence permit.[77]

"Aisha", a 33-year-old Syrian woman living in the Bekaa Valley with her husband and four young children, told Amnesty International:

"I am afraid to go out. I'm afraid to cross checkpoints. I have to go to Beirut for hospital appointments for my daughter every 15 days. She has a rare medical condition and has to have injections every 15 days. I go across the checkpoints and they [the authorities] haven't stopped me yet but I'm always afraid that someone will speak to me."[78]

For refugees from Syria who are living inside Palestinian refugee camps, not having a valid residence permit makes it difficult to leave the camp. The camps cover small areas and were densely populated even before the arrival of refugees from Syria. The Lebanese government maintains checkpoints at the entrances to Palestinian refugee camps.

Palestinian refugees from Syria and Syrian refugees living in Palestinian refugee camps told Amnesty International about their fears of leaving the camp. "Rasha", a 28-year-old Palestinian woman, said: "We can't leave Shatila camp because of the checkpoints. Because of luck we would probably be arrested. I don't leave the camp. I only leave if I really have to and I'm afraid. My father has been living here [in Shatila] for three years. One week ago was

[76] Amnesty International interviews with international and national NGOs, June and October 2015, Beirut, Mount Lebanon and Bekaa Valley.

[77] Interview with Amnesty International, 6 October 2015, Majdel Anjar, Bekaa Valley.

[78] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 6 October 2015, Saadnyal, Bekaa Valley.

the first time he left the camp but he only went because he had to."[79]

"MAHA": HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER

Some refugee women from Syria are using their skills to monitor human rights abuses committed against other refugees. "Maha", a 28-year-old Palestinian human rights defender, told Amnesty International about her experience:

I am an activist in [one of the] Palestinian refugee camps. I work with a friend. We are known in the camp as activists. A few months ago I got a phone call asking me and my friend to help because people were being detained. We were told that over three days seven young women, 12 young men and an old man had been detained at an army checkpoint for having invalid residence permits. My friend and I tried to contact the police station to investigate if the number we were told about was true. The police said "no we didn't detain anyone but in the first place we take into consideration the [validity of] residence permits".

In order to confirm the number [of detainees] we had to visit each house to investigate and find family members to speak to. From this we were able to deduce the number. When we asked families about the names of those detained, the families wouldn't give the names of girls who were detained because they were worried about their reputations. I was able to meet one of the girls who had been released [from detention] and I asked her about who was still detained. So I came to know that six girls were released after three days and another remained detained for 10 days and while they were detained they were distributed across several police stations.

The leaders at the camp started a protest to call for release [of the detainees]. Since then I have been receiving threatening phone calls. The calls come from an unknown or withheld number. In one call threatening me – they said "you and your friend stop working or else".[80]

---

[79] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 15 October 2015, Shatila, Beirut.

[80] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 8 October 2015, Mar Elias, Beirut.

THE STRUGGLE TO SURVIVE

'I want to ask governments if $13 [a month] is enough to survive.'

"Rajaa", Barr Elias, Bekaa Valley[81]

Refugee women told Amnesty International about their struggle to support their families. A shortage of funds has led to the UN reducing its financial support for refugees leaving the majority living in poverty. Refugee women who work or look for work are at risk of exploitation by employers who take advantage of their dire economic situation. Likewise, the need to ensure shelter for their family in an environment where accommodation costs are high and few refugees have written tenancy agreements means that refugee women are at risk of eviction or exploitation by landlords.

INADEQUATE SUPPORT FOR REFUGEES

The international community has failed to provide adequate funds to support refugees in the main host countries. The UN-led humanitarian response is grossly underfunded. At the end of 2015, the UN had only received 57% of the funds it requested for its 2015 work to support refugees in Lebanon.[82] The UN, in response, has cut the numbers of refugees receiving its support and the amount of assistance provided.

The severe shortage of funds has resulted in the UN's World Food Programme (WFP) reducing its monthly payment to Syrian refugees to support purchase of food. In January 2015 the amount dropped from US$27.70 per person per month to US$19[83] and in July 2015 a further reduction was made to just US$13.50 per person per month.[84] A late injection of funds towards the end of 2015 meant that the WPF was able to increase the

[81] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 13 October 2015, Barr Elias, Bekaa Valley.

[82] UN *2015 Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), Funding Requirements (Lebanon)*, last updated 29 December 2015, available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122 The UN's work across the region under its Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan for refugees from Syria and host communities was only 58% funded at the end of 2015.

[83] UNHCR, *Syrian Refugees, Inter-agency regional update*, September 2015, p. 6.

[84] UN Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon, *Food Security Sector, Monthly Dashboard*, July 2015, available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=9506

monthly payment to US$21.60 per person from October 2015.[85] This means that refugees receive US$0.72 per person per day, significantly below the World Bank's global poverty line of US$1.90 poverty line per day.[86]

The funding shortage has meant that the UN has reduced, and continues to reduce, the number of Syrian refugees receiving the monthly payment for food, despite acknowledging that the needs of the population remained the same or worsened.[87] The UN warned in April 2015 that it expected to see a rise in the number of refugees resorting to negative coping strategies such as reducing portion sizes, increased debt, reducing spending on education and health or increased begging.[88] By September 2015 it estimated that 70% of Syrian refugee families were living below the Lebanese national poverty line of US$3.84 per person per day[89] and the WFP stated that only 7% of refugee households were food secure, down from 25% in 2014.[90]

In May 2015 UNRWA reduced the monthly amount provided to Palestinian refugees from Syria for food from $30 per person per month to $27 per person per month. Despite the reduction in assistance UNRWA reported that its cash assistance was the primary source of income for 98% of Palestinian refugees from Syria compared to 70% in April 2014.[91] UNRWA also reported that 91% of Palestinian refugee families from Syria have experienced "lack of food or money to buy food" leading to family members reducing their food

---

[85] World Food Programme, *Syria Crisis Response, Lebanon Highlights*, November 2015, available at: http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/op_reports/wfp263813.pdf

[86] See http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/global-poverty-line-faq The WFP calculates a Minimum Food Expenditure Basket based on 2,100kcal per day. It states that, in Lebanon, a minimum amount of US$37 per person per month is required to purchase the required food items. The financial support the WFP is able to provide refugees falls far short of its own calculation of the minimum refugees require each month to buy food.

[87] UNHCR, *Inter-Agency Regional Update, Food Security Sector, Mid-Year Dashboard*, June 2015, p. 2, available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=9237 The WFP reported that 883,833 Syrian refugees received monthly payments for food between January and March 2015. By August 2015 this number had reduced to 772,102 refugees[87] and by November 2015 it had dropped again with 603,423 refugees receiving payments.[87] In September 2015 the UN capped the assistance so households could only receive payments up to a maximum of 5 people.

[88] World Food Programme, *Syria Crisis Response- situation update Jan-March 2015*, April 2015, available at: http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ep/wfp273846.pdf

[89] UNHCR, *Syrian Refugees, Inter-Agency Regional Update*, September 2015, p. 7 available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=9617

[90] World Food Programme, *Lebanon: Syria Crisis Response, Situation Report*, September 2015, available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=9670

[91] UNRWA, *2015 Syria Crisis Response: Progress Report*, May 2015, p. 12, available at: http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2015_syria_crisis_response_progress_report.pdf?_sm_au_=iVV1P20SrFjf6v2R

consumption or skipping meals and that 90% of families have been forced to sell assets and 80% have exhausted any savings they had.[92]

About one quarter of the Syrian refugee women who spoke to Amnesty International had stopped receiving payments for food over the last year. The impact of the cessation of financial assistance or, for those still receiving assistance, the reduction in amount of support provided has had a severe impact on the ability of refugee women to support their families. One 34-year-old Syrian woman told Amnesty International:

"At the beginning I got LBP 45,000 [US$30] from UNHCR, then it decreased to LBP 30,000 [US$20] and now it's US$13. I buy bread and a bit of cheese. Every couple of months we would maybe eat meat. The amount is not enough, especially for people with children. The UNHCR have appointed places where we can spend the vouchers. The designated shops are far away from where I live. I need transport and have to pay about LBP 10,000 [US$6.60] to get to the shop and back."
"Rana", Saadnyal, Bekaa Valley[93]

Another woman, 21-year-old Hala, whose husband is dead and who lives with her parents and baby, said:

"I am registered with UNHCR but last month they stopped giving me assistance. I called them and they told me that we don't need help. I asked them 'if I am not in need, who do you consider the people in need?' They told me they don't have enough money. Although the vouchers [for food] *weren't enough support, they helped in a little way."*[94]

In July 2015 lack of funds resulted in UNRWA suspending its monthly payment of US$100 per household for housing.[95] The housing assistance was received by 43,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria and UNRWA described its suspension as "disastrous".[96]

"Hanan", a 38-year-old Palestinian refugee from Syria who is supporting her three daughters, told Amnesty International about the impact of the suspension of UNRWA housing assistance. She said: "UNRWA used to give our family US$100 for [assistance with] rent even though our rent is not less than $300. We also used to get LBP 45,000 per person but this has been cut to LBP 40,000 and afterwards the $100 was cut. I work and receive some

---

[92] UNRWA, *Profiling the Vulnerability of Palestine Refugees from Syria Living in Lebanon 2015,* p. 18.

[93] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 6 October 2015, Saadnyal, Bekaa Valley.

[94] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 13 October 2015, Barr Elias, Bekaa Valley.

[95] For more information on housing, see the section titled "Inadequate Housing" later in this chapter.

[96] UNRWA, *Lack of funds forces UNRWA to suspend for housing*, 22 May 2015, available at: http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/lack-funds-forces-unrwa-suspend-cash-assistance-housing-palestine-refugees

aid, but it's not enough."[97]

UNWANTED DEPENDENCY

For many refugees from Syria this is the first time they have had to rely on assistance and they find it difficult to be dependent on outside help. Due to the massive underfunding of the UN relief programme the UN has been forced to take difficult decisions in prioritising who will receive the limited support they are able to provide. To enable them to prioritize, the UN has undertaken surveys in which refugees are asked detailed questions about their situation in order to determine who continues to receive help.[98] A number of refugee women interviewed by Amnesty International in different parts of Lebanon perceived the questions asked during UN surveys to be "humiliating". "Hiba's" response illustrates their view:

"I am registered [with UNHCR] but my assistance was cancelled in July 2015. Before UNHCR cancelled my assistance, they came to where we were living and interviewed us. They asked really embarrassing and humiliating questions like 'do you get your food from your neighbours'. Afterwards we received an SMS saying that we are not in need of financial assistance."[99]

While refugee women who are heads of their households face increased difficulties in affording basic necessities, women who have relatives or friends supporting them financially sometimes face other difficulties associated with their dependency on others and their desire not to be "a burden" on others.

"SARA"

"Sara" is a 45-year-old Syrian woman from Daraya. Her husband is detained in Syria. She arrived in Lebanon in early 2014 and lives with her mother, her 10-year-old son, an aunt and cousins near Chtaura, Bekaa Valley. She told Amnesty International:

My brother helps with paying the rent and buying other necessities but I can't put more pressure on him because he has his own family to support and he's supporting the family of another brother who is still back in Syria. I depend mainly on food vouchers from UNHCR. Things got much worse when UNHCR decreased the aid.

I tried to buy a sewing machine so I could do some work with my mother because we know something about sewing but the machine broke and I can't fix it because we don't have enough money.[100]

"Noura", a 22-year-old Syrian woman whose husband was subjected to an enforced disappearance and who came to Lebanon with her husband's family, said: "My situation is

[97] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 8 October 2015, Mar Elias, Beirut.

[98] For example the World Food Programme (WFP) conducted a 'Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees' (VASyR) using a 45 minute long questionnaire.

[99] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 6 October 2015, Saadnyal, Bekaa Valley.

[100] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 12 October 2015, Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

difficult. Although my brother-in-law supports us, he has his own family and it's hardly enough. My baby suffers from problems with his nose but nobody can afford medication for him."[101]

Another Syrian woman, "Samra", who is 29, a widow, and lives with her two children in the Bekaa Valley, said:

"*I live in Taalabaya. I don't live in a permanent residence but I move from one place to another. I stay with friends or people I know. The people I live with [right now] pay US$300 a month rent. Sometimes they ask me for money, sometimes they don't. I can't afford a place of my own but I try to help pay the rent. We are really depriving ourselves of everything to survive".*[102]

EXPLOITATION IN EMPLOYMENT

"I am a widow with four daughters but I am afraid to let them work because they will be harassed."

"Rouba", Shatila, Beirut[103]

Refugees frequently work informally, especially those that have irregular status in Lebanon.[104] In December 2014 the Lebanese government introduced restrictions which prohibited Syrians from working in occupations other than "agriculture, hygiene and construction".[105] The International Labour Organization (ILO) reported that 70% of Syrian refugee women who are employed work in agriculture or as domestic workers. This means they work in occupations which have low pay and little job security.[106]

The ILO also reported that the legal restrictions (described previously in the section "Additional difficulties faced by Palestinian refugees in Lebanon") on Palestinian refugees' right to work mean that 90% of Palestinian refugees from Syria are unemployed and that, of those who are employed, only 10% are Palestinian women.[107] Irregular status and the inability to work regularly leaves refugees at risk of exploitation from employers.

---

[101] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 13 October 2015, Barr Elias, Bekaa Valley.

[102] Interview with Amnesty International, 24 June 2015, Saadnyal, Bekaa Valley.

[103] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 25 June 2015, Shatila, Beirut.

[104] International Labour Organization, *Assessment of the Impact of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and their Employment* Profile, 2014, p. 15, available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=8920

[105] See: http://www.labor.gov.lb/_layouts/MOL_Application/LatestNewsDetails.aspx?lang=ar&newsid=115 (in Arabic)

[106] International Labour Organization, *Assessment of the Impact of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and their Employment* Profile, 2014, p. 25.

[107] International Labour Organization, *Assessment of the Impact of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and their Employment* Profile, 2014, p. 14.

The ILO reported that Syrian refugee women earn on average LBP 248,000 (US$165) per month, lower than the average earnings of Syrian refugee men, which is LBP 432,000 (US$288) and significantly below the minimum wage level of 675,000 (US$450).[108] The ILO also reported that refugees from Syria often work in unsafe or unhealthy conditions with 75% of working refugee women reporting back or joint pain and that they are often forced to accept unfair working conditions including "low income, long working hours, working without breaks, and late payment of wages".[109]

About one third of the refugee women who spoke to Amnesty International were working. Women whose husbands had died or were detained were more likely to be working than women who were in Lebanon with their husband. Others said they were unable to work because they had small children to look after or had tried to find a job but were unable to find work. All said that they struggled financially. A consistent complaint among refugee women who worked, or had worked, was underpayment of wages. Employers would inform them of the salary they would be paid but, in practice, would pay them less:

"I am a university graduate but no one will employ me [in my field] because I am Syrian. I work cleaning houses. I am feeling exploited because I work long hours and for low wages. We feel humiliated, especially when they call us servants. They [employers] will make false promises. They pay me half the wage."
"Rafa", Nabatieh, South Lebanon[110]

Another woman living in the same area, "Amina", told Amnesty International about what usually happens when discussing terms with a would-be employer: "We would have a pre-agreement [with the employer] that we would be working from, let's say, 7am to 5pm. But then we start work and after the first couple of days, he [the employer] would say 'you work from 7am to 7pm and if you don't like it then you can leave the job'."[111]

"There is exploitation by employers. They know we will agree to whatever low wage they offer because we are in need. They will offer a job for a very low wage and you wouldn't agree if you weren't in need. If you protest about the wage, they say 'instead of having you I will bring two other Syrians on the same wage'."
"Hanan", Shatila, Beirut[112]

"Hiba" told Amnesty International about the experience of her sister: "My sister is 25 years old. She's a graduate of a pharmacy institute in Syria and she wanted to work in a pharmacy

---

[108] International Labour Organization, *Assessment of the Impact of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and their Employment* Profile, 2014, pp. 27-28.

[109] International Labour Organization, *Assessment of the Impact of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and their Employment* Profile, 2014, pp. 31-32.

[110] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 15 October 2015, Nabatieh, South Lebanon.

[111] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 15 October 2015, Nabatieh, South Lebanon.

[112] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 8 October 2015, Mar Elias, Beirut.

here in Lebanon. The employer wanted to exploit her. He offered her $1 an hour."[113]

In addition to low wages and economic exploitation, refugee women also spoke about sexual harassment and the fear of harassment in the context of employment.

Some families prefer to forgo income rather than take the risk that a family member will experience violence or harassment. "Asmaa" is a 56-year-old Palestinian refugee from Syria. Her husband is dead and she lives in Shatila, Beirut, with three of her daughters and her son. She said: "My daughter worked in a store. The manager harassed her and touched her. That is why I don't let my daughters work now". Her son, who was 14 when they arrived in Lebanon and is now 17 years old, is the only member of the family who is working.[114]

Several women told Amnesty International that they had left a job, or not taken a job, because the attitude or behaviour of employers caused the women to become suspicious of the employer's intentions. Refugee women who were unmarried or who were heads of their household reported instances of this to Amnesty International more than married women whose husbands were in Lebanon. In some of the incidents reported, the employers could have been acting in good faith. However, in the context of a considerable power imbalance between employers and refugee women who desperately need an income to support their families, the women perceived that there were sexual undertones to what could be innocuous remarks.

"Nada", a 29-year-old unmarried Syrian woman, said, "I used to work in a warehouse for clothes. The employer didn't pay us for a week so that's why we left. And before that he used to say, 'if you agree to stay late, I will drive you back' and I thought this was a type of harassment".[115]

Another woman, 30-year-old "Mouna", whose husband is dead and who lives with her three children and her brother's family, said:

"There is a big difficulty living here in Lebanon because of the society and the men. If I want to search for a job, a man would always ask for something – an exchange. I went to one place to apply for a job there. It was a clothes shop. The employer asked to have a coffee with me but I refused. I had doubts because of the way he was looking at me and I thought he wanted something beyond coffee."[116]

---

[113] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 6 October 2015, Saadnyal, Bekaa Valley.

[114] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 25 June 2015, Shatila, Beirut.

[115] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 12 October 2015, Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

[116] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 12 October 2015, Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

INADEQUATE HOUSING

"There is no water tank near my tent. I have to transport the water with buckets from another family's tank. We have to use the same place to go to the toilet and to wash the dishes."

"Sahar", Barr Elias, Bekaa Valley[117]

For all refugee women who spoke to Amnesty International, especially those whose UN financial support has stopped or reduced, finding enough money to pay for accommodation is a serious, ongoing concern.

Adequate accommodation was in short supply in Lebanon before the arrival of more than 1 million refugees. There was a shortage of affordable accommodation with large areas of poor quality informal settlements. In a 2014 report, the UN noted that there were no public housing projects in Lebanon or measures to secure affordable housing for low income groups and rental prices were set by the market.[118]

The UN reports that the Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria who live outside informal tented settlements live mostly in urban areas "in poverty stricken dense urban neighbourhoods amongst an already poor Lebanese and Palestine host population".[119] In 2014 the UN found that for 41% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon shelter that is affordable is inadequate for their needs; adequate shelter is not affordable for them.[120] The main problems identified were overcrowding, poor quality shelter, where, for instance, there was a need for replacement of, or repairs to, the roof, windows or bathroom, and inadequate access to water and sanitation (particularly a problem in informal settlements).[121]

UNAFFORDABLE RENT AND POOR LIVING CONDITIONS

The UN reports that 58% of Syrian refugees live in apartments or houses, 24% in substandard buildings and 18% in informal settlements. The vast majority of Syrian refugees (82%) pay rent for their shelter. Other arrangements include 5% who are hosted for free, 5% whose shelter is provided by an employer and 6% whose shelter is provided by a charity. Of those who are renting, 75% rent unfurnished properties.[122] According to the UN, Syrian refugees pay an average rent of US$164 per month which varies by region. In the Bekaa Valley, where the proportion of refugees living in informal settlements is higher than other regions, the average rent is US$113 and in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, where the vast

---

[117] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 13 October 2015, Barr Elias, Bekaa Valley.

[118] UNHCR and UN Habitat, *Housing, Land and Property Issues in Lebanon: Implications of the Syrian Refugee Crisis* (Land and Property Issues in Lebanon), August 2014, pp. 17-18, available at: https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=6600

[119] UN Inter-Agency Coordination, Lebanon, *Shelter Sector, Mid-Year Dashboard*, June 2015, available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=9233

[120] UNHCR and UN Habitat, *Housing, Land and Property Issues in Lebanon,* August 2014, p. 6.

[121] UNHCR and UN Habitat, *Housing, Land and Property Issues in Lebanon*, August 2014, p. 6 and 31.

[122] UNHCR, *Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2015*, December 2015, p. 17.

majority of refugees live in houses or apartments, the average rent is US$236.[123]

UNRWA reports that up to 60% of Palestinian refugee families from Syria share a household with one or more families and 12% live in extremely crowded conditions of 3.5m² or less per person.[124] Over 75% of Palestinian refugees from Syria live in an independent house or apartment with the remaining population living in tents, factories, garages, shops, barracks or unfinished shelters.[125] UNRWA reports that 81.7% of Palestinian refugees from Syria pay rent, 10.4% are hosted for free and 6.4% live in assisted accommodation. The mean monthly rent of Palestinian refugees from Syria who pay rent is US$257 per household. Households living outside Palestinian refugee camps pay higher rents than those living in camps and those living in Beirut pay higher rents than those living in other areas.[126]

Many refugee women told Amnesty International about numerous challenges they face in paying the rent on time. "Rajaa", a 50-year-old Syrian woman who lives near Barr Elias, Bekaa Valley, said: "Every 15th of the month I have to pay the rent for my tent. The landlord won't wait for us [to pay] so sometimes I have to go out and beg for the money in order to pay the rent."[127]

"Rajaa" also told the organization that she and her family share their tent with other families because she can't afford the rent on her own. She said, "I live in a tent with 10 other people. The tent leaks. We asked for a cover to cover the tent where the water gets in but no one helped us. We are three widows and our children living together."[128] A 28-year-old Syrian woman, "Tahirah", whose husband is detained in Syria, said: "I live with my parents and my

---

[123] UNHCR, *Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2015*, December 2015, pp. 17-18. The report also notes that a March 2015 UN telephone survey of refugees found the average rent was $200 but it does not provide a reason for the differing results.

[124] UNRWA, *2015 Syria Crisis Response Progress Report*, May 2015, p. 13, available at: http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/2015_syria_crisis_response_progress_report.pdf

[125] UNRWA *Profiling the Vulnerability of Palestine Refugees from Syria Living in Lebanon 2015*, p. 22. The majority of families live in an independent house or apartment (78.67%); 6.45% live in a separate room (inside a house or an apartment), 5% live in a factory, warehouse, garage, or shop, 3.35% live in an unfinished shelter, and 2.65% live in a collective shelter. Only 3.58% of families of Palestinian refugees from Syria live in a tent, hut, or barrack.

[126] UNRWA *Profiling the Vulnerability of Palestine Refugees from Syria Living in Lebanon 2015*, p. 24. The UNRWA report specifies that the calculation of average rent has been made for those households that pay rent and that it is the mean amount. The UNHCR vulnerability assessment does not specify either the type of average calculated or whether Syrian refugee households who do not pay rent have been excluded from the calculation. This makes it difficult to compare the two calculations and assess whether the different figures are due to methodological differences or other reasons.

[127] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 13 October 2015, Barr Elias, Bekaa Valley.

[128] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 13 October 2015, Barr Elias, Bekaa Valley.

children. We all live in one room. My father can't work. He's 65; even if he tried to work, he wouldn't be able to get a job. I work doing embroidery in order to pay the rent. The rent is $100 [a month]. We can't rent another room because we can't afford it."[129]

Refugee women told Amnesty International about problems they had with the condition of their accommodation. This included dirty surroundings, rodent infestation and, for those living in informal settlements, a lack of basic amenities such as electricity and water. The UN reports that in informal settlements many people rely on illegal electricity connections or informal supplies at high prices and that sanitation facilities are extremely basic. Most informal settlements have a water tank with water supplied by NGOs.[130]

The UN has a programme to upgrade shelter conditions, with priority given to weatherproofing shelters for winter and providing cash assistance and items such as blankets and stoves to those most in need.[131] However, Syrian refugee women living in informal tented settlements told Amnesty International that they worried about water leaking in their tent and cold conditions in winter. "Wafaa", a 39-year-old Syrian woman who lives with her children in an informal tented settlement near Barr Elias, Bekaa Valley, said: "I am really worried about winter. Last time it rained, the tent leaked water. They were supposed to come and give us covers for the tent but no one came yet. Last winter after there were floods, they came in November and gave us covers."[132]

Another 34-year-old Syrian woman, "Rana", who lives with her family in a tent near Saadnyal, Bekaa Valley, said: "The land where we live – the [Lebanese] land owners are good people but there are rats, insects - crickets and the rain gets in. We have to put cotton in our ears to stop the insects."[133]

Living conditions in houses and apartments are also sometimes inadequate. "Manara", a 43-year-old Syrian woman living in Barr Elias, Bekaa Valley, said: "At the entrance of my building there are lots of mice and rats. One of my daughters got really frightened when she saw them, especially because there is no sunlight there."[134] Another woman, "Nour", said of the place she rents for her and her son: "it hardly qualifies for living – it only has one lamp and one pipe for water. Even though we only have one lamp, it costs LBP 20-25,000 [US$13-$16] per month for electricity."[135]

---

[129] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 12 October 2015, Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

[130] UNHCR and UN Habitat, *Housing, Land and Property Issues in Lebanon*, August 2014, p. 38.

[131] UNCHR, *Inter-Agency Winter Support Update*, December 2015, available at: http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=10033

[132] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 13 October 2015, Barr Elias, Bekaa Valley.

[133] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 6 October 2015, Saadnyal, Bekaa Valley.

[134] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 13 October 2015, Barr Elias, Bekaa Valley.

[135] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 13 October 2015, Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

Refugees from Syria who live in Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps also have to cope with a pre-existing level of insecurity in the camps, which further interferes with the refugees' rights to personal security. "Reem" described an incident which caused her and her family to move:

"We lived in Shatila. There are factions in the camp that are always fighting each other. Our house was between two areas of the camps [controlled by] opposing factions. We lived on the first floor and would always witness drug dealers and weapons traffickers and people having fights. One night a fight grew very big. There was shooting at our house but no one told us to leave the house and that this fight was going to happen even though other people knew. We had a really terrifying night. The next day we looked for another place and moved to Mar Elias camp."[136]

INSECURE TENURE AND THREATS OF EVICTIONS

Lebanese law on contracts for leasing built property – such as houses or apartments – "provides security of tenure for the first three consecutive years of the contract", but states that "rent prices may vary with every renewal".[137] The UN reports that refugees' rental "agreements are typically oral, open-ended, and rarely specify the rights of tenants" and that those who are familiar with the Lebanese housing market are able to secure better agreements than newly arrived refugees. The UN found that rental agreements tend to be "more predatory and harsh in their terms" in urban areas like Beirut.[138]

Leases for "unbuilt property" – land on which informal settlements are established – do not enjoy the same protection in law as those for "built property". The duration of a lease for unbuilt property can vary from a few days to several years with the duration being fixed by oral or written agreement.[139] The UN reports that the vast majority of refugees living in informal settlements have oral rental agreements. For refugees who pay their rent monthly, one month is the term of the lease, giving little security. Those who pay annual rent have greater security of tenure and, in theory, the rent should not increase during the year.[140]

Lebanese law provides protection from eviction. Even when the property owner is legally entitled to evict the occupant, the eviction must be authorised by a court. If a property owner evicts an occupant without a court order, they can be charged under provisions preventing individuals from taking the law into their own hands.[141] The UN reports that more than half of all evictions occur because refugees are unable to pay the rent; however, it states that "while some evictions may be justifiable, they do not seem to be carried out in compliance

---

[136] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 8 October, 2015, Mar Elias, Beirut.

[137] UNHCR and UN Habitat, *Housing, Land and Property Issues in Lebanon*, August 2014, p. 23.

[138] UNHCR and UN Habitat, *Housing, Land and Property Issues in Lebanon*, August 2014, p. 42.

[139] UNHCR and UN Habitat, *Housing, Land and Property Issues in Lebanon*, August 2014, p. 23.

[140] UNHCR and UN Habitat, *Housing, Land and Property Issues in Lebanon*, August 2014, pp. 37-38.

[141] UNHCR and UN Habitat, *Housing, Land and Property Issues in Lebanon*, August 2014, p. 25.

with domestic law or international standards".[142] The report also stated that "many evictions were characterized by repeated threats and harassment" and that refugees are unable to address illegal evictions or other housing-related grievances through the courts.[143]

Several refugee women interviewed by Amnesty International said that, when they had been unable to pay the rent on time, their landlord had evicted them without notice or threatened to evict them immediately. One said that she had been evicted because the landlord had found someone who would pay a higher rent for the property, another that threats of eviction occurred if refugees complained about living conditions. Others said their landlord had increased the rent or charged what seemed to them to be suspiciously high bills for electricity or water and that they were unable to challenge this for fear of eviction. Refugee women across Lebanon told Amnesty International about insecure accommodation and constant worry they would be evicted.

"MARYAM"

"Maryam" came to Lebanon in 2013 with her four children. She lives in rented accommodation with her husband, children and parents-in law near Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

Our rent is no less than US$300 per month. Paying the rent is very difficult and it puts pressure on me psychologically. When we try to find a cheaper house it doesn't have running water or electricity. Once we spent 800,000 LBP [US$534] to equip the house [with those basic amenities] and then the landlord evicted us. When we were evicted we started searching for a new house but this usually takes a month or more.

There are eight members in my family and whenever the landlord finds out the number of people he will refuse to rent to us, even if he is asking for a higher price. Most of the time I feel homeless in Lebanon because the longest time I have spent in one house is six months.

Sometimes I have to pay an electricity bill which is very high and it is seemingly the landlord's bill and my bill combined. Whatever those people do to us, we can't defend ourselves. My only wish is to live in a cheaper house and not be evicted.[144]

"Rasha", a Palestinian woman from Syria living in Shatila camp, Beirut, with her parents and her children, said: "One place we lived cost 200,000 LBP per month [US$134]. We were late paying the rent by four days and our clothes were thrown out. We had to stay with some people we knew until we managed to rent another room."[145]

"Manara" said: "It is humiliating when the landlord asks you to pay the rent and you can't

---

[142] UNHCR and UN Habitat, *Housing, Land and Property Issues in Lebanon*, August 2014, pp. 43-44 and 48.

[143] UNHCR and UN Habitat, *Housing, Land and Property Issues in Lebanon*, August 2014, p. 8.

[144] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 13 October 2015, Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

[145] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 15 October 2015, Shatila, Beirut.

afford it yet and he says that he cannot wait for you to afford it. We asked if he can wait 15 days [for us to pay], because my husband is sick and I have little daughters. I asked him 'where will we go if you evict us? Should we sleep in the streets?' And he said that it's impossible for him to wait. This is humiliation."[146] "Alya", a Palestinian woman from Syria, said: "We are in debt to the grocery store all month in order to save money for rent because rent is the most important thing. The landlord will hold a weapon in your face and ask you to move out at any time."[147]

"Hanan" told Amnesty International: "Landlords will kick you out of the house if you are one or two days late with the rent. If you complain to the landlord that there has been no water for three days then they will say 'if you like it like this stay, otherwise get out'."[148]

A Syrian woman living in Shatila camp, Beirut said:

"I have to save every penny I have and deprive the children of clothes, food and other things in order to save money to pay the rent for the house. The moment you don't have the rent, the owner of the house will evict you. Every so often the owner of the house will knock at the door and ask for an increase in the rent. He asks for an extra, $50 or so, even though he knows the economic conditions of Syrians living here. Because I don't have a valid permit and my children have invalid permits and we can't move around, we have to pay him whatever increase he asks in order to remain in the house. At the beginning my rent was LBP 500,000 [US$333]*. It increased and now it's LBP 600,000* [US$400]*".*
"Iman", Shatila, Beirut[149]

NGOs working with refugees told Amnesty International that the increased demand for housing due to the high number of refugees in Lebanon and refugees' lack of valid residence permits creates a climate in which landlords have considerable power over refugees from Syria. This leads to a risk of insecurity and exploitation, especially for refugee women who are heads of their household. NGOs reported that in addition to increasing the rent, some landlords were pressuring women into engaging in "survival sex" – offering reduced rent or rent free housing in exchange for sex. One NGO working with survivors of violence told Amnesty International that they had provided assistance to a woman head of household whose landlord had demanded she have sex with him. The woman had refused and sought protection and relocation from the NGO.[150] The refugee women who spoke to Amnesty International had not experienced this type of pressure from their landlord.

---

[146] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 13 October 2015, Barr Elias, Bekaa Valley.

[147] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 8 October, 2015, Mar Elias, Beirut.

[148] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 8 October, 2015, Mar Elias, Beirut.

[149] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 15 October 2015, Shatila, Beirut.

[150] Amnesty International interviews with NGOs working with refugees, June and October 2015, Lebanon.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

As a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Lebanon is obliged to ensure that everyone enjoys the rights contained in the Covenant "including non-nationals, such as refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, migrant workers and victims of international trafficking, regardless of legal status and documentation".[151] While Article 2.3 of the ICESCR permits developing countries to "determine to what extent they would guarantee the economic rights recognized… to non-nationals",[152] this does not mean that states are free to leave refugees and other non-citizens destitute. The ICERD requires states to eliminate racial discrimination in the enjoyment of all rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural.[153] The CERD has stated that although some rights, notably those relating to elections, allow differentiation between citizens and non-citizens, states have an obligation to ensure equality between citizens and non-citizens with respect to other rights.[154] This includes removing obstacles to the enjoyment of the rights to education, housing, employment and health by non-citizens.[155]

The ICESCR provides that states must "take steps, individually and through international assistance and cooperation, especially economic and technical, to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively" the rights in the Covenant.[156] Although economic, social and cultural rights are to be realized "progressively", states still have to immediately ensure that "minimum core obligations" of each right are met.[157] The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), which monitors state compliance with the Covenant, has stated that this means states must ensure "at the very least, minimum essential levels of each of the rights". It has said "a State party in which any significant number of individuals is deprived of essential foodstuffs, of essential primary health care, of basic shelter and housing, or of the most basic forms of education is, prima facie, failing to discharge its obligations under the Covenant".[158]

---

[151] Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment 20 on Non-Discrimination, E/C.12/GC/20, July 2009, para 30, available at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2fGC%2f20&Lang=en

[152] International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), GA res 2200A (XXI), 16 December 1966, Article 2.3, available at: http://ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx

[153] ICERD, Article 5.

[154] CERD, General Recommendation 30 on discrimination against non-citizens, CERD/C/GC/30, para 3.

[155] CERD, General Recommendation 30 on discrimination against non-citizens, CERD/C/GC/30, para 29.

[156] ICESCR, Article 2.1.

[157] ICESCR, Article 2.1 and Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment 3 on the nature of states parties' obligations, E/C.12/1991/3, January 1991, para 10, available at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=INT%2fCESCR%2fGEC%2f4758&Lang=en

[158] ICESCR, Article 2.1 and Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment 3 on

The CESCR holds that any state who uses a lack of resources to justify its failure to provide the minimum core elements of rights to their population must demonstrate that it has made every effort using all resources available to meet its minimum core obligations. Even where resources are clearly inadequate, states must "strive to ensure the widest possible enjoyment of the relevant rights under the prevailing circumstances" and that "vulnerable members of society can and indeed must be protected by the adoption of relatively low-cost targeted programmes".[159]

OBLIGATIONS ON LEBANON TO REQUEST AND UTILISE INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

The provision in the ICESCR referring to "international assistance and cooperation" reflects that even when a state does not have sufficient resources to fulfil economic, social and cultural rights for its population, there are resources within the international community it could utilize. When the situation in a state is such that it is unable to meet the minimum core obligations for everyone within its jurisdiction, the state is obliged to seek international assistance and co-operation and to ensure that the assistance is utilized in a way that contributes to the realization of economic, social and cultural rights and prioritizing minimum core obligations.[160]

Lebanese government officials have repeatedly highlighted the difficulties it faces as a result of hosting more than a million refugees from Syria and have stated that the international community has failed to provide the assistance it needs. For example the Prime Minister has said "The influx of Syrian refugees has a negative economic effect. It puts a burden on the country. We are not receiving enough financial aid to handle them".[161] In a statement to the UN General Assembly in New York, the Ambassador of Lebanon said "Lebanon cannot cope by itself neither with the humanitarian rights and needs of Syrian refugees on its soil, nor with the various socio-economic detrimental effects of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon".[162]

---

the nature of states parties' obligations, E/C.12/1991/3, January 1991, para 10.

[159] CESCR, General Comment 3 on the nature of states parties' obligations, E/C.12/1991/3, January 1991, paras 10-12.

[160] CESCR, General Comment 3 on the nature of states parties' obligations, E/C.12/1991/3, January 1991, para 13, and Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, "The obligations of 'international assistance and cooperation' under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. A possible entry point to a human rights based approach to Millennium Development Goal 8" in *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 13:1, 86-109, 2009, available at: http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13642980802532424

[161] https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/lebanons-prime-minister-we-are-heading-toward-a-breakdown/2015/09/18/6c743c94-5c97-11e5-9757-e49273f05f65_story.html

[162] Statement to the General Assembly, 20 November 2015, http://lebanonun.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Statement-by-Dr.-Nawaf-Salam-at-the-General-Assembly-on-global-awareness-November-20-2015-.pdf In addition, in its dialogue with CEDAW, the government representative said: "Sadly, much of that funding had yet to materialize, while the refugee crisis was only deepening, as exemplified by the numbers now risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Lebanon could no

OBLIGATIONS ON THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE

Members of the international community have obligations to provide humanitarian assistance and co-operation in accordance with Articles 55 and 56 of the UN Charter and relevant resolutions of international bodies relating to times of emergency.[163] This includes providing assistance to refugees. A fundamental emphasis of refugee protection is international responsibility sharing to reduce the impact of mass refugee influxes on host countries.[164] Each state should contribute to the maximum of its capacity.

All states parties to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are required under the Article 2.1 provision on international assistance and co-operation to ensure that their assistance is provided in a manner consistent with human rights. This includes ensuring assistance prioritizes the most marginalized, focuses on realizing the minimum essential levels of economic, social and cultural rights and ensures equality and non-discrimination.

---

longer bear the refugee burden without international assistance and she urged the international community to provide the funding it had promised", CEDAW Summary Record 1346, para 31, available at: http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=CEDAW/C/SR.1346&Lang=E. Lebanon's state report for the Universal Periodic Review stated: "Lebanon has not yet received the international assistance pledged by donor countries at numerous conferences held to consider the situation of Syrian displaced persons. Such assistance could be used to address the serious crises encumbering the country", para 137, available at: http://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?Open&DS=A/HRC/WG.6/23/LBN/1&Lang=E

[163] See for example: Executive Committee of UNHCR, *Conclusion on International Co-operation and Burden and Responsibility Sharing in Mass Influx Situations*, 8 October 2004, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/41751fd82.html

[164] CESCR, General Comment 14 on the right to the highest attainable standard of health, E/C/12/2000/4, August 2000, para 40, available at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=E%2fC.12%2f2000%2f4&Lang=en

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND RISKS OF EXPLOITATION

'A lot of [refugee] women are subjected to assaults, harassment, theft and even rape but can't present complaints because of their illegal status in Lebanon and being threatened with arrest.'

"Hanan", Mar Elias, Beirut[165]

Amnesty International heard repeatedly from refugee women about harassment they experience regularly. Refugee women living in different parts of Lebanon spoke about instances of Lebanese men making inappropriate sexual advances towards them while they were going about their daily lives. In some cases, men offered financial or other assistance to the refugee women in exchange for sex. In other cases men threatened them, including with weapons. Refugee women consistently cited their lack of valid residence permits as a key reason why they were unwilling to report the harassment and threats to the Lebanese authorities.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND RISKS OF VIOLENCE IN PUBLIC SPACES

The vast majority of Syrian refugee women and all the Palestinian refugee women who spoke to Amnesty International said that they did not feel safe in Lebanon. They told Amnesty International that refugee women in Lebanon experience sexual harassment in public spaces irrespective of their marital status; however, many women heads of household said they also experienced more targeted harassment from men who knew they did not have a husband or other adult male relative living with them in Lebanon.

"Harassment [of refugee women] is a very big problem in Lebanon, whether I'm single or married, I'm always harassed. It's why we're afraid for our children. I have a daughter who is 16 and I'm afraid to send her even to the closest shop. It's the suffering of all Syrians."

---

[165] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 8 October, 2015, Mar Elias, Beirut.

"Maryam", Chtaura, Bekaa Valley[166]

Another Syrian woman, 22-year-old "Noura", said: "The view of the people [about Syrians] is humiliating. Especially if you go and walk in the streets and your husband isn't here, any other man thinks that you are 'easy to get' and asks you to join him".

"HANAN"

"Hanan" is a 38-year-old Palestinian refugee from Yarmouk, Damascus. She arrived in Lebanon in early 2013 and lives with her three daughters in Shatila camp in Beirut.

I had an incident once with a bus driver when I was with my daughters coming back from Bekaa to Beirut. There was only one other man apart from the driver on the bus and I was alone with my daughters. The bus driver started doing abnormal things to try and harass me. The first thing he did was take his gun and place it next to him so I would know that he had a weapon with him. My eldest daughter who is 16 was really terrified. But I had to tell her not to be scared and promised her that I would manage the situation.

How do you think I was able to get off the bus? I had to promise to come back to him and told him, "As you like, I will first just take my daughters home". I took his phone number and his name because this was the only chance for us to get out. I gave him my phone number and smiled a lot so he would believe my lie and told him I would call him back. He said he'd call me "Princess" and I said, "OK, you can call me whatever you like". I even thought to myself that, if things went to the extreme and I wasn't able to get away, I would just give him whatever he wanted as long as he didn't hurt my daughters.

I waited to complain until I reached Shatila police station in Beirut. I was really angry but they told me, "Do you know that you're not eligible to present a complaint? You don't have legal status". And then they said in a sarcastic way, "Why did he come up to you and harass you in the first place?"[167]

"Saada", a 25-year-old Syrian woman living with her young son near Chtaura, Bekaa Valley, told Amnesty International about her experience of living in Lebanon:

"Just because I am a woman living alone, if I get into a cab, the driver will try to touch me and I will hear a lot of verbal harassment. Most of the time I try not to ask for help from anyone. But sometimes I need help, like with carrying a gas bottle. If I ask any man for help with carrying a gas canister, or any other kind of help, he will indirectly feel like he has the right to interfere in my life. But harassment [of women] is not only restricted to Lebanon. It's not a problem that only occurs to us because we are refugees here in Lebanon. It can happen in Syria and in Lebanon and any other place."[168]

Another Syrian woman described an incident that happened to her:

---

[166] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 13 October 2015, Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

[167] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 8 October 2015, Mar Elias, Beirut.

[168] Interview with Amnesty International, 12 October 2015, Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

"Once I was on a main road in Zahle. I was with two other women and we were asking how to find [an NGO] office. One of the taxi drivers said to us, 'Get in, I know where it is, I'll take you there'. We got in the car but it seemed like he was drunk. He was laughing in a very strange way and was saying 'I love Syrians' a lot. We kept saying 'it's OK, we know where we are' until we could get out of the car. I was really afraid that he would do something bad."
"Sara", Chtaura, Bekaa Valley[169]

There is little data available on sexual and gender-based violence against refugee women in Lebanon. The most recent comprehensive survey of refugees, the 2015 UN "Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon" looked at issues including food security, shelter, education and health; however, it did not specifically address issues of gender-based violence.

The UN study asked one question on whether household members had "experienced any kinds of issues related with their safety during the last three months in Lebanon" and found that only 6% of surveyed households had experienced any issues.[170] In contrast, the majority of women interviewed by Amnesty International expressed concerns for their safety and that of other family members and said that harassment of refugee women on the streets was commonplace. In addition, NGO staff interviewed by Amnesty International described a climate in which refugee women were at risk of gender-based violence.

Amnesty International's experience of holding focus group discussions with refugee women was that some women were keen to discuss issues of safety and harassment and raised them before the organization asked; however, others were more cautious about speaking out about the issue. For example, some women made a general comment about "hearing bad words" and only after seeing how other women reacted, continued and spoke in more detail about incidents of harassment.

OFFERS OF 'HELP' COME WITH UNWELCOME CONDITIONS

Seven refugee women who spoke to Amnesty International spoke of receiving offers of assistance from Lebanese men but the offers were made, explicitly or implicitly, on condition of engagement in sexual activity. These conditional "offers" were made to four unmarried women or women heads of household by men who were aware that they did not have a husband living with them. Three married women reported also receiving unwelcome sexual

[169] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 12 October 2015, Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

[170] UNHCR, *Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2015*, December 2015, p. 34 & 88. The UN "Vulnerability Assessment" surveyed 4,105 Syrian refugee households, using a detailed questionnaire; however, the report does not give a gender breakdown of the number of men and women who were interviewed. The questionnaire that was used for the survey prompts the interviewer to "Ask if it is possible to interview the household head". Since the number of households headed by men is considerably higher than the number headed by women it is possible that the interviewees were mostly men. If more interviewees were men, this may have influenced the answers to the question on safety. For example, refugee women may not have told their husband (or other relative who is head of household) about incidents of sexual harassment they had experienced out of fear or a desire not to worry them.

advances.

"FATIMA"

"Fatima" is 38 years old. She arrived in Lebanon from Syria early in 2014 and lives with her four children in southern Lebanon. In 2012 some unknown men arrived at the factory in Syria where her husband worked, asked for him by name and took him away. "Fatima" has not heard from him since. She told Amnesty International:

The situation in Lebanon is very difficult and I don't feel protected here. When I arrived and was in need of aid, I tried to register my children in school. Someone at the school said that they would help me with the registration. I gave him my phone number so he could send me updates. He phoned me two to three times a day and he said that he would offer me anything I liked and asked me if I would like to go out with him. I told him I didn't need his help any more. Now I've stopped giving my number [to people who offer help] because I feel afraid.

I feel exploited in Lebanon, mainly by men. If I hear of good people who can help me, I will go. But I discover they are not good people, that they want something in exchange. They will start complimenting me and then I understand that they want something else. Many times when I am outside on the road where I live, men who know me from my area will stop and offer me a ride. These men know that my husband isn't here. If I accept, the man will indirectly offer me his services. He will say, "If you need a ride to any place, I'll take you." I assume in the coming days that he will ask me for more.

Sometimes the men will ask me about my marriage. When I answer that I am still searching for my husband and that my children are waiting for their father, they tell me to quit searching and say that my husband is probably dead.

The men also start challenges between each other. One will tell his friend, "If she ignores you, I'll make her speak to me." This harassment always happens to me, every couple of days I experience this. But I have to be polite to them.[171]

Palestinian women from Syria who were unmarried or whose husbands were not living with them in Lebanon also reported men putting unwelcome conditions on assistance. Access to services in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon is limited because government authorities are not present. In practice authority in the camps is held by "Popular Committees".[172] These "Popular Committees" control distribution of some assistance to the population living in the camp (both Palestinians who are long-term residents in Lebanon and those from Syria). "Hanan", whose husband had travelled to Europe, told Amnesty International: "Since my husband left, people look at me weirdly, even the people who distribute aid. They put conditions on the aid – to see me later on. They say they will give aid if I will see them later on or if they have good [political] connections, they say they won't give

[171] Interview with Amnesty International, 15 October 2015, Nabatieh, South Lebanon.

[172] Amnesty International meeting with UNRWA staff, 19 June 2015.

me any aid."[173]

"Reem", a Palestinian woman who is not married, described how her mother went back to Syria to pick up some of the family's documents. While she was there, the Lebanese government introduced new regulations for Palestinians entering Lebanon and her mother was unable to return. "Reem" telephoned the General Directorate of General Security, which is part of the Lebanese Ministry of Interior. It is the branch of government that refugees need to deal with when renewing their residence permits. She spoke to an official she had dealt with in the past to ask if he could help. She told Amnesty International, "He said he would help if I went to Jounieh with him". Jounieh is a coastal town about 16km north of Beirut known for its resorts. "Reem" said, "I told him, 'No, I'd rather my mother went back to Syria'." She said that eventually her mother was able to pay and cross the border back to Lebanon.[174]

"Wahda", a 29-year-old woman living with her husband and four children, told Amnesty International that "one man proposed to give me money to be his girlfriend because he is aware my husband is sick".[175]

"AISHA"

"Aisha" is a 33-year-old Syrian woman from Damascus. She arrived in Lebanon in 2012 and lives in Taalabaya, Bekaa Valley, with her husband and four children, one of whom suffers from a rare medical condition.

A Lebanese man once came and told me he would help me with official documents but in exchange he wanted to spend the night with me.

Even though I was standing with my daughter, this man passed by and stopped to ask me this. It was 10am. He was in a car, stopped and offered assistance saying that the centre is in Zahle and would I go with him. I said I'd have to speak to my husband. Although I mentioned my husband, he still proposed to spend the night with me and give me money.

I told another woman about what happened to me and I described the car. She said that she knew the man and he had done the same thing before.

I wasn't afraid because it was daytime and on a main street but I felt really disturbed and upset because the general view of Syrians is that we are cheap and people are thinking about us like that. Not everyone thinks like this but there is a general view. There is exploitation of the situation of Syrians, especially when they find us in need.[176]

---

[173] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 8 October 2015, Mar Elias, Beirut.

[174] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 8 October 2015, Mar Elias, Beirut.

[175] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 15 October 2015, Nabatieh, South Lebanon.

[176] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 6 October 2015, Saadnyal, Bekaa Valley.

'HELP' CONDITIONAL ON MARRIAGE

Several refugee women told Amnesty International about marriage proposals they had received. Some were proposals made directly to them and others were proposals for marriage to their teenage daughters.

"Nasreen" is a 36-year-old Syrian woman from Damascus. She arrived in Lebanon in 2012 and lives with her children, her sister and nephew. Her husband was forcibly disappeared in Syria. She told Amnesty International that a man offered to act as a guarantor for her so she could renew her residence permit. She said that, in return, "he asked me to marry him – temporarily". A temporary marriage is a, traditionally Shi'a, form of religious marriage that lasts for a limited time period, which could be days, months or years. "Nasreen" said that the man in question worked for the government's General Directorate of General Security and, because she had previously renewed her residence permit there, "he knows my husband has disappeared".[177]

International organizations have been reporting on instances of child marriage among refugees from Syria for several years. Traditionally, it is the responsibility of a husband to provide financially for his wife. For families who are struggling to pay the rent and provide sufficient food for everyone, the marriage of a daughter may be seen as one way to reduce their financial difficulties. Marriage is sometimes also seen as a means of "protecting" girls from sexual harassment and violence.[178]

Financial dependency coupled with traditional family structures and religious laws which grant decision making power in family matters to male guardians can leave refugee women unable to challenge decisions that men in the family make.

"NOUR"

"Nour" is a 40-year-old Syrian and comes from the south of the country. Her husband disappeared in 2013 in Syria. When she first arrived in Lebanon she was dependent on her brother. She described to Amnesty International how she was unable to prevent the marriage of her 16-year-old daughter:

One day, my husband went out to the shops and never came back. That was in May 2013. I don't know if he was taken by gangsters or detained [by the Syrian government]. Some people called me from my husband's phone and said he was with them and asked for money. It was very stressful; they would call from time to time, very early morning or late at night. I would have paid them but they would tell me a date and then turn off my husband's phone so I couldn't do anything. After a few months I didn't hear from them again.

I've been living in Lebanon since 2013. I don't have any qualifications so it was very difficult for me to get employment. It was also very difficult for me to even rent a tent.

At first my daughter, son and I were living with my brother and his family. My daughter had to get married

[177] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 15 October 2015, Nabatieh, South Lebanon.

[178] See for example http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/girls-voices/protect-marry-child-marriage-syrian-refugees/ and https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/Too_Young_to_Wed.pdf

because we were under pressure. I didn't approve of this but circumstances pressured us – economically, financially and psychologically.

When we came to Lebanon my children couldn't continue their education. My brother wouldn't let my daughter work. Since she was a young girl and a stranger, young men would harass her verbally even when she was with me or her uncle. We couldn't protect her from this sort of harassment. She wanted to get a job but my brother refused and he beat her. As a reaction to this beating, when my brother's wife said that she knew of an old man who wanted to get married, my daughter agreed. My daughter was 16 years old when she got married to a man 20 years older than her. Now she suffers a lot of problems because of this.

Since I left my house in Syria I lost every sort of freedom and liberty, my freedom of opinion. I couldn't prevent the marriage because I didn't have any sort of freedom financially or emotionally because of my dependency on other people.

Now I rent a small place for just my son, who is 14, and I. An NGO helped me get a job teaching sewing. They pay me US$100 a month but it costs me US$40 per month for the transport to go to work and the rent costs me US$150 a month.

My daughter lives in Beirut with her husband. Her husband was married before and already has children and his elderly mother also lives with them. My daughter is now 19 and has a baby. She's a child raising a child. My daughter hasn't visited me here since her marriage. She was going to visit once but she was stopped at a checkpoint and threatened with arrest because her residence permit is invalid. A Lebanese man vouched for her so the officer let her go. Now she's too scared to travel. I can't go to Beirut for the same reason. I've seen photos of her baby though. We mainly communicate through WhatsApp.[179]

IMPACT OF HARASSMENT AND FEARS OF HARASSMENT ON WOMEN

Refugee women from Syria told Amnesty International how they are altering their routines and curtailing activities they previously undertook in an attempt to avoid being harassed.

"My life pattern has changed, the way I do my hair has changed. I have to dress differently. I can't go out with my friends outside the camp [Mar Elias Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut]. Even if I come back at 8 or 9pm, I hear a thousand bad words from men. It's mainly Lebanese men or Palestinian Lebanese[180] *men. They approach me and all have weapons."*
"Reem", Mar Elias, Beirut[181]

"Amira", a 40-year-old Syrian woman living in Majdel Anjar, Bekaa Valley, said: "Since I've been a widow for a long time, I got accustomed to being alone. In Lebanon it's much worse because I don't feel safe. In Syria I used to go out in the street. I'm always afraid to take a taxi alone. It's very difficult."[182] Another woman, "Lama", aged 49 and living in the same

[179] Interview with Amnesty International, 13 October 2015, Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

[180] Palestinian refugees who are long-term residents in Lebanon.

[181] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 8 October 2015, Mar Elias, Beirut.

[182] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 6 October 2015, Majdel Anjar, Bekaa Valley.

area, said: "Most women have been harassed. I'll be standing by the road and will be told to "get in the car". I'm an old woman and it happens to me so how about the young women? That's why we don't want young women to go out."[183]

INABILITY TO SEEK REDRESS

Amnesty International's interviews with refugee women highlighted their serious lack of trust in the Lebanese authorities' willingness to effectively and impartially investigate complaints brought by refugees. International and national NGOs working with refugees also told Amnesty International that while some survivors of violence sought their support services, it was very rare for survivors to report instances of gender-based violence to the police.[184]

Few refugee women who spoke to Amnesty International said that they would be prepared to report a crime committed against them to the Lebanese police. One woman, "Nada", said, "I would go to the police because I won't shut my mouth for my rights".[185] However, the majority of refugee women said that they would not feel safe to report a crime to the Lebanese authorities. Another woman, "Yara", said, "I wouldn't go [to the police] because, once they find out you are Syrian, they will treat you badly and claim you have no rights".[186]

The main reason refugee women gave for their fear of approaching the authorities was their invalid residence permit. "Hala" said, "Of course I wouldn't feel safe because I don't have a valid [residence] permit and they would ask for a valid permit whenever I walked into any police station."[187] Of the few women interviewed by Amnesty International who had attempted to report incidents to the police, none had a positive experience. Several women told Amnesty International that the authorities had refused to help them or their family members because they did not have valid residence permits. "Haifa", a Palestinian woman from Syria, told Amnesty International that her daughter's friend had gone to Shatila police station to report that her purse had been stolen. She said that the friend "was detained for 15 days for having illegal status. Her purse had all her papers in it".[188]

"MARYAM"

"Maryam" is a 35-year-old Syrian woman from Homs. She told Amnesty International how she was harassed by Lebanese police officers after having to make a report to them about the death of a relative.

---

[183] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 6 October 2015, Majdel Anjar, Bekaa Valley.

[184] Amnesty International interviews with international and national NGOs, June and October 2015, Lebanon.

[185] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 12 October 2015, Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

[186] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 12 October 2015, Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

[187] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 13 October 2015, Barr Elias, Bekaa Valley.

[188] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 8 October 2015, Mar Elias, Beirut.

One of my relatives died in August 2015. The police took a report from me and my sister. It included all our information – names, addresses and telephone numbers.

After a while the police would pass by our house or would call us and ask us to go out with them. It was the same three police officers who took our report. Because we don't have legal [residence] permits, the officers threatened us. They said that they would imprison us if we didn't go out with them.

This happened for about two months. Then our landlord wanted the house back so we moved house. We changed our phone numbers and didn't give the police our new address. Now I wouldn't dare go to the police station. Even if I did go, I wouldn't benefit. The police wouldn't help me.[189]

Sexual violence is significantly under-reported worldwide and Lebanon is no exception.[190] All women and girls in Lebanon face obstacles in accessing justice for crimes of sexual or gender-based violence;[191] however, refugee women and girls face an additional barrier to reporting because they are concerned about possible repercussions for having an invalid residence permit.

The government of Lebanon acknowledges that it has difficulties in collecting data on numbers of cases of sexual and gender-based violence in the country.[192] The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in a November 2015 review of Lebanon's implementation of its legal obligations on women's rights, expressed its concern at the "lack of disaggregated data on the number of reports, investigations, prosecutions and convictions in cases of violence against women, including sexual harassment, domestic violence, assault and rape, including by security forces".[193] It recommended that the government collect such data disaggregated by "sex, age, nationality and relationship between the victim and the perpetrator".[194]

Specifically relating to gender-based violence against refugee women, CEDAW recommended

---

[189] Amnesty International focus group discussion on 13 October 2015, Chtaura, Bekaa Valley.

[190] See for example, the UN Secretary-General's campaign, UNiTE, to end Violence against Women, http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/situation.shtml. The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and CEDAW consistently mention under-reporting of sexual violence in their country specific work.

[191] CEDAW, Concluding Observations on Lebanon, CEDAW/C/LBN/4-5, para 21. Obstacles include lack of legal assistance and lack knowledge and sensitivity to women's rights from justice officials.

[192] Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports: Lebanon, CEDAW/C/LBN/4-5, 15 May 2014, paras 74-75, available at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fLBN%2f4-5&Lang=en

[193] Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) , Concluding Observations on Lebanon, CEDAW/C/LBN/4-5, November 2015, para 27.

[194] CEDAW, Concluding Observations on Lebanon, CEDAW/C/LBN/4-5, para 28 (c).

that Lebanon "seek technical support for the establishment of a data collection system on incidents of gender-based violence against women, in particular sexual violence, and incidents of child, early and forced marriages of refugee women and girls".[195]

Amnesty International wrote to the Ministry of Interior, whose responsibilities include the police, and to the General Directorate of General Security requesting data on the numbers of Syrian refugee women and Palestinian refugee women from Syria reporting to the police that they had experienced a crime committed against them. The organization also informed the government about the allegations received from refugee women that they had been subjected to sexual harassment by police officers and officials working for the General Directorate of General Security and requested a response. As of time of publication, Amnesty International had not received a reply from the government.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Gender-based violence is a form of discrimination against women and is prohibited under international law.[196] States are not only obliged to ensure that gender-based violence is not committed by any state officials, they "may also be responsible for private acts if they fail to act with due diligence to prevent violations of rights or to investigate and punish acts of violence, and for providing compensation".[197] The Lebanese authorities therefore have a legal obligation to ensure that state officials do not commit any act of gender-based violence, including sexual harassment, against any women and girls in Lebanon, including Syrian refugee women and Palestinian refugee women from Syria. They also must also take all appropriate measures to prevent acts of gender-based violence committed by private persons, including family members, neighbours, employers, landlords and strangers on the street.

CEDAW, in its November 2015 review of Lebanon, expressed concern at obstacles women in the country face in accessing the justice system. It recommended that the government "ensure that all allegations of sexual harassment are recorded and that all allegations of assault and rape are duly investigated, prosecuted and sanctioned and that victims have access to appropriate redress, including compensation. Ensure that all allegations of assault and rape by members of the security forces are investigated by an independent judicial authority".[198]

In addition, CEDAW has highlighted that factors such as being a refugee, asylum-seeker or stateless frequently make it more difficult for women to access justice. It states that "Women belonging to such groups often do not report violations of their rights to the authorities for

---

[195] CEDAW, Concluding Observations on Lebanon, CEDAW/C/LBN/4-5, para 12 (c).

[196] CEDAW, General Recommendation 19 on violence against women, CEDAW/C/GR/19, 1992, para 6, available at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/INT_CEDAW_GEC_3731_E.pdf

[197] CEDAW, General Recommendation 19 on violence against women, para 9.

[198] CEDAW, General Recommendation 33 on women's access to justice, paras 21 and 28 (e).

fear that they will be humiliated, stigmatized, arrested, deported, tortured or have other forms of violence inflicted upon them, including by law enforcement officials."[199]

Lebanon must take appropriate steps to ensure that all women and girls, including Syrian refugee women and Palestinian refugee women from Syria without valid residence permits, are able to report gender-based violence and other human rights violations or abuses to the police without fear of detention, harassment or other adverse repercussions. States are obliged to investigate, effectively and impartially, all instances of gender-based violence and other serious human rights violations or abuses reported to them.

States parties to CEDAW are also required to ensure non-discrimination between men and women in all matters associated with marriage and family relations, including rights and responsibilities within marriage and the end of marriage and equality with respect to matters relating to their children and to guardianship or trusteeship of children.[200]

CEDAW has expressed concern that Lebanon's numerous different personal status laws result in discrimination against women within their religious sect and discrimination between women belonging to different religious denominations. It has also highlighted as a concern "a draft law intended to regulate marriage among minors instead of prohibiting child marriage".[201] CEDAW recommended that the government "Adopt an optional civil personal status law based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination and the right to choose one's religious affiliation in order to protect women and alleviate their legal, economic and social marginalization".[202]

---

[199] CEDAW, General Recommendation 33 on women's access to justice, CEDAW/C/GR/33, August 2015, para 10, available at: http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/GC/33&Lang=en

[200] CEDAW, Article 16.1(c), (d) and (f).

[201] CEDAW, Concluding Observations on Lebanon, CEDAW/C/LBN/4-5, para 45.

[202] CEDAW, Concluding Observations on Lebanon, CEDAW/C/LBN/4-5, para 46(a).

Above: Mountains on the border between Lebanon and Syria. Many refugee women interviewed by Amnesty International want to be able to go back to Syria. © Amnesty International

Below: A Syrian refugee woman interviewed by Amnesty International, October 2015, Bekaa Valley, Lebanon. © Amnesty International

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The economic and security situation for refugee women from Syria in Lebanon declined over the course of 2015. A severe lack of funds forced the UN to reduce the support it provides to refugees. Refugees are living significantly below the Lebanese poverty line. In addition strict criteria and high costs for refugees to renew their residence permits introduced by the Lebanese government means that far fewer refugees have a valid permit.

This combination of pressures has resulted in a climate in which refugee women from Syria are at risk of violence, harassment and exploitation and are unable to seek redress from the authorities. Women who head their households are particularly at risk from landlords, employers or neighbours who know they do not have an adult male relative living with them and that they are unlikely to have regular status in Lebanon due difficulties in renewing their residence permit. Refugee women are unable to seek redress for gender-based violence or other human rights violations and abuses they experience because they fear that reporting to the authorities will have negative consequences, including their detention for lacking a valid residence permit.

Amnesty International recognizes that more than 1 million people from Syria have sought refuge in Lebanon, placing a heavy strain on the country's resources, infrastructure, services, including housing, education and health care, and security. The international community's failure to provide sufficient support to Lebanon and to the UN's regional response to the Syrian refugee crisis is shameful. The international community must share the responsibility for assisting and hosting refugees by increasing financial support for the humanitarian response and by increasing resettlement of those refugees most in need.

The failure of the international community to provide anything close to the level of assistance needed by Lebanon does not, however, justify the restrictions on refugees put in place by the government nor the consequent risks of human rights violations and abuses. The government must ensure that refugee women and girls are protected from gender-based violence and other human rights violations and abuses and are able to seek redress without fear of negative repercussions due to their invalid residence permit.

Amnesty International recommends

To the government of Lebanon, in particular, the Ministry of Interior:

- Ensure that all refugees from Syria can renew their residency in Lebanon until there is a fundamental change in circumstances in Syria that means it is safe for them to return. To this end, remove obstacles to residency renewal, including the fee of US$200. Ensure renewal processes are effective, fair, speedy and transparent and that relevant information is publicly available.

- Ensure that Syrian refugee women and Palestinian refugee women from Syria living in Lebanon without their husband are able to renew their residence permits without being

required to show permission from their husband or to prove his whereabouts.

- Ensure that police provide a safe and confidential environment for all women and girls to report incidents of gender-based violence, labour exploitation or other human rights violations or abuses, irrespective of their nationality or the status of their residence permit, and ensure that all such complaints are recorded and promptly, impartially and effectively investigated.

- Take appropriate action against police who fail to record cases or investigate allegations of human rights violations or abuses, including gender-based violence, committed against Syrian refugees or Palestinian refugees from Syria.

- End the suspension of registration of refugees as it is a key mechanism to identify those in need of international protection and assistance. Further, allow the UNHCR to re-register those who were deregistered due to their entry into Lebanon being after 5 January 2015.

- Work with UN agencies to improve service provision to refugees, in particular access to housing, education, health, food and water, in line with international obligations to ensure that minimum essential levels of each right are met for everyone in the country.

To the international community including the Gulf Co-operation Council, the EU and its member states, the USA, Australia, Canada and all other countries able to provide support:

- Substantially increase financial contributions to the UN Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) and ensure the UN response has full funding early in 2016 in order to avoid the damaging cuts to refugee support that occurred in 2015.

- Support the government of Lebanon in increasing the capacity of national services to meet the needs of refugees from Syria and the host communities impacted.

- In accordance with the principle of responsibility sharing, substantially increase the number of resettlement and humanitarian admission places for refugees from Syria who are currently hosted in Lebanon and other neighbouring countries so that the 10% of refugees from Syria who UNHCR consider the "most vulnerable" (approximately 450,000 people) are resettled by the end of 2016. Resettlement should be equally available to Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria. Places offered should be over and above existing quotas.

- Ensure that refugee women whose husbands are forcibly disappeared, or who lack documentation proving the fate or whereabouts of their husbands, are not disadvantaged in decision-making on resettlement because they are unable to demonstrate their whereabouts.

- Ensure that resettlement programmes are in line with UNHCR criteria and accept refugees in accordance with UNHCR's "vulnerability criteria", including refugee women whose husbands are forcibly disappeared or who are unable to demonstrate their whereabouts.

To UNHCR:

- Increase the number of cases of refugee women submitted for resettlement to states

operating resettlement programmes, with a particular focus on cases of women and girls at risk, including women whose husbands are forcibly disappeared or who lack documentation proving the fate or whereabouts of their husbands.

- Ensure that all published data on the situation of refugees includes gender disaggregated data on the situation of refugee women. Collect and publish comprehensive gender disaggregated data on all aspects of refugee resettlement.

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL IS A GLOBAL MOVEMENT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. WHEN INJUSTICE HAPPENS TO ONE PERSON, IT MATTERS TO US ALL.

CONTACT US

info@amnesty.org

+44 (0)20 7413 5500

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

www.facebook.com/AmnestyGlobal

@AmnestyOnline

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

‘I WANT A SAFE PLACE’

REFUGEE WOMEN FROM SYRIA UPROOTED AND UNPROTECTED IN LEBANON

More than one million refugees from Syria live in Lebanon making up about 25% of the country’s population. Syrian refugee women and Palestinian refugee women from Syria face risks of serious human rights violations and abuses in Lebanon, including gender-based violence and exploitation. Those who are heads of their households are at particular risk.

The international community has failed to provide sufficient funds for the UN’s work to assist refugees from Syria. This lack of funding means that the UN has had to reduce the support it gives refugees. The majority of refugees in Lebanon live well below the Lebanese poverty line.

The Lebanese government, while initially open to refugees, has now tightened restrictions. It is procedurally extremely difficult and too expensive for most refugees to renew their residence permits leaving them at risk of a range of human rights abuses and afraid to approach the authorities for help.

This combination of pressures puts refugee women, especially women who are heads of their household, are at risk harassment, violence and exploitation, including from employers and landlords who hold considerable power over them. Refugee women and girls are also at risk of sexual harassment in public spaces and are unable to seek redress from the authorities.

Index: MDE 18/3210/2016
February 2016
Language: English

amnesty.org

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL