

background



This report summarizes the findings from a survey conducted by the American University of Beirut (AUB) on behalf of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees (UNRWA) to assess current socioeconomic issues for Palestine refugees living in Lebanon. The survey comes at a critical time: in the context of the Syria crisis, it shows the impact that 68 years of displacement have had on Palestine refugees in Lebanon (PRL), in a country which today also hosts more than 1.1 million registered Syrian refugees.¹ The study is all the more important as it also documents the situation of over 42,000 Palestine refugees from Syria living in Lebanon (PRS) at the time of the survey. As such, the report covers the situation of all Palestine refugees residing in Lebanon regardless of their time

of entry, their registration status with UNRWA and their legal status vis-à-vis the Lebanese authorities. The scale and depth of the data in the report are intended to inform programs and policies for improving the living conditions and livelihoods of PRL and PRS.

Data on PRL and PRS are presented separately, based on the reasoning that PRL, who have been in Lebanon since 1948, have a different situation than PRS, who have only recently taken refuge in Lebanon as a result of the Syria crisis. PRS are regarded as wartime refugees; their status in the eyes of the Lebanese government and the international community is wholly different to that of PRL, who are now in their third generation of displacement.

The living conditions for most Palestine refugees in Lebanon are precarious: this fact was established in the report of the foundational AUB-UNRWA study of Palestine refugees in Lebanon in 2010. The current study updates many of the findings of the original flagship report, and tracks key aspects of PRL and PRS lives, with the 2010 findings serving as a benchmark for the current living conditions and well-being of PRL. In keeping with the approach of the 2010 report, the poverty status of Palestine refugees is measured through a multidimensional approach, including not only the lack of income or assets, but also looking at education, health, food security and other relevant indicators.

¹ UNHCR. (2015). Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.

social exclusion of palestine refugees in lebanon



The Palestine refugee presence in Lebanon dates back to the Nakba in 1948. Today, the state of PRL is considered as one of protracted refugees, rather than refugees fleeing from recent conflict. More than 67 years after their initial presence in Lebanon, Palestine refugees are still considered as foreigners under Lebanese law, which does not grant them any special legal status and deprives them from basic rights enjoyed by the Lebanese. This prolonged foreigner status mainly stems from the strong rejection by the Lebanese authorities of the naturalization of Palestine refugees, which is sometimes used as justification for the various discriminatory policies against them. On a political level, Palestine refugees have also opposed naturalization. Accordingly, despite their longstanding presence in the country as refugees, PRL remain excluded from key aspects of social, political, and economic life. They face legal and institutional discrimination; they are denied the right to own property² and face

restrictive employment measures such as a ban from some liberal and syndicate professions.

Despite the August 2010 amendments to Article 59 of the Labour Law and Article 9 of the Social Security Law which resulted in waiving work permit fees for Palestine refugees born in Lebanon, and which revoked the reciprocity of treatment policy for end-of-service and work-related injuries compensation, these amendments have not significantly affected the quality of employment for PRL; this study finds that less than 3.3 per cent have an official employment contract by a public notary that enables them to apply for a work permit.

Due to restrictions and limitations on many of their rights, refugees have relied on UNRWA as their main source of assistance and service provision since 1950. In Lebanon, UNRWA provides primary, secondary and vocational education, health care, relief and social services, infrastructure and

camp improvement, protection and emergency response. The Agency also works closely with government authorities and other international and non-profit organizations to provide resources and services to refugees.

Still, Palestine refugees in Lebanon (PRL) face one of the worst socioeconomic conditions in the region, and these have been deteriorating given the country's weakening socioeconomic situation and the prolonged Syria crisis. A little short of two thirds of the PRL population is poor, a proportion that has not changed since 2010, and the discriminatory laws against them hinder their ability to improve their living conditions and livelihoods. Decaying infrastructure, a dearth of recreational spaces, insufficient access to roads, deteriorated water and sewage treatment systems, contaminated water, and jerry-rigged electrical wires along with open drainage ditches paint a gloomy picture of camps where over 63 per cent of PRL reside.

²Amendment (296 of 20 March 2001) to the existing presidential decree 11614.

palestine refugees from syria living in lebanon: *a brief overview*



The neighbouring Syria crisis has led many to seek refuge in Lebanon, which now hosts over 1.1 million registered Syrian refugees³ and over 42,000 Palestine refugees from Syria, making Lebanon the largest per-capita recipient of refugees in the world. Since 2011, when the conflict in Syria began, an increasing number of Palestine refugees from Syria have sought safety and refuge in Lebanon. According to UNRWA registration figures, their numbers were 42,284 (as of November 2015). The arrival of PRS has added further pressure on the infrastructure and services within existing Palestine refugee camps and the areas outside the camps.

Before the outbreak of the conflict in Syria, Lebanese border restrictions treated Syrians and PRS as foreigners wishing to enter the country. Once the Syria crisis broke out, entry procedures were eased between February and August 2013, to treat Syrians and PRS as refugees fleeing a crisis. This is the period during which the majority of PRS arrived in Lebanon. Entry then became more restricted and a screening system for entry was set up at the border in August 2013, although the criteria for entry were never officially published. UNRWA has, on rare occasions, been able to intervene on behalf of some PRS to secure their entry.

In May 2014, the Ministry of Interior announced its intention to set restrictions on PRS entering at the border. Accordingly, entry into Lebanon was severely restricted. Entry at the border is now only granted to PRS who either have a verified embassy appointment in Lebanon, or a flight ticket and visa to a third country. UNRWA has recorded a very limited number of new arrivals in its emergency database in the months prior to the publication of this report.

In addition, PRS currently residing in Lebanon face challenges in regularizing their legal status or residency. Since the arrival of PRS in the country, the General Security Office (GSO) has issued several circulars enabling PRS to renew the required residency permit. Most of these circulars have been valid for a period of one to three months, and many were issued with some intervals between them, during which time theoretically no renewal was possible. The renewal of residency was free of charge for the first year. During 2014 and part of 2015, the cost of renewing legal residency documents was US\$ 200 per person per year for those who have exceeded one year of stay. It seems likely that many PRS did not approach the GSO for fear of arrest

and deportation or due to the length and cost of the process. Since 17 October 2015 several memos have been issued periodically allowing for a renewal of residency documents, free of charge. Some PRS with expired residency permits have been issued a departure order, though it is noted that these have not been enforced.

UNRWA has been struggling to ensure adequate shelter, education, health care and other services to PRS, who now represent an approximate 20 per cent increase of beneficiaries in need of assistance in Lebanon. As the primary provider of assistance to PRS, UNRWA instituted in February 2014 programs of monthly cash assistance for food (US\$ 30 per person) and housing (US\$ 100 per family). In April 2015 food assistance was reduced from US\$ 30 to US\$ 27, and in May 2015, due to financial constraints, UNRWA announced a suspension of cash for housing assistance to PRS, effective in July 2015. This suspension in aid comes at a time when PRS are becoming increasingly vulnerable, with UNRWA cash assistance representing the main source of income for 92.6 per cent of the population, according to the survey.

³ UNHCR. (2015). Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.

main survey findings



Demographics

The survey spanned the 12 refugee camps and areas outside the camps in Lebanon and included 2,974 PRL households and 1,050 PRS households. Sixty-three per cent of PRL live in refugee camps compared to 54.8 per cent of PRS, while the rest of the population lives in areas outside the camps. Palestine refugees are distributed over five Lebanese regions, namely the Beqaa, North Lebanon Area (NLA), Central Lebanon Area (CLA), Saida, and Tyre. The largest concentration of PRL in camps is in Ein El Hilweh camp in

Saida and in Rashidieh camp in Tyre, where respectively 15 per cent and 12 per cent of PRL currently reside. South Lebanon accommodates the largest portion of PRL – 52 per cent reside in Saida and Tyre – whereas the smallest share of PRL resides in the Beqaa, at 4 per cent. NLA hosts around 20 per cent while the CLA is home to around 24 per cent. PRS are also mostly concentrated in Ein El Hilweh 13.7 per cent, and 52.9 per cent of PRS more generally live in south Lebanon, figures similar to those for PRL for these regions. The Beqaa hosts

14 per cent of PRS, NLA 18 per cent, and CLA 15 per cent.

On average, the PRS population, with a mean age of 25.6 years, is five years younger than the PRL population. PRS also account for bigger households than PRL at 5.6, compared to 4.5 household members for PRL. The average age of the PRS household head is 46, younger than the average age of the head of a PRL household, at 55.

Money-metric Poverty

While extreme poverty rates have halved for PRL since 2010 from 6.6 per cent to 3.1 per cent, general poverty rates have remained the same over the past five years at 65 per cent. This drop in extreme poverty is worth investigating in future studies to help shed light on the reduced rate. There are, however, variations in these poverty dynamics among the various regions. General poverty rates have declined slightly in south Lebanon, but they have slightly increased in NLA, Beqaa and CLA. Poverty levels in Saida have dropped by 8 per cent. In addition, Tyre has also witnessed a 9 per cent drop in poverty rates. However, poverty has

increased in NLA by 11 per cent, in CLA by 9 per cent and the Beqaa by 2 per cent. Poverty affects young refugees most, with 74 per cent of adolescents living in poverty, and 5 per cent living in extreme poverty.

An even larger proportion of PRS are poor. Nine per cent are extremely poor (3,500 are estimated to be unable to meet essential food requirements); while 89.1 per cent are generally poor (35,000 could not meet their basic food and non-food needs).

Both extreme and overall poverty rates are higher inside the camps than out. In the NLA and the Beqaa,

areas adjacent to Syria, poverty levels are at 94.1 per cent for PRS. PRS poverty is lowest in CLA at 77 per cent. Extreme poverty incidence in NLA is 15.6 per cent while it is 11.3 per cent in the Beqaa. Providing PRS with economic opportunities is extremely important to lift them out of poverty, even if these opportunities are provided through the informal economy.

PRL monthly per-capita spending is under half the average spending of the Lebanese, at US\$ 195 compared to US\$ 429⁴, respectively. PRS monthly per-capita spending is even lower than PRL at US\$ 140.

⁴Central Administration of Statistics. (2012). Households budget survey. Retrieved January 31, 2016, from <http://goo.gl/9CxsTv>.

Education

Educational attainment and decent employment opportunities are protective against poverty. Higher educational attainment and higher attendance rates, for both PRL and PRS, correlate with higher spending. It is worth noting that PRL educational enrolment is particularly high, especially at the elementary level. Secondary level enrolment has increased for PRL since 2010 from 51.1 to 61.2 per cent. PRS

have a lower enrolment rate than PRL, and the reasons for non-enrolment range from distance from schools and universities, to restrictions on mobility, and a lack of means to purchase school supplies. PRL and PRS enrolment rates vary by educational cycle. While PRL enrolment is close to 97.2 per cent in elementary, 84.2 per cent in preparatory and 61.2 per cent in secondary schools, PRS enrolment is

88.3, 69.6 and 35.8 per cent for the same respective cycles respectively for the same year. PRS enrolment is significantly higher for camp residents (93.7 per cent) compared to students residing in areas outside the camps (82.6 per cent), indicating the negative impact that restrictions on movement and a lack of access to means of transportation may have on children accessing education outside of camps.

Labour Market Outcomes

Another factor that ties into PRL and PRS poverty is unemployment. The PRL unemployment rate stands at 23 per cent (a significant increase from the 2010 rate of 8 per cent); this rate is around 31 per cent for women. The PRS unemployment rate, in comparison, is at an alarming 52.5 per cent, 48.5 per cent for men and a staggering 68.1 per cent for women. Around 80 per cent of employed PRL are self-employed and wage labourers. The main source of

income for PRL is self-employment at 41 per cent, followed by wage labour at 37.8 per cent, and UNRWA assistance through the SSN programme at 33.5 per cent.

Not only are PRL and PRS struggling with unemployment, the majority of those who are employed work in low-paying, low-skilled jobs that are more often than not subject to harsh, exploitive and insecure working conditions. For instance, 53.4 per cent

of the employed PRS are paid on a daily basis, while the vast majority (97.7 per cent) only have verbal agreements with their employers, meaning that employment could be terminated at any time without notice. Moreover, 98.2 per cent do not have sick or annual leave. All professions, except the senior 'white collar' occupations,⁵ show poverty rates higher than 50 per cent, reflecting the low pay and precarious work conditions PRL still experience.

Health

PRL and PRS health conditions and access to health services are highly dependent on UNRWA services. An almost unanimous count responded that they have access to UNRWA health services. 81.3 per cent of PRL report at least one family member

suffering from a chronic illness. That rate is 83 per cent among PRS households. Sixty-three per cent of PRL respondents and 75 per cent of PRS respondents report at least one household member who suffered from an acute illness in the past six

months. Both PRL and PRS reported 10 per cent who suffer from a disability. Both PRL and PRS health conditions improve with increasing educational attainment and employment levels.

⁵ Legislators, senior officials, managers and professionals.

Food Security

Overall, food insecurity levels of PRL are similar to 2010. While overall (moderate and severe) food insecurity prevalence rates are almost unchanged from the 2010 survey (61.5 per cent in 2010 compared to 62.2 per cent in 2015), there is a four percentage-point increase in severe food insecurity, with a corresponding

decrease in households classified as moderately food insecure. Among PRL, 38 per cent reported being food secure, 38 per cent moderately food insecure and 24 per cent severely food insecure. An alarming 27 per cent of PRL children live in severely food insecure households. PRS have been found to be far more vulnerable:

a mere 6 per cent are food secure, and 63 per cent are severely food insecure. PRS are subject to legal and mobility restrictions. Their access to the labour market is insecure and they experience exploitive working conditions. These factors likely explain the gap between PRL and PRS when it comes to food security rates.

Conditions of the Dwelling

While the majority of both PRL (84 per cent) and PRS (79 per cent) have access to potable water, their housing conditions are still considered poor. Houses suffer from a lack of maintenance, power supply, proper sewage networks and waste disposal, and homes are damp and suffer from water leakages. These conditions are predominant among

both PRL and PRS living in camps across Lebanon.

While 46 per cent of PRS report living in overcrowded conditions, the number is much lower at 9 per cent for PRL. Seventy eight per cent of PRL households complain from dampness in their dwelling, 62 per cent of houses suffer from water

leakages, 52 per cent suffer from poor ventilation and 55.2 per cent are affected by darkness. Similarly, 81.1 per cent of PRS households are affected by dampness, 68 per cent of houses suffer from water leakages, 56.4 per cent suffer from poor ventilation and 57.6 per cent of homes are too dark.

Security

PRS live in constant fear of deportation which is associated with significantly lower school enrolment for non-camp students compared to camp residents and PRL. Around 60.6 per cent of PRS

fear being deported (in the Beqaa, 83.3 per cent fear deportation), and 67.8 per cent report being concerned for their family's safety (85.5 per cent in the NLA).

Furthermore, 57.1 per cent of PRS report feeling insecure due to the physical and social environment around them (70.1 per cent in CLA and the Beqaa).

Multidimensional Poverty

Finally, regardless of the region, camp, or population group (PRL or PRS), a respondent's living conditions, their overall well-being and sense of security improve when they have decent opportunities of employment and advanced

educational attainment. Using a multidimensional poverty index that includes education and employment in addition to expenditures, around a quarter of PRL are poor, compared to 64 per cent of PRS. Any policy that ties into improving labour

market access, work conditions and employment opportunities and increasing education enrolment and the quality of education across the various educational cycles and levels will serve both PRL and PRS mental, physical and financial interests.
