

Challenges of aid coordination in a complex crisis: An overview of funding policies and conditions regarding aid provision to Syrian refugees in Lebanon

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Abstract

With a refugee population that accounts for more than a quarter of its population, Lebanon faces an unprecedented humanitarian crisis and it is the most affected host country in the region. The unexpected numbers of the crisis community has raised numerous challenges for aid donorship. The aim of this paper is to take stock of and critically assess the state of aid provision for Syrian refugees. In order to do so, it will begin by identifying the numerous actors, donors, and their funding mechanisms and implementation strategies, which constitute the very heterogeneous Lebanese aid landscape. It appears that the traditional—mainly Western—humanitarian actors are now being challenged by so-called non-traditional donors—mostly from the Gulf States. This major switch in humanitarian aid has an important impact on most of the identified challenges, which will be analyzed in the second section; challenges that range from coordination shortcomings to Lebanese terrain specificities. The paper will conclude by emphasizing the dangers of ultra politicization of aid provision and its ultimate, negative impact on coordination efforts.

Keywords: Syrian Refugees, funding policies, non-traditional aid actors, politicization of humanitarian aid, Coordination in Complex Emergencies

To cite this paper: Dalya Mitri, "Challenges of aid coordination in a complex crisis: An overview of funding policies and conditions regarding aid provision to Syrian refugees in Lebanon ", Civil Society Knowledge Center, Lebanon Support, May, 2014 . DOI: [10.28943/CSR.001.003](https://doi.org/10.28943/CSR.001.003).

[ONLINE]: <https://civilsociety-centre.org/paper/challenges-aid-coordination-complex-crisis>

Introduction: the challenges of an unprecedented refugee crisis in Lebanon

The latest figures provided by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) Syria Regional Response Plan (SRRP 6)¹, estimate that the total number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon exceeds one million persons². In addition to those who are accounted for, it is widely believed that another two hundred to three hundred thousand reside with Lebanese relatives or in rented apartments, without being registered. Another group of Syrians, whose numbers are difficult to estimate, spend more time in Lebanon than their usual short visits made to family, friends, and for medical or shopping purposes. A large number of Syrians, around three hundred thousand according to a common estimate, are the legal, illegal, or undocumented immigrants who brought their families into Lebanon and who considered themselves as refugees. They face problems related to shelter, health and education.

Understandably, more than 50% of registered Syrian refugees are scattered in North Lebanon, 243,106 according to the UNHCR statistics, and the Bekaa, where they add up to 278,296. In both regions, a greater concentration is found in areas close to Syrian-Lebanese borders. In Beirut and Mount

Lebanon, with greater potential work opportunities, the figure is 192,956. However, less expected and often ignored is the presence of 104,881 persons in South Lebanon. The number of Palestinian refugees fleeing Palestinian camps in Syria to Palestinian camps in Lebanon has reached a little more than 15,000 persons. They are being registered, and offered some assistance, by the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA).

Lebanon is the most affected host country in the region. It has the highest number of refugees to the total population in the whole world. Its educational system is unable to absorb the very large numbers of Syrian school-age children, estimated at more than three hundred thousand (or nearly one third of the total refugee population). The Lebanese weak public health infrastructure is on the brink of collapsing. With a refugee population that accounts for more than a quarter of its population, Lebanon faces an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. The unexpected scale of the crisis and the somehow counter-intuitively weak Lebanese humanitarian community, which is poorly equipped to deal with massive emergency relief, have raised numerous challenges for aid donorship in Lebanon.

Before discussing these challenges in its second section, this paper will start by identifying the numerous actors, donors, and their funding mechanisms and implementing strategies, which constitute the very heterogeneous Lebanese aid landscape. It appears indeed that the traditional—mainly Western—humanitarian actors are now being challenged by so-called non-traditional donors—mostly from the Gulf States. This major switch in humanitarian aid has an important impact on most of the identified challenges and shortcomings.

First and foremost, there is the question of coordination. Indeed, the original day-to-day planning response revealed an almost complete lack of strategic and contingency planning. As highlighted by numerous actors in the field, the coordination platform led by UNHCR, which includes the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) as an acting agency representing the Government of Lebanon (GoL), does not appear to be able to handle the crisis properly.

Beyond the traditional problem of dealing with very heterogeneous actors within the humanitarian space, the issue of coordination happens to be strongly influenced as well by the specificities of the Lebanese terrain. The endemic weakness of the Lebanese State, the latest government crisis, and the somewhat fuzzy Lebanese open-door policy towards Syrian refugees, certainly do not help humanitarian actors in dealing properly with the Syrian crisis.

Last but not least, one of the main challenges underpinning the creation of a strategic, comprehensive, and effective common aid policy is what could be called the vicious circle of politicisation. It makes it impossible to reconcile between an approach based on the real needs of the refugee population and the host communities and the varying and sometimes divergent political agendas.

Coordination between traditional and non-traditional donors already constitutes a problem per se, since they do not operate in the same humanitarian forums and do not always share the same values toward humanitarian aid. In this specific case, the situation is dramatically made worse by the very fact that some donors have divergent political agendas that underpin the very efforts of coordination and the establishment of a clear common policy, when it comes to aid to the Syrian refugees and towards the Syrian crisis as a whole.

In the initial months of the crisis, a plurality of expressions of Lebanese solidarity with Syrian refugees could be observed. Family ties and communal and political affinities motivated people, mostly in villages, to host and help refugees³. While the commitment of many Lebanese to continue to support refugees to the best of their abilities has not waned, traditional forms of hospitality and solidarity do not seem to be sustainable. They have become very costly to large segments of the underprivileged population, socially disrupting, and, in certain cases, politically problematic.

In short, most of the assistance provided to Syrian refugees in Lebanon was conditioned by short term considerations and did not move much beyond a humanitarian emergency response. Development strategies, implemented in a coordinated manner, did not emerge. There was a failure to sufficiently take into account uncertainties about the evolution of the Syrian conflict and the specificities of the Lebanese host community. A difficult problem to be reckoned with is the high level of politicization of humanitarian work, more particularly in the case of non-traditional donors, and the divergence between their approaches and those of the traditional community of donors, whether UN-related, governmental, or private. At present, neither UNHCR nor GoL seems capable of addressing this problem in a palpable and durable manner. The increased levels of sectarianism of the conflict in Syria, as well as the political involvement of many refugees, adds to Lebanon's vulnerability as a host country deeply divided along communal and political lines.

The methodology used for this paper is research based on available donors reports, recent policy papers, and breakdowns of humanitarian aid figures. For a more accurate picture, interviews were conducted, based on a reputational approach for actor identification, analysis, and assessment. Semi-directive interviews on perception of the effectiveness of their work, relations to other actors, and their critical opinion on the challenges and shortcomings of the policy were conducted with representatives from three major international donors/actors—UNHCR, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the UK's Department for International Development (DFID)—and three implementing partners/civil society organizations (CSOs)—Sakina, a faith-based organization working with non-traditional donors; SAWA, a Syrian-Lebanese joint initiative; and IOCC, a faith-based organization working with both traditional and non-traditional donors.

I. Identifying actors and funding mechanisms: a blurred picture

As already mentioned, the once relatively-weak presence of western humanitarian agencies grew dramatically in recent times. As a middle-income country with a weak state, aid to Lebanon since the 1975-1990 Civil War has been mainly channeled through longer term development programs, implemented by various actors such as UN agencies, and International (INGO) and local NGOs. Thus, emergency relief had not been the main activity of humanitarian and development actors in Lebanon. However, in the aftermath of the Summer 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon, there appeared a certain increase in humanitarian presence, with the implementation of humanitarian aid programs and the setting up of major humanitarian players in the country, such as the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO).

It is not an easy task to make a comprehensive presentation of or even grasp the humanitarian actors

currently active in Lebanon. Donors, implementing partners, and coordinators constitute a vast group, ranging from traditional UN agencies to individuals driven by religious solidarity. But despite their heterogeneity, it is possible to classify them into traditional and non-traditional actors.

Traditional and non-traditional donors

Until recently, it was assumed that support to crisis affected countries originated almost exclusively from the rich and industrialized world—mainly Western countries represented by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). However, a much more diverse range of countries have been engaged in humanitarian response for many years and outside the club of the DAC and other key forums. Often coined as non-traditional, non-DCA or emerging donors challenge the traditional approach to aid programs, even if they do not constitute a homogeneous group. Historically, the political foundations for aid programs of many non-DCA countries, such as China and India, could be traced back to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in the 1950's. Their original call for the respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity still informs, to an extent, the criticism of the adoption of humanitarian intervention as a Western tool of power and the need to strengthen South-South cooperation⁴. Beyond these origins, based on a sense of solidarity among NAM countries, non-DCA countries, such as the Saudi Arabia, seem to share a common understanding of humanitarian aid as closely related to foreign policy and economic and security matters⁵. In this context, the principles of conditionality and good governance are considered as less important. This is reflected by the selectivity of aid provision by non-traditional donors, which share a strong preference for bilateral aid over multilateral aid⁶, as well as through national operational agencies like the Red Cross/Red Crescent societies.

This situation constitutes a clear challenge to UN humanitarian agencies, the traditional channel for humanitarian response in crisis situations. Although non-traditional donors currently represent only about 12% of official humanitarian aid, their politically selective engagement in crises can be significant. This is the case in the Syrian refugee crisis. As it will be discussed below, even if it is impossible to quantify aid from non-traditional donors in Lebanon, it appears that Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries play a central role as donors.

In a broader context, January 2013 saw an attempt to bring together a wide variety of traditional and non-traditional donor, which included official, semi-official, and private bodies from the GCC. The International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria, held in Kuwait, saw 43 UN Member States pledge US\$1.5 billion towards humanitarian efforts, with NGOs pledging another US\$182 million. However, the pledged funds were not disbursed in full and those which were made available for work with Syrian refugees in Lebanon did not adequately meet the needs, nor were they spent in a concerted manner according to clearly defined priorities. As the humanitarian situation in Syria and the conditions for refugees in neighboring countries continue to deteriorate, a second Pledging Conference was held on January 15, 2014 in Kuwait City, aiming to rally further international financial support to meet the basic humanitarian needs of Syrians.

In conjunction with the conference, Kuwait's International Islamic Charity Organization invited 235 international and local humanitarian organizations, charities, and philanthropists to attend an NGO conference to raise donations for Syrian refugees and US\$400 million were pledged. The Second

International Pledging Conference for Syria was able to raise US\$2.5 billion, in response to the largest ever appeal for a single humanitarian emergency.

The traditional channel: donors, implementing partners, and funding mechanisms

It appears relevant in this paper to distinguish between traditional and non-traditional actors, as solid data only exists for the latter. Recent solid data generated by the OECD⁷ and OCHA does not take into account unrecorded aid flows from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran, although they appear to be the largest contributors according to many accounts from the field. As for the crisis inside Syria, OCHA is providing data, but it has not yet been consolidated. Even though Lebanon has a recent history of receiving more reconstruction and development than humanitarian aid, the core players have been the same since the 1975-1990 Civil War: the US, western donors (EU), Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iran, in addition to the key role of UN Agencies, INGOS, and a strong network of local NGOs.

The most recent data on official humanitarian aid (OCHA), donor contributions accounted for over US\$427 million in pledges, commitments, and contributions, which makes up 98% of the aid received by Lebanon targeting the Syrian refugee crisis. Over a billion US dollars remain to be dedicated. The top funding contributors are the US (via UNHCR), Kuwait (via UNHCR), Unicef, the World Food Programme (WFP), ECHO (via UNHCR and Danish Refugee Council (DRC))⁸. Important bilateral donors include Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Sweden, Switzerland, the UAE, the UK⁹, and the US. Major multilateral donors are the UN's Central Emergency Response Fund, the European Commission, ECHO, and WFP.

When it comes to how the aid is channeled, most of the official aid goes through UNHCR. However, it is worth mentioning UNRWA (for Palestinians refugees from Syria) and the Red Cross and Red Crescent. Among the traditional big humanitarian non-UN agencies, only ECHO and DFID¹⁰ have a considerable presence in Lebanon. For example, the US' Development Assistance International (DAI) is almost invisible¹¹.

Through a series of Syria Regional Response Plans (SRRP)¹², the leading role among international actors for dealing with the humanitarian crisis has been devoted to UNHCR. Officially, UNHCR does not act as a donor, but as a beneficiary of donor countries. Its role is to coordinate and implement the aid. These two functions are very distinct, and UNHCR has tried to avoid double hatting by creating a separate coordination team (in spring 2013) to ensure that UNHCR functions as a neutral coordinator. According to SRRP 6—the latest Regional Response plan—activities are divided into eight sectors¹³. SRRP 6 was launched as a concerted effort at the end of December 2013, with the participation of more than 60 partners including UN agencies, INGOS, and Lebanese NGOs. The total appeal was for \$1.7 billion for interagency response and \$165 million for the GoL.¹⁴ Overall leadership went to the MoSA and UNHCR.

According to UNHCR, SRRP 6 should not be considered as an outline of Lebanon's needs to deal with the crisis, but as a strategic document, which includes both figures and the challenges ahead. With the collaboration of many humanitarian partners and the donor community (traditional and non-traditional), SRRP 6 was drafted in order to move beyond the day-to-day response towards a more engaged and proactive strategy. Due to the growing impact of the massive influx of Syrian refugees on Lebanon's

economy, infrastructure, and society—the refugee population rose by 500% in 2013—all actors were aware of the importance of including host communities and implementing livelihood projects. According to the World Bank (WB)/UN economic and social impact assessment, 170,000 Lebanese could be pushed into poverty, and up to 340,000 Lebanese, mainly youth and low-skilled workers, could become unemployed by the end of 2014 as a consequence of the Syrian conflict. In order to take this situation into account, SRRP 6 projections for 2014 in Lebanon include up to 1.5 million Syrian refugees, 100,000 Palestine refugees from Syria, 50,000 Lebanese returnees, and 1.5 million affected Lebanese. The plan is also in line with regional priorities and targets assistance across all sectors; introducing new programming efficiencies; enhancing the capacity of government institutions, which are most affected by the refugee influx; supporting host communities; and prioritizing areas with both high concentrations of Lebanese poor and high numbers of refugees from Syria.

Non-traditional channel: many actors, little data

Contrary to traditional humanitarian actors, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to present a clear picture of so-called non-traditional aid in Lebanon. Even if many accounts seem to indicate that this kind of aid is extremely important—even greater than the traditional one according to some observers, it is difficult to evaluate its magnitude and impact, let alone its responsiveness to clearly assessed needs and the adoption of priorities defined accordingly. Whether through funding local groups or distributing hand to mouth relief items, Gulf countries, local NGOs, and the constellation of philanthropic associations and wealthy individual donors are in no position to integrate their work into the broader collective engagement of the international community or even ensure that there is neither duplication nor competition. Their political and religious motivation are undeniable. Their confessional or communal solidarity is likely to be a primary determinant in their engagement the refugees.

Even if the contributions of GCC states, let alone those of individuals, remains mostly undocumented, even if UNHCR and many other Western actors are eager to cooperate¹⁵, the little available data sketches a picture of critical contribution to aid for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The Kuwait 2013 conference allocated \$100 million to UNHCR regionally. As for contribution tracking, the FTS (Financial tracking system) indicates that a larger amount of funds were allocated directly to partners in Lebanon than through the Regional Response Plan.¹⁶

Non-traditional actors remain very scattered. But converging accounts have mentioned a loose estimate of \$100 million in humanitarian aid to confessional groups coming from GCC countries since the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis in the country. It appears that these donors definitely work outside of the system. Thus, a significant part of the aid is channeled through the embassies of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE , and Qatar. Another case in point is Qatar's massive funding the Qatar Red Crescent, which covers health expenses bills that are not covered by UNHCR.¹⁷

Beyond the Gulf States, other players act as donors and implementing partners. A non-exhaustive list would include Islamic organizations; CSOs, Syrian refugee associations, Churches and other Christian faith-based relief (ACT Active Churches Together, IOCC International Orthodox Churches, Jesuit Relief Service, Caritas, IOCC, (DERD, GOPA (Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and all the East), Syrian diaspora (old and new), and pre-existing Syrian CSOs and networks.

Christian refugees only represent 5% of registered refugees and prefer to receive aid from churches and Christian organizations.¹⁸ They are usually more concerned by resettlement, as some Western countries¹⁹ have decided to prioritize Christians, gays, and political dissidents in their asylum procedures.

The faith-based Islamic networks are very active in many parts of Lebanon, but mostly in the north, where most Syrian refugees are based. Although the number of refugees has recently grown in the south of the country, they remain out of reach. Some Islamic relief networks appear to be closer to the Muslim Brotherhood (Sakina) and others to Salafi movements. A great portion of this aid comes from individual donors based in GCC states and part of the Syrian diaspora.

As the individual donors mostly give monetary donations, Islamic organizations activities are multifold and cover aspects such as reaching out to refugees, assessing the volume and the variety of aid needed, visiting refugees in their homes or shelters, and distribution of aid. Regarding funding, some organizations, such as Sakina, work with all types of donors (GCC, Arab, and Islamic associations) through a banking system. They justify their expenses through pictures, checks, and bills. Another Lebanese secular association, which includes Lebanese and Syrian volunteers, SAWA, does not receive funding from any traditional channel. They rely on individual donations (family, random donors, Syrian and Lebanese diaspora) and direct donations through their Facebook page.²⁰

Such Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and NGOs generally do not receive funding from traditional channels for various reasons. Some mention the fact that international organizations hardly ever work with Lebanese organizations. Another reason is a certain distrust towards the Lebanese government and its Hizbollah component.²¹

II. Challenges and shortcomings

Dealing with such a critical humanitarian situation and an impressive array of different actors brings up its fair amount of issues, challenges, and criticisms. The impact of the crisis on funding policies and conditions regarding Syrian refugee aid provision in Lebanon can be best captured by three issues, which will be addressed in detail: strategic planning and coordination, the specificities of Lebanese terrain, and the dangerous politicization of humanitarian aid.

Strategic planning and coordination: UNHCR on the line

As already mentioned above, the donor community in Lebanon is weak.²² Before the crisis, a lot of work was done directly from the embassies, referring to their capitals for decision-making. Unsurprisingly, this kind of setting inhibited any kind of strategic planning beyond day-to-day response. In order to tackle the challenge constituted by multi-partnerships and inter-agency coordination, UNHCR was appointed as the leading organization, with the succeeding SRRPs as a strategic framework. The choice appeared as a surprise to some observers, who would have expected OCHA to play to part. Thus, two important shortcomings in UNHCR's leadership have been identified.

First, and despite its efforts to avoid the situation, UNHCR became triple hatted. The UN refugee agency acts as a donor, a coordinator, and an implementing partner, which is problematic given the enormous scale of the crisis and the amounts requested (\$1.7 billion for SRRP 6).

Therefore, there is a widespread concern among the humanitarian community in Lebanon about UNHCR's ability to lead and coordinate, although coordination and the humanitarian response in general had been scaled up in the past six months. UNHCR has often been depicted as having no experience with a crisis of this scale and particularly in the coordination and leadership functions (despite the creation of a separate unit dedicated to coordination).

Another identified issue lies in the lack of strategic planning, which could be attributed to UNHCR's tendency to consider the crisis as a refugee rather than a humanitarian crisis. This can be attributed to an inclination to see the situation only through UNHCR institutional lenses, which hindered the full and timely acknowledgement that the crisis has spilled-over to Lebanon's economy, infrastructure, and social cohesion. Although SRRP 6 clearly considers the impact of the crisis on Lebanon, for example through the implementation of livelihood projects, some mistakes have been made in putting up this more inclusive institutional setting.

Taking into account the transition between emergency response and the reaction to a protracted long-term crisis implies an emphasis on development agencies, in order to target host communities in an efficient manner. In that sense and according to many stakeholders, UNDP—which is well established in Lebanon—should be encouraged to draft an Early Recovery Strategy. Assistance is necessary in such a protracted, but more cost effective solutions should be found for longer-term projects. UNDP failed to do so partly because UNHCR inexplicably failed to ask for it. The issue generated a systemic failing in the strategic documents now being produced. Even INGOs sometimes feel excluded from the decision-making process, but cannot oppose UNHCR. According to converging sources, it is not clear whether it is a strategy that comes directly from the UN headquarters in New York. However, no one had the courage to stand up to UNHCR.[23](#)

The sidelining of UNDP appears even more surprising as UNHCR's mandate does not cover host communities. An important consequence of this situation lies in the lack of trust from donors. Nonetheless, UNHCR appears to be dealing with the situation. OCHA pointed out gaps and coordination problems and was asked to act as a balance and ask UNDP to handle development projects.[24](#)

This shortfall in inter-agency coordination led to poor exchange of information. As there is no official census in Lebanon[25](#), numbers and figures are different for each survey. Data collection in the country is difficult and does not fit the standards (60% accuracy only). Accordingly, WFP's Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) was conducted—too late—at the beginning of 2013, in order to improve beneficiary targeting, as there was a need to identify vulnerabilities, not only by sector but also through a more comprehensive overview. The survey concluded that 12% of the refugees were severely vulnerable and 65% moderately vulnerable, which meant that approximately 35% should get less emergency assistance, such as food distributions. Another finding was that 85% of registered refugees live in 182 localities, as do 67% of the vulnerable Lebanese population.[26](#)

Originally, the WFP conducted this survey on targeted assistance, to assess and verify refugee registration. But UNHCR asked them to only focus on food assistance. This meant that despite the VASyR study being based on a complicated formula, it was derived from inaccurate indicators from UNHCR.

Beyond UN interagency cooperation shortfalls, some major actors still fall outside of the scope of UNHCR's action. Thus, ECHO—as one of the main but also the most outspoken and opinionated donors—is drafting a parallel plan. ECHO's representative complains about the lack of clear policies from donor countries, for example, when it comes to including newcomers who do not fall under the UNHCR mandate and the day-to-day policies that seems to be applied to this crisis. The European donor agency is currently elaborating a strategy for 2014, based on lessons learned, clear prioritization of needs, and the identification of gaps and how to fill them in the most efficient and cost-effective manner.

Non-traditional donors also represent a coordination problem. According to several actors, it is very hard to meet with GCC representatives or their associates. They do not attend any of the coordination meetings, although they are invited through their respective embassies personnel. Nevertheless, the Saudis have been recently attempting to cooperate more with UN agencies, the UAE established a development agency, and Kuwait replied to SRRP 5 and hosted the SRRP 6 conference (January 2014). However, Lebanon's specific political dynamics make a Saudi neutral position seem unlikely. According to some interviewees, Saudi Arabia cannot properly answer the SRRP, as this would constitute an endorsement of GoL in which Hezbollah is active.

The Specifics of the Lebanese terrain

It is today widely acknowledged by the humanitarian aid community that the Syrian crisis has important regional implications. The scope of the refugee flow started to have consequences for Syria's neighboring countries. Lebanon is by far the most affected country, with a dramatic impact on its economy, infrastructure, and social cohesion. Therefore, aid response must therefore move from day-to-day aid relief to a more long-term response. It appears central to analyze the influence of the Lebanese context and its specifics on funding policies. A few elements are key to understand and assess the challenges and shortcomings facing humanitarian aid actors in Lebanon: the particular legal and practical status of Syrian refugees, the subsequent impossibility to build refugee camps and shelters, the high pressure on the Lebanese infrastructure, the impact on social cohesion, the question of cash assistance, and GoL's weakness.

Being a Syrian refugee

Even if we keep mentioning the issue of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, their practical and legal status vis-à-vis the Lebanese state and society is quite different from the other neighboring countries. The choice to come to Lebanon, beyond geographical and cultural proximity, is highly influenced by the fact that Syrian citizens do not need a visa or even a passport to enter or cross the border. An ID card automatically grants a 6 months visitor pass (iqama) to enter Lebanon, as opposed to Turkey and Jordan, where a passport-less Syrian citizen will automatically have to register in a refugee camp. Furthermore, due to very bad accounts about the conditions of refugee camps in other neighboring

countries, Lebanon appears to be more attractive, with the possibility of a normal life. However, the GoL allows the 6-months iqama permit to be renewed only once for free. As a consequence, many Syrian refugees in Lebanon cannot afford the renewal fees or fear for their safety if they have to go back to Syria to renew the permit. This generates a complicated legal and practical situation, as Lebanon is not signatory to the 1951 UN convention (and its protocol) relating to the status of refugees²⁷. In that case, these refugees would automatically become "illegal immigrants." This situation, particular to Lebanon, favors refugees who are unaccounted for or who have a very "weak" status (i.e. having a UNHCR certificate).

The quest for shelter

Even if Lebanon could not close its borders or prevent the entrance of Syrians, allowing an influx of Syrian refugees into Lebanon has been a politically divisive issue. In this context, the proposal of establishing camps could not be approved. For a number of political forces, influential in governmental decision-making, such a move might evoke a sense of permanence that may be comparable, in their eyes, to the camps that are populated by Palestinian refugees since 1948. The GoL is still firm on refusing camps for Syrian refugees.²⁸ Thus, shelter becomes a crucial issue. Very few efforts have been made in that sense by the GoL; MoSA offered 4000 pieces of public land (but with unclear topography), granting permission to establish tented settlement of up to twenty tents. Many of such small settlements appeared in Bekaa. MoSA also permitted formal three months settlement called "transit sites" of 100 tents in Ersal. The Swedish furniture company IKEA, in partnership with UNHCR, offered easily deployable solar-powered shelters and sponsors another settlement initiative.

The question of shelter became even more important with the second refugee wave in 2013. Informal tented settlements in Lebanon are estimated at more than 300.²⁹ Naturally, the shelter crisis has had an impact on rents. In Beirut, it became impossible to find a place for less than \$300 (aid only covers 150\$). Additionally, shelter issues caused problems of social cohesion with host communities. Increasingly, Lebanese residents started complaining against Syrians benefiting from shelter programs at the expense of local Lebanese workers. Lebanese authorities are also starting to react in the same direction. For example, DRC implemented a vocational training program for Syrian women, but MoSA strongly opposed it, because Lebanese women in the host communities could not benefit.

This pressure on shelter demonstrates that the solution to the refugee crisis is not merely through humanitarian assistance and should include longer-term development as well. SRRP 6 shows signs of improvement on that matter. UN Habitat has launched a series of initiatives: locating buildings to be used as large collective shelters and helping host municipalities with the housing infrastructure, in addition to the sewage system and power and water supply. These types of initiatives would not only provide help to the most vulnerable refugees, but also to the deprived host communities.

Infrastructure under pressure

Many other (often already weak) Lebanese infrastructures are being put under pressure by the crisis. Public health is on the brink of collapse. Hospitals in certain regions cannot handle the load. The lack of hygiene in settlements (sewage system, water) favors the outbreak of epidemics (especially in tented settlements in the Bekaa). Education is also on the line, as 300,000 school-age Syrian children are

enrolled in public schools with another 300,000 Lebanese children. Difference of educational levels, especially in foreign languages, increases difficulties to adapt. Some children are schooled in schools run by NGOs and associations, which use various curriculums. Educational deficit “threaten to foster an entire generation of illiterate or semi-literate kids.”[30](#)

Cash assistance

As for shifting to cash aid, donors had decided at the end of 2012 that in-kind donations (NFIs) should be converted to cash interventions. A cash expert would recommend applying cash interventions to all sectors. But GoL fears the negative impact on the Lebanese economy and losing grip on how this money circulates (weapons, sending back to Syria, etc.). However, no actual research on the impact of cash donations on the Lebanese economy has been conducted so far. However, in August 2013, MoSA authorized cash assistance for winterization programs, in the form of a single-ATM card.[31](#)

A weak State

Since the GoL had not been playing his executive role since 2013, possible negotiations about shifting stances on topics such as the settlements, refugees status, or even more concrete operational steps such as cash assistance have come to a halt. The overall weakness of Lebanese political institutions also impacts the very capacity of Lebanon to receive funds. On that matter, the recent call from the Lebanese authorities at the UN General Assembly to share the burden of Syrian refugees has led to the establishment of a Multi Donor Trust Fund by the World Bank. This fund brings together various aid donors, to the great relief of GoL, as it would compensate governmental expenditures. However, this type of fund, by putting Lebanon under international financial supervision, is also problematic, as it epitomizes the lack of trust of the donors towards the Lebanese government.

Needs vs politics: two irreconcilable agendas and the inescapable politicization

The classical issue of coordination in the context of a complex refugee, crisis such as the one affecting Lebanon, is eclipsed by the existential challenge of politicization at the foundations of humanitarian aid. Since its inception during the nineteenth century, with the creation of the Red Cross and the so-called Dunantian approach[32](#), humanitarian action has been grounded on the three principles of humanity, neutrality, and impartiality.[33](#) They provide an ethical framework, defining and delineating the humanitarian space in which relief agencies are supposed to operate. Yet the very existence of this space and the strength of the humanitarian cannon—i.e., ensuring the vital recognition of need-based, independent, and impartial humanitarian aid—has always been challenged, sometimes with political objectives, which endangered the effectiveness of humanitarian aid. Humanitarian workers are accustomed to deal with this constant struggle against the organizing principles of their mission. This transformation of humanitarian practice is often coined as the questions of politicization and institutionalization.[34](#)

However, the autonomy of the humanitarian space seems to be even more at stake today in Lebanon. Humanitarian aid appears to be caught in a vicious circle, which exacerbates and feeds politicization in a historically unrivaled manner. Thus, the usual issues of politicization within the practice of traditional humanitarian space, such as independence towards donors political agendas, is worsened by new

emerging actors that do not share the same humanitarian values. Even if we draw on the traditional distinction between Dunantian and Wilsonian approaches to humanitarian aid, a certain understanding of staying out of political issues prevails among humanitarian practitioners. The belief in a profession grounded on universal values (inspired by Wilsonian human rights) presents the image of a homogeneous profession.³⁵

By not sharing values, it is implied here that non-traditional donors have not been socialized by decades of humanitarian work, which has become a densely institutionalized field. This lack of shared values—with the arrival of “too many” newcomers—therefore impacts the very efficiency of aid, by raising the costs of coordination.

Presenting this issue brings into perspective the practical implications of a heterogeneous humanitarian community dealing with a complex emergency. It appears, therefore, that the important weight of non-traditional donors worsens an already over-politicized humanitarian arena since the end of the Cold War, which keeps drifting away from humanitarian aid's historical cannon.

III. Conclusion and Recommendations

- It remains to be seen if the SRRP 6, which is the most comprehensive and strategic document to date, will succeed in bringing more coherence to humanitarian work among refugees and displaced people and host communities, contributing to need-driven aid policies rather than perpetrating the present practices, ideologically, religiously or politically motivated.
- Shifting from a state of emergency response to a development-based approach to a protracted refugees crisis took too much time and solutions were not creative enough; the day-to-day management of the crisis proved inefficient, more strategic planning and contingency planning are necessary, as well as crafting the aid in order to fit the real needs of the refugees, including the needs of the host communities.
- There is an urgent need to adapt to a longer-term crisis and to prevent the host country from collapsing, by strengthening the infrastructure and empowering the leadership of the GoL and its different institutions.
- The GoL should be taking the leading role in the process of elaborating a strategy and coordinating efforts. Its capacity to manage the response to the crisis should be strengthened. A national ownership should ensure the participation of the host communities (including the Palestinians).
- As for the donors, they should be on the same page, with a clear understanding of the plea, and enhance the coordination in order to include the newcomers (actors) and to accept their unorthodox ways of working in this field, even if this means an acknowledgment of the unfortunately inevitable politicization of the crisis. It is a way to track and estimate the input of non-traditional donors who are often non-predictable and also to see an opportunity to break the

traditional barrier between donors, INGOs, and local NGOs who have a wider experience of the field and know how to deal with its specificities.

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- 9. The latest figure for UK in the region is £500 million (\$841 million), which is the largest humanitarian aid contribution an EU Member state has ever made (DFID figures).

- [10.](#) US\$10.5 million were directly allocated by DFID, mainly food via WFP, shelter through UNHCR and partners (informal settlements), several NGOs for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH), and International Medical Corps (IMC) and Médecins du Monde for health (DFID figures).
- [11.](#) Except for a focus on Akkar and Wadi Khaled.
- [12.](#) UNHCR website: <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/regional.php> [accessed December 8, 2013]
- [13.](#) The sectors are Protection, Food Security, Non-food items (NFIs), Shelter; Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), Public Health, Education, and Social Cohesion.
- [14.](#) Another \$80 million were presented by GoL with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and WFP (SRRP 6).
- [15.](#) A certain diplomatic and lobbying activity took place, before the January 2014 Kuwait II Conference, in Doha and Riyadh through the embassies, in order to strengthen GCC countries commitment.
- [16.](#) For example, this kind of tracking enabled to notice a raise of activity with in-kind assistance from Saudi Arabia and UAE after the last winter storm.
- [17.](#) Interviews with DFID, 23 December 2013 and OCHA, 17 December 2013.
- [18.](#) According to cross-checked information from interviews with Christian relief organisations, December 2013.
- [19.](#) Germany wants around 5000 people for a resettlement of 3 to 5 years, giving priority to Christians. The same goes for Canada (for Syrians), Australia, Norway, and Sweden.
- [20.](#) Interviews with Faith-based Muslim NGOs. 12 December 2013 and 5 January 2014.
- [21.](#) Ibid.
- [22.](#) Except for DFID and ECHO, who had a strong presence since 2006, in addition to the relative absence of a US donor agency, despite the US being the most important bilateral donor.
- [23.](#) This section is based on many testimonies coming from both well established INGOs and Lebanese local NGOs. The latest are particularly put to the side when it comes to coordination efforts.
- [24.](#) Interviews with OCHA, 17 December 2013; and a local NGO (SAWA), 5 January 2014.
- [25.](#) Since 1932.
- [26.](#) Since aid should provide half of monthly expenditures, which are estimated at \$350-400 (food and shelter), there is an urgent need to enhance cash transfers.
- [27.](#) As a consequence, High Relief Committee became irrelevant as a Lebanese partner.
- [28.](#) Interviews with OCHA, 17 December 2013; and UNHCR, 14 December 2013.
- [29.](#) Interviews with OCHA, 17 December 2013; and UNHCR, 14 December 2013.
- [30.](#) Based on interviews with OCHA, 17 December 2013 and DFID, 23 December 2013.
- [31.](#) Interview with OCHA, 17 December 2013.
- [32.](#) As opposed to the Wilsonian approach that aims at tackling the root causes of conflicts through a more transformative agenda (peace building, rule of law, etc.).
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