

HIGHLIGHTS

- First wave of refugees return to Syria.
- Cash Consultation brings together partners to discuss the sustainability and effectiveness for the cash response in Lebanon.
- Lebanon Humanitarian Fund allocates USD 4 million to support people with special needs.
- Statelessness raises risk of increased marginalization and vulnerability of children.
- Funding received for LCRP in 2017 is 30 per cent less than by May 2016.



Syrian refugee children in the Bekaa. Source: OCHA

In this issue

- First wave of refugees return to Syria P.1
- Cash Consultation explores way forward P.2
- LHF launches Standard Allocation P.3
- Statelessness in Lebanon P.3
- Funding Update P.4
- Hassan's Story P.5

FIGURES

(As of 30 June 2017)

# of estimated refugees	1,500,000
# of registered refugees	1,001,051
# of returnees	35,000
# of Palestine Refugees from Syria (PRS)	32,000
# of Palestine Refugees from Lebanon (PRL)	277,985
# of vulnerable Lebanese	1,500,000
Total Lebanese population	4,400,000

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In this issue, we look at the returns of several hundred refugees from Lebanon's north-eastern border town of Aarsal to their villages in Syria. This issue also puts the spotlight on the July Cash Consultation in Beirut that looked at how to improve the sustainability and effectiveness of cash assistance programmes for refugees in Lebanon. In addition, we provide an update on the latest Standard Allocation issued by OCHA's Lebanon Humanitarian Fund to support people with special needs. Finally, our issue gives an overview of the funding for Lebanon for the second quarter of 2017, and tells the story of a vulnerable refugee family that benefited from multi-purpose cash assistance.

First groups of refugees return to Syria

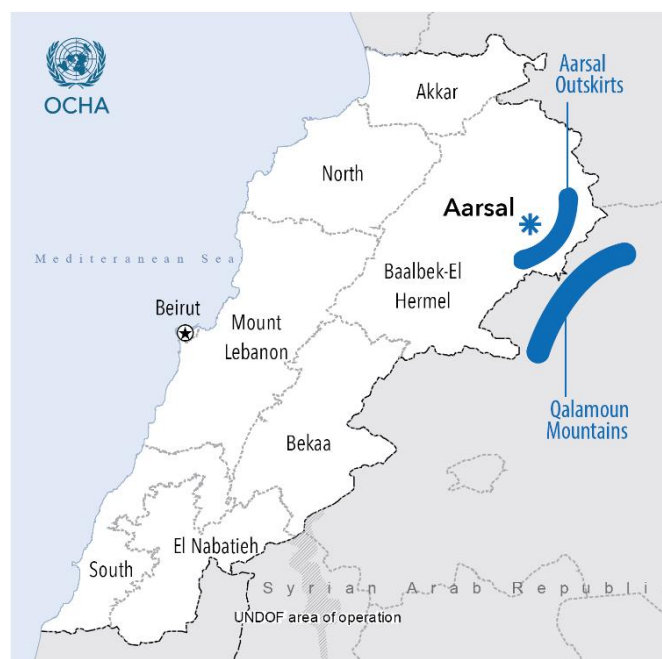
Conditions for safe and dignified return still not present on the ground

In the first significant return movement out of Lebanon, two waves of refugees have returned to Syria in recent weeks from the northeastern border town of Aarsal. An estimated 20 families left Aarsal on 10 June and 106 individuals on 12 July, with both groups returning to Asal al-Ward in Syria's West Qalamoun region.

These returns took place within the framework of an agreement brokered between Hezbollah, the Syrian Army, and opposition groups in the area, with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) escorting the families to the border. UNHCR was not involved in the agreement; however, UNHCR teams in the Bekaa met with the families in the second group before they departed, and were assured by the refugees that they had not been coerced to return.

On the Syrian side, the Governor of Rural Damascus confirmed on 12 July that 105 people had arrived in Asal Al Ward. While reports suggest that the area still has access to water, electricity, and basic goods, the full humanitarian and protection situation of the returnees remains unclear. As this Bulletin went to press, UNHCR Syria was awaiting permission from the Syrian authorities to visit the returnees to assess the conditions of return and humanitarian needs.

The town of Aarsal hosts a large number of Syrian refugees, with over 40,000 refugees registered



in the town. The vast majority of refugees in Aarsal arrived from the Qusayr and Qalamoun areas following clashes in the area in 2013 and 2014.

The returns to Asal al-Ward do not necessarily represent any wider trend of return, nor indicate that conditions are more generally met for returns to Syria.

The returns have triggered an intense public debate in Lebanon. While the government was not involved in the returns, a Ministerial Committee chaired by Prime Minister Hariri met on 12 July to discuss the issue and agreed to draft a national policy covering any future returns. Prime Minister Hariri also emphasized, in the 14 July meeting of the High Level Steering Committee, that any return would have to be in line with international standards and take place with the close involvement of the UN.

While their scale is unprecedented, the two sets of returns to Asal al-Ward involved a small number of people in specific localities; they do not necessarily represent any wider trend of return, nor indicate that conditions are met for returns in safety and dignity. While Syrian refugees overwhelmingly wish to eventually go back to their country and resume a normal life, the situation in Syria remains volatile and unpredictable, with shifting conflict lines and high levels of violence in many parts of the country. As highlighted by UNHCR and other key humanitarian voices, only once ceasefires, reconciliation agreements, or political solutions demonstrate sustainability over time, and once the humanitarian situation stabilizes, will large-scale programmes of voluntary return, in safety and dignity, be able to take place.

Cash Consultation explores way forward in Lebanon

Experts and practitioners discuss increased sustainability for cash assistance

On 4 July in Beirut, a Cash Consultation brought together more than 70 participants from NGOs, UN agencies, the Lebanese Government, donors and academia to discuss ways to increase the sustainability and effectiveness of cash assistance in Lebanon. The consultation was hosted by Humanitarian Coordinator Philippe Lazzarini and facilitated by OCHA, with support from the Inter-Sector Coordination, the World Bank and the Ministry of Social Affairs.



Participants discussing the future of cash assistance in a breakout group. Source: OCHA

The consultation began with a stock-taking exercise to look at the approaches, both globally and in Lebanon, that could be built on to further develop the vision for a humanitarian safety net approach for 2018 and beyond. The session looked at examples from other countries such as Yemen and Jordan which have been developing longer-term safety net approaches to humanitarian assistance, while highlighting the specificity of the Lebanese context. Government representatives provided an overview of their current programmes and the development of their policy to address chronic economic insecurity for vulnerable Lebanese which also includes a vision for refugees.

A vision for 2018 and beyond

In the breakout group sessions, participants brainstormed on a vision for the future of the cash response in Lebanon. They agreed that it should be first and foremost a people-centered approach in order to ensure that the response meets the most crucial needs and is accountable to the most vulnerable. Participants touched on how “graduation” approaches could ensure stability for both host communities and refugees. Discussions also focused on multi-year funding models that should include not just humanitarian but also development donors, in addition to increased engagement from the private sector.

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Interventions highlighted how the development of a safety net approach for refugees should also provide an opportunity to strengthen and benefit Lebanon's social protection system.

In the closing session, participants highlighted key questions that need to be addressed for the cash response for 2018 and beyond. These include issues of sustainability, alignment with national systems, coherence with other international initiatives, and accountability to populations. As the next steps, the HCT will designate a forum to tackle the key issues highlighted at the Consultation, develop a vision for the future of the cash response, and weave this into a new Cash Roadmap for Lebanon.

LHF launches first 2017 Standard Allocation

Allocation prioritizes people with specific needs

Fifteen projects worth a total of \$4.1 million have been selected for the first 2017 Standard Allocation of the Lebanon Humanitarian Fund (LHF). The projects, which focus on supporting people with special needs, were selected by Humanitarian Coordinator Philippe Lazzarini in consultation with the LHF Advisory Board following a detailed screening and selection process at sector level. Special emphasis was put on projects bridging critical humanitarian funding gaps; assisting vulnerable communities with little or no access to essential services; or preventing and addressing refugee evictions.

The Allocation was launched on 1 June to support persons with special needs including the disabled, the elderly and individuals with mental health issues as well as marginalized groups. This is in line with the 2017 LHF strategy which focuses on disabilities as one of its key areas, in order to support a group of people who have often been marginalized and under-assisted in Lebanon.

The selected projects were submitted by eight national NGOs, five international NGOs, and one Red Crescent organization; they cover Education, Health, Shelter, Social Stability, WASH and Protection sectors. The technical and financial review process is due to be finalized by the end of August 2017, with the projects expected to start in early September.



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Statelessness in Lebanon

Conference addresses policy to end statelessness in Lebanon

The Lebanese NGO Frontiers Rights (Ruwad al Houkuk) held a conference on 20 July entitled 'Invisible Citizens: A Comprehensive Policy to End Statelessness in Lebanon', involving Government representatives, legal experts and practitioners, UN agencies, and NGOs. In his opening remarks, State Minister for Human Rights Affairs Ayman Shucair stressed the urgency of the problem of statelessness in Lebanon, as well as the opportunities to solve statelessness according to international standards.

Several international legal instruments reaffirm the right to a nationality, including the 1954 and 1961 Conventions on Statelessness, the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, and a number of General Assembly resolutions. Countries around the world have been making a concerted effort to address the problem of statelessness since 2003; this momentum was captured in target 9 of Sustainable Development Goal 16, which commits countries to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030.

Statelessness puts Syrian refugees at risk

Statelessness is a risk for Syrian refugees, especially children born to refugees since the start of the Syria crisis. UNHCR estimates that over the last seven years, approximately 120,000 children have been born in Lebanon to Syrian refugees. Around 78 per cent do not have their birth registered with the competent authority (the Foreigners' Registry), and over 50,000 children under five years do not have a birth certificate registered with the Nofous, the local registry office. Birth registration and nationality are essential to protect individual rights; statelessness can lead to legal and socioeconomic marginalization, and has been linked to increased vulnerability to trafficking and recruitment of child soldiers. Registration with the Foreigners' Registry and documentation of nationality will also be essential for eventual returns of refugees to Syria.

Government and humanitarian community join efforts to address statelessness

Obstacles to birth registration and acquisition of Syrian nationality by refugees include a lack of awareness, unfamiliarity with procedures (which can differ markedly from those in Syria), prohibitive costs (particularly where parents have failed to register a birth within a year), and lack of registration among parents. Government entities have been working to combat this problem, working with municipalities and local authorities. NGOs and UN agencies have also been active in providing legal support and raising awareness. However, more still needs to be done, including possible amendments to nationality and personal status laws, increasing awareness of the need for registration and the proper procedures among refugees and local authorities, and ensuring that accessible avenues exist for refugees to register, including minimizing costs and administrative obstacles.



State Minister for Human Rights Affairs Ayman Shoucrair, and UNHCR Lebanon Representative Mireille Girard deliver opening remarks at the conference. Source: Frontiers Rights

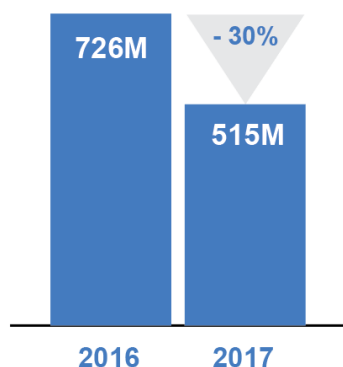
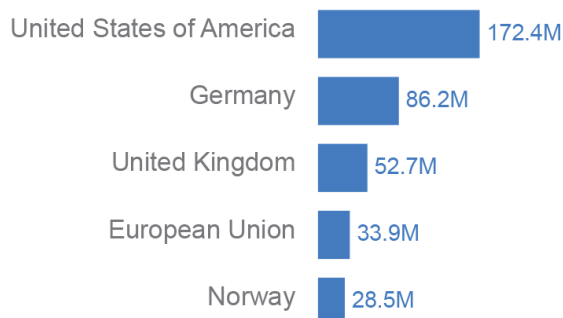
78 per cent of the 120,000 children born in Lebanon to Syrian refugees do not have their birth registered with the competent authority.

Funding

Disbursements for the LCRP 30% lower than in mid-2016

At the end of June 2017, resources received by implementing partners in support of the LCRP totaled USD 515.22 million – a 30 per cent reduction compared to the funding received by LCRP partners by May 2016 (which amounted to USD 726 million). In addition, while the overall resources for Lebanon in 2017 amount to USD 1.5 billion (similar to the overall funding committed for 2016), the funding allocated for the coming years remains low: donors have so far committed USD 371.77 million in support of Lebanon for 2018 and beyond, and the limited visibility of donor support is placing constraints on multi-year planning and programming.

Thus, while the total aid committed to Lebanon in 2017 remains similar to last year, the slow disbursement rate and lack of visibility for 2018 and beyond remains a concern. Some critical programmes are extended on a month-to-month basis, and additional and sustained funding is urgently required to avoid dramatic cuts to both basic and life-saving services in the second half of the year. In a context of rising social tensions and increasing fatigue of host communities, it is crucial to maintain stability and the resilience of Lebanese host communities while avoiding interruption of critical humanitarian assistance.



Hassan's story

'Without the \$175 per month, we simply would have died'

Hassan, 64, lives in an informal settlement in the Bekaa town of Qab Elias with his wife and their two children. He suffers from a chronic heart disease preventing him from performing any physically demanding task, thereby excluding him from the few sectors open to Syrian refugees – agriculture, construction and cleaning services.

"I used to fear after buying bread for my children that I would wake up to find the bread stolen by another father with hungry children. But now I can sleep knowing that I am lucky and I try to lend a hand to my neighbors as much as I can."

The Bekaa is known for its harsh winters during which temperatures often drop below zero and snowstorms are common. This makes life very difficult for refugee families, whose flimsy dwellings are prone to weather damage, snow and floods in extreme weather. Thanks to monthly cash assistance provided by Relief International (USD 175) and UNICEF (USD 45 in winterization support), this winter Hassan was able to buy clothes, blankets and firewood and secure a warm shelter for his family. This assistance was crucial, particularly from January to March. "Without the USD 175 per month, we simply would have died," he says.

The Hamadeh family benefitted from multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) for nine months through Relief International's Cash Assistance for Severely and Highly Vulnerable Households, from July to December 2016 (CASH-I) and from January to March 2017 (CASH-II). CASH-II specifically targeted vulnerable refugees who had been supported under CASH-I in order to ensure continuity of assistance during the most difficult time of the year. Both programs were funded by OCHA's Lebanon Humanitarian Fund.

Hassan emphasizes how life-changing cash assistance has been for his family: "I used to fear after buying bread for my children that I would wake up to find the bread stolen by another father with hungry children. But now I can sleep knowing that I am lucky and I try to lend a hand to my neighbors as much as I can." The Hamadeh family continue to receive MPCA from Relief International through funding from United States Department of State and hope they will still be supported in the coming years.



Hassan tells his story. Source: Relief International

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