

Accommodation of Displaced Syrians in Northern Lebanon

Tripoli & Akkar – June-July 2012

Executive Summary

Following the unrest in Syria, Lebanon's Northern Governorate witnessed a significant influx of Syrian families fleeing violence and seeking shelter and protection. The Lebanese communities reacted in a positive and supportive way by hosting many of the displaced families. In July 2011, a DRC shelter assessment revealed that over 90% of displaced Syrian families in Akkar were hosted by Lebanese households. However, after more than one year of conflict in Syria and sporadic unrest in northern Lebanon, the absorption capacity of Lebanese families is beginning to decrease and in many cases to end. Moreover, humanitarian organisations are now assisting more displaced Syrians in Tripoli, where the accommodation dynamics are very urban and rental-oriented.

Between May and June 2012, DRC field teams surveyed 771 households – 432 in Tripoli and 339 in the Akkar region. The findings of this assessment indicate that as of June 2012, **the majority of displaced Syrians in Northern Lebanon are renting accommodation in both Tripoli (72% of the households surveyed) and Akkar (56% of those surveyed)**. Some Syrians living with host families are looking for alternative accommodation solutions due to the unsustainability of the hosting environment, although this assessment's findings indicate that the increase in displaced households renting is more to do with the increase in overall number of displaced families in Northern Lebanon, rather than hosted families being asked to leave. This finding is supported by a recent study released by UNDP, where the majority of Lebanese hosting families surveyed in the North had hosted for at least 3 months – 47% for 3-6 months, and 51% for over 1 year.

Other main findings include:

- Despite a qualitative understanding that Syrian displacement in Tripoli was far more rental-oriented than in Akkar, the findings of this survey indicate that **displaced families in both areas have similar rental profiles**.
 - The majority of displaced households renting accommodation in both Tripoli are paying between USD 200 and USD 400 per month, while in Akkar the rent is considerably less (roughly half the price – under USD 200 per month).
- **Approximately half of the displaced households surveyed are gaining an income through employment**, however informal or infrequent, which helps them pay for rented accommodation. The percentage is significant because it excludes families who are hosted, since they were not asked questions related to income sources.
 - Tripoli: 49% of households currently renting reported they pay for rent with income from employment
 - Akkar: 53% of households surveyed indicated they pay for rent with income from employment
- The majority of those currently hosted in both Tripoli and Akkar would try to rent accommodation if they could no longer be hosted. This indicates a **roughly 15% increase in the rental market if local communities cannot host these families any longer**, which has been a growing trend over the last year.

Please see page 11 for a more comprehensive list of conclusions and recommendations based on this report.

Assessment Objectives

The assessment aimed to inform DRC and partners on the following issues:

- Current living conditions of Syrian families displaced in Northern Lebanon
- Existing absorption/hosting capacity of local communities, as perceived by displaced families
- Percentage of displaced Syrians living in rented accommodation versus those living with host families
- The sustainability of current living arrangements

This information was collected during distribution activities in May and June with a specific questionnaire developed for this purpose (Annex I). Based on the data collected during the assessment, this report aims at comparing findings related to the living condition of Syrians hosted by Lebanese families and those living in rented accommodation in both the Tripoli and Akkar areas. The two groups are analyzed separately per area in order to highlight specific needs and challenges faced by each group.

Tripoli

Background

Tripoli is the second largest city in Lebanon and is characterized by a significant Sunni majority, which creates strong linkages to Syrian opposition and its historic antagonism against Syrian regime. Since May, Tripoli has been the scene of sectarian fights between pro- and anti-Syrian regime fighters, and current political tensions often prevented humanitarian organizations to implement projects and assist Syrian families living in the city and surroundings.

Unlike the rest of the North, displaced Syrians in Tripoli mainly live in rented accommodation and have to cope with very difficult economic and security constraints. Through the questionnaire, interviewees were asked about their current situation with regard to accommodation and its financial sustainability, their relations with the local community, and their plans for the future.

The assessment in Tripoli took place during DRC's food and non-food item distribution in the month of May and was carried out by DRC outreach workers (OWs). Out of the 900 families registered with UNHCR, DRC interviewed 432 households (**48% of the total registered population**).



Tripoli: Types of Accommodation

Renting Families vs. Hosted Families

The results of the assessment showed that **72% of surveyed families in Tripoli are living in rented accommodation, while 28% are hosted by Lebanese families.**

Quality of accommodation

During the survey, DRC asked Syrian families to rate from 1 (worst) to 5 (best) their accommodation. DRC outreach workers and shelter officers jointly developed specific questions to be asked during the verification exercise in order to properly assess the quality of accommodation (please see Annex I).

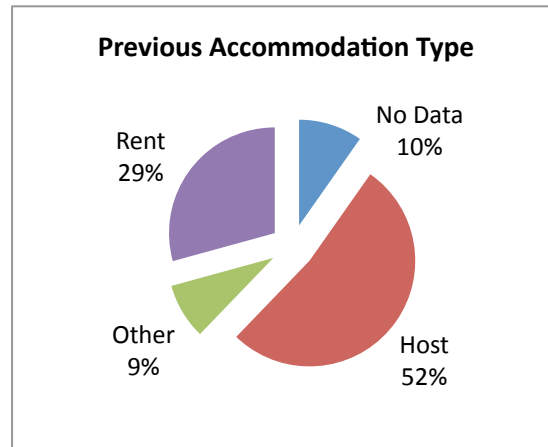
According to the findings, 80% of displaced Syrians living with host families rated their accommodation as fair, good or very good and 20% as bad or very bad. 85% of families paying rent considered the place where they lived to be fair, good or very good; 15% said the accommodation was bad or very bad. Reasons for accommodation being “good” mainly related to the fact that families did not experience any problems with the basic functionality of the house; the main reasons for bad accommodation were rot/decay, lack of water and sanitation, and no electricity. Thus, the data collected revealed that **the perceptions of accommodation conditions are very similar, regardless of whether Syrian families were renting or living with host families.**

Relations between displaced families and the local community

The relationships between displaced and the local communities have been positively rated both by hosted Syrians and by those paying rent. 80% of renting families declared to have a fair, good, or very good relation with local communities, while 20% rated it as bad or very bad. Similarly, 74% of hosted families rated the relation with the neighborhood as fair, very good or very good, and 26% of them rated it as bad or very bad. Good relations were explained as cordial interaction between the displaced and local communities, although in some cases “no relation” was considered a good relation, as families could go about their lives undisturbed. It is therefore interesting to note that **the majority of Syrian families had a good relation with the local Lebanese community whether they were renting an accommodation or living with host families.**

Accommodation Issues

Findings from the assessment indicated that **19% of the total households interviewed changed accommodation at least once since their arrival**. Out of these families, **52% were hosted by Lebanese families and 29% were renting**. This means that **Syrian households living with host families are more likely to change accommodation than those living in rented houses**. When asked about the reasons for moving, most answered that it was due to the small size of the house that they were living in previously.

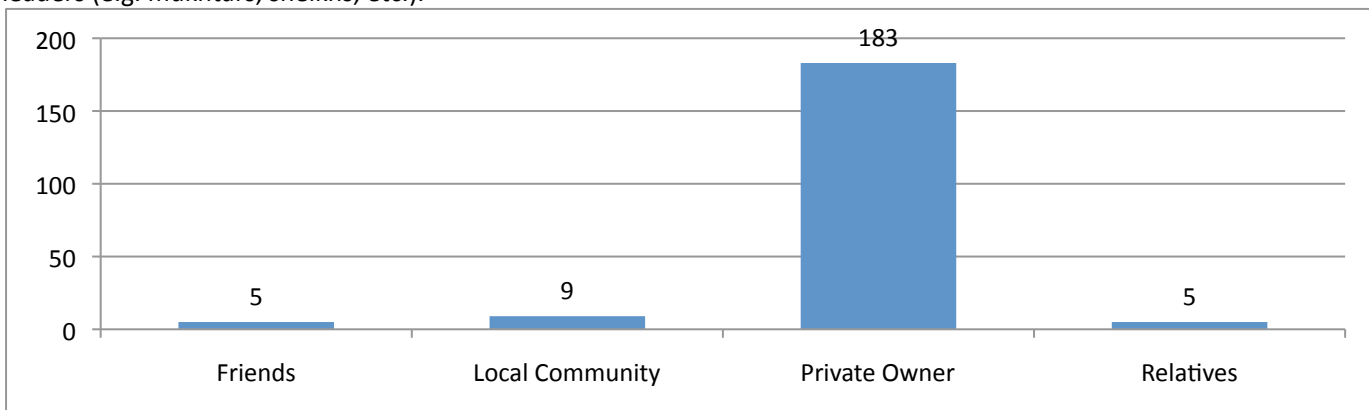


Moreover, findings showed that **it is more common for a household to move from one host family to another, rather than to move from a host family to a rented accommodation**. This is mainly due to the costs related to renting – being hosted is drastically cheaper.

Tripoli: Rented Accommodation

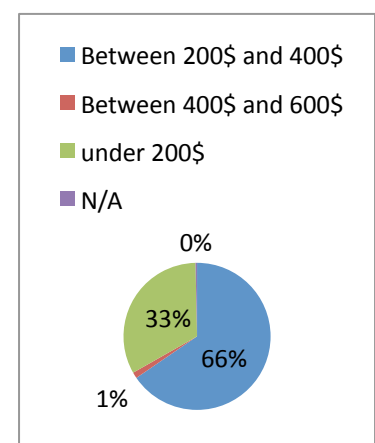
Out of the 432 households surveyed, 309 families were living in rented accommodation (72%).

91% of the 309 surveyed were renting from private owners, while 9% were renting from friends, relatives or local community leaders (e.g. mukhtars, sheikhs, etc.).



Rental Costs

66% of surveyed families reported to pay monthly between USD 200 and USD 400 for the rent. 33% declared to pay less than USD 200. According to DRC staff from Tripoli, the average price of monthly rented accommodation in Tripoli is around USD 250; the majority of Syrian families are therefore paying the same amount of money as Lebanese families. The average number of family members per household was 5, and the average number of rooms provided by the rent was 2.7 (or roughly 2 people per room). However, there were many cases of families with 8 or more members residing in 2-3 room accommodations.



Rental Arrangements

51% of the households who are renting noted that the price does not include electricity fees, which is generally the trend regardless of how much the family pays monthly for rent.

Monthly Rent	% surveyed where rent fees <u>included</u> electricity	% surveyed where rent <u>did not include</u> electricity
Less than 200 USD	51%	49%
200 USD or above	43%	57%

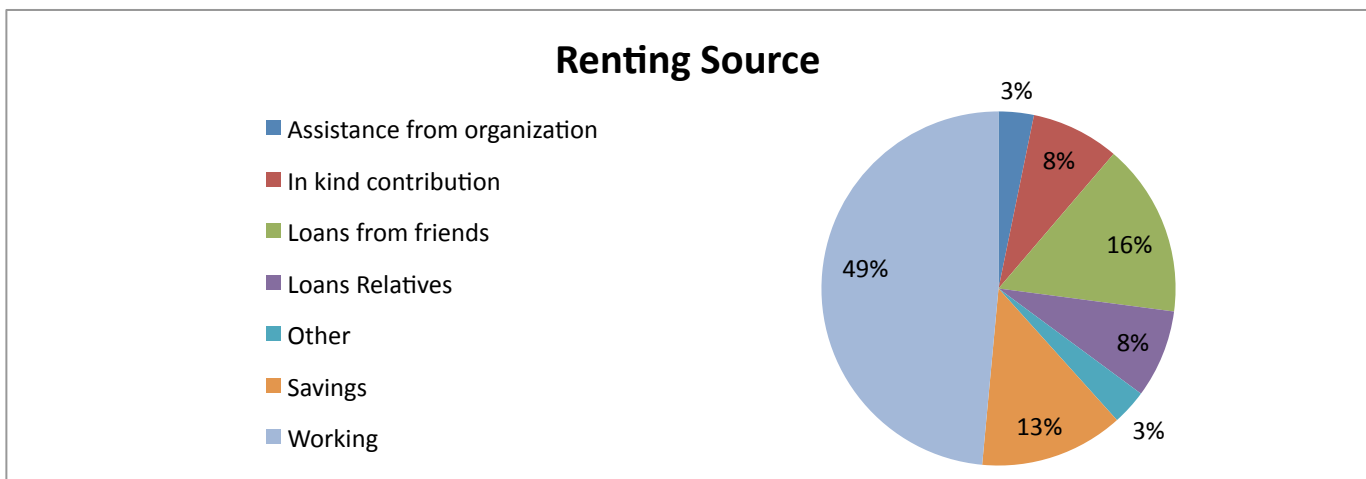
51% of families reported to be sharing their house with other families. However, **only 7% said they shared the room with other families.**

Monthly Rent	% surveyed who are <u>sharing the house with another family</u>	% surveyed who are <u>sharing the room with another family</u>
Less than 200 USD	71%	3%
200 USD or above	55%	8%

Only 10% of Syrian families reported that the rent increased between USD 25 and USD 100 since moving to their current accommodation.

Renting Source

In order to understand how Syrian families were able to pay their rent, DRC staff collected information about their source of income. Findings demonstrated that, despite the high rate of unemployment among Syrian households, **49% declared to be currently working** and paying with their own income the rent of the accommodation. **Loans from relatives and friends (24%) were discovered to be the second most common source of money**, while **13% of families were still relying on their private savings from Syria.**

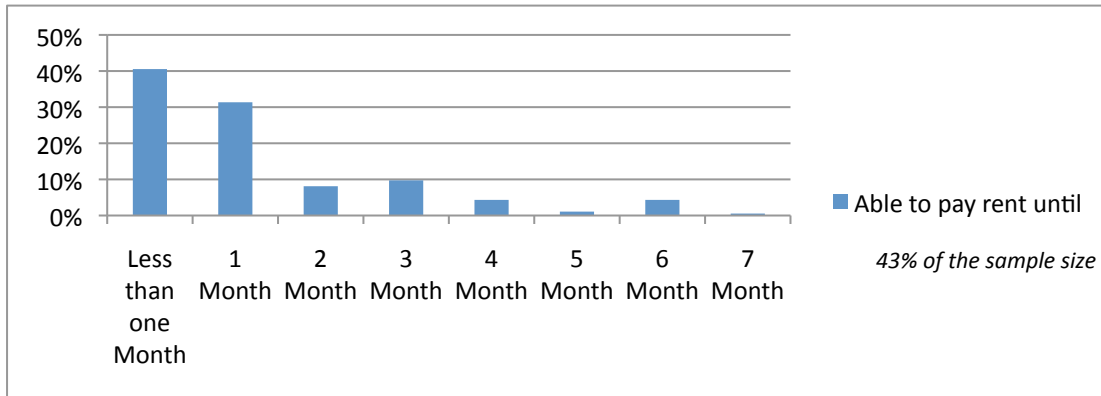


Financial Sustainability of Renting

31% reported to have resources to pay only for 1 more month of rent. The main sources of income for this percentage were employment (57%) and savings (36%).

41% of families declared not to have enough money to pay for another month. The main sources of income for this percentage were employment (32%), loans from friends (20%), and savings (19%).

These percentages are extremely high and shed the light on the precarious conditions of the majority of Syrian displaced living in rented accommodation; despite the availability of employment in the Tripoli area, the opportunities often only provide enough income to stabilize a household for a short period of time.

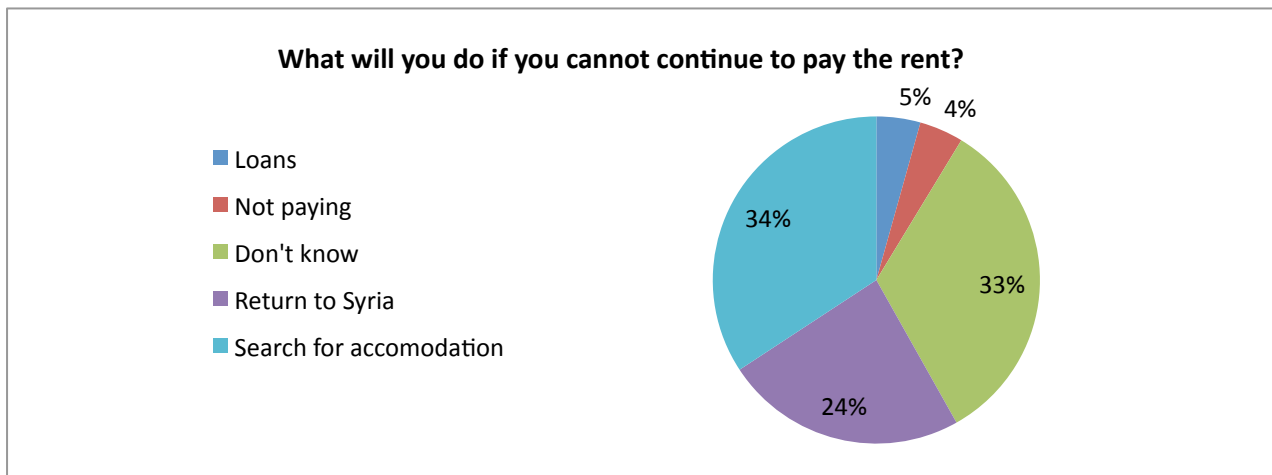


Future Plans

When asked what their plans were in case they were not able to pay rent in the coming months, surveyed families reported the following:

- **34% were thinking of looking for cheaper accommodation.**
- **33% did not know how to solve the problem.**
- **24% answered that they would have to go back to Syria.**

It is interesting to notice that only 5% of the interviewed households were considering asking for loans to family and friends. Further, the percentages of families considering returning to Syria is surprising, given that returning to the conflict areas they escaped from is believed to be a last resort scenario.



Tripoli: Hosted Accommodation

Out of the 432 surveyed households, 121 were living with host families (28%).

Relationship with the host family

Findings from the assessment showed that the relation between Syrian families and Lebanese host families is generally very positively perceived by Syrian families: **35% judged to be very good, 29% of surveyed hosted households rated the cohabitation with their hosts as fair, and 17% defined it as good.** Good relations were attributed to an ability to cohabitate and maintain social ties despite living in close quarters; bad relations were generally due to tensions caused by sharing a small space, or by host families repeatedly telling the displaced to leave because they were a burden on the household.

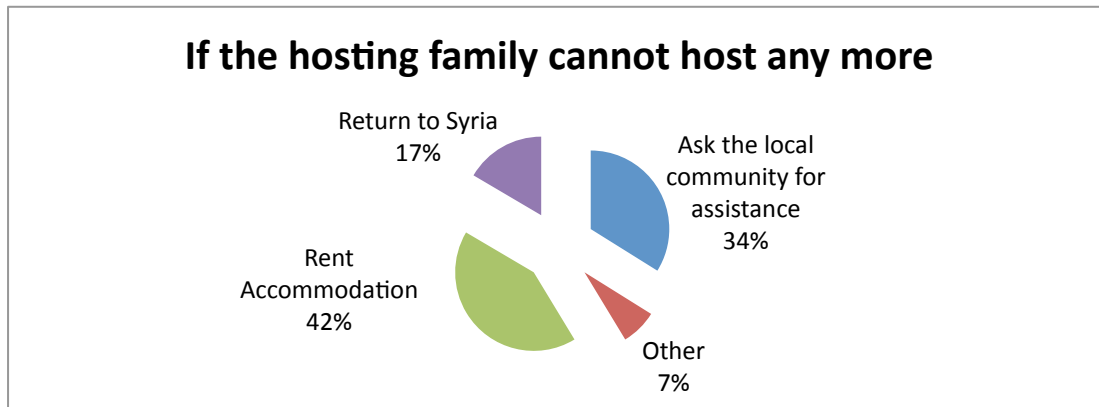
Future Plans

DRC asked Syrian families what were their plans if Lebanese families could not host them any longer. They answered the following:

- **42% would move to a rented house,**
- **34% would rely on the assistance of the local community,**
- **17% would return to Syria.**

Change of accommodation

Although the relations with host families and neighborhoods were good or very good, **56% of households reported a wish to change accommodation**. The vast majority of respondents wanted to move because their current arrangement was too small – too many people occupied the same space (which often caused problems or violated privacy). Others cited poor quality accommodation as the reason they wanted to leave. This data revealed that the majority of Syrians living with host families consider the cohabitation as a temporary solution. Further, **53% of the interviewees indicated that they wanted to stay in Tripoli**. Several households mentioned the job opportunities and network of assistance as reasons to remain in Tripoli.



Akkar

Background

The Akkar area, and in particular Wadi Khaled, hosted the first displaced Syrians to enter Lebanon in 2011 as a result of the unrest in Syria. Syrians entered the Akkar area both legally and illegally, giving some the right to move freely and restricting others to the area of Wadi Khaled. Displaced families often live with host families, but others rent accommodation, occupy abandoned spaces, or are housed in collective shelters. A DRC shelter assessment in July 2011 indicated that the vast majority of displaced households (over 90%) were hosted by Lebanese families. This was partly due to the fact that in mid-2011, the majority of displaced Syrians were in Wadi Khaled, where many had family ties to the host communities. However, by mid-2012 DRC and UNHCR have registered displaced families throughout the Akkar region, notably in more urban hubs such as Halba and Birreh.



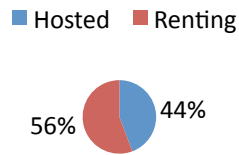
This assessment in Akkar took place during DRC’s food and non-food item distribution in the month of June and was carried out by DRC outreach workers (OWs). Out of the 540 families registered with UNHCR, DRC interviewed 339 households (**63% of the total registered population**).

Akkar: Types of Accommodation

Renting Families vs. Hosted Families

The survey revealed that as of mid-2012, **56% of surveyed families in Akkar are living in rented accommodation, while 44% of households are hosted by Lebanese families**. This is a drastic change from the data collected by DRC in 2011; it indicates a shift towards rented accommodation as the number of displaced people increase (beyond local communities’ hosting capacities) and as local resources are exhausted during prolonged displacement.

Type of Accommodation



Quality of accommodation

During the survey, DRC asked Syrian families to rate from 1 (worst) to 5 (best) their accommodation. 88% of displaced Syrians living in Akkar with host families rated their accommodation as fair, good or very good and 12% as bad or very bad. 87% of families paying rent considered the place where they lived to be fair, good or very good; 13% said the accommodation was bad or very bad. Bad accommodation needed consistent repairs or was damaged by humidity/rot, while good accommodation contained functional, basic amenities such as a kitchen and toilet facilities. The assessment therefore highlighted that **the perceptions of accommodation conditions by the two groups are comparable, and they follow a similar pattern to the findings in Tripoli.**

Relations between displaced families and the local community

The relationships between displaced and the local communities were positively rated both by hosted Syrians and by those paying rent:

- 90% of renting families declared to have a fair, good, or very good relation with local communities, while 10% rated it as bad or very bad.
- 92% of hosted families rated the relation with the neighborhood as fair, very good or very good, and 8% rated it as bad or very bad.

The reasons cited for good or bad ratings for displaced families renting and hosted were similar to the responses from Tripoli – in essence, displaced people considered good relations with the local community to be social and respectful, while displaced families' perceived burden on the community created tensions and bad relations.

Accommodation Issues

Findings from the assessment indicated that **30% of households interviewed changed accommodation at least once since their arrival.** Out of these 101 families, **31% were hosted and 69% were renting.** This means that unlike Tripoli, **Syrian households renting accommodation in Akkar are more likely to change accommodation than those living with host families.**

In particular:

- Of the families currently hosted who changed accommodation, 48% were previously hosted and 35% moved from rented accommodation to their current hosted situation.
- Of the displaced Syrian households currently renting, 41% were previously hosted and 56% were also renting their prior accommodation.

This means that roughly 9% of the surveyed population in Akkar has moved from hosted to rented accommodation, while only 3% leave rented accommodation to enter a hosting arrangement. 16% stay in the same type of accommodation (either rented or hosted). Therefore while the overall trend in Akkar is moving from mainly hosted, as observed in 2011, to a higher proportion of rented accommodation, this assessment did not report clear statistics on hosted families moving to rented accommodation– the numbers appear to be more affected by the influx of displaced families. When asked about the reasons for moving, the majority cited either the poor condition of the accommodation or tensions with the host family, as reported in Tripoli.



The “past other” category included responses such as working as janitor (and receiving accommodation at the workplace), staying in a collective shelter/school, or seeking refuge in agricultural structures (e.g. animal enclosures, barns, etc.).

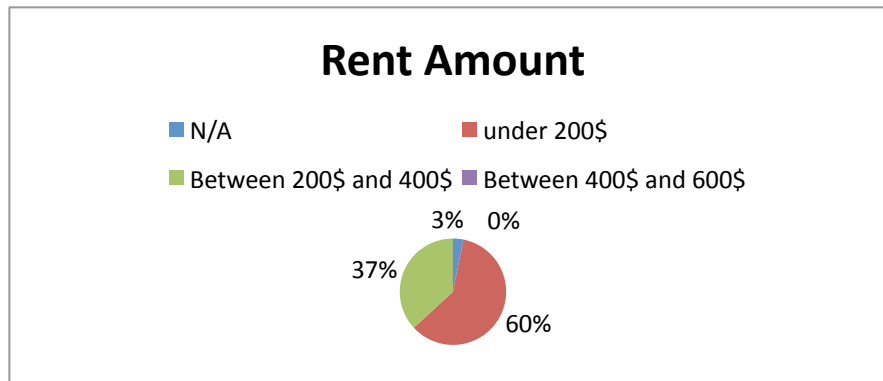
Akkar: Rented Accommodation

Out of the 339 households surveyed, 189 families were living in rented accommodation (56%).

54% of the 189 surveyed were renting from private owners, while 46% were renting from friends (11%), relatives (13%), and local community leaders (22%).

Rental Costs

60% of surveyed families reported to pay less than USD 200 per month. This is markedly lower than in Tripoli, where the majority paid over USD 200. 37% in Akkar declared to pay monthly between USD 200 and USD 400 for the rent. None of the households surveyed who were renting paid more than USD 400 monthly.



Rental Arrangements

55% of the households who are renting noted that the price does include electricity fees, while 45% reported they did not have access to electricity. This percentage was reversed in Tripoli, where slightly over half of respondents who rent did not have electricity in their accommodation.

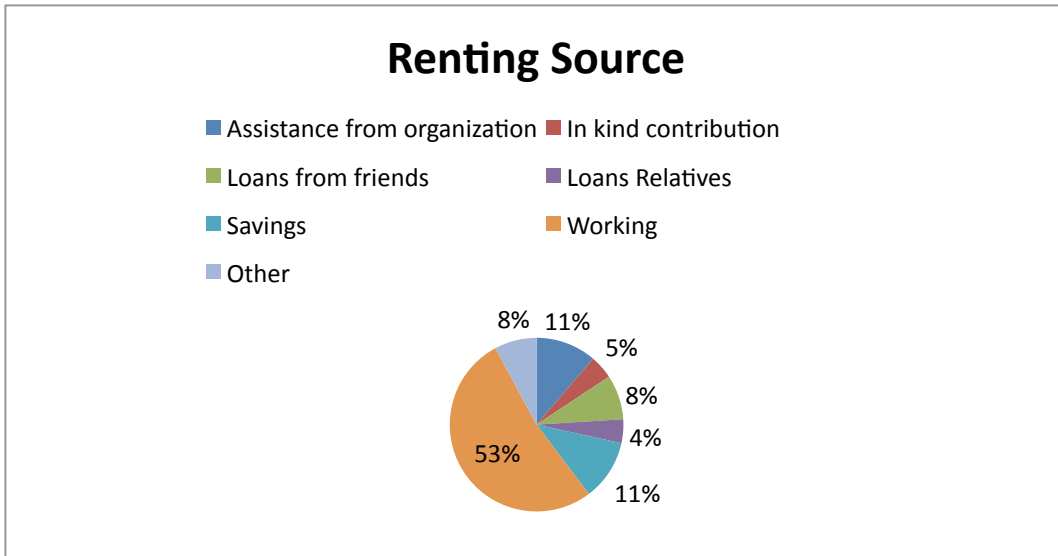
49% of families that rent reported to be sharing their house with other families. However, only 4% said they shared the room with other families.

Monthly Rent	% surveyed who are <u>sharing the house</u> with another family	% surveyed who are <u>sharing the room</u> with another family
Less than 200 USD	67%	9%
200 USD or above	74%	5%

Only 2% of displaced families in Akkar renting accommodation reported that the rent increased between USD 25 and USD 100 since moving to their current accommodation, which is considerably lower than the findings in Tripoli.

Renting Source

53% of families renting accommodation indicated that they pay rent with their income through employment. Savings and assistance from organizations (each 11%) were discovered to be the second most common sources of money, while 8% of families were relying on loans from friends.



Financial Sustainability of Renting

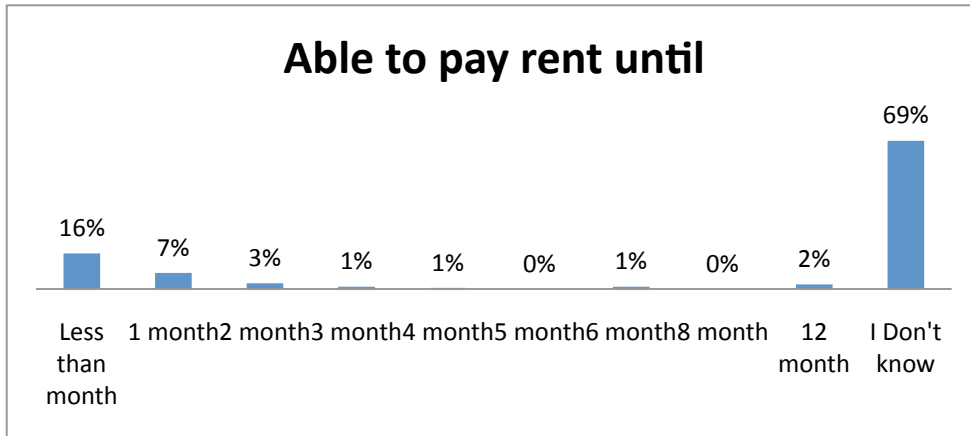
69% did not know how much longer they could afford paying rent. As in Tripoli, reasons could be due to:

- A reluctance to share this information with an organization providing assistance
- Uncertainty about the future (remaining displaced)
- Inability to plan financially – because of limited resources, employment instability, etc.

16% of families declared not to have enough money to pay for another month. The main sources of income were employment (40%), loans from relatives (15%), and in-kind donations (15%).

7% reported to have resources to pay only for 1 more month of rent. This group relied on employment (57%) and savings (36%) as financial resources to pay rent.

3% could pay for another 2 months of rent. From this limited sample size, families relied on employment (33%), savings (17%), loans from relatives and friends to pay the rent.



Future Plans

If households would not be able to pay rent in the coming months, surveyed families reported the following:

- 33% were unsure of what to do
- 29% would return to Syria
- 27% would search for other accommodation
- 6% planned to find a loan
- 5% would not pay the rent and hope to continue living on credit

The high degree of uncertainty among respondents about financial stability and future plans may be because displaced families did not want to divulge this information to an organization providing assistance. However, the percentage is still significant enough to indicate the general uncertainty about how sustainable accommodation arrangements are for displaced Syrians in Akkar, and how strong family ties across international borders are insufficient to host an increasing number of displaced people.

Akkar: Hosted Accommodation

Out of the 339 surveyed households, 150 were living with host families (44%).

Relationship with the host family

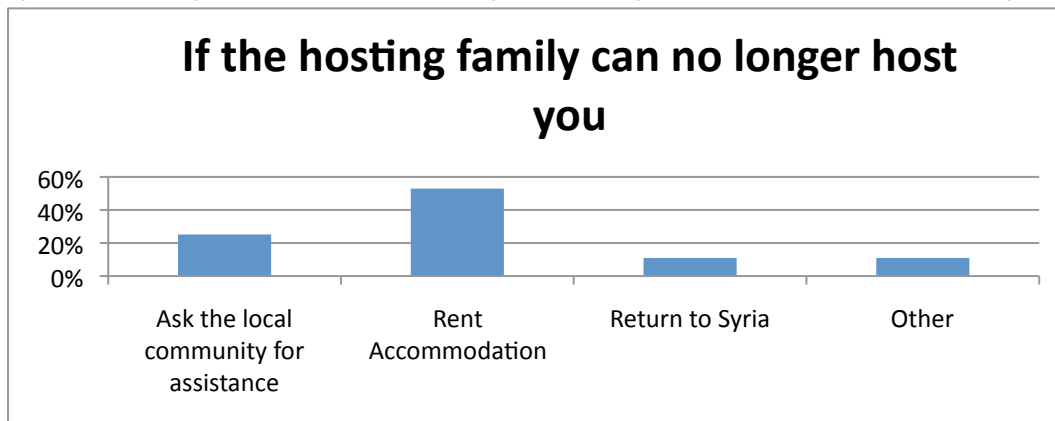
Displaced families hosted in the Akkar region perceived a positive relationship with the hosting families: **61% of surveyed hosted households rated the cohabitation with their hosts as very good, 28% defined it as good and 8% judged to be fair.** (Only 2% of those hosted reported “very poor” relations with the host family.) While the top rankings resemble the findings from Tripoli, the percentages of good relations between host and displaced families were much higher in Akkar. Many respondents specifically mentioned that their own families hosted them (either nuclear or extended families), which likely contributed to the high degree of satisfaction in the hosting arrangement.

Future Plans

DRC asked Syrian families what were their plans if Lebanese families could not host them any longer. They answered the following:

- **52% would rent accommodation,**
- **25% would rely on the assistance of the local community,**
- **11% would return to Syria.**

The ranking of responses to this question follows the same pattern of replies as the families hosted in Tripoli.



The “other” category included responses such as moving to a collective shelter or a farm (for a work plus accommodation arrangement).

Conclusions & Recommendations

Main Conclusions

- Despite a qualitative understanding that Syrian displacement in Tripoli was far more rental-oriented than in Akkar, the findings of this survey indicate that displaced families in both areas have similar rental profiles.
 - The majority of displaced households renting accommodation in Tripoli are paying between USD 200 and USD 400 per month, while in Akkar the rent is considerably less (roughly half the price – under USD 200 per month).
 - Approximately half of displaced families’ rental costs do not include electricity in Northern Lebanon.
 - Rent is mainly paid through employment income, with a surprisingly higher percentage in Akkar than in Tripoli (53% compared in Akkar to 50% in Tripoli). In Tripoli, employment is followed by loans from friends and relatives, with a smaller percentage of households using private savings, while in Akkar, families rely on savings and assistance from organizations to pay rent.
- Approximately half of the displaced households surveyed are gaining an income through employment, however informal or infrequent, which helps them pay for rented accommodation. The percentage is significant because it excludes families who are hosted, since they were not asked questions related to income sources.

- Tripoli: 49% of households currently renting reported they pay for rent with income from employment
- Akkar: 53% of households surveyed indicated they pay for rent with income from employment
- In general, the quality of accommodation and the relationship with the local community is positively perceived by displaced Syrians in both Tripoli and Akkar.
 - Despite this positive perception, UNDP’s assessment of Lebanese hosting families revealed the extent to which the hosts see their “guests” as a significant financial burden. 100% of Lebanese respondents of the UNDP survey in Wadi Khaled indicated that Syrian displaced do constitute a burden – they decrease space, increase expenditures and consumption, and reduce the gender-separated privacy most families are used to enjoying.
- The majority of those currently hosted in both Tripoli and Akkar would try to rent accommodation if they could no longer be hosted. This indicates a roughly 15% increase in the rental market if local communities cannot host the families any longer, which has been a growing trend over the last year.
- Rent prices in northern Lebanon are relatively stable, at least over the last 6 months, with very low percentages of families reporting an increase in price since they acquired the accommodation.
- Through qualitative data collection, a number of families reported being in debt in both Akkar and Tripoli. Families estimated they owed between USD 500 and USD 2,000. Although some hosted families reported having debts, the majority of respondents were renting accommodation.
- The main structural/construction issues raised by the families surveyed were the following:
 - Rented accommodation: rot/decay, bad sanitation, little to no access to water, electricity problems
 - Hosted accommodation: cramped space, lack of privacy, inadequate sanitation

Recommendations

- It is essential to **strengthen hosting mechanisms and local communities’ capacity to absorb displaced families**, starting with reducing the perception that the displaced are overwhelming burdens on local communities.
 - *At the household level:* Agencies should understand the specific hosting arrangements (family ties, space concerns, etc.) in order to determine how sustainable the hosting situation could be. Programs such as cash for shelter or direct assistance (vouchers/in-kind) that target host families in a systematic way could alleviate the burden of hosting a displaced family.
 - *At the community level:* Organizations should invest in partnerships with development organizations that can support entire communities that have welcomed a large influx of displaced families.
 - Combining household and community level analysis allows organizations to understand the various hosting realities between geographic areas – i.e. between the different neighborhoods in Tripoli, or between Wadi Khaled and the rest of Akkar.
- **Organizations need more accurate information on what kinds of employment generate income** from which families pay rent, which can be obtained through joint protection-livelihood profiling.
 - There is a risk that displaced people face exploitation or even harassment in order to pay for rent, which creates serious protection concerns. Moreover, if employment is casual/unstable, the risk of not being able to continue renting will increase significantly.
- Agencies ready to engage in cash for rent programming should develop a “sliding scale” or formula to calculate rental costs related to the number of people per family, the facilities, utilities, and location of rental.
 - This assessment’s data and findings can guide organizations to set standards – for example on the number of people per room, quality of accommodation and rental price related to access to electricity.