

GENERAL OVERVIEW

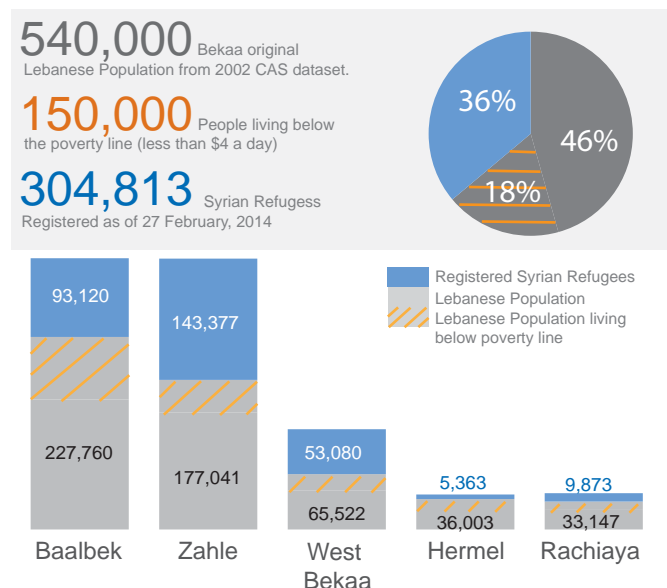
The Bekaa valley, with a length of 120 km and width of 16 km, represents 42% of Lebanon's area. It is divided into three main areas. North Bekaa, composed of Baalbek and Hermel, has been relatively marginalised which has left conditions ripe for smuggling activities. Central Bekaa (Zahle) is considered the economic hub of Bekaa. It is also hosts the largest official border crossing, Masnaa. West Bekaa and Rachaya have a relatively greater sense of security than the rest of Bekaa.

POPULATION OVERVIEW

Bekaa has a population of 540,000. North Bekaa is populated by a large number of clans and the population is mainly Shiite, although it is also home to some Sunni pockets. Central Bekaa is composed of a majority of Sunni and Christian population, whilst West Bekaa and Rachaya has a more mixed confessional population than the rest of Bekaa.

There is one Palestinian camp in Bekaa, located outside Baalbek. However, most of the 8,500 Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS) live outside the camp. Bekaa also hosts more than 10,000 Lebanese returnees who have listed food and health services as their priority needs.

More than 300,000 refugees in Bekaa are scattered across 340 locations in 150 municipalities, but there are three main concentration points: Aarsal, Central Bekaa and Baalbek. The halting of trade with and through Syria has hit Bekaa particularly hard, with many trade routes being affected. However some routes in Bekaa have remained operational, eg. Aarsal. There are indications that the once good relations between the host communities and refugees (based on kinship), has started to deteriorate. This has been exacerbated by some Lebanese labour being replaced by cheaper Syrian refugee workers, as well as from the strain on basic social services.



Palestinian Refugees

UNRWA programmes for Palestinian refugees in the Wavel camp outside Baalbek, include one health centre, two schools and a women's centre. The main challenges are bad living conditions, limited employment opportunities and a high school drop-out rate. One fifth of the 51,000 Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS), is hosted in Bekaa mostly living outside of the Palestinian camp.

10,000 Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon

9,000 Palestinian Refugees from Syria



Humanitarian Intervention

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

Bekaa is hosting the largest number of refugees in the country, as well as 8,500 PRS and over 10,000 Lebanese returnees. Several UN and INGOs have offices across the valley and regular inter-agency coordination meetings are held in Zahle. However, the security situation in parts of Bekaa has meant that at times humanitarian access has been a challenge, and the winter months also lead to physical access constraints.

The issue of Informal Tented Settlements is of great concern in Bekaa with more appearing every week. The first Formal Tented Settlement was approved by the authorities in Aarsal at the end of 2013, as was the use of T-shelters, which are considered the most appropriate shelter option for Lebanon.

Security Situation

Bekaa has suffered from the spill-over of the conflict into Lebanon. In June 2013, armed groups clashed inside Lebanon east of Baalbek, and January 2014 saw shelling within north Bekaa. Additionally, the northern Bekaa towns of Hermel and Aarsal have continued to receive rockets and mortars fired from Syria, resulting in several deaths and injuries as well as a feeling of general insecurity. This has affected humanitarian activities which on several occasions have had to be temporarily suspended in some areas.

Bekaa saw a surge of refugees arriving during the battle for Al-Qusayr in May 2013, as well as during the November-December 2013 and February 2014 offensives in Qalamoun. Concerns have been raised that the ultimate absorption capacity of Aarsal has been reached. There have also been reports of landmine incidents affecting refugees arriving into Lebanon through unofficial border crossings.

Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Data Source: Lebanese Population - Central Administration of Statistics (CAS), Syrian Refugee Population and Humanitarian Intervention Data - UNHCR, Palestinian Refugee Population - UNRWA

