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Vulnerability amidst Compounded Crises in Lebanon: The experience of Syrian and Palestinian Refugees

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Centre for Lebanese Studies at the Lebanese American University

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The photo displayed on the cover page was taken by Maria Maalouf during the fieldwork in Bar Elias Informal Settlement in the Bekaa. The image shows a Syrian refugee behind her tent where she cooks for her family using wood for the fire because of the high prices of gas in Lebanon.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research report has been published as part of the EU Horizon 2020 VULNER research project (www.vulner.eu). The VULNER research project's objective is to reach a more profound understanding of the experiences of vulnerabilities of migrants applying for asylum and other humanitarian protection statuses, and how they could best be addressed. It therefore makes use of a twofold analysis, which confronts the study of existing legal and bureaucratic norms and practices that seek to assess and address vulnerabilities among migrants seeking protection, with migrants' own experiences.

In this second report from the Lebanon case study of the VULNER project, the objective is to understand the relationship between experiences of vulnerabilities among displaced populations and the legal and bureaucratic frameworks in place. With the help of insights from Syrian Refugees, Palestinian Refugees from Syria and Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon we explore how vulnerabilities are constituted and may increase or decrease as a result of the legal and bureaucratic framework they encounter. The report builds directly on the first phase of the project and the first report from Lebanon (El Daif et al. 2021) in seeking to understand the experience of vulnerability by refugees. In the first report, which focused mainly on the legal and bureaucratic framework, we showed that in Lebanon, there is no legal protection for refugees, there is no asylum law and Lebanon considers itself a transit country rather than a host country. As a result, different refugee groups are treated differently: Most Palestinian Refugees residing in Lebanon have legal residency and a work permit to access a limited number of occupations, most of the Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria we interviewed did not have legal residency in Lebanon. Yet all displaced populations – regardless of their residency status and despite their protracted residence in the country – officially reside in Lebanon temporarily.

In this second stage of the project we conducted 57 interviews with refugees – Syrian refugees (34), Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon (9) and Palestinian refugees from Syria (14). We also interviewed representatives of seven organisations working with directly with refugees. In the report, we explore the relationship between refugee experiences and policy frameworks at different scales. First, we analyse – at a micro level – refugees' understandings and experience of vulnerability. Second, and moving to a meso level, we discuss research participants' encounters with the legal and bureaucratic frameworks that concern them. Finally, we address the relationship between the experiences of vulnerabilities and the macro level, namely the global and national frameworks relating to Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The interviews were conducted in the context of compounded crises in Lebanon. We show in the report that living with displacement in the context of an ongoing deep financial and governance crisis, the Covid pandemic and the aftermath of the Beirut explosion in August 2020, influence the ways in which vulnerabilities are experienced.

'Vulnerability' is a contested concept in Lebanon where it is frequently used in different ways in national and international frameworks and by organisations assisting refugees, yet it does not have a clear translation in Arabic. In our interviews with refugees and representatives from organisations, we found a wide range of understandings that can be divided into two meanings. The first meaning is a categorical understanding based on vulnerability determined from personal characteristics such as age, gender, disability and sexual orientation. The second meaning refers to a more dynamic, situational and contextual understanding focusing on susceptibility to harm and threat to interest and autonomy that can happen to any individual at some point in time.

Regarding the individual experience of vulnerability at the **micro level**, the report discusses how vulnerability is experienced based on people's displacement histories, their legal residency status in Lebanon, categories such as age, gender and health. We also examined specific conditions related to employment and livelihoods, housing and social networks. Exploring the different dimensions that research participants shared with us, we find, first, that there is an interaction of legal and socio-economic factors that create the individual experience of vulnerability. Second, we find that in a context of compounded crises where most people experience some level of vulnerability, it is the interaction of different factors that produces individual vulnerability outcomes and changes vulnerability over time.

At the **meso level** the report shows that there is an institutional void in Lebanon's refugee governance. Refugees do not consider the Lebanese state institutions as a site of protection or assistance. No-one of the research participants felt they have any say and influence over the decisions that impact their presence and future in the country. For support, refugees rather seek towards international and local organisations than the state, but found it hard to access them and it was difficult to understand who is eligible for assistance and consequently what vulnerability criteria are operating at any given time. For many research participants, what is left for support are informal connections and networks. However, friends and family are often in the same dire situation and can offer limited material support. Refugees can only mobilise a constrained agency in the encounter with different institutions because there is a limit to refugees' ability to counter the processes that cause vulnerability.

This brings us to the **macro level** and the role of national and global policies and frameworks in producing of vulnerabilities. Analysing policy processes, donor meeting outcomes and reports and instruments, we show that the humanitarian system and the international community missed the opportunity to hold the Lebanese government to account in order to secure refugees' rights. The international community has an interest to prevent refugees from moving towards Europe by keeping them where they are. This interest come together with the humanitarian approach of neutrality, impartiality and independence resulting what can be seen as an indirect endorsement of the Lebanese state's approach to refugees as exceptions, matter out of place and devoid of right to a say in decisions taken over their lives. We conclude that refugees continue to stay in Lebanon with ever increasing vulnerabilities and with limited prospects for finding a solution to their plight.

الملخَص التنفيذي

تمَ نَشر هذا التقرير كجزء من المشروع البحثي VULNER ضمن مبادرة الإتحاد الأوروبي أفق EU Horizon لعام ٢٠٢٠. ويهدف المشروع إلى الوصول لفهم أعمق لأوجه جوانب الضعف التي يواجهها المهاجرون المتقدمون بطلبات اللجوء وحالات الحماية الإنسانية الأخرى، وكيفية معالجتها بشكل أفضل. لذلك، تمَ إستخدم تحليلاً مزدوجًا، لمقابلة القواعد والممارسات القانونية والبيروقراطية القائمة التي تسعى إلى تقييم ومعالجة أوجه جوانب الضعف بين اللاجئين طالبي الحماية، مع تجارب اللاجئين الخاصة.

في هذا التقرير الثاني من دراسة حالة لبنان لمشروع VULNER، يتمثّل الهدف في فهم العلاقة بين تجارب أوجه جوانب الضعف لدى النازحين والأطر القانونية والبيروقراطية القائمة. وبمساعدة آراء اللاجئين السوريين واللاجئين الفلسطينيين من سوريا واللاجئين الفلسطينيين المقيمين في لبنان، نستكشف كيف تتشكل أوجه جوانب الضعف، وكيف يمكن أن تزداد أو تنخفض نتيجة للإطار القانوني والبيروقراطي الذي يواجهونه.

يستند التقرير مباشرة إلى المرحلة الأولى من المشروع والتقرير الأول المقدّم من لبنان (El Daif et al. 2021) في محاولة لفهم تجربة أوجه جوانب الضعف لدى اللاجئين. في التقرير الأول، الذي ركز بشكل أساسي على الإطار القانوني والبيروقراطي، أظهرنا أن في لبنان، لا يوجد حماية قانونية للاجئين، ولا قانون للجوء، ويعتبر لبنان نفسه بلد عبور وليس بلدًا مضيفًا. نتيجةً لذلك، تُعامل مجموعات اللاجئين المتعددة بشكل مختلف: معظم اللاجئين الفلسطينيين المقيمين في لبنان لديهم إقامة قانونية وتصريح عمل للوصول إلى عدد محدود من المهن، ومعظم اللاجئين السوريين واللاجئين الفلسطينيين من سوريا الذين قابلناهم لم يكن لديهم إقامة قانونية في لبنان. ومع ذلك، فإن جميع النازحين - بغض النظر عن وضع إقامتهم وعلى الرغم من إقامتهم التي طال أمدها في البلاد - يقيمون رسميًا في لبنان بشكل مؤقت.

في المرحلة الثانية من المشروع، أجرينا ٥٧ مقابلة مع لاجئين – ٣٤ مقابلة مع لاجئين سوريين، و٩ مقابلات مع لاجئين فلسطينيين مقيمين في لبنان، و١٤ مقابلة مع لاجئين فلسطينيين من سوريا. كما أجرينا مقابلات مع ممثلين عن سبع منظمات تعمل مع اللاجئين على أصعدة محدّدة. في هذا التقرير، نستكشف العلاقة بين تجارب اللاجئين وأطر السياسات على مستويات مختلفة. أولاً، نحلّل - على المستوى الجزئي - فهم اللاجئين وتجربتهم لأوجه جوانب الضعف. ثانيًا، وبالانتقال إلى المستوى المتوسط، نناقش مواجهات المشاركين في البحث مع الأطر القانونية والبيروقراطية التي تعنى بهم. أخيرًا، نتناول العلاقة بين تجارب أوجه جوانب الضعف والمستوى الكلي، أي الأطر العالمية والوطنية المتعلقة باللاجئين السوريين والفلسطينيين في لبنان. ولقد أجريت المقابلات في سياق الأزمات المتفاقمة في لبنان. نبيّن في التقرير أن التعايش مع النزوح في سياق أزمة مالية وحوكمة عميقة مستمرة، وجائحة كوفيد وعواقب انفجار بيروت في آب ٢٠٢٠، يؤثر على الطرق التي يتم من خلالها إختبار جوانب الضعف .

«جوانب الضعف» هو مفهوم متنازع عليه في لبنان، بحيث يُستخدم بشكل متكرر بطرق مختلفة في الأطر الوطنية والدولية ومن قبل المنظمات التي تساعد اللاجئين، ومع ذلك ليس له ترجمة واضحة باللغة العربية. في مقابلاتنا مع اللاجئين وممثلي المنظمات، وجدنا مجموعة واسعة من المفاهيم التي يمكن تقسيمها إلى معنيَيْن. المعنى الأول هو فهم فئوي يستند إلى أوجه جوانب الضعف التي تحدّدها الخصائص الشخصية مثل العمر والنوع الاجتماعي والإعاقة والميول الجنسي. ويشير المعنى الثاني إلى فهم أكثر ديناميكي وظرفي وسياقي، يركز على قابلية ضرر وتهديد المصلحة والاستقلالية، اللذين قد يتعرَض لهما الفرد في أي وقت.

في ما يتعلق بالتجربة الفردية لأوجه جوانب الضعف على **المستوى الجزئي**، يناقش التقرير كيفية إختبار أوجه جوانب الضعف بناءً على تاريخ نزوح السكان، ووضع إقامتهم القانوني في لبنان، والفئات مثل العمر والنوع الاجتماعي والصحة. إضافة الى دراسة الظروف المحدّدة المتعلقة بالتوظيف وسبل العيش والمسكن والشبكات الاجتماعية. ومن خلال إستكشاف الأبعاد المختلفة التي تمَت مشاركتها في البحث، نجد: أولاً، أن هناك تفاعلًا بين العوامل القانونية والاجتماعية-الاقتصادية التي تنشئ التجربة الفردية لأوجه جوانب الضعف. ثانيًا، في سياق الأزمات المعقدة حيث يعاني معظم الناس مستوى معين من أوجه جوانب الضعف، وجدنا أن تفاعل العوامل المختلفة هو الذي يسفر عن نتائج أوجه جوانب الضعف الفردية وأنَ أوجه جوانب الضعف تتغير بمرور الوقت.

أما على **المستوى المتوسط**، فيُظهر التقرير فراغًا مؤسساتيًا في إدارة شؤون اللاجئين في لبنان. لا يعتبر اللاجئون مؤسسات الدولة اللبنانية موقعًا للحماية أو المساعدة. ولم يشعر أحد من المشاركين في البحث أنهم يملكون رأيًا وتأثيرًا في القرارات التي تؤثر على وجودهم ومستقبلهم في البلاد. فمن أجل الحصول على الدعم، يبحث اللاجئون على المنظمات الدولية والمحلية، لكنهم يجدون صعوبة في الوصول إليها وفي فهم من هو المؤهل للحصول على المساعدة. وبالتالي ما هي معايير أوجه جوانب الضعف التي يُعمل بها في أي وقت. بالنسبة إلى مشاركين عدَة في البحث، ما تبقى للدعم هو الاتصالات والشبكات غير الرسمية. ومع ذلك، غالبًا ما يكون الأصدقاء والعائلة في الموقف المأساوي نفسه ويمكن أن يقدموا دعمًا ماديًا محدودًا. ولا يمكن للاجئين سوى تعبئة وكالة مقيَدة في مواجهة المؤسسات المختلفة، بسبب محدودية قدرتهم على الاستجابة للعمليات التي تسبب أوجه جوانب الضعف.

ويقودنا ذلك إلى **المستوى الكلي** ودور السياسات والأطر الوطنية والعالمية في إنتاج أوجه جوانب الضعف. من خلال تحليل عمليات السياسات، ونتائج إجتماعات المانحين والتقارير والأدوات، نبيّن أن النظام الإنساني والمجتمع الدولي أضاعا فرصة محاسبة الحكومة اللبنانية من أجل تأمين حقوق اللاجئين. وللمجتمع الدولي مصلحة في منع اللاجئين من التحرك نحو أوروبا من خلال إبقائهم حيث هم الآن. تأتي هذه المصلحة جنبًا إلى جنب مع النهج الإنساني للحياد والنزاهة والاستقلالية، الذي يمكن اعتباره تأييدًا غير مباشر لنهج الدولة اللبنانية تجاه اللاجئين باعتبارهم استثناءات، ومسألة في غير محلها وخالية من الحق في إبداء الرأي في القرارات المتخذة على حياتهم. نستنتج أن اللاجئين في لبنان لا يزالون يعانون أوجه جوانب الضعف المتزايدة باستمرار مقابل آفاق محدودة لإيجاد حل لمحنتهم.

ABBREVIATIONS

(S)GBV Gender Based Violence

GDP Gross Domestic Product

GS General Security

LCRP Lebanon Crisis Response Plan

FPRL Female Palestinian Refugee residing in Lebanon

FPRS Female Palestinian Refugee from Syria

FSR Female Syria Refugee

ILO International Labour Organisation

IRB Institutional Review Board

LBGTQ Lesbian, bisexual, gay, trans, queer

MPRL Male Palestinian Refugee residing in Lebanon

MPRS Male Palestinian Refugee from Syria

MoU Memorandum of Understanding

MSR Male Syrian Refugee

NGO Non Governmental Organisation

OHCHR Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

PHC Primary Health Care

PRL Palestinian Refugee residing in Lebanon

PRS Palestinian Refugee from Syria

SDC Social Development Centres

UN United Nations

UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNICEF United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

UNRWA United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

VARON Vulnerability Assessment of Refugees of Other Nationalities in Lebanon

VASyR Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

VULNER Vulnerabilities Under the Global Protection Regime

WFP World Food Programme

VULNER

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY IN ARABIC 6
ABBREVIATIONS 8
I. INTRODUCTION 11
II. METHODOLOGY 13
2.1. Preparation 13
2.2. Interviews 13
2.3. Description of fieldwork locations 15
2.3.1. A collectively shared building in Koura in North Lebanon: 15
2.3.2. Bar Elias informal settlement in Bekaa: 15
2.3.3. Bar Elias town - Bekaa: 15
2.3.4. Burj El Barajneh Palestinian camp: 16
2.3.5. Beirut area: 16
2.4. The interview situation and positionalities 17
2.5. Data analysis 18
2.6. Ethical considerations 18
2.7. Limitations 19
III. SETTING THE LEGAL AND BUREAUCRATIC SCENE 20
3.1. Approaches to displacement and the notion of refugee 20
3.2. Factors shaping the discourse on vulnerability in Lebanon 22
3.3. Legal measures and bureaucratic restrictions for refugees and vulnerable groups 23
IV. VULNERABILITIES AND PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES 25
4.1. The refugee journeys from Syria and the timing of arrival in Lebanon 26
4.2. The meaning of legal status 28
4.3. Age, gender and vulnerability 29
4.4. Employment – and securing a livelihood 31
4.5. Health and mental health 32
4.6. Residential area and housing status 33
4.7. Social networks 34
4.8. Displaced lives and the constitution of vulnerability in the context of compounded crises 36
4.8.1. Refugee status 36
4.8.2. Crisis, temporality and poverty 37
4.8.3. Intersections 38
V. SEEKING PROTECTION: VULNERABILITIES AND ENCOUNTERS WITH INSTITUTIONS 39
5.1. Encountering State Institutions 40
5.1.1. Collective Shelter, Koura 40
5.1.2. Bar Elias informal settlement and town 41
5.1.3. Burj Al Barajneh Palestinian Camp and neighbourhoods 42
5.1.4. Seeking Justice in front of State institutions 43
5.2. Local and more informal institutions 44
5.3. Encounters with International organisations 45
5.3.1. UNHCR and the World Food Programme 45
5.3.2. UNRWA 46
5.4. Approaching health institutions 47

5.5. Interaction with civil society organisations 48
5.6. The dream of moving on: institutional encounters for resettlement and other durable solutions 51
5.7. Mobilising constrained agency in the context of alienation, deprivation, non-representation and marginalization. 52
VI. VULNERABILITIES AND MIGRATION POLICIES 55
6.1. Production of vulnerabilities as temporal injustice in the tension between Lebanon's and the international community's approach and interests 55
6.2. The production of illegality shapes vulnerability 57
6.3. The irrelevance of durable solutions in the context of Lebanon 57
6.4. The refugee experience, compounded crises and production of vulnerability 59
6.5. Non-representation and depoliticization of migration governance through the humanitarian approach 60
VII. CONCLUSION 62
ANNEX 65
BIBLIOGRAPHY 67

I. INTRODUCTION

Vulnerability is a rather ambiguous concept in Lebanon (El Daif et al. 2021) – a country haunted by compounded crises. Here, vulnerability has become the norm rather than the exception for its citizens, migrants, and the estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees and 257,000 Palestinian refugees residing in the country (LCRP 2022). Relative to its citizens, Lebanon hosts the most refugees per capita in the world (LCRP 2022). Adding to the refugee crisis is the country's current financial crisis, which is likely to rank in the top 10, possibly among the top three, most severe crises globally since the mid-nineteenth century (World Bank 2021: xi). Between 2018 and 2021, Lebanon's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) plummeted, marking a nearly 60 percent contraction (ibid.). The crisis has been termed a 'deliberate depression', culminating in the country's largest financial crisis, which then was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Port of Beirut explosion. In 2021, almost nine in ten displaced Syrian households were living in extreme poverty, with poverty levels also rising dramatically among Lebanese and Palestinian refugee populations (LCRP 2022).

At the same time, the protection regime for displaced populations in Lebanon continues to prevent people from fully participating in the host societies and accessing employment that could have enabled them to cope better with the crises. It is in this context that we have interviewed Syrian refugees, Palestinian Refugees from Syria, and Palestinian Refugees from Lebanon about their experiences of vulnerability and the interaction with the legal and bureaucratic frameworks put in place to identify, asses, and address vulnerabilities, representing the norms that control migration movements in Lebanon.

This is the second report from the Lebanon case study of the VULNER project, which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme. With the view of understanding the interaction between the refugee experience and the legal- and policy frameworks available to people forced to move, the overall research question we seek to answer is *How are experiences of vulnerabilities shaped, and sometimes even produced, by the legal and bureaucratic framework in the country under study?*

The report's objective is to understand the relationship between experiences of vulnerabilities among displaced populations and the legal and bureaucratic frameworks in place. With the help of insights from refugees residing in Lebanon, we aim to understand how vulnerabilities are constituted and may increase or decrease as a result of the legal and bureaucratic framework they encounter.

In this report, we build directly on the first phase of the project and the first report from Lebanon (El Daif et al. 2021) in seeking to understand the experience of vulnerability by refugees. In the first report, which focused mainly on the legal and bureaucratic framework, we showed that in Lebanon, there is no legal protection for refugees, there is no asylum law and Lebanon considers itself a transit country rather than a host country. Consequently, all displaced populations – despite their protracted residence in the country – officially reside in Lebanon temporarily. The lack of protective legislation for refugees exacerbates refugees' vulnerabilities in Lebanon. The approach that Lebanon has taken towards refugees is a 'no-policy approach' (Stel 2021, Fakhoury 2017), where most of the services to refugees are offered through international organisations and where the specific legal and institutional measures towards refugees are limited and ad hoc. As we show in this report, this scattered and fragmented approach implies that refugees must manoeuvre through a number of different formal and informal institutions to seek the protection and assistance they need.

Vulnerability is present in the discourse on refugees in Lebanon in different ways. Yet, as a concept, 'vulnerability' is not easily translated into Arabic. We show in the report that the understandings and uses among research participants and institutions vary. Sometimes vulnerability is understood as a category-based concept, focusing on specific personal characteristics and groups that are assumed to be vulnerable (see also Leboeuf 2021). At other times, vulnerability takes on a more dynamic, multidimensional, and contextual meaning that may broadly be described as "a susceptibility to harmful wrongs, exploitation, or threats to one's interest and autonomy" (Mackenzie et al. 2014:6, Gilson 2016: 72). The latter meaning is more situational and can happen to anyone at a given point in time (Orru et al. 2021).

In addition, the ambiguity in the approach to the vulnerability of refugees in Lebanon derives from its meaning being used for socio-economic matters in some instances, sometimes for legal residency status, and in the context of resettlement to a third country in other instances. The only existing detailed recognition and implementation of vulnerability in Lebanon derives from the vulnerability assessments of refugees by main UN agencies led by the UNHCR (VASyR, VARON), which does not define vulnerability, but introduces indicators such as shelter, water, sanitation, health and food consumption to measure socio-economic dimensions of vulnerability (El Daif et al. 2021). Hence, the dominant approach to vulnerability is a humanitarian one, and most actors are more careful or reluctant to engage with its legal and political dimensions, that is, with how experiences of vulnerabilities are being produced through the policies in place and the limited access refugees in Lebanon have to any kind of legal status. We understand a humanitarian approach to mean assistance with a short-term perspective that is mainly in place to keep people alive rather than addressing more structural and political constraints (Brun 2016, Brun and Shuayb 2020). Yet, on the other hand, the legal dimensions of vulnerability of displaced populations continue to play an important role and must be understood in a political and securitization approach driven by the Lebanese state which focuses on monitoring refugees, restricting their residency and mobility and consequently placing refugees under risk of detention (Brun et al. 2021, El Daif et al. 2021).

This report places at its centre the experience of vulnerability by refugees. We conducted a total of 57 interviews with Syrian refugees (34), Palestinian refugees from Lebanon (9), and Palestinian refugees from Syria (14). We will then situate their experiences in the context of the encounters with the system and the macro structures and policy norms they face on a daily basis.

In the remaining chapters of this report, we will present the methodology in Chapter 2 before presenting the context by setting the bureaucratic and legal scene in Chapter 3. We then move to our analysis which consists of three levels (micro, meso and macro). In Chapter 4, we focus on the micro level and document the experience of vulnerability and the multiple vulnerabilities that refugees experience by reflecting on how they presented their understanding of vulnerability and what makes them feel vulnerable. We also discuss how these different vulnerabilities that research participants explained interact to constitute particular outcomes related to the diverse set of social positions represented in the material. In Chapter 5, we move to the meso level and the interaction between refugees and relevant institutions. We particularly focus on the perspective of the refugees and their active strategizing in relation to what kind of assistance and protection they can mobilise. In Chapter 6, we adopt a macro perspective by taking a step back and make a broader analysis of how current state norms and international approaches towards refugees impact their vulnerabilities. The conclusion summarises the main findings from the report.

II. METHODOLOGY

The 'policy of no policy' for refugees in Lebanon creates a void in protection and leads to enhanced risk of vulnerability for refugees residing in this crisis ridden country. Our analysis of the policies and governance of refugees (El Daif et al 2021) showed some of the gaps in the frameworks for refugees' protection leading to potential vulnerabilities. Hence in this report, we are concerned with understanding how those policies are experienced and impact refugees in Lebanon. Accordingly, the data collected for this report consist of qualitative interviews with 57 refugees and seven nongovernmental organisations (international and national).

Interviews took place over a period of three months in three different areas of the country, in this chapter, we describe the methodology.

2.1. Preparation

The interview questions for both refugees and national and international organisations were based on a common template for all VULNER case country teams (see https://www.vulner.eu) yet contextualized to suit the Lebanese situation. Hence, the specific questions were developed based on the data collected in the first stage of the project, where we analysed the national legal framework (El Daif et al. 2021) and previous extensive work with Palestinian and Syrian refugees in Lebanon (see for example, Shuayb et al. 2021, Brun and Shuayb 2020, Jordan and Brun 2021). The interview guide was divided into sections with overall themes covering different aspects related to refugees' experiences, such as: living conditions, relationships with state and non-state institutions, protection, safety and security, community support and durable solutions. In order to unpack refugees' perception of their vulnerability and as part of the preparatory phase, the team conducted a desk review of hundreds of reports and briefs (grey literature) published periodically by the humanitarian response as well as academic literature to unpack its structure, main actors, response and referral procedures in addition to Covid-specific responses.

2.2. Interviews

While there are other refugee groups present in Lebanon, at this stage of the project, we decided to concentrate on the experience of Syrian refugees, Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon, and Palestinian refugees from Syria. These three groups featured most prominently in the information we documented regarding institutional and legal measures during the earlier stages of the project. Before starting the interviews with refugees, the team reached out to local actors (head of municipalities and staff of International NGOs and National NGOs) and established contacts in different areas. Based on the information gathered from these local actors, three localities were chosen for interviews with Syrian refugees, Palestinian Refugees from Lebanon (PRL), and Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS).

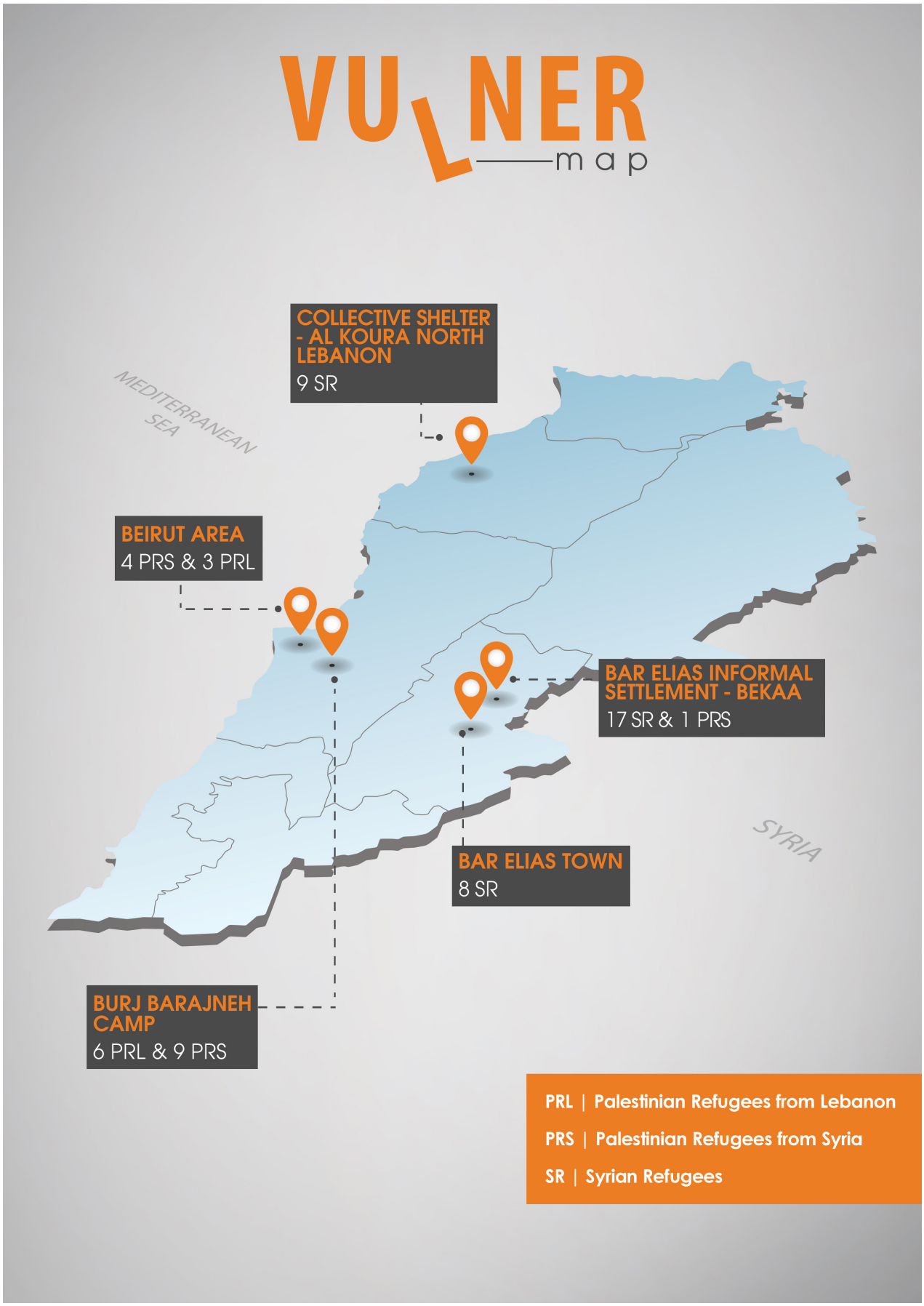

Figure 1: Map showing the fieldwork locations visited from July 2021 till October 2021.

These three localities constituted altogether five 'neighbourhoods': A collective shelter in Al Koura in North Lebanon; Bar Elias Informal Settlement and Bar Elias town, both located in the Bekaa; Burj El Barajneh Camp, which is a Palestinian camp in Beirut and the camp's surrounding neighbourhoods in Beirut.

2.3. Description of fieldwork locations

In July 2021, the first visit was made to the collective shelter of Koura (North Lebanon) to assess the instruments and amend them as needed for the remainder of the fieldwork. From then, the team conducted extensive fieldwork for three months in three areas: We interviewed Syrian refugees in the collective shelter in Koura (North Lebanon) and in the Bar Elias informal settlement and town (Bekaa), where the highest percentage of Syrian refugees in Lebanon reside. In the Burj El Barajneh Palestinian camp and its neighbourhoods in Beirut, we interviewed Palestinian refugees from Lebanon and Syria. Additionally, we conducted interviews in the town of Bar Elias and in the city of Beirut with both Syrian and Palestinian self-settled refugees who experience different living conditions in collective shelters, tented settlements, and camps. Here, we provide a short description of the different fieldwork locations.

2.3.1. A collectively shared building in Koura in North Lebanon:

This building was not built for residential purposes and had been abandoned for a while. The Syrian refugees turned it into residences for 130 Syrian families: 103 families live in the built area while the rest live in tents surrounding the building. Each family lives in a small room, which they have arranged and turned into a small residence. It is an overcrowded shelter with limited infrastructure, and there is a lack of water and presence of sewage smell across the shelter.

2.3.2. Bar Elias informal settlement in Bekaa:

Around 100,000 refugees live in tents in the approximately 200 Bar Elias informal camps. The majority are Syrian, but there are some Palestinian from Syria and Dom[1]. The tents are not overcrowded but provide challenging living conditions in the cold winters and hot summers. The settlements are spread out on both sides along a road of 3 kilometres with the Bekaa Valley surrounding them.

2.3.3. Bar Elias town - Bekaa:

Many Syrian refugees are renting houses in Bar Elias town in the vicinity of the informal settlements. All houses are owned by Lebanese. Some houses are still under construction, sometimes even without windows fully covered. Other houses are in better condition. Some refugees had lived in tents earlier but preferred to move to houses since they are safer from sudden attacks or fires and have better living conditions.

1 Dom often called Roma in other country contexts, originated in the Punjab region of northern India as a nomadic people and entered Europe between the eighth and tenth centuries C.E.

2.3.4. Burj El Barajneh Palestinian camp:

Burj El Barajneh camp was established in 1949 by the League of Red Cross Societies and is located in the southern suburb of Beirut, 4 kilometres from the capital's downtown. The initial camp population was approximately 3,500 people. The camp was partially destroyed during the Israeli invasion in 1982 and the Lebanese civil war. Starting in 1969, the camp population expanded rapidly and the urban design changed. Building work was undertaken randomly, with no opportunity to increase the foundations. Roads became extremely narrow, and infrastructure was put under heavy stress. These problems were compounded by the destruction of several Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon during the Lebanese civil war and the ongoing Syria crisis, each resulting in a wave of new refugees to Burj Barajneh.[2]

2.3.5. Beirut area:

An unknown number of Palestinian and Syrian refugees live outside the Palestinian camps in the city of Beirut, and specifically in the surroundings of the Burj Al Barajneh Camps, there is a high concentration of Palestinians, but also Syrian refugees live here. These are generally poor neighbourhoods where most people rent their residences, and there is no clear physical boundary between the camp and the surrounding neighbourhoods.

In order to get access to the areas, the team reached out to local actors, such as the head of municipalities and staff of International NGOs and National NGOs, as well as already established contacts residing in the three areas. Through these contacts, we were able to recruit interviewees. We contacted the interviewees independently from the gatekeepers and made sure that no interviewee felt obliged to participate in the study. Before starting the interviews, the team explained to research participants the concept and the objectives of the research, the use of their personal data and how the data would be fully pseudonymized. Also they were asked to sign an informed consent and asked if they agreed to record the interview.

Fifty-seven (57) interviews with Syrian and Palestinian refugees from Lebanon and Syria were conducted in the mentioned areas.

Number of interviews (Total 57 interviews)	Nationalities of the interviewees	Locations
9	Syrian refugees	The Collective Shelter in North Lebanon
18	17 Syrian refugees & 1 Palestinian refugee from Syria	Bar Elias informal settlement
15	6 Palestinian refugees from Lebanon & 9 Palestinian refugees from Syria	Burj El Barajneh camp
7	3 Palestinian refugees from Lebanon & 4 Palestinian refugees from Syria	Beirut area
8	Syrian Refugees	Bar Elias town

Table 1. Number of Interviews held according to the interviewees' background and locations

2 For more information, please see (UNRWA 2022d).

We interviewed 33 women and 24 men. Hence, there was a slight bias towards women in the material. We interviewed 34 Syrian refugees, 14 Palestinian refugees from Syria, and nine Palestinian refugees from Lebanon. In this way, there is also a bias towards Syrian refugees in the sample. However, rather than seeking a representative sample, and a comparative approach between different refugee groups, we were aiming for qualitative interviews focused on the contextualised experience of vulnerability that the research participants were experiencing.

In addition to interviews with refugees, seven interviews were conducted with staff working with international and national non-governmental organizations providing legal or humanitarian assistance to protection seekers to analyse the humanitarian response in the area of their intervention. Five of the organisational interviews took place over zoom, while two took place face-to-face. The interviews were also recorded and have been used to complement the interviews with research participants. Hence, where we rely on the organisational interviews, we make specific reference to that.

2.4. The interview situation and positionalities

The team visited each area a minimum of two times to build a connection with the refugees living there, break the ice, make observations, and have informal discussions in order to document living situations. Where permitted, we also documented the living conditions through photographs.

Most interviews were conducted in, or immediately outside, research participants' residences. We aimed to provide a space where participants would feel comfortable and ensured they were not distressed by our questions. Most participants were happy to share both general and personal information with the interviewers. However, talking through a difficult time in their lives, participants sometimes got emotional but were happy to continue the interview and expressed gratitude that someone was listening to them. Conversely, a few participants did not like to share much information during the formal in-depth interview process. They preferred to share some personal thoughts and challenges through more informal discussions with the team, often related to marital problems, shelter conditions, and lack of aid and services. In this case, we turned off the recorder and had more informal chats according to the research participants' preferences.

In the collective shelter in Koura, the team mainly visited the interviewees in their homes and held the interview there. A few of the interviews were held in a backroom of the shelter's store in order to ensure privacy. While visiting the shelter and during the times in between interviews, other residents would also chat with us, and we got a sense of the daily struggles that people encountered.

As for the interviews in the Bar Elias Informal settlement, the interviews were held in the tents of the interviewees. If others were in the room, we kindly asked them to leave the room for the interviewee's privacy. In Bar Elias Informal settlement, which we visited three times, we were at first guided by a Syrian refugee resident in the settlement. He worked with several organizations in the Bekaa and knew most other residents and as such, provided a helpful introduction. However, the team made sure that we also contacted residents independently from this contact to avoid a too narrow representation in this area.

As for the Burj Barajneh camp, the team visited five times and held interviews at "The National Institution of Social Care and Vocational training," also known by its Palestinian name "Beit Atfal Al Soumoud"[3], a humanitarian, non-sectarian, and non-governmental organization, located in the middle of the camp. The team discussed with the centre coordinator, who gave an overview of the centre and camp histories. Through different networks and contacts, we then recruited research participants who came to the centre for the interviews.

All interviews were audio-recorded with the interviewees' consent, although, as mentioned above, we sometimes turned off the recorder during parts of the interview. In such cases, the interviewer made sure to take notes during or immediately after the interview was conducted. Most of the interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis by the VULNER researchers Maria Maalouf and Chaden El Daif, as well as by a research assistant. All researchers were Lebanese but had extensive experience interviewing and working with refugees.

Many refugees are used to being interviewed, and the team witnessed certain research fatigue among refugees, particularly Syrian refugees. However, most research participants warmly welcomed the interviewers and appeared to be relaxed during the interview, and even thanked the interviewers after the interviews for the ability to share their stories and situation, which made them feel relieved. Hence, the team felt it was necessary to be careful about the interview approach and ensure that interviewees understood what the research was about and that we were not representing an aid organisation to avoid raising expectations about assistance resulting from the interview. Generally, interviews were conducted as a conversation where, with the use of the interview guide, we made sure to cover all planned topics, but where we did not always follow the same order of questions and the research participant was free to talk about the themes in their own way. Research participants did not bear any financial costs for transportation fees or calls.

2.5. Data analysis

All the collected qualitative data were coded and analysed through NVIVO to develop consistent stories in all categories of narratives and to establish an understanding and explanation of different trajectories. An in-depth analysis followed the initial organizing of the data to draft the second general report, which follows a common template agreed upon across the consortium, yet, the particular context of Lebanon is reflected in both the structure and content of the report.

2.6. Ethical considerations

The project team used the VULNER common ethics instruments.[4] Within these guidelines, we were dedicated to ensuring that all research participants received appropriate and sufficient information about the research to give their informed consent. As we discussed above, the interviewers ensured that the research participants felt safe and comfortable during the interview. We have ensured that all data remain confidential and cannot be traced back to the research participants. We have thus created pseudonyms for all research participants that are quoted and referred to in this report. And we indicate whether the

3 For more information, see The National Institution of Social Care and Vocational Training (2022).
4 For further information, see https://www.vulner.eu/106307/Ethics

interviewee is a female or male refugee from Syria (FSR/MSR) or a female or Male Palestinian Refugee from Lebanon or Syria (FPRL/MPRL/FPRS/MPRS). While such labelling is never straightforward, we hope this clarifies some of the diversity of experiences the research participants shared with us. When quoting research participants from organisations, we use the number of the interview.

Complying with the project ethical guidelines was also fully in correspondence with the ethical guidelines in Lebanon, where we applied and received Institutional Review Board approval from the Lebanese American University (Research Approval Tracking Number LAU.STF.MS1.22/Apr/2020). All involved researchers obtained CITI certificates (Citiprogram 2022). As per the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, all interviewees were above the age of 18 .

2.7. Limitations

The research in Lebanon was conducted in the context of multiple challenges. The Covid-19 pandemic and accompanying restrictions caused multiple delays in carrying out fieldwork. In order to ensure the safety of research participants and researchers, we delayed the process until it was deemed safe by the Lebanese health authorities to conduct face-to-face interviews. However, the pandemic overlapped with a financial crisis which caused a fuel deficiency, making it extremely challenging to move around and travel to conduct interviews. Finally, travel was also made difficult by the security issues that accompanied the financial crisis and the response to it. Hence, planned fieldwork journeys had to be postponed several times. Yet, despite these challenges, we managed to conduct a sufficient number of interviews, spend time with residents in the neighbourhoods where we conducted the research, and ensure the safety of the researchers and research participants in the process. Finally and similar to phase one, we were unable to interview UNHCR's staff, we contacted them multiple times but were not able to secure an interview.

III. SETTING THE LEGAL AND BUREAUCRATIC SCENE

> "The only existing detailed recognition and implementation of vulnerability in Lebanon derives from the vulnerability assessments of refugees by main UN agencies led by the UNHCR. When reviewing the criteria of these assessments, one can notice the focus on the socio-economic dimension. While legal protection is included in the assessment criteria and response plans, Lebanese policies continue to discriminate and put further restraints on legal protection for refugees, which reflects a sectoral rather than a comprehensive and cross-sectoral approach." (El Daif et al. 2021: 4).

This quote from our first research report summarises our work so far on vulnerability approaches for refugees in Lebanon, which is more focused on socio-economic needs than legal status and protection. In this Chapter, we briefly summarise the legal and bureaucratic scene as set out in our previous work (El Daif et al. 2021).

3.1. Approaches to displacement and the notion of refugee

Lebanon's policies on refugees must be understood from its history of hosting displaced populations – Palestinian refugees in particular – and the country's position in the region, specifically, its relations with its neighbour Syria. Hence, fear of further militarisation of Palestinians and Syrian refugees, as well as fear of further permanence to their presence, colours the response to refugees in the country and its no-policy approach (Turner 2015, Stel 2021). The governance of Syrian refugees is then, in many ways, a direct outcome of the governance of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, where legal, political, and institutional arrangements for Palestinians are kept short-term and under probation (Stel 2021). The aim is to ensure that no arrangements can lead to any form of integration of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

The terminology of displacement, combined with the fact that Lebanon has not signed the 1951 Convention on Refugees, supports the understanding of the no-policy approach mentioned above. Yet, this does not mean that Lebanon does not take a stance. As mentioned above, the no-policy approach is clearly a way of signalling that refugees are only temporarily present as the country portrays itself as a transit country. The approach also allows for treating different refugee groups differently and even categorising them differently. Accordingly, the concept 'refugee' is the least commonly used (El Daif et al. 2015: 15): "For instance, Syrian refugees are referred to as 'displaced,' Iraqi refugees as 'foreigners' or 'illegal residents.' While Palestinians in Lebanon are referred to as 'refugees' in the public discourse, conflicting opinions still exist, and it has been highlighted that Lebanon never referred in its legislation to Palestinians as refugees. Lebanon has only once defined an asylum-seeker, whereas the 2003 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the General Security (GS) and UNHCR, it refers to them as 'those seeking asylum in a third country.'"

The UN characterises the flight of civilians from Syria as a refugee movement and considers that these Syrians are seeking international protection and are likely to meet the refugee definition (LCRP 2022). The Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP 2022) – a multi-stakeholder response plan co-led by the Government of Lebanon and the UN and contributed to by a wide range of entities, including local and international NGOs – uses the following terminologies to refer to persons who have fled from and cannot currently return to Syria:

1. "persons displaced from Syria" (which can, depending on context, include Palestinian refugees from Syria as well as registered and unregistered Syrian nationals);
2. "displaced Syrians" (referring to Syrian nationals, including those born in Lebanon to displaced Syrian parents);
3. "persons registered as refugees by UNHCR";
4. "Palestine refugees from Lebanon" (referring to 180,000 PRL living in 12 camps and 156 gatherings);
5. "Palestinian refugees from Syria" (referring to 29,000 PRS across Lebanon).

A generic term that may bridge the various groups of displaced people in Lebanon is 'protection seeker', meaning those that are "outside their own country and unable to return home because they would be at risk there, and their country is unable or unwilling to protect them" (UNHCR 2017). Some interviewees – Syrian refugees in particular – did not like to be named refugees due to the discrimination and negative discourse in Lebanon. Noor, a female refugee from Syria, for example, said that "I reject the idea of being a refugee…I don't like to see myself as a refugee in Lebanon, I like us to be siblings". However, research participants generally acknowledge that they share the experience of being a refugee. In more sociological terms, the refugee experience can be described with Said's (1988: 48) account of exile as 'dispossessions', 'impermanence', 'loss' and 'doubleness'. These dimensions of the experience were expressed by the research participants:

> *We are lost. We don't know our destiny… It has been 10 years and we don't know anything* (Wafa, FSR).
>
> *I wish that I established my life in another country* (Fares, MSR).
>
> *Miserable. I don't think we will be able to go anywhere and I don't know what to do about this* (Asma, FSR).
>
> *I never regretted coming to Lebanon but I know I have no future unless things get better in Syria or we relocate to Europe* (Osman, MSR).
>
> *Let us specify what is the refugee. The refugees are 2 kinds: there are Palestinian refugees from 1948 because Palestine was taken; and the Syrian refugees that are present now and both suffer from the same problems which are discrimination, work, education, and everything (…)* (Jamal, MPRL).

The research participants felt the experience as a '"simultaneously split and doubled existence – stretched across the multiple ruptures between 'here' and 'there'" (Bammer 1994: xii). We understand the experience of the research participants, regardless of official terms, as one of refugee and in the remainder of the report we apply the concept of 'refugee' as a common denominator for the research participants based on their specific experiences in Lebanon.

3.2. Factors shaping the discourse on vulnerability in Lebanon

So far in our work, we found that there are three main factors shaping the discourse on vulnerability in Lebanon: these are the laws concerning vulnerability, the government policies, and the humanitarian response (El Daif et al. 2021). These factors intersect and influence each other.

First, concerning laws, the lack of protective legislation for refugees is a primary cause of exacerbating refugees' vulnerabilities. The lack of asylum and protection provisions for refugees increases their vulnerability. Although the Lebanese law offers minimal protection to some groups, such as victims of gender-based violence (GBV) and minors, regardless of status, according to our interviews, the application of protection to refugees who have an illegal status is uncertain. Granting legal protection for refugees specifically can help protect some of the most vulnerable groups.

Second, while Lebanon's policies concerning refugees differ based on the refugee's nationality and even within the same nationality, the policies have fluctuated and changed over time during consecutive governments. We found two different approaches to vulnerability in policies. First, vulnerability as a primarily socio-economic vulnerability that dominates the humanitarian response plans which are essential for the access to and management of funds from the humanitarian community. Yet, the humanitarian approach is largely depoliticised, and despite a shift in discourse towards more long-term measures, the current financial crisis resulted in humanitarian agencies dropping attempts for development and mainly focusing on humanitarian assistance. Second, a security-based approach which restricts refugees' residency, mobility and puts them under risk of detention contributing to the vulnerability of refugees and rendering thousands of them illegal, thus preventing them from seeking legal protection when needed.

Finally, we identified the humanitarian approach to refugees. The humanitarian response to the influx of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is centred around a vulnerability assessment led by UN agencies, titled VASyR and VARON (El Daif et al. 2021, VASYR 2022, VARON 2021). The assessment is based on numerical socio-economic indicators that takes into consideration the livelihood challenges experienced by refugees in addition to the specific needs of vulnerable groups. The assessment is used to define who of the refugees are in need of assistance. However, as Janmyr and Mourad (2018) have shown, VaSYR does not define vulnerability, but identifies its components and how vulnerability is understood seems to be a result of a number of unidentified assumptions. These assumptions also rest in the predetermined categories of who is vulnerable, such as age, disabled and victims of torture and sexual violence, that used by the UNHCR to decide who should access resettlement (ibid.). The 'comprehensive' approach adopted by these vulnerability assessments then largely fails in mitigating the vulnerability of refugees (El Daif et al. 2018). After 10 years of the protracted Syrian crisis, over one million Syrian refugees in Lebanon continue to rely on humanitarian aid delivered by UNHCR to help them meet their survival needs.

The three approaches above are to some extent coming together in the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan, yet there is an emphasis on the humanitarian approach, confirming the global trend of 'humanitarianising' the discourse of refugees (Leboeuf 2021). The Lebanese government integrated the response to the Syrian Crisis in Lebanon in late 2014. Since then, the plan has been updated each year and issued on a governmental level. Although the 2020 version refers to "vulnerable" people and mentions "vulnerability" 105 times, and the 2022 version mentioned it 82 times, which is considered a high rate of references; vulnerability is not a cornerstone of the state's response. Further, and similar to the VaSYR, the LCRP does not define vulnerability and uses the latter to refer indiscriminately to people, areas, cadastres, and local-

ities and not to target refugee contexts. It encompasses the Lebanese, Palestinians, and Syrians without prioritizing one vulnerability over another. Consequently, the use of the concept of vulnerability under the response plan is mainly a socio-economic one that often refers to categories that are traditionally the most vulnerable, such as: persons with specific needs, female heads of household, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and other minority groups at risk of violence. While the plan steadily refers to 'vulnerability,' 'most vulnerable,' and 'acute vulnerability,' as well as 'vulnerable groups,' it does not define these words and expressions; it uses them in a non-homogeneous manner (El Daif et al. 2021).

Hence, the plans and the international and governmental response do not address some of the core issues around the legal and bureaucratic restrictions that refugees face and that contribute to their vulnerabilities. In Chapters 4 and 5, in particular, we address some of the specific experiences related to these restrictions.

3.3. Legal measures and bureaucratic restrictions for refugees and vulnerable groups

The production of vulnerabilities for refugees is closely associated with the difficulties of accessing a refugee status. We return to some of the specific measures below, but generally Palestinian refugees do not have Lebanese citizenship, they are treated as foreigners. Some hold residency cards, others, who arrived after 1948, are considered illegal immigrants (De Bel-Air 2012). Palestinians are officially excluded from Lebanon's politics, society and economy and hence from significant sections of the labour market. As for Syrian refugees, they are also treated as foreigners that need to go through the same process of obtaining residency as any foreigner in the country. Despite rounds of advocacy and attempts to enable a legal status for refugees, the costs involved in obtaining residency means that at the time of writing more than 80 percent of Syrian refugees above the age of 15 are without legal residency in the country. We describe this in further detail below.

For all groups of refugees, as they are defined as foreigners, they need a work permit. For Palestinians residing in Lebanon, this is granted through their residency. Yet, for Syrian refugees and Palestinian Refugees from Syria, this is not the case and can be obtained through a costly work visa or a sponsor, which would often be the employer. Yet, sponsorship is uncertain and often leads to exploitation due to the dependency on a third party. For all groups of non-citizens with residency and work permit, there are restrictions to which occupations they can work in, such as medicine, law and engineering.[5]

In addition to the hard legal sources, there are soft legal sources where more explicit use and reference to terms such as 'refugees', 'displaced', and 'vulnerability' are made. However, these provisions are not binding force and have little impact on guiding practices.

The soft legal sources include the visa categories to enter Lebanon from Syria: The General Security issued seven restricted visa categories to enter Lebanon from Syria, starting in January 2015 (General Security 2015). Accordingly, only Syrians who hold valid identity documents could enter Lebanon. Just one of these categories titled 'displaced' could be applied to the refugees' cases, and its criteria were disclosed under the name 'humanitarian exceptions criteria'. It was allowing Syrians to apply for "Unaccompanied

5 See UNRWA (2017) for more details on the 39 professions of prohibited access.
Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon (PRLs) are prevented from employment in 39 professions. Changes to the Lebanese Legal Framework in 2005 and 2010 have in principle improved PRL's right to access 75 professions and related social protection mechanisms, giving them partial access to the National Social Security Fund. However, they are required to obtain an annual work permit which is dependent on the willingness of the employer to request it from the Lebanese authorities and involves a lengthy administrative process. For more information, see UNRWA (2018).

and/or separated children with a parent already registered in Lebanon; persons living with disabilities with a relative already registered in Lebanon; persons with urgent medical needs for whom treatment in Syria is unavailable; persons who will be resettled to third countries." In March 2022, the General Security amended the conditions of entry to Lebanon through all land border and allowing entry for Syrian based on eight new categories: 1) Business visit; (2) property owner; (3) tenant; (4) studying; (5) transiting to a third country; (6) medical treatment; (7) an embassy appointment; and (8) Lebanese father or mother. Consequently, the new regulations do not leave room for Syrians fleeing armed conflict, violence, or persecution to seek safety in Lebanon.

The VASyR 2021 reveals the continuous decline in the percentage of Syrian refugees, men and women, holding residency permits (VASyr 2022). As in previous years, rates of legal residency for women were 4 percentage points lower than for men. 2021's findings showed that women with legal residency declined from 18 percent in 2020 to 14 percent in 2021 and that men with legal residency declined from 23 percent to 19 percent (ibid.). We return to the impact of these measures in Chapter 4.

There are various Codes of conduct in soft legal law. The General Security and the Internal Security Forces each adopted a code of conduct developed in close coordination with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). They share basic principles when dealing with people, especially vulnerable groups and people with specific needs. Additionally, these codes enumerated refugees and displaced as vulnerable groups, making the impression that refugees are accounted for under Lebanon's legislation or policies. However, and as we return to in Chapter 5, the state does not use these laws for refugees, which shows the lack of compatibility and homogeneity in state responses.

In the following we turn to how these contrasting and fluid framework are experienced by refugees living with displacement in Lebanon.

IV. VULNERABILITIES AND PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

'Vulnerability' has become a key term in contemporary Lebanon, especially in the context of mass migration and the frequent use by international organisations. The term's exact significance for people is, however, frequently left unexplored and this is significant because 'vulnerability' is not easily translated into Arabic. When we used the word هشاشة (literally translated as fragility) in interviews, this was a word not generally understood by research participants. We thus spent some time with the research participants to come to a joint understanding of the meaning of vulnerability where the word حالة الضعف (weak condition) and ضعيف (weak) were the closest. Jamal (MPRS) stated: "Vulnerability is when I have a girl or a boy and I cannot secure their future; I feel weak and I feel disappointed as a father in the house. At the same time I feel weak like I married and I got kids; the reason is that I didn't study the matter correctly to let my kids live the phase we are living."

In those extended discussions with the research participants about the meaning of vulnerability, it was also translated as loneliness, the feeling of being left alone, that there is no help, no one to look after them, and closely related to this feeling, not having a state and living in precarious conditions:

> *When there are no laws to protect you* (Fatima, FSR).
>
> *For example the workers who are forced to work under harsh conditions to get by* (Yasmine, FSR).

It was also referred to as restrictions related to not being a full member of the society in which people live: **"**like when I'm forced to keep quiet when the *shaweesh* [middleman - شاويش] humiliates me because there's nothing I can do. I could call the UN but they're not answering us (Yasmine, FSR). This was also explained by Osman (MSR): "First, it's the lack of finances and being tied up, unable to commute or work and can only stay at home doing nothing. You can become weak, depressed, violent, and have seizures and other health issues. I consider that I'm vulnerable too, I feel like I'm suffocating sometimes. For example, I went to fill up my car today, the entire time I spent in the queue I was quiet and I couldn't express my frustration because I'm not from here. The Lebanese would be screaming and cussing because they can afford to, no one would approach them."

Focusing on the microlevel and the individual experiences of vulnerability in this Chapter, it is significant to note that in a society like Lebanon, most people may be seen to experience vulnerability due to its compounded crises. Yet, as the introductory discussion show, the experience of vulnerability among the research participants is closely related to the refugee experience. Yet, the refugee experience is not uniform across the groups of refugees. In this Chapter, we discuss how this experience of vulnerability varies from one individual to another and how the intersection of social positions and individual circumstances is at the centre of producing those multitudes of different experiences. The international refugee regime tends to focus on specific vulnerable groups, such as children, sex, gender identity and sexual orientation and female-headed households. Here we are exploring the specific spheres of life that interviewees identified as essential in their experience of vulnerability which to some extent includes the regime's categories but also extends to socio-economic conditions and their social and legal status in the host country.

We thus proceed to describe the research participants' account of vulnerability and the different personal circumstances that they described to understand the experience of vulnerability. We refer to those circumstances as different constitutive factors of vulnerability and explain the particularities of experiences and integrate, where relevant, the differences for the three refugee groups of Palestinians residing in Lebanon, Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria. We then reflect on the ways in which different categories or circumstances of vulnerabilities interact.

4.1. The refugee journeys from Syria and the timing of arrival in Lebanon

Becoming a refugee and leaving one's home is not what most displaced people would have envisaged for their lives. However, with the experience of war, violence and with substantial danger to their lives, the decision to move is the first step towards becoming a refugee for most people. In the case of refugees in Lebanon, not all have experienced the physical movement themselves, yet the experience of displacement is the reality for all. For second and third generation of Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon (PRL), they share a narrative of violence and displacement but most were born in Lebanon and did not experience the physical displacement themselves. In contrast, the experience of violence and the often traumatic journeys of Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) and Syrian refugees arriving in Lebanon after 2011, play a significant role in their identity and the process of seeking protection in Lebanon.

> *I was born in Lebanon in 1971 and I am still here* (Khaled, MPRL).
>
> *I was born here. My mum's parents are here in the camp so she gave birth to me here in Haifa hospital* (Farah, FPRL).
>
> *I came here in 2017. I used to live in Yarmouk camp*[6] *and it was under siege. We suffered from hunger and lots of people perished. My family and I fled Yarmouk camp and I came to Lebanon with my son and then my wife and children followed. I came to Burj Al Barajneh camp at first because I'd been coming to it for 30 years and had friends there* (Adel, MPRS).
>
> *From 2011… With my mom and my siblings, my father came here before us and we followed him* (Huda, FPRS).
>
> *I came in 2014 or 2013, with my father and sister because of the war and we came here to Lebanon and I stayed for 3 years knowing that things were better in Syria. I stayed here [in Lebanon] for 2 years then I went back to my university [in Syria], but I faced some pressure. The pressure was on the ones that left then came back so I was obliged to come back* (Ola, FSR).
>
> *I came here in 2013…It was very difficult. I came here on my own and I spent 5-6 months and my children were struggling over there [in Syria], they suffered…* (Youssef, MSR).

Some research participants recount distressing journeys through the war-ridden Syria before arriving in relative safety in Lebanon. Some research participants attribute mental health challenges to the traumatic experiences of war, loss of home, and trauma related to the journey to which we return below. In this context, it is also important to mention that Syrians who have experienced violence are sometimes still affected by particular relations that make them vulnerable (threats of revenge for incidents that took

6 Palestinian (unofficial) camp in Syria.

place in Syria, for example). For other interviewees, however, the journey to Lebanon was described as straightforward. The nature of the journey varied partly due to the timing of displacement, partly by the place of origin and route they had to take out of Syria and possibly also partly due to financial means and support to make the journey. We do not have sufficient data to present particular patterns in this regard. Yet for a final group of Syrians, they lived in Lebanon before the war and had a more planned entry into the country, either because they knew the country and people already or because they already had family members residing in the country and with employment.

For Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria the date of arrival in Lebanon is significant. The majority of the research participants came between 2011 till 2014 (around 25 Syrian refugees out of 34 Syrian interviewees), and some came in 2016 and 2017. The arrival date is significant for all groups. From February 2013, Palestinian Refugees from Syria could obtain residency permits valid for three months and renewable for up to 12 months at no cost, upon entry into the country (UNRWA 2020). However, starting in 2014, a fee of USD 200 per person was required to extend their legal residency. According to UNRWA (ibid.), the high costs meant that the majority of the PRS did not renew their documents and from then on were considered by the authorities to be present in Lebanon illegally. UNRWA describes how, throughout 2014, several new restrictions were introduced for PRS, including restrictions on the number of renewals and the maximum period of stay. But then again, in October 2015, they were allowed to renew their visas, free of charge, for a limited period of time – often between one and three months only. In July 2020, PRS could regularise their status if they could secure a sponsor or a work permit, but this has only been possible for a small minority. Consequently, PRS who arrived after 2014 have faced difficulties in staying in the country legally.

Similarly, the rules for arrival and stay for Syrian refugees has changed over the years as we alluded to in Chapter 3. As of October 2014, obtaining a residency permit was a must with the renewal of this permit every six months. But the refugees had to pay a USD 200 fee for this process (Janmyr 2016) which meant that families with limited funds chose to spend their money on their basic needs such as shelter, health care, and food rather than on renewing legal documents (Norwegian Refugee Council and International Rescue Committee 2015). With these new measures in place, the number of refugees registering was dramatically reduced. In May 2015, the Ministry of Social Affairs requested suspension of registrations of refugees by the UNHCR and, as a result, less than 20 percent of Syrian refugees above the age of 15 now hold legal residency (VASyR 2021, VASyr 2022). Furthermore, the process became so complicated that the majority of the Syrian refugees could not keep track of the new procedures. Besides the fees paid on the permit, the applicant is now obliged to present a document signed by the 'mukhtar' proving that the refugee owns or rents a property to live in. But this document is practically impossible to obtain because a high number of Syrian refugees have informal rental agreements with the property owners. Even if the contract is formal or legal, municipalities regularly avoid registering their rental agreements (Kikano et al. 2021). In addition, Syrian refugees were required to decide whether they want to work or receive foreign aid because Syrians who acquire a legal work permit would lose their right to profit from humanitarian aid (Janmyr 2016).

For both Palestinian Refugees from Syria and Syrian refugee, there is not much mobility after their arrival in Lebanon, although, as in other cases of displacement (Brun 2016) people in rented accommodation are more likely to move more often than people in camps and settlement for displaced people. We also found that some people had moved from tented settlements in Bar Elias and into rented accommodation to escape the dire conditions living in tents.

4.2. The meaning of legal status

As we have already shown in the discussion above, it matters for their legal status where an individual displaced from, what their nationality is and when they arrived in Lebanon. The three categories of displacement we have interviewed, Palestinians residing in Lebanon, Palestinian refugees from Syria and Syrian refugees have different positions, access to protection and assistance. As we mentioned above, many of the PRS and Syrian refugees we interviewed did not have legal residency, although some had had such status in the past. Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon, although they often have better access to legal residency, are excluded from participation in social, economic and political life including the prohibition to work in 39 professions and from owning property as well as access to state provided services such as health and education (UNRWA 2022a).

Similarly, even for refugees who arrived from Syria, if they have legal residency and work permit, they are prevented from working in those 39 professions. However, the minority of Syrian refugees and PRS have such legal residency even if they may be registered UNHCR and UNRWA respectively, far fewer have obtained work permits.

As more and more people have moved into illegality, being or becoming illegal means increased vulnerability for many, but may not be the most important dimension in people's understanding of their vulnerability: legal residency is meaningful for some but does not feel important for others.

Some refugees we interviewed had managed to obtain a sponsorship through an employer. However, this had also created a dependency on the sponsor and a vulnerability to exploitation. Similarly, for those without a work permit and legal residency, they work in informal sectors and are often facing tough working conditions, with lower pay than nationals and greater risk of exploitation with limited means of addressing their grievances (see also Shuayb et al. 2021).

"Being illegal", as some interviewees said, did cause concerns for the interviewees and their families. It was a concern, particularly in the tented settlement where residents had experienced multiple raids by the Army to check if papers were in order (please also see Chapter 5). Yet, it was more of a concern for moving around and being stopped on a checkpoint. In this case, men were far more vulnerable for the consequences than women. While women were normally sent home without much repercussion, men could face imprisonment and even repatriation to Syria if they were caught. As a consequence, men without legal residency would sometimes just stay at home for fear of being caught, severely affecting their mental health but also their ability to provide livelihoods for their families.

> *If I went to another area the people there know that my papers are illegal for that reason I don't go far away* (Nasima, FPRS).
>
> *Maybe because I am a woman, they don't stop me, but once I was coming to the shelter the checkpoint stopped me and they asked for my papers and I didn't have them* (Israa, FSR).
>
> *(…) they would take me, despite my disability... They took my motorcycle and they took me. I paid a fine for the motorcycle* (Majed, MSR).
>
> *I was only stopped once and they were nice to me even when they knew that I was here illegally* (Yasmine, FSR).

I was subjected to detention 3 times because my papers were not legal (Fares, MSR).

Some men, however, could simply not afford staying at home, and had to take the risk or did feel relatively safe. Some interviewees who had arrived before 2015 had not registered with the UNHCR, simply because they did not see the value of it. They regretted this decision now, but were not aware of the importance of registration at the time. For some research participants, particularly those living outside Beirut, fear and a sense of vulnerability is produced through the lack of legal residency. For example, for both women and men, the lack of legal residency, means a greater barrier of approaching authorities to report gender based violence or other crimes for fear of repercussion based in the lack of legal residency.

4.3. Age, gender and vulnerability[7]

> "Syrian refugee women and girls of diverse backgrounds continue to confront widespread and systemic gender inequality, which manifests in less access to resources, services, and opportunities, as well as higher risks of violence, abuse, and exploitation. While Syrian refugee women and girls share the burden of gender inequity, men and boys are subject to some forms of gender discrimination. Moreover, women and girls are not a homogeneous group. Their unique needs and circumstances must be understood with an intersectional lens, meaning how identity factors such as socio-economic status, age, area of residence, sexual orientation, and physical ability, influence gender inequality" (UN Women 2019: 1).

Lebanon is a patriarchal society with significant gender gaps that are reflected in research participants' experiences of vulnerability. When asking research participants about their understanding of vulnerability and who they consider to be vulnerable, age and gender played a crucial role in their responses. Each response also reflects that each age comes with their specific vulnerabilities.

For youth, there is a sense of uncertainty for the future. The limited access to quality education, the high drop-out rate and increasing responsibility to provide for their families play a significant role in depriving young people from seeking an aspired future. Not being able to stay in education (due to lack of papers, financial circumstances, access issues) is presented as a feeling of huge loss and increased vulnerability related to socioeconomic futures as well as the social capital that comes with education. But also Palestinian refugees (PRL and PRS) we interviewed, despite their relative better access to education through the UNRWA education system, would still present the uncertainty for the future and the inability to see a way of securing an education and a relevant job thereafter in Lebanon as a major concern in their lives that adds to their vulnerability. Parents were also clear that they were forced to take their children out of school:

> *I only have one kid working the one we took out of school. He is a worker he takes 40,000 LBP* (Wafa, FSR).

Not all the children in the Syrian community work. However, among the refugees we interviewed in Burj El Barajneh, the majority of families had children working.

7 There is no comprehensive published data on Syrian lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LBGTQ) women. In this study, we have not interviewed people who identified as LGBTQ.

VASyR states that 80 percent of young women between 15 and 24 years of age are 'inactive' with no engagement in education, employment or training (VASyR 2021, 2022). The continuing trend reported in VASyR is that there is a high prevalence of early marriages for young women (15 to 19 years old), while child labour (age between 5 and 17) have continued to rise with more boys (8 percent) than girls (2 percent) working.

For younger adults and middle-aged research participants, family responsibilities play a significant role amid the financial crisis in Lebanon, the extreme pressure on research participants with family responsibility, the constant worry for not being able to provide for their families and giving their children what they need. Feeling vulnerable for this age group is directly related to these family responsibilities:

> *I am surrounded by children here, they are the ones who need care and guidance* (Amina, FSR).

While Lebanon has one of the lowest rates of labour-market participation by women in the world (World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report 2020) and women take a much higher proportion of child rearing and other reproductive activities in the household, VASyR (2022) has observed an increasing number of women working. UN Women (2019) reports that working Syrian female refugees often take the role of main breadwinners in their families. However, the gender pay gap means Syrian female refugees earn on average 39 percent less than male refugees and they are mainly employed in agriculture (47 percent) and the service sector (34 percent):

> *They work at houses because there are no lands to plant, so here they work at houses* (…) (Israa, FSR).
>
> *When someone wants to clean his house, I work* (Hana, FSR).

Yet, according to VASyR (2022), there is not a significant difference in economic insecurity between male and female headed Syrian refugee households.

Old age and ill health (as we return to below) is mentioned by many research participants as the feeling of weakness, not being able to work anymore and limited assistance but increased dependency. Many research participants emphasized this reality for older women in particular:

> *The widow or the older person or the one who has a family or the one living alone are facing hard times* (Wafa, FSR).
>
> *Here they look at the widow and they help her, you look from the other side the widow is living her life in a very good way, some families don't have bread to eat, we have to help widows and there are families with men that need more help* (Noor, FSR).
>
> *Widows. Some people need medications for their chronic sickness (Fares, MSR).*

The gendered disparity in employment and the highly patriarchal society means that even though some women would like to work, their husbands or other male family members might not approve of it, as Noor stated:

> *Yes, he [husband] cannot stand a lot and work... I asked my brother if he can lend me money because I want to open my own business... My husband came and interfered in the business and he opened a market along with the things that I am selling. My husband likes the woman to stay at home he doesn't like to show that the woman is better than him, so I left him alone working until we were broke and we were in debt.*

Gendered identities, practices and expectations play a role in how vulnerability is experienced related to exposure to risks and hence clear gender gaps in experience of vulnerability. For example, Syrian women are less likely to have legal residency than men (UN Women 2019). Yet, fears related to legal residency seem to restrict men more than women we interviewed as we mentioned above. Gendered experiences are related to the particular risks and exposures of going out from the residence and neighbourhoods. As showed above, Syrian men without legal residency are more worried about going out due to the risk of arrest and even return to Syria. Hence, some Syrian female refugees have taken the role as breadwinners in their families because of the risks to their husbands, sons and fathers who are without legal registration (UN Women 2019). Women, both Syrian and Palestinian we interviewed, are feeling unsafe outside and sometimes within their neighbourhood. However, their fear is more related to harassment and gender-based violence.

4.4. Employment – and securing a livelihood

> *I don't have a fixed job, I work when I find something. I have no other source of income... I make small ovens and sell about 1 or 2 per week to people from the camp or Lebanese outside the camp* (Amani, FSR).

As mentioned above, a foreigner can only work in certain occupations in Lebanon, and all refugees are defined as foreigners. They need a residency permit and a work permit to be able to work. Yet, most Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria do not have access to a work permit due to the costs involved in securing one, and the complexity of the procedures. Palestine refugees in Lebanon must get a free yearly work permit in order to be able to work (ILO 2012, UNRWA 2016). Hence refugees' education paths towards employment in Lebanon are restricted and they feel discriminated in hiring practices and opportunities for employment (see also, UNRWA 2020):

> *I had the chance but the job offer was outside the camp, and they didn't let me work because I am Palestinian and it happened a lot with me* (Huda, FPRL).

> *(Interviewer: Any problems you face to find a job?)*
> *My nationality. I've applied to a lot of jobs in hospitals outside the camp (in Beirut). I get an approval and a praise for my CV but when I provide my documents, I get rejected* (Farah, FPRL).

Most interviewees were working informally and in casual work and did not have a permanent job or even a contract. One Palestinian from Lebanon worked in an organization and was in formal work with a contract, yet it was not permanent. Out of all the other interviewees, all Syrian refugees and Palestinian Refugees from Syria did not have a valid work permit which is representative of the reality today. Women and men in rural areas tend to work as casual workers in agriculture and be subject to the Syrian middleman, the Shaweesh for employment, to which we return in Chapter 5.

In addition to the limited access to salary and income, informal work creates different types of vulnerability related to the level of exploitation people are exposed to, and related to not being paid, being paid too little and having to work long hours. Often, people were working in dangerous working environments and some interviewees had been injured at work: injuries that they could not afford to treat and which had left them disabled and prevented them from continuing to work. Some people feel forced to continue to work for an exploitative employer because of their legal status and fear of being laid off, not getting another job or being reported:

There are few Syrians who work and don't receive money (Israa, FSR).

Some people are nice and others humiliate us for the wages (Qasem, MSR)

There are challenges in finding work related to the Lebanese law that doesn't allow Palestinians to work, and even worse for Palestinian-Syrian refugees. And if I work illegally, I could get arrested and deported. There's also the issue of using Palestinian-Syrian refugees for free labour. It hasn't happened with me, but I've heard of so many people who got screwed over by agencies and there's no legal protection here (Ismail, MPRS).

During COVID and with the current financial situation, more people had problems finding employment and research participants have experienced a marked reduction livelihood opportunities since the beginning of the financial crisis in 2019:

I don't have fixed work, I wish I did. My work is seasonal. I have financial aid from the UN and I used to sell pieces of my daughters' jewellery, but we don't have anything anymore. Our income has decreased, especially this year (Youssef, MSR).

4.5. Health and mental health

With the declining financial situation in the country, access to health services have dramatically deteriorated for all nationalities living in Lebanon (including the Lebanese). Most research participants do not have the financial means to treat their health problems. As Osman (MSR) stated: "It used to be good, but it's not anymore. If you want to go to hospital, even public one, you have to pay a large amount."

Some research participants have serious health conditions, such as debilitating injuries, sometimes from working in an unsafe environment, heart problems, cancer or other potentially fatal illnesses that they cannot seek proper treatment for. Some are suffering injuries from the Syrian war that they cannot treat. Even minor health issues that are left untreated have, in some cases, resulted in chronic health problems, severe deterioration of health and sometimes disability which again affects the ability to work and secure an income for the family. Most individuals we interviewed had themselves or their family members an untreated medical condition that affected their vulnerabilities in specific ways. Many interviewees could not pay for medicine or needed medical assistance beyond the basic assistance covered by the UN or other organisations. Other families had accumulated debts because they had to pay for treatment or medicines they could not afford:

I have diabetes and my wife has hypertension and my daughter has thalassemia...I am paying for her treatment from what I receive from the UNHCR (Hassan, MSR).

Yes, they don't cover everything and you need to go from one organization to another and the organization will keep stalling until they give you 100 USD (Amira, FPRL).

The hospital here doesn't provide everything, so if we have to get a major surgery, we have to go to a private hospital outside the camp. And there are not many specialised doctors there either, it's mostly general health ones (Farah, FPRL).

In itself those health problems caused mental health issues. Similarly, the multiple concerns and pressures of living as a refugee added to the mental toll. Some refugees, notably Syrian refugees and Palestinian Refugees from Syria, mentioned anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of experiencing war and violence in Syria, the loss of their homes as well as experiences of insecurity on the journey from Syria to Lebanon.

Living in a context of deep crisis in Lebanon also affects people's mental health and concerns. These cumulative experiences of distress are affecting research participants profoundly. As Fatima (FSR) states when talking about the need for assistance that she cannot access for her poor mental health: "I'm angry all the time".

> *I got addicted to 'Tramadol'…I was in need of a psychological support, but couldn't afford it, and I didn't find any support from anyone* (Amina, FSR)

Health problems are cumulative over time due to the costs and limited assistance. Hence, health issues contributed profoundly to most refugees feeling of insecurity and vulnerability. 73 percent of those who did not access healthcare could not afford the cost of treatment (VASyR 2021)

4.6. Residential area and housing status

There are substantial regional variations in services, employment and housing between different geographical regions in Lebanon. These differences are also prominent in the research material. We interviewed Syrian refugees living in shelters/informal tented camps with other Syrians in rural areas: Syrians and Palestinians living in the more established and urban camps for Palestinians, as well as Syrians refugees renting in urban areas in Beirut and in the Bekaa outside any formalized camps for refugees. Living in a camp or shelter means people are closer to other refugees and more visible to aid providers and in this way, these more 'institutionalized' settings provide some social security and support. However, particularly the informal tented camps in the Bekaa where people live in tents throughout the year have their challenges in access to heating in the winter, water year-round and other facilities. It gets very cold in the winter, very hot in the summer. A tent does not protect from outside sounds. Hence the living environment is noisy and in addition to feeling less protected from the elements, experiences of raids from police and security is also a challenge due to the visibility of the settlement as a concentration of Syrian refugees.[8]

Similarly for Palestinian refugees, who cannot own property, most refugees feel safe inside their shelters and camps – as being with likeminded people. Many interviewees, particularly women, said they avoid leaving the neighbourhood unless for emergencies, because they feel the danger outside. Some interviewees also referred to tensions between different nationalities when they live together. For example, in the predominantly Palestinian camp of Burj Barajneh, Palestinian Refugees from Lebanon, would state that the Palestinian Refugees from Syria and the Syrian refugees were in a better situation than them due to better access to assistance from the UNRWA and UNHCR respectively.

8 Evictions of families in tents who could not pay rent and even demolitions of tented settlements have been reported, however, none of the research participants we interviewed mentioned this (see, for example, Syria Justice and Accountability Centre 2019).

The Burj Barajneh camp in Beirut is also a good example of the dire housing conditions that affect many of the interviewees. The infrastructure in the camp is in a poor condition and often causes danger such as death by electric shock when it rains due to the wiring and electricity provision to living units. Also, there are many irregular building structures, often not very stable and people referred to collapsing buildings, especially in the winter season. The UNRWA restored some houses but only for a very few registered refugees. There is no ritual checkup from UNRWA on the infrastructure of the camp. Also, the water is salty and with lime scale and is not appropriate for housework, drinking, and bathing.

Generally, all interviewees lived in dire housing conditions – tents or permanent housing alike - experiencing damp, mould, difficulty of heating up living spaces in the winter, and often with less security with windows and doors not shutting properly or absent altogether.

4.7. Social networks

Social networks and hence social capital are significant for making up for and countering the vulnerabilities produced by the state and the condition of displacement. When assistance is needed, many research participants first sought towards their social networks. Those refugees with a stronger social network, whether in their residential area, with relatives and friends in Lebanon or abroad tend to have more security and more diverse sources of assistance when they are in need. In this case, the networks an individual can rely on depend on their displacement history and the details of their stay in Lebanon.

As discussed above, living in a Palestinian camp or a tented settlement means that there are known people in the vicinity and research participants described how they felt safe within such more segregated residential areas, but more vulnerable when they had to leave those areas. Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon, may have more well established local networks than Syrian refugees or Palestinian refugees from Syria. However, as most people were in similarly vulnerable situations, it was also emphasised that assistance may be limited, simply because everyone is in the same boat and there are so few resources available. In this context, research participants differentiated between family and relatives on one hand and friends on the other, as well as financial and psychological- and social support. They emphasised the negative impact of the financial crisis Lebanon, which meant that sharing their challenges and worries were common, while financial support was becoming more difficult:

> *Can you depend on them financially?... Yes, I can. Whenever someone needs something, he has his brother* (Abed, MSR).
>
> *We do have family, but we are in an "each to their own" situation* (Asma, FSR).
>
> *It's a good community, but the people are exhausted, and it's hard for them to support each other especially when they are not happy* (Osman, MSR).

Social support from neighbours were widely mentioned as essential in their day-to-day life. Connections and friendships had formed during their time in the neighbourhoods or were based on life-long connections:

> *It is good we all love each other in the shelter, like here we are from the same village* (Noor, FSR).

> *We were able to build friendships here, whether with Syrians or Lebanese, and we did social visits* (Jamal, MPRS).

Not all interviewees had the same experience of those more segregated spaces, however. Some people did not feel safe in those environments and had chosen to live on the outskirts, particularly due to dangerous infrastructure and crime.

Networks outside the neighbourhood and elsewhere in Lebanon were also mentioned by many research participants: relatives living in other locations in Lebanon and some, particularly people who had worked in Lebanon before the war, had friends from that time that they sometimes sought help from. However, there were limited chances to meet people living further away due to the financial costs of travelling.

Some also mentioned transnational networks, and particularly relatives abroad in Europe, North America, or other Middle Eastern Countries that they sometimes relied on for assistance. However, much of this assistance had dried out during the pandemic, although it still represented a main source of security for many.

While many people would have a network of people they could potentially rely on, some interviewees explained that they would never ask relatives or friends for assistance because it is humiliating. They would rather borrow money in a shop and try to approach local, national or international organisations:

> *I don't talk to anyone, my tears start to come out and I cannot talk to anyone and I don't try to tell anyone anything* (Amira, FPRL)
>
> *Yes, I'm marginalised in this camp and I say it out loud…I only felt humiliation in this camp* (Samir, MPRS).

Finally, there may also be negative dimensions of networks and connection related to a refugee's status in their home country. Some interviewees felt in danger and threatened due to being on the wrong side of the conflict and would not want to associate with people from their country of origin.

> *I don't like moving around I feel like if I moved from a place I cannot live* (Israa, FSR).
>
> *I sit in my house and I am not like how I used to be before* (Amira, FPRL).
>
> *When I first came I felt that there was a lot of discrimination* (Nasima, FPRS).

4.8. Displaced lives and the constitution of vulnerability in the context of compounded crises

Among the refugees interviewed, there is a prevailing opinion that – due to the financial crisis - there are no more vulnerable categories of people than others because of the negative impact of the economic situation on all people residing in the Lebanese Territories. Yet, as we have shown so far, the experience of vulnerability vary from one individual to another. In this final section of the Chapter, we aim to synthesise some of the findings and discuss the intersection of different constituting factors of vulnerability and its specific context of crisis in Lebanon. The majority of the interviewees rationalized their struggles by comparing their problems to the Lebanese population:

> *It is not about a person is better than the other ... in the current situation, everyone needs help* (Ola, FSR).
>
> *We are all at the same level in this camp because of personal and economic conditions. People are exhausted. (…) Yes, they can be Lebanese or Syrian... anyone can get kidnapped or attacked or anything* (Osman, MSR).

This general understandings of living in a context where almost the whole population is vulnerable and suffer from the consequences of compounded crises, including the increasing crime rate that have caused kidnappings and attacks related to robbery as Osman alluded to, coloured most responses and narratives. The specific refugee category and associated legal status of an individual as well as socio-economic dimensions resulting in poverty played essential roles.

4.8.1. Refugee status

Some interviewees believed that their situation – as refugees – is worse than the situation of Lebanese nationals: "If you compare yourself with the Lebanese, I am at a level and they are at a level" (Hana, FSR). Some interviewees felt that the refugee group they represented (Syrian, PRS, PRL) was the worst off as suggested in statements such as "I feel that all Syrians need help" (Wafa, FSR). Research participants would explain their vulnerability compared to others based on access to assistance and social networks: "Of course there are differences. Some people are capable of taking care of themselves, others are not, some can help others" (Mona, FSR). Even when most people are exposed to the same structural conditions, each individual has a story and multiple positionalities that to construct the many different categories of vulnerability that refugees in Lebanon experience. Here, there are also differences between Syrian refugees, Palestinian refugees from Lebanon and from Syria. The more recent experience of war, physical displacement and arrival in Lebanon, combined with limited access to legal residency, affected Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria negatively. Yet, sometimes these groups had better – albeit scattered and random – access to assistance from humanitarian organisations than Palestinian refugees from Lebanon, who on the other hand, have better access to legal residency in the country and may have a wider networks in Lebanon due to the long duration of their stay. Access to employment may also be better among Palestinian Refugees residing in Lebanon than among Palestinian refugees from Syria and Syrian refugees due to access to work permits.

While there are significant differences between the three groups of refugees we have interviewed, our purpose is not to rank different vulnerabilities and different vulnerable groups, rather, we aim to understand how these different positions interact with to produce particular vulnerability outcomes.

4.8.2. Crisis, temporality and poverty

The refugees we interviewed experience a negative spiral of their financial conditions that seem to override all other concerns of vulnerability for most. With the fluctuation of the dollar rate and the Lebanese Lira having lost 95 percent of its value, people's purchasing power is extremely low. Even Syrian refugees among the research participants, most of whom have access to financial support through the UNHCR/WFP, are not able to purchase all the items they were able to get in the past from that financial support. Hence, people are forced to make hard priorities and many cannot afford meat as part of their daily food intake (see also VASYR 2021).

The extreme pressure on their responsibility to secure one's family-needs are mentioned by many interviewees as their main challenge and it is a concern that tends to override the concern for lack of legal residency of most Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria. Generally, and connected with the informalisation of most families' employment, there is a lack of stable income and most people live day by day without any possibility of planning for the future of their families.

The negative economic conditions were amplified during Covid when many families lost their livelihoods due to having to stay at home and businesses closing down:

> *How has the economic crisis affected your life and your family? (…) It was horrible, we couldn't go anywhere. I started selling things that I still owned and I didn't have a job... it was really bad, we were humiliated* (Kathem, MSR).

Over time, refugees have experienced a deprivation of their assets because of the negative financial situation which was amplified during the pandemic. The exclusion to work in many occupations and more formalized employment has affected their access to employment further. Debt – which involves borrowing from family and friends or in shops – is also presented as an important challenge that impacts research participants' vulnerabilities in significant ways. Most families we interviewed have only one working member, or none at all. Hence, they are dependent on aid and – in some few cases - assistance from relatives abroad. Yet, even the assistance has reduced in value due to the crises:

> *We used to get an amount per person, they added 300,000 per person now and 400,000 per family. It used to be enough, but definitely not now* (Samira, FSR).

With the general deterioration of living conditions in Lebanon, Lebanon's financial crisis and the pandemic as tipping points for being plunged further into vulnerability. In an already vulnerable situation, there are few reserves to withstand that crisis. Syrian refugees we interviewed might have had savings or other assets (such as jewellery) when they arrived in Lebanon, but these resources have become depleted over time.

4.8.3. Intersections

The compounded crises grind people down. Over time, people become increasingly vulnerable as they continue to struggle to stay afloat. Also over time, most Syrian refugees have moved into illegality, the rules and regulations changed and as people's financial means became slimmer they could not afford to renew their residency which again affected vulnerability. Similarly for health, over time in the dire financial situation and with limited means for paying for health services beyond the basics, health deteriorations fundamentally affect families' and individuals' capacity to get by in their daily lives.

Within those two broad constituting factors, however, different combinations of vulnerability cause different outcomes and individual experiences: One constituting factor of vulnerability can intersect with other constituting factors and perpetuate vulnerability further. In this context, one significant intersection of vulnerabilities mentioned by the research participants, is to be Syrian, male and without a legal residency: This positionality increases the risk of being detained and possibly returned to Syria, restricts freedom of movement which again limits access to work and social life, which again perpetuate socio-economic vulnerability.

As mentioned above, most interviewees themselves, or someone in their households, had a chronic or acute health condition for which treatment cannot be sought due to financial constraints. Ill-health severely impacts the ability to work and providing a livelihood for oneself and family members. It impacts most other spheres of life such as housing, ability to keep children in school and for many research participants it also affected their mental health.

The interaction of legal status and socioeconomic status shapes people's experience of vulnerability. As we have shown here, both legal conditions and socioeconomic status vary hugely over time and the content of these two broad categories is not fixed or static and vary from person to person. Yet, the experience of vulnerability may often be seen as a snapshot that describes the needs of a refugee at a specific time, yet vulnerability is also created by the past, exemplified above by people's social networks established before flight and during displacement. These trajectories from the past continues into – and intersects with – the futures of displacement: With depleting resources, declining health and not being able to send children to school or only be able to access low quality education, the experience of vulnerability is not a passing situation. The current situation of vulnerability is likely to continue or even increase in the future and for the next generation.

V. SEEKING PROTECTION: VULNERABILITIES AND ENCOUNTERS WITH INSTITUTIONS

In this chapter, we address vulnerabilities from a meso perspective, by considering the interaction between refugees and relevant institutions that are involved in assistance to and protection of Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. By directing our emphasis to this scale, we aim to better understand what relationship refugees have to different institutions and organisations, and how vulnerabilities are affected by the interaction with those bodies, including how refugees negotiate access to protection and assistance in encountering these actors. To this end, we also show how refugees mobilise their – often constrained – agency in Lebanon. The chapter explores the role of, and encounters with, formal and informal institutions, local and national government institutions as well as international organisations (such as the UN system) and local, national and international civil society organisations.

In the Chapter, we are primarily concerned with understanding the encounters with institutions through the experience of the refugees we interviewed. Where relevant, we also bring in the perspective from some of the implementing organisations to make visible the interaction between different meanings and perspectives of vulnerabilities that refugees encounter. 'Protection' is broadly understood as securing rights, both socio-economic and legal rights. These meanings of protection were reflected in the research participants' understanding who brought in their individual refugee experiences as well as their socio-economic status, educational background, gender and age when discussing the meaning of protection (in Arabic, حماية). Most participants related their understanding of protection to their surroundings, a feeling of safety, belonging to their residential area and relations with their families, relatives and neighbours. Huda (FPRS), for example, considered that "protection is based on the area you live in and the people around you and the parents". Majed (MSR) who lives with a physical disability feels protected by his family. Others were more concerned with the wider institutions and systems of protection. Hassan (MSR) defined protection as the act of "protecting the person from threats and persecution" and Ismail (MPRS) directly referred to his country as a place of protection: "Palestine and the fact of being there", while Qasem (MSR) briefly answered "the police". In this context, some mentioned and criticized the protection offered by the Lebanese state and the UNHCR and they differentiated between international and national protection. Yet others, emphasised the independence and satisfaction of an individual, living in dignity and enjoying the fundamental rights of a person in any country. Abed (MSR) for example, stated that "the rights are the most important in this country"; "good humanly living conditions, friendliness, and safety" was Samir's (MPRS) answer. Farah (FPRL) and Muna (FPRS) gave similar answers "Legal, mental, and health". Finally, some participants related protection to Allah and religion.

Despite the differing understandings of protection, the majority of the research participants stressed their need for protection amidst the deteriorating economic and security situation in the country. With the research participants' broader understanding of protection in mind, we now turn to explore how research participants seek protection in Lebanon where the state has taken a 'no-policy policy'. We show how interviewees engage with a multitude of institutions and organisations beyond the state in what is experienced as a fragmented field between state, humanitarian organisations and semi-formal local institutions and actors. We are not discussing all relevant institutions that are dealing with refugees in Lebanon but concentrate on those institutions that research participants mentioned during the interviews.

5.1. Encountering State Institutions

Despite the non-policy approach to refugees in Lebanon, most interviewees had some dealings with Lebanese state institutions. While the state is there to regulate their presence, however, in return there is not much safety. The state largely produces vulnerabilities by making it near to impossible for Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria to stay in legality, by preventing people from accessing employment and through their increasingly prominent discourse of return. With this approach, the relationship to state institutions, including the army, is determined by research participants' legal status and their nationality.

In earlier work (El Daif et al. 2021), we mapped the principal actors of the security response in Lebanon, which were mainly: the General Security (GS), the Lebanese Army Forces (LAF) and the local authorities. We explained that the securitization of refugees has contributed to considering the presence of refugees as threat to the security, infrastructure, and economy of the country. The lack of a clear and comprehensive policy and national response led to fragmentation of the refugee response, and a myriad of state actors: Each state actor involved (see Appendix 1, El Daif et al. 2021) based its response on its mandate and security information without centralized guidance.

In our interviews with refugees, we asked about their dealing with the specific state institutions we had identified in the first stages of this research and in this section, we provide an overview of what institutions research participants mentioned.

The main institutions that were mentioned by Syrian refugees and PRS were the General Security for registration, the municipality for matters dealing with their neighbourhoods and the Lebanon Armed Forces. The latter mainly in connection with raids of tented settlements and detention which tended to be more frequent in the first years after they arrived. Most Syrian refugees had some dealings with municipalities, but some had this contact through the *Shaweesh*, a local middleman, to which we turn below. Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon had less dealings with the state and mentioned the Palestinian Security Committees governing the camps – and which we describe further below – but they were generally feeling more in between the state and the Palestinian fractions.

To achieve an understanding of the relationships to the state, we describe these according to the three main geographical areas where we conducted fieldwork before discussing the encounter some research participants mentioned to the justice system.

5.1.1. Collective Shelter, Koura

In the Collective Shelter in Koura, the official authority in charge of the area was, most research participants explained, the municipality. According to Fares (MSR): "(…) everything here is through the municipality". Across the eight interviews from the shelter, the municipality was mentioned several times, only one interviewee mentioned dealings with the *Serail,* the Personal Status Department which registers births and deaths. Others mentioned the general security for the renewal of their residency papers.

Generally, on direct question about their experiences, interviewees stated that they had good experience from dealing with state authorities, however people had mixed views on this. Ola (FSR) mentioned that the Army or General Security treat refugees well, but when refugees violate the rules, the authorities should stop them. They felt that the security forces did not bother the refugees and the majority of the interviewees gave positive feedback about them. However, they also expressed a feeling of being vulnerable in their encounters with the same institutions: The army used to raid the shelter in the past but recently, especially after the spread of Covid-19, the raids had become less frequent.

In July 2021, just before we visited the shelter, a unit of the Lebanese Army raided the shelter and searched it thoroughly. However, they left without detaining anyone. The interviewees generally understood the main reason for the raid to be searching for weapons. The opinions of the refugees were divided on the experience: some of them welcomed it and considered it routine procedures from the security forces, and others were upset. Other interviewees described their experience with the Lebanese Army when they got detained in the past because of the lack of their legal papers. Reflecting on their experiences, they felt fairly treated and were asked to renew their papers and to pay and were then released. However, later in the interview, some of the research participants were less positive about such encounters and presented more mixed attitudes towards the same government institutions. These mixed messages may be partly related to the feeling – as a refugee – of not having the right to criticise the host state. Such feelings of mistrust and uncertainty in the encounters with the state were more difficult to reflect on and only came out when they felt more comfortable in the interview setting.

5.1.2. Bar Elias informal settlement and town

In the Bar Elias informal settlement and Bar Elias town research participants mentioned their dealing with the Army, the municipality and the Shaweesh. The participants did not seem to have much dealing with the General Security (GS). Most of the research participants did not have legal residency, worked in agriculture nearby and hence did not feel the need for residency.

> *We only dealt with the GS when we renewed our residency. They treated us well and we never had any issues with them* (Amani, FSR).
>
> *It's equal treatment like they would treat the Lebanese* (Osman, MSR).

In our mapping of relevant institutions (El Daif et al. 2021), we discussed the Social Development Centres (SDCs) affiliated to the Ministry of Social Affairs which offer a myriad of services for both Lebanese and non-Lebanese. However, only two interviewees in the settlement mentioned the SDCs, others had not heard about them. In Bar Elias town, more refugees had heard about the SDCs and had tried – unsuccessfully – to seek assistance through them:

> *I contacted them on Facebook... They never got back to me* (Yasmine, FSR).
>
> *Yes, we deal with them usually. I asked them for assistance, but they haven't responded* (Osman, MSR).

Most residents did not complain about the Lebanese security authorities' (the Lebanese Armed Forces and General Security) and behaviours toward them, and as in Koura, upon direct question, stated that they were treated respectfully. However, one research participant with a physical disability who had been detained due to his legal status felt he was unfairly treated.

5.1.3. Burj Al Barajneh Palestinian Camp and neighbourhoods

In the third area, in Burj Al Barajneh Palestinian Camp, a Security Committee composed of different armed Palestinian parties is in charge of all internal security issues. The camp is not under the authority of the Lebanese State. The committees "are often referred to as municipality-like bodies in the sense that they oversee service provision and the related informal taxation, operate as a land registry, serve as intermediaries in judicial matters and social conflict, and have a related security committee that polices the settlements. (…) while the Popular Committees are officially civil bodies, they are heavily politicized and are perceived by Palestinians as party structures rather than public, communal bodies" (Stel 2021: 161).

Palestinian camps have seen many attempts of local governance to oversee services and other activities, yet the more enduring actors are often the political fractions that are part of the everyday fabric of the camps (Abou-Zaki 2013, Issa 2018). While the camps in many ways are treated as "extraterritorial spaces – outside the state's sphere of control and responsibility" (Ramadan and Fregonese 2017: 10), the camps are still included in the Lebanese state's punitive and disciplinary reach (Stel 2021). Yet, most refugees we interviewed had limited relation with the Lebanese authorities, but camp residents and residents in surrounding neighbourhoods, shared the experience with the General Security with whom they dealt for renewing the residencies such as legal papers (for the PRS), and the passports (for the PRL). The majority of PRL/PRS we interviewed in these areas mentioned their positive experience with the GS and did not experience any discrimination in those encounters. One interviewee mentioned that there is a separate section for the Palestinian refugees at the GS which is why they don't feel the discrimination. However, interviewees felt discriminated against more generally:

> *Of course there's discrimination* (Adel, MPRS).
>
> *Yes, of course. There's discrimination on all fronts* (Basma, FPRS).

Others felt that their exclusions in the society was represented through the camp:

> *(…) we are living in a shelter where the police cannot go in* (Nasima, FPRS).

In this context, most people knew about the security committee, but some did not know who its members were or they were aware of the different political parties that were involved, but also felt overwhelmed by the tensions and differing interests:

> *(…) there's a committee but I don't know who its members are* (Amal, FPRL).
>
> *The committees, Tahrir organisation, and the security committee – they collaborate really well* (Adel, FPRS).

The political affiliations in the camps and other power dynamics present specific protection challenges and vulnerabilities where Palestinian refugees find themselves between the Lebanese State and Palestinian political factions. The interviewees did not talk much about these types of relationships, but Amira (PRL) stated: "You cannot know. You feel like all the shelter is filled with people in charge."

5.1.4. Seeking Justice in front of State institutions

When the rights of a person who is illegally present in Lebanon are violated, the rules and laws vary. They depend on deciding whether the authorities apply the Immigration Law (the 1962 Law Regulating the Entry and Stay of Foreigners in Lebanon) criminalizing the refugee for illegal residency in Lebanon or the legal provisions protecting the same refugee because they cover all persons present on the land of the country (El Daif et al. 2021). Hence, it is fully possible for refugees to seek to be covered by the legal provisions of the country. Yet, as we have showed so far, the research participants expressed an ambivalent relationship to state institutions. It was also clear that the majority did not prefer to go to a police station to report if any of their rights were breached. Their approach, in case of any dispute or violation of their rights, was to attempt to resolve the matter amicably and avoid any further conflict or attention. Some of them preferred to seek assistance from the UNHCR first, but as we show later in this chapter, they often did not succeed in receiving assistance. Some had heard of other organisations providing legal assistance but again had not managed to access them. The shared reality for most of the interviewees was then mistrust in the system, the uncertainty of whether they would be seen as a someone with a legitimate claim. The outcome was that most interviewees let go of the issue and rather than seeking justice, as some said, would "rely on God":

> *Several things happen here and we try to solve it without getting the police* (Amir, MSR).
>
> *It depends on the situation. It has to be worth it* [to go to the police] (Majed, MSR).
>
> *Let's be honest if I want to go to the police to complain about a Lebanese person, the government will stand with him not against him* (Ali, MSR).

It was thus an exception among the refugees we interviewed if they decided to seek to access their right under the Lebanese laws. One such exception was Israa, a female Syrian refugee who explained her experience with the Lebanese judiciary system regarding her daughter's divorce case. The daughter was under the legal age at the time and was experiencing domestic violence. Israa was able to attend the court procedures on behalf of her daughter even though she did not hold a valid legal residency. She felt she was treated equally to the Lebanese. However, because of the lack of residency papers, they could not close the case which remains unresolved. This experience affected Israa's trust in official Lebanese institutions and she decided never to seek assistance from them again "if you want to seek help from these people and they do not respond I prefer staying at home" (Israa, FSR).

Another exception was told by staff in one of the organisational interviews we conducted: The organisation represented a group of 24 Palestinian refugees in South Lebanon before the Lebanese Labour Arbitration Council. The Palestinian refugees were working for a Lebanese company, and they were arbitrarily dismissed during Covid-19. The organisation engaged in collaborative dispute resolution through a lawyer. As a result, the refugees were compensated for the arbitrary dismissal, and they were satisfied with the outcome of the negotiations. In this case, and without more systematic evidence, what is clear is that the support from organisations and legal actors is necessary for refugees to have the courage and resources to manoeuvre through the legal system. Most organisations are not assisting with legal residency but there are some provisions for legal assistance for other matters such as birth and marriage registration and employment cases and housing.

5.2. Local and more informal institutions

With the lack of a comprehensive national framework for refugees, a number of more semi-informal and local institutions have emerged. Stel (2021: 86-87) refers to these institutions as an increasing formal informality in Lebanon's response to the Syrian refugee crisis indicating: "that exploitative institutions are informally encouraged and co-opted by security agencies, but never formally recognized by civil authorities, while more committee-like structures emerging in Syrian settlements are systematically undermined."

For the Syrian refugees in the Bekaa and for the research participants we interviewed in the tented settlement in Bar Elias, the *Shaweesh* has come to play a crucial role. The Shaweesh has traditionally been men managing foreign labour in Lebanon. However, as UNHCR (2018) shows, the word found a new meaning with the arrival of Syrian refugees. He, normally – but not always – a man, acts as a settlement supervisor and decision-maker. He is sometimes appointed by the refugees (ibid.) but does not generally appear as a representative of the refugees residing in a settlement, who are generally marginalized and without representation (Stel, 2021). More often, the Shaweesh is a Syrian middleman between the landowner and the informal camp, sometimes appointed by the General Security, sometimes by the Lebanese landowner of the local municipality and may take on the role as an informer (Ghaddar 2017, Stel 2021). Ghaddar (2017) describes the Shaweesh: "If nothing else, the Shawishes are a perversion in a system that is reinforced by State Security actors, ignored by the ministry of interior and local municipalities, convenient for landowners, and problematic for aid organizations and refugees."

In all cases, the Shaweesh is powerful in the informal camps. He collects rent from refugees, sometimes receives a commission for the work that refugees may do on landowner's land and has the authority to allow people to settle, decides how to distribute aid that arrives in the settlement. The Shaweesh even has the power to decide whether a girl should go to school or not (El Helou 2014). Consequently, the Shaweesh is an ambivalent character that contributes to the exploitation of the refugees but is at the same time being exploited by the landowners and the state (Ghaddar 2017).

The research participants in this study explained that the Shaweesh acted as a link between the refugees and the Lebanese authorities, international and national organisations and even as a contact for the Syrian intelligence forces. Hence, the complex relationship to the Shaweesh was reflected among the research participants in multiple ways. Women living in the settlement tended to work locally in agriculture being employed through the Shaweesh. Men – regardless of their legal status – tended to work further away from home in the Bar Elias area. This is how one Shaweesh we interviewed described his role in agricultural work:

> *I agree on the fees with the landowners, and I get workers from the camp, I drive them to and from work in my car. I pay them their fees or they get the equivalent in food supplies. Otherwise, they have nothing to do. Refugees are not well off, this is not enough and some are living off boiled potatoes* (Osman, MSR).

In some cases, the research participants were friends or relatives with the Shaweesh and benefitted from their presence. In other case, however, interviewees described their difficult relationship or experience with the Shaweesh when aid was not distributed fairly or agricultural labourers felt exploited. One research participants explained that he was evicted from his tent in a settlement when he did not abide by the Shaweesh' instruction that his wife had to work on the landowners' fields.

The Shaweesh, then a crucial actor, specifically for refugees in tented settlements in the Bekaa, contributed to the feeling of being subject to control and marginalization for some and was an avenue for access to some limited privilege for others.

5.3. Encounters with International organisations

International organisations, here primarily referred to as those organisations representing the UN system, have a prominent presence in the humanitarian response to refugees in Lebanon. They play a role for both financial and legal matters. In this section, we show how interviewees talk about and describe their contact with these organisations.

5.3.1. UNHCR and the World Food Programme

"Vulnerability has hit everyone and the only way to fix that is by fixing the economy. If the economy wasn't this bad in Lebanon, we wouldn't be struggling like this. The UN card used to cover 75 percent of our needs and now it barely covers 25 percent", Qasem (MSR) affirmed.

UNHCR's Multipurpose Cash Assistance Programme (MCAP) and the World Food Programme's Cash for Food (CFF) figured as the most prominent providers of cash assistance among the Syrian refugees we interviewed. As mentioned by Qasem, however, even this cash assistance has reduced in value due to the dire economic situation in the country. In addition to the cash assistance, many Syrian refugees mentioned UNHCR as an important institution for their day-to-day existence. Their experience with the organisation varied hugely, and this experience also coloured the many different views on the UNCHR expressed among the research participants. Some research participants had received assistance with registration papers, the process of renewal of registration, in addition to the financial assistance, and they stated that they had much hope in assistance from the UNHCR and considered UNHCR their representative. Amir (MSR) had recently received assistance from the UNHCR and was very happy with the help they had received: "the government turned off the shelter's electricity by removing the main cable, so people went to the UNHCR, which reconnected the cable. This made us feel that the UNHCR is protecting us in this matter."

Over time, however, most research participants' experience with the organisation was one of disappointment and some complained about being cut from the monthly cash aid without any explanation or facing delays in accessing cash assistance. The immense struggles to communicate and get in touch with the organisation, and a feeling of being neglected meant that many no longer trusted the UNHCR.

> *No, they stopped helping me for a year and a half, then they started giving again* (Israa, FSR).

> *There are many people in the camp here who have been cut off from the cards. Some people don't have phones or chargers for their phones so they did not receive the* [UN] *texts; some get busy with work and life and miss the memo and that's why they get disqualified from receiving aid through that card. Even*

if these people call again, the UN are too busy to get back to them (Mona, FSR).

Some few research participants felt they had managed to contact UNCHR and receive a helpful response, but a more dominant experience was the multiple ways in which they had struggled to get in touch with them. They call and call but cannot get through and they are trying to access them to get legal assistance, help to register their new-born babies, or apply for resettlement, but they find it extremely challenging to get through. Yasmine (FSR) stated "I've been advised to contact them but when I do, no one picks up the phone…I will make a sacrifice and go for my daughter. I feel that my family and I need financial protection". Osman (MSR) said: "There is the international protection (the UN one), and the State protection. We need both protections to feel safe. However, the protection of the Lebanese State is not available, neither to the Lebanese nor to the Syrian".

Other Syrian refugees among our interviewees received their food aid from the World Food Programme, research participants tended to know from which organization they received cash assistance. Interviewees also knew about the role that the UNHCR plays in resettlement, like Ola (FSR): "I tried talking to the UNCHR and I told them to take me out somewhere else to another country and they said this is not their duty to do so". We discuss resettlement further below.

5.3.2. UNRWA

Assistance for Palestinian refugees from Syria and Lebanon is experienced as more important than the Lebanese state for most Palestinians. All Palestinian refugees from Lebanon that we interviewed and the majority, but not all, Palestinian Refugees from Syria, were registered with the UNRWA.

Contrary to the stable and almost universal cash assistance offered by UNHCR to Syrian refugees, we noticed that the support offered by UNRWA fluctuated considerably between the Palestinian refugees we interviewed. We were not able to confirm the main criteria for assistance, and it even varied within the group of PRS and PRL. For example, some PRS families were given monthly monetary help, for others, UNRWA covered the house rent. Common support for all Palestinian refugees from Lebanon and Syria, was medical support and support in the education sector through the UNRWA-schools. UNRWA in Lebanon provides education services to 39,144 Palestinian refugee students in its 65 schools Some Palestinian refugees mentioned that the people in need get financial aid every 3 months (UNRWA 2022b).

With Lebanon's economic crisis, many interviewees thought that UNRWA should increase the aid it offers them, but were disappointed that the reality is the opposite. Consequently, and because most Palestinian refugees rely on support due to the crisis, they are not satisfied with its assistance and consider it marginal. Hence, criticizing the UNRWA system and the lack or the inequality of services was widespread among most Palestinian refugees we interviewed. Many refugees mentioned that access to assistance from UNRWA was dependent on personal connections and corruption (wasta) (Amira, FPRL and Ismail, MPRS):

(…) yes I told you if I have "Wasta" they [UNRWA] *give me aid, but if I don't have, they don't give me. I've gone and sought help for my three daughters and my disabled husband, they registered me and took my number. They told me that they would call when they distribute, but they didn't. I don't go and curse and say bad things to take what is mine, I don't act like this* (Amira, FPRL).

Finally, the lack of connection and communication was adding to the grievances for some participants, especially after the Covid-19 outbreak. Some had given up trying to fight the system. Before the pandemic, some participants mentioned that UNRWA used to communicate with them frequently, by conducting surveys over the phone or by visiting them and checking on them and asking about their documents and offering legal support. Jamal (MPRS) mentioned the lack of funding for UNRWA as a cause for the lack of aid and services, but others were less understanding and felt left alone.

5.4. Approaching health institutions

In Chapter 4 we showed that health is a major issue in refugees' experience of vulnerability. Health services in Lebanon are largely privatised and under pressure due to the pandemic, the financial crisis and the Beirut explosion (VASyr 2022). The ability to respond to the needs of the vulnerable populations is decreasing and accessing basic lifesaving health care has become a challenge for most people in Lebanon (UNHCR 2021a). Under the framework of the Lebanon Crisis Plan, UNHCR contracted 33 hospitals across the country where Syrian refugees can access treatment for urgent lifesaving conditions (UNHCR 2022a). Additionally, Syrian refugees have access to Primary Health Care (PHC) services such as free childhood vaccination, subsidized diagnostic tests for the most vulnerable groups at 149 PHC facilities across the country supported either by UNHCR, its implementing partners or by other actors (UNHCR 2021b). Vaccines and essential acute medicines are provided free of charge, with a small handling fee for chronic disease medicines.

In the UNHCR-contracted hospitals, UNHCR covers 75 percent of the cost of hospitalizations above USD 100 up to USD 2,900. Treatment, as a consequence of SGBV, torture and acute malnutrition, as well as COVID-19 is fully covered. Refugees with conditions requiring long term, specialized and high-cost treatment (chronic diseases) are not covered by the UNHCR.

Access to health services for Palestinian Refugees from Lebanon and Syria differ from that of Syrian refugees as they mainly rely on UNRWA assistance, who are operating 28 Primary Health Care Facilities. Access to secondary healthcare is ensured in coordination with the Palestine Red Crescent Society (NRC 2020). Other access to health care for Palestinian refugees is provided by the private sector, which has high fees. There is a reimbursement scheme in place for secondary and tertiary care (UNRWA 2022c). However, research participants did not seem to access reimbursements.

The inability to pay for health services is a profound challenge for all groups and the scramble for securing support for treatment is the norm for most interviewees, regardless of status and nationality. Encountering health institutions is also experienced as a space of discrimination for most of the interviewees:

> *We go to the dispensary and the closest hospital. There's a bit of discrimination, they let other people before me because I'm Syrian* (Saleh, MSR).

> *In 2019, my eldest son had a bicycle accident, and I took him to hospital, he was unconscious. He had been hit by a car and I didn't see it. Of course, I was panicking, my son wouldn't recognise me at all. He was bleeding from everywhere, his nose was broken, and they wouldn't admit him unless I paid. I was begging them to treat him, I said I'd get the money and I said I'd sue them for not taking him in* (Sana, FSR).

UNHCR only works with some hospitals, and not necessarily the closest ones to some of the research participants. Hence, some interviewees explained how they had to pay for treatment because they could not afford the transport to a UNHCR contracted hospital. Sometimes, the experience of discrimination resulted in being sent away at the entrance, as Khalil (MSR) described: "We are able to go to the clinics through the UNHCR but if we don't pay for the insurance the hospitals will not let us enter."

Palestinian refugees, as mentioned above, do get some assistance from UNRWA for basic health services, and as Khaled (MPRL) stated, "The UNRWA is covering my medicine... I go every 2-3 months and get it from them". Yet, Palestinian and Syrian refugees alike must pay to cover their full medical needs, and most of the research participants simply cannot afford to stay healthy by treating medical conditions. They recount how the only thing they are offered if they cannot pay is Panadol. This experience is amplified by the crisis in Lebanon and medicines are generally difficult to find, even if there is financial means to pay for it. Reem (FSR) explained: "We go to Bar Elias clinic and we pay 3,000 LBP [fees for the treatment] but there are no medicines."

Most interviewees scramble for help and seek assistance from civil society organizations to try to get support to cover medical bills:

> *Organisations didn't help with even providing medication for my daughter she needs for other medical issues. Organisations that work only with people with disabilities helped me temporarily (Yasmine, FSR).*

It is to the encounters with civil society organisations we now turn.

5.5. Interaction with civil society organisations

Access to assistance was highly dependent on whether the research participant was Syrian or Palestinian (including Palestinian Refugees from Syria). Access also varied according to residential area because organisations tended to work in specific areas only and in agreement with local municipalities. However, during the pandemic, most research participants had only remote access to organisations through phone calls and emails. Generally, interviewees felt that they had little say over assistance to their areas, that assistance was irregular and that it was not easy to understand who were and were not eligible for assistance. For example, some interviewees mentioned that they could only access assistance from civil society organisations during the month of Ramadan and that assistance had detrimentally slowed down during the pandemic.

> *I tried with* [an international NGO] *because I'd heard that they offer accommodation aid. They promised they'd help, they said they'd send a team to my home, but they never did. This was a long time ago* (Marwan, MSR).

Which area an interviewee resided in also contributed to determine what kind of access to assistance research participants identified. In some areas where specific organisations operated, there was somewhat more mention of assistance – ongoing or that had happened in the past. There was frustration expressed towards organisations dropping in with a needs assessment for then never to return to the area again, a well-known narrative from displacement-settings across the world (Brun 2010). Some interviewees felt that an organisation had promised help but never delivered. The disillusionment regarding assistance was thus prominent.

Palestinian refugees from Lebanon had less access to assistance from civil society organisations than Syrian refugees who also felt that they had limited access, but still reported more contact with civil society organisations than Palestinians we interviewed. The experiences are reflected in The Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Olivier De Schutter (UN Human Rights Council 2022: 8) description of the assistance to Syrian refugees in Lebanon as "Chronically underfunded, piecemeal humanitarian assistance by the international community is the only lifeline for many, given practically insurmountable obstacles in accessing decent jobs and basic services."

Some research participants, mainly women, mentioned that they attended awareness sessions by organisations as part of receiving assistance. Some mentioned the value of the social support they received from those sessions and that the organisations had become someone to turn to in difficult times. Yet, generally, research participants looked to the civil society to seek assistance for food, health services and medicine, education for their children and housing (such as the need for repairs, help to pay rent and to keep warm in the winter). Interviewees felt the assistance they received from civil society and international organisations was not enough, but most expressed an understanding of the pressures that organisations were under in order to support as many as possible with limited funds. Hence, the need to prioritise to reach the most vulnerable was generally understood, but how organisations prioritised was not understood. Some interviewees, like Ola (FSR), who did not receive assistance felt they should have been eligible for assistance; others expressed doubts regarding the relevance of the type of aid their area received.

The research participants' experiences were to a large extent reflected and confirmed in interviews with implementing civil society organisations. Interviewees from organisations exposed a nuanced understanding of the meaning of vulnerability but this nuance was perhaps not always reflected in implementation. This was particularly related to how organisations often needed to adopt different definitions of vulnerability – and hence different eligibility criteria – from one project to the next. These fluctuations were sometimes due to funders' requirements, although other organisations were very clear that they would never accept conditionalities from funders. Other reasons for the fluid meaning of vulnerability was due to the changing contexts or that different projects required different understandings of how to define the most vulnerable.

Some organisations used the vulnerability assessments in VASyR and VARON as their main source of data for making priorities. As one NGO interviewee said: "The notion of vulnerability that is used the most is monetary poverty as measured by monthly expenditures per capita. (…) the ones with the lowest monthly expenditures are considered to be the most vulnerable and are targeted with the combined package of multipurpose cash for food and basic needs" (NGO interview, SH-61). Others used a categorical understanding of vulnerability such as women and children (SH-66), while some were focusing more on a particularly vulnerable area or neighbourhood.

The interviewees from organisations explained how, during Covid and with the financial crisis, the categories of vulnerable groups had changed to include both refugees and Lebanese "as everyone are vulnerable now".

Most assistance requires a refugee to be proactive and seek assistance. Often, the first point of contact with an organization may be facilitated by a friend or relative who may be informing an organization about someone being widowed and in dire need of support. On other situations, a friend or relative accompanied the interviewee to the organisation or called on their behalf, indicating the importance of

social networks as described in Chapter 4. However, in other situations, interviewees reflected on how much time they had spent contacting organisations over the phone, email or trying to visit their offices – often without much luck. With the ongoing crisis, some spend hours every week trying to secure some assistance, frequently without much results. Being on the phone or even travelling to an organisation's office comes with a substantial cost which might make aid even more out of reach for some.

Our interviewees confirm the statement by the UN Human Rights Council (2022: 19): "the rapidly unfolding humanitarian needs of Lebanon in the last two years have led international donors to scramble aid, adopt opaque benefit distribution methods and become inefficient (…)."

The civil society organisations we interviewed also mentioned how difficult it is to manage the pressure of the overwhelming need on the ground. Organisations had developed different strategies to cope with this: Some had made themselves more accessible through mobile units or community centres in the neighbourhoods where refugees live. A common strategy was a helpline that refugees could call, and many interviewees reported calling such helplines frequently. However, other organisations, notably more international ones, had made themselves less accessible to cope with the pressure:

> *We have a focal person, complaint and feedback officer ... complaints sensitive and non-sensitive complaints* (SH-58).
>
> *With the mobile units we reach out to the refugees and to the Lebanese population who are living in remote areas. As for the urban or rural areas where we have community centres, our outreach strategy is related to the fact that we're present in the centre of the village, usually next to the municipality, or next to places where people would gather, it's a lot about word of mouth* (SH-59).
>
> *We cannot deny the important role played by the outreach volunteers, the refugee ones and the Lebanese one in order to explain what kind of services* (SH-59).
>
> *We have centralised the community helpline (...) think it has to be contextualized to how* [the organization] *is also known in the communities* (SH-60).

For the research participants, this inaccessibility and limited understanding of what kind of assistance may be possible, increases the feeling of uncertainty and hence vulnerability. Generally, the limited information about, and involvement in, assistance meant more speculation and feeling of being overlooked and forgotten by the international and national civil society. The assistance received, which was crucial for people's lives, was nevertheless mainly short term and for survival rather than assistance that could have helped with more long-term development of their lives.

5.6. The dream of moving on: institutional encounters for resettlement and other durable solutions

Research participants did not generally look to civil society organisations for legal assistance, assistance to get legal residency or to seek assistance for resettlement. Some research participants had heard about the resettlement opportunities through the UNHCR or about the humanitarian corridors offered by the migration project titled Mediterranean Hope[9]. One interviewee and their family had even succeeded in being selected for assistance to seek asylum in Italy. The programme offers humanitarian visas, and upon arrival in Italy in December 2021, they applied for asylum. Hassan, a male Syrian refugee, had heard about the initiative through a group visiting his neighbourhood from an international organization providing "awareness sessions". He welcomed them into his residence and told them about his family's health issues and economic challenges. The representative from the organisation took all their details, filled a request and sent it to an email. The request then took three years to process and meanwhile Hassan and his family were interviewed through the phone multiple times before receiving the approval to travel at the end of 2021.

However, most refugees we interviewed had not been so fortunate and generally knew very little about the procedures for applying for resettlement due to the unavailability of public information on resettlement. Mona (FSR) told us her family thought they had applied for resettlement, but realized it was a fraud and they lost the money they had paid for the application. Others – among the Syrian refugees - were aware of the resettlement process, some had tried and some did not qualify:

> *I call the UNHCR every day to travel outside Lebanon and I do this for my kids* (Abed, MSR).
>
> *I am aware about the procedures* [for resettlement]*, but because I'm not registered with the UN, I cannot apply. and cannot return to Syria because he is wanted for military service* (Marwan, MSR).
>
> *Resettlement is the best solution. The war that we lived with in Syria was fought with bombings and the war we are fighting here is an economic one* (Samira, FSR).

Some interviewees thought that they had to apply for resettlement, and not to wait for UNHCR to select them for resettlement.[10] Yet others had been offered resettlement early on, but had rejected it, thinking the displacement would be short lived and there was no need to move further away from Syria.

As a result, UNHCR's resettlement programmes are seen as ambiguous and without transparency for the different organisations' staff and refugees themselves.

> *(Interviewer) Why do UNHCR refer to you and don't deal with refugees themselves?*
> *This is not clear for us, maybe they could be refused by UNHCR, or by the embassy of the country that they would be resettle to or maybe also they don't have much capacities… UNHCR does not share a lot about this* (NGO interview, SH-68).

For Palestinian refugees, the discussion on resettlement was not relevant, yet many of the interviewees wanted to move away from Lebanon but were aware that it would be difficult to find another country who could accept them:

9 Mediterranean Hope is a migration project of the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI), financed in large part by the Otto per Mille tax allocation of the Waldensian Church – Union of Methodist and Waldensian Churches (Mediterranean Hope 2022).
10 The information is available on UNHCR's home pages under "Frequently asked questions" (UNHCR 2022b).

I wish to resettle abroad (Basma, FPRS).

They are saying that the countries outside are better than here as living conditions and as everything as education and everything is better outside (Hanan, FPRL).

While the discourse of return is still strong among Palestinians, the research participants we interviewed did not realistically discuss return as an option. Most Syrians we interviewed were also rather sceptical about the idea of return to Syria:

My living conditions will change drastically because I don't have a place to live in Syria so where do I want to put my children (Ola, FSR).

I have nothing left in Syria except the land where the house was built and the house was destroyed by a bomb (Kathem, MSR).

Syria and Lebanon have the same situation, you cannot go back to Syria and you cannot stay here since things are getting worse for us and the Lebanese, we are the same so a third country is a good solution." …." I only hear them saying resettlement, and I don't know what it means (Israa, FSR).

Generally, the possibility of resettlement is very slim and only an option for the very few. Return does not feel like a realistic alternative either so staying in Lebanon and mobilising to stay afloat is the only option most research participants can see.

5.7. Mobilising constrained agency in the context of alienation, deprivation, non-representation and marginalization.

The Chapter has showed that there are significant differences in the experiences of the migration governance systems among the groups of Palestinian refugees from Lebanon, Palestinian refugees from Syria and Syrian refugees and that the different groups often relate to different structures. Nevertheless, across the three groups there are also shared experiences. The encounter with governance structures are often described as feelings of alienation, deprivation and non-representation which leads to marginalization and hence increased vulnerability. For many Syrian interviewees, the additional fear attached to their illegal status leads to further deprivation of rights and increasing vulnerabilities. The financial crisis, however, overshadows most encounters and negotiations that refugees engage in and as we showed here, the state institutions are not among the actors that refugees would turn to for support.

In both the grey- and academic literature (UNHCR 2021c, VASyr 2021, Nabulsi et al. 2020) and in many of the organisational interviews we conducted, the common language to describe the strategising that people are forced into as a result of the compounded crises is 'negative coping strategies' or 'negative coping mechanisms' defined by the UNHCR (2021c) as "begging, borrowing money, not sending their children to school, reducing health expenses or not paying rent". However, the concept of negative coping strategies is taken for granted and not questioned or nuanced. Yet, we found that among the interviews we conducted with staff in organisations, there were some more reflection on this term:

I've always been against this terminology of negative coping mechanism, given the fact that in most if not all of the cases, the individuals have no other option...this is just the reality (NGO interview, SH-59).

The quote indicates the importance of unpacking the realities beyond the so-called negative coping strategies. We suggest adopting the term 'constrained agency' (Coe and Jordhus-Lier 2011) rather than negative coping strategies in order to better understand the interaction of the individual capacity and the contextual constraints that impact on refugees' vulnerability and ability to cope with the multiple crises they encounter. As we have showed here, there are different layers or spheres of barriers that refugees manoeuvre in order to mobilise what can be described as 'constrained agency'. In Chapter 3 and in the current Chapter, we have shown that the individual constraints that refugees experience derive from their history, and social capital, their current location and access to livelihoods, their specific legal status and the specific outcomes of the institutional measures that they encounter due to their status. The strategising that refugees have to turn to in the context of compounded crises may lead to a downward spiral of deprivation of resources and increased vulnerability. Yet, at the national level, the overlapping dimensions of legal and institutional measures that represent the structural constraints contribute to produce individual vulnerabilities.

Mobilisation of agency takes place in the encounters with institutions. The multiple calls and attempts to get hold of organisations, for example, is one of the few lifelines that remain for many people. However, seeing this reality from the organisations we interviewed, the organisations adopt multiple exclusion strategies in attempting to keep people away due to the limited capacity to meet people's needs. Yet, this experienced inaccessibility contributes to the feeling of alienation and deprivation. Many interviewees expressed a strong sense of being left alone. Emphasising the constrained agency as we consider it here, is the unidirectional relationship that all interviewees have with the institutions they encounter: It is a one-way relation, with the refugee asking for assistance, yet having no say over the priorities of the assistance or their access to rights. Refugees we interviewed do not feel that they have representation and a voice, and this lack of influence over decisions that affect their lives is a significant dimension in the experience and production of vulnerability. The isolation and inability to feel like members of a community contributes significantly to their understanding of the situation in displacement: there is no-one to protect them and it is expressed as a feeling of loneliness:

> *There is no-one to represent the refugees (…) No one is by my side* (Ola, FSR).

> *Yes, I feel I am more vulnerable than others because I have no one in my life and because of the circumstances that I am in. I cry all the time (Asma, FSR).*

> *So that's my weak point now. No one is going to help me in this case, it's everyone for themselves. And in this camp, it's like we're in jail, we can't go anywhere or visit anyone (Yasmine, FSR).*

While some Syrian refugees did feel that UNHCR was their representative, over time, many had lost trust in the organisation as we showed above. Adding to this feeling was the experience of discrimination, including a negative public discourse on refugees and in accessing health services, resulting in Syrian refugees in particular being afraid of confronting state institutions. Palestinian refugees experienced discrimination differently, feeling that they were between a rock and a hard place with limited protection from the state and from Palestinian fractions. For Syrians, there is a certain nervousness related to not feeling any support and protection, combined with fear of having to return to Syria, which has become an explicitly expressed policy from the Government of Lebanon. The Lebanese state is not the institution people seek to for assistance.

The complexity of the situation and the institutional voids means that the social networks and social capital that people have built play a crucial role in gaining access and finding their way. However, sometimes, the situation is just too dire and the constraints too much to be able to identify a positive outcome as one of our interviewees from the civil society stated:

> *For me there is no resilience of refugee because resilience should be a choice and they did not choose to move to Lebanon...I mean resilience, being the capacity to adapt, I think that we reach a point where people are not able anymore to come to adapt* (SH-59).

This experience is reflected among the refugees we interviewed too: the feeling of always being in crisis and with no future in Lebanon:

> *There's no future, we used to think about tomorrow, but now we don't, we live worrying about how we'll get through the day. I used to dream about things. My only need right now is to keep my job* (Aya, FPRL).

VI. VULNERABILITIES AND MIGRATION POLICIES

In July 2022, Lebanon's caretaker Minister for the Displaced announced that Lebanon – within months – plan to start repatriating 15,000 Syrian refugees a month (Al Jazeera 2022). However, this decision is not supported by the international community, and it is unclear at the time of writing to what extent the process has been agreed with Syrian authorities. The announcement is not surprising given the dominant discourse, also supported by the international community: that Syrian refugees is a huge burden to Lebanon and that the only viable solution is for the refugees to return. The return discourse combined with the discourse on the economic costs of hosting refugees have come to dominate the current public mood towards Syrian refugees.

The anti-refugee sentiment is also experienced by Palestinian refugees. In fact, understanding the role of governance and production of vulnerabilities among Lebanon's refugees must be discussed in relation to the history of hosting Palestinian refugees, the geopolitical situation of Lebanon, and its economic interests as discussed in Chapter 3. In this Chapter we discuss some relevant migration policies that need to be taken into account to understand the production of vulnerabilities in the Lebanon context. There are three interacting – and overlapping – spheres of national and international policies: The government policies and state interests; the humanitarian community and the crisis response plans[11] (LCRP 2022) that are formulated in collaboration with the Government of Lebanon; and the global policy reflected in the Global Compact on Refugees (UN 2018). In this context, macro policies are moving targets, and the refugees residing in Lebanon have been subject to different policies and discourses over the years they have resided in Lebanon. In what follows, we synthesise some of the insights from the previous two chapters based in refugees' experiences by reflecting on these macro scale policies.

6.1. Production of vulnerabilities as temporal injustice in the tension between Lebanon's and the international community's approach and interests

In Chapter 3, we set out the three main factors shaping the discourse on vulnerability in Lebanon: the laws concerning vulnerability, the government policies, and the humanitarian response (El Daif et al. 2021). Crucially, these factors derive from two different approaches and interests that are embedded in the governance of refugees. One is Lebanon's approach of defining itself largely as a transit state and adopting a securitisation approach where refugees are considered a security threat (Fakhoury 2020, Janmyr 2018). The other approach is the international community's understanding of the situation as a protracted refugee situation where the priority is to help refugees to survive where they are and at the same time prevent refugees from moving to Europe (Brun et al. 2021, Shuayb and Brun 2021).

Both approaches come with challenges that, as we have shown here, profoundly affect refugees in Lebanon. The spatio-temporal outlook for the two approaches may be slightly different: The security approach takes a hard-line on the refugees being temporarily present and should not be granted access to the society in a way that may indicate prolonged stay: The ultimate aim is that refugees should return. On the other hand, the humanitarian approach, while being mainly about short term assistance for the receivers of aid to survive, recognises the protractedness of the situation, but nevertheless do not have the mandate to shift towards a more long-term perspective in their assistance.

11 According to LCRP (2022): "The LCRP promotes the strategic priorities identified by the GoL and partners, with interventions aligned to national policies and strategies, responding to evolving needs, and seeking to complement and build on other international assistance in the country."

For the refugees then, the temporal outcome of the two approaches is experienced as largely the same: a permanent impermanence where refugees' future status in Lebanon continues to be one of uncertainty for the future: a sense of being stuck (Brun 2016). This experience of vulnerability towards what will happen in the future represents a temporal injustice: an injustice that deprives individuals of control over and access to decisions that influence day to day lives as well as their future lives (Fontanari 2017, Thorshaug and Brun 2019, Brun 2021). This temporal injustice is enabled by the clear depoliticization of governance that takes place through the humanitarian approach and the international community's presence in Lebanon. While the securitization approach is fundamentally about taking a political stance against the presence of refugees, the crisis response plans represent a depoliticised discussion of refugees' needs. The crisis response plans mention the challenges with lack of legal residency, access to employment and other protection measures, but the proposed actions do not sufficiently address the structural conditions that cause socio-economic vulnerabilities and constrained agency.

An important agenda-setter for the discourse on Syrian refugees in Lebanon has been the donor meetings in London and Brussels together with the Lebanon Crisis Response Plans and its regional umbrella, the Syria Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan. In previous work, we have analysed the documents produced in the donor meetings between 2016 and 2021 (Brun et al. 2021). In all documents, there is an emphasis on the costs that Lebanon has incurred as a result of the refugee crisis. The cost of hosting refugees has become a dominant discourse. While there has been a shortfall in funding for refugees in Lebanon, the donor conferences could have been a vehicle to hold the Lebanese government accountable to ensuring rights for refugees. While pledges made by the Lebanese government in these areas have not been fulfilled, the broken commitments have had limited consequences for international funding for Lebanon. International funding serves to support the government and cements current inequalities, including the separation between refugees and the Lebanese, rather than as an impetus to change the current system that caused the economic collapse (Brun et al. 2021).

There is an additional aspect to the temporal injustice that produces vulnerabilities: the top-down and transient nature of humanitarian aid. Humanitarian organisations operate on short term projects and funding priorities often change according to larger political priorities and trends. While the Government of Lebanon seems to be able to wriggle out of aid conditionalities, this is not the case for local and national organisation seeking funding from the international humanitarian system. Several of the national- and refugee led organisations mentioned the challenges the faced in trying to assist refugees based on priorities formulated with refugees based on the situation in the local areas where they worked. Some representatives of organisations felt they had limited chances to develop more participatory approaches with refugees. Consequently a top-down system of assistance is maintained where refugees feel that they have very little influence over decisions that concern their lives. This was clear from one interviewee working in a refugee led organisation:

> *Sometimes (…) criteria are imposed by donors, so we have to follow. If we have the margin to argue, because sometimes we have a mandate to target certain people as we just cannot say and communities doesn't understand that we have a funding commitment, you know, "oh why you stopped providing us a service", for example, but because this program is not targeting. For example (…) this program is strictly only for Lebanese you know, Syrians would be like crazy oh my God, no, these funds are for us and so on and this creates a lot of community tensions sometimes (…) it's not good it's very troubling*

at the community level (…) our centres are located in the middle of the society and we are on a daily basis in touch with the communities and in our communities we have an open door policy where people can come, shout, yell, claim whatever they want and we have a clean procedure for follow up on any concern, but sometimes we face the point that it's not something that we have control over (SH-59).

6.2. The production of illegality shapes vulnerability

Most Syrian refugees and Palestinian Refugees from Syria emphasized that their feeling of vulnerability is tied to the financial crisis of the country. However, as we showed in Chapter 4, the socio-economic factors interacted with refugee status. Since October 2014, the ad-hoc policies concerning refugees' legal status contributed to constitute vulnerability in specific ways. Palestinian Refugees residing in Lebanon have not been immune to this ad hoc approach to policies, and over recent years, there have been changes to their access to labour market and to their ability to own property. Yet, for the Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria, these policy changes meant they now have hardly any means to renew their residency with the consequence that the majority are now illegal residents.

The production of legality and illegality is commonly used by nation states as a strategy of exclusion and as a means of controlling labour (De Genova 2013, De Genova and Roy 2020). In Lebanon, this production of legality and illegality takes place through the governance of refugees in Lebanon and contributes to create what Malkki (1992) termed 'matter out of place': spaces where governance techniques such as headcounts, situation reports, and control over space and the movement of people dominate (Ramadan 2013).

The deliberate policy of making people illegal is part of the drive to push Syrian refugees and PRS out and must be seen in the context of the overall discourse of return and costs of hosting refugees. Consequently, as we have shown in this report, the production of vulnerability is closely tied to the legal status that people can access. The many Syrian refugees and PRS that are 'illegal' because they could not secure legal residency creates profound uncertainties in people's daily lives and contributes to the experience of vulnerability that permeates their lives. As we have shown, it affects people's freedom of movement and even sense of security in their own homes.

6.3. The irrelevance of durable solutions in the context of Lebanon

The Global Compact on Refugees (UN 2018) presents return and resettlement as the preferred durable solutions. The compact also mentions the third durable solution, local integration and legal naturalisation, but affirms that de jure local integration is up to the host government. Lebanon understands local integration to be unconstitutional (Janmyr 2017, Brun et al. 2021, LCRP 2022). For countries like Lebanon that do not accept local integration, the compact suggests *alternative local solutions such as* legal access to employment, protection and welfare, accordingly a way of supporting 'self-reliance'. However, we are writing from a context where resettlement is out of reach for most refugees and return is not a preferred option or also out of reach – such as for Palestinian refugees. Despite the Government of Lebanon's emphasis on return, what most refugees today are left with would be the hope for some kind of *alternative local solutions*.

A key concept in those alternative local solutions formulated in the Global Compact is 'self-reliance'. Self-reliance is not a new concept (Crisp 2003) and became part of Uganda's strategy for refugees in 1999 and has been used as a model in global refugee policies (Serwajja and Refstie in press). With self-reliance, forced migrants can stay in the place of displacement, be independent of aid, but may not become members of the societies where they live. We have argued elsewhere that such local alternative solutions in host states like Lebanon have become *a solutions lite* (Brun and Fábos 2017). In this context, the Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon is a case in point, having some access to employment and legal residency, yet they are not full members of the society in which they live. This kind of local solution does not formally bring an end to displacement, it does not ensure protection and it leaves refugees vulnerable to both socio-economic and policy changes as we have identified in the case of Lebanon.

While self-reliance was mentioned in earlier versions of the LCRP (see 2015, 2017, Brun et al. 2021), it is not emphasised in the 2022 version. Rather the 2022 version states in footnote number 38 that: "In any refugee situation, the ultimate goal for the United Nations is the realisation of durable solutions to the plight of refugees. While local integration is not an option for displaced Syrians in Lebanon, the safety, dignity and well-being of displaced Syrians must be preserved until they can attain durable solutions outside of Lebanon." Yet, living as a refugee in a hostile environment in the midst of a financial crisis contributes to the constrained agency that we have pointed out in this report. It means that even self-reliance is far from realisable and that refugees continue to linger in a marginalised position.

The durable solutions are similarly present in the previous versions of the Lebanon Crisis Plan (2015, 2017, 2021). The LCRP (2017) states that resettlement is only a 'partial solution' because it is available to very few. The available protection spaces for refugees in other countries, especially in the global north, have been considerably shrinking. In addition to the decreasing resettlement figures, other indicators showcase a trend of keeping refugees away from EU territory. A change in EU policies is leading the way by moving the screening process to the external borders of the European Union (El Daif 2021). It is in this context that the international community continues to present return as the preferred solution. In the latest LCRP (2022: 14), it is stated: "Ensure that persons displaced from Syria have access to legal status in accordance with Lebanese laws and regulations, while anticipating their return in safety and dignity as the preferred durable solution, and while abiding by the principle of non-refoulement."

The continued emphasis by the international community on return as the preferred solution has consequences. While not directly supporting the government of Lebanon's constant push for return, current international policies may help to legitimise the government position. As mentioned in Chapter 5, most Syrian refugees we interviewed for this project did not see return as the preferred solution, but would rather move on to a third country. This was also the situation for some of the Palestinians we interviewed and who felt that the best option would have been to move from Lebanon, preferably to Europe or North America. Yet both Syrians and Palestinians felt that this was an option out of reach for them.

As we showed in Chapter 5, and in our earlier report (El Daif et al. 2021), refugees who would qualify for resettlement find it very hard to access information about resettlement and to understand the procedures. It should be every refugee's right to be able to access information about their option for reaching a solution, but the pressure on humanitarian organisations have meant that it is almost impossible to access the organisations to apply for resettlement. Again, these difficulties have made refugees open to fraud which some of the research participants mentioned and we described in Chapter 5.

Refugees in Lebanon feel trapped in a regime that does not protect them and which makes them feel vulnerable. The Refugee Compact and the policies on refugees as presented in the Lebanon Crisis Plans and by the Government of Lebanon are all a clear indication of the irrelevance of the current durable solutions for refugees residing in Lebanon: Most refugees do not see a solution to their plight. For them, being a refugee is a never-ending experience of displacement (Brun and Fàbos 2015) where vulnerability in the context of a financial crisis has become the norm.

6.4. The refugee experience, compounded crises and production of vulnerability

When refugees – Palestinian and Syrians – arrived in Lebanon from Syria, they came to a country that was already experiencing a downward economic trend (Brun et al. 2021). As mentioned in the introduction to this report, Lebanon is facing one of the most severe crises globally since the mid-nineteenth century (World Bank 2021: xi). The crisis has been termed a 'deliberate depression' due to mismanagement, culminating in the country's largest financial crisis, which then was exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and the Port of Beirut explosion (World Bank 2021: xi).

Being a refugee in a compounded crisis, means that vulnerabilities that derive from the displacement status are amplified. We have shown in the report that the inability to secure livelihoods affect all spheres of life. The crisis has also contributed to a continued short-term approach in assistance to refugees with less possibilities to move to a more long-term approach. In fact, the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (2022) suggests that assistance is geared towards 'humanitarian and stabilization' interventions rather than development.

Refugees have more than once been blamed for the crisis, adding to the insecurity that many refugees feel in participating in society. Many of the research participants had experienced discrimination and harassment. However, there is no evidence that the refugee crisis caused the national financial downturn. In fact, an analysis we did last year (Brun et al. 2021, see also Brun and Fakih 2022), found that there is no connection between the arrival of the refugees from Syria and the macroeconomic downturn. The arrival of refugees might even have delayed the financial crisis somewhat due to, among other factors, the access to international aid associated with the refugees that the country could access. Yet, this does not mean that local areas, local infrastructure and services have not struggled to cope with the increase in population due to the mismanagement of the country.

As we showed in Chapter 5, the concerns that are related to the financial crisis overrides many other concerns as people struggle to get by on a day-to-day basis. The downward spiral and deprivation of material and human capital that accompany living with a financial crisis is likely to continue to produce further vulnerabilities in the future as health conditions worsen and children are deprived of an education whilst their families' material capital is depleted.

In this context, and as we showed in Chapter 5, Syrian refugees who receive cash assistance from either UNHCR, WFP or UNICEF are very appreciative of this assistance, which for many is their only lifeline. Palestinian refugees from Syria also receives cash assistance. Syrian refugees are often presented as the most vulnerable group in Lebanon supported with findings from LCRP (2022) that 90 percent of Syrian refugees are food insecure. Such statistics are used to justify that Syrian refugees – as a group – have greater access to cash assistance than the general society and particularly Lebanese, which causes grievances among poorer Lebanese nationals. The LCRP (2022) reports that in the last three years, there is an increase in negative inter-communal relations rising from 21 percent inter-communal tensions in July 2018

to 36 percent in August 2021. Competition in access to employment and services and the access to cash assistance for Syrian refugees are often the cause of the tensions (LCRP 2022). Also the Palestinian refugees we interviewed were aware of the differences in accessing assistance. As we have alluded to above, research participants reported rising community insecurity and increasing crime in their areas. For those without legal residency, the barriers to seek protection and report crime are high and hence vulnerability is felt due to the inability to seek protection.

With the financial crisis, the increasing dependency on aid is also significant for the refugees we have interviewed, with cash assistance being the only income for some families, followed by a constant deprivation of resources and not least worsening health.

6.5. Non-representation and depoliticization of migration governance through the humanitarian approach

In Lebanon's non-policy response to refugees (Stel 2021, Fakhoury 2017) most services and assistance towards refugees are 'outsourced' from the government to international and national organisations. This non-policy approach does not mean that there are no policy processes or policies relevant for the lives of refugees and hosts. On the contrary, policy developments, particularly related to the soft laws of residency, have been crucial for the conditions in which refugees live (Brun et al. 2021, El Daif et al. 2021).

The non-policy approach together with not being a signatory to the 1951 convention, means that Lebanon has been relatively free to manage refugees according to their own priorities. In effect this has contributed to processes of exclusion. We have shown in this report that refugees have to manoeuvre through a number of different formal and more informal institutions to seek the protection they need, whilst at the same time feeling that there is no-one there to represent them and no-one to seek protection from. This exclusion of refugees is experienced as increased vulnerability. Yet, the agencies that are present and that could take a clearer role in protection has chosen not to do so. UNHCR, for example, went from being a refugee agency to becoming a humanitarian agency in the 1980s (Crisp 2001, Harrell-Bond 1996): a development that enabled the temporal logic in which refugees and displaced are only temporarily present.

As we have already alluded to, humanitarianism has a short-term aim of saving lives (Brun 2016). As a practice, humanitarianism is tied to a global north-dominated international humanitarian system (Donini 2010, Wilkinson 2017). The system is a "network of inter-connected institutional and operational entities that receive funds, directly or indirectly from public donors and private sources to enhance, support or substitute for in-country responses in the provision of humanitarian assistance" (Knox Clarke, 2018: 32). This system generally adheres to the humanitarian charter and the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence (ICRC/IFRC nd.). Hence, humanitarian actors would normally, at least officially, concentrate on saving lives and not intervene politically in the states where they are operating. This makes them useful actors for many host governments, such as the Lebanese, who would welcome humanitarian organisations to assist with refugees, yet do not accept assistance that may indicate that refugees are there to stay permanently. Furthermore, the humanitarian system continues to be top-down and does largely exclude local communities and local practices that do not conform to the northern dominated humanitarian system (Donini 2010). Despite its recent focus on 'localisation' of aid (Dijkzeul 202, Roepstorf 2020, Shuayb 2022), there has been few genuine attempts in including refugees in decision making including in education for refugees.

The problem of long-term refugee situations is inherently political, and as Sadako Ogata (the former UN High Commissioner for Refugees) famously stated: "There is no humanitarian solution to humanitarian problems" (Tan 2005). Hence, a humanitarian approach cannot bring about solutions to displacement. In the case of refugees in Lebanon, they are subject to the production of vulnerabilities by being stuck in a depoliticised humanitarian approach.

VII. CONCLUSION

The report's objective has been to understand the relationship between experiences of vulnerabilities among refugees and the legal and bureaucratic frameworks in place. In order to analyse this relationship, we have conducted 57 interviews with refugees – Syrian refugees, Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon and Palestinian refugees from Syria. We have also interviewed representatives of seven organisations working with refugees in specific capacities. We have attempted to explore the relationship between refugee experiences and frameworks at different scales. First, we analysed – at a micro level – refugees' understandings and experience of vulnerability. Second, and moving to a meso level, we discussed research participants' encounters with the legal and bureaucratic frameworks that concern them. Finally, we addressed the relationship between the experiences of vulnerabilities and the global and national frameworks relating to Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

'Vulnerability' is a contested concept, not least in Lebanon where it is frequently used in national and international frameworks and by organisations assisting refugees, yet it does not have a clear translation in Arabic. In our interviews with refugees and representatives from organisations, we found a wide range of understandings from the more categorical understanding based on personal characteristics to a more dynamic, situational and contextual understanding.

Regarding the individual experience of vulnerability and the **micro level**, we discussed how it is experienced based on people's displacement histories, their legal residency status in Lebanon, categories such as age, gender and health. We also examined specific conditions related to employment and livelihoods, housing and social networks. Exploring the different dimensions that research participants shared with us, we find that there is an interaction of legal and socio-economic factors that create the individual experience of vulnerability. In a context of compounded crises where most people experience some level of vulnerability, it is the interaction of different factors that produce individual vulnerability outcomes. We have showed throughout the report that it is challenging to define some people as more vulnerable than others. However, the three groups of refugees we interviewed – Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon, Palestinian refugees from Syria and Syrian refugees – all have different displacement trajectories and different access to legal residency which influence the experience of vulnerability. Yet, in this context, where lack of legal residency and membership should be a major concern for most refugees, the struggle to get by and survive on a day-to-day basis has taken prominence both in refugees' individual experience and in the humanitarian discourse on refugee vulnerability: it is the socio-economic vulnerability that dominates people's lives.

What is most concerning in this context is how vulnerabilities are shaped over time. Health represents a powerful example and is a site of interaction between many dimensions that people experience constituting their vulnerability: poverty, war and displacement and legal status. All individuals we interviewed had themselves or a family member, health problems associated either with war-related injuries, work related injuries due to working in dangerous conditions in Lebanon or due to treatable health problems that they could not afford treating and as a result had become chronic. The health system that refugees can access is minimal and most people cannot afford to pay for sufficient health services. The analysis we conducted helped to understand how current vulnerabilities have been amplified due to refugee status and the compounded crises in Lebanon, and more emphasis must be placed on how the current conditions would shape future vulnerabilities.

It is thus not sufficient to understand vulnerability based on the micro level: A move to understanding refugees' encounters with the institutions that represent the **meso level** in the legal and bureaucratic framework is necessary. In the institutional void of a no-policy refugee governance, lack of access to health services and the discrimination experienced in encounters with the health system are representative of the encounters refugees have with a broad range of institutions, which was the theme of Chapter 5. For example, most refugees we interviewed have had some dealings with the Lebanese state, particularly through General Security for residency. However, they do not consider the Lebanese state institutions as a site of protection or assistance. No-one of the research participants felt they have any say and influence over the decisions that influence their presence and future in the country. For support, they rather seek towards the international and local organisations, but as we have shown, it is hard to access them. Interviewees also expressed that it was difficult to understand who is eligible for assistance and consequently what vulnerability criteria are operating at any given time. For many research participants, what is left is informal connections and networks, but friends and family are often in the same dire situation and can offer limited material support as discussed in Chapter 4.

The report shows that state institutions contribute to refugees experience of vulnerability. The research participants, particularly male interviewees, emphasised the encounters with the Army with the risk of detention and possibly forced return to Syria if they are caught without legal residency. Most Palestinians residing in Lebanon have legal residency, but they are still deprived of full membership in the place where they have lived their whole lives. The particular vulnerability that comes from being deprived of legal residency and lack of the recognition that comes with membership takes its mental toll. In our analysis, we thus suggest that the agency that refugees can mobilise in the encounter with different institutions is constrained. The constrained agency limits refugees' ability to respond to the processes that cause vulnerability.

This brings us to the **macro level** and the role of national and global policies and frameworks in producing vulnerabilities. The humanitarian system and the international community missed the opportunity to hold the Lebanese government to account and fulfil conditionalities that accompanied aid. The interest of the international community to keep refugees where they are together with the humanitarian approach of neutrality, impartiality and independence indirectly endorse the Lebanese state's approach to refugees as exceptions, matter out of place and devoid of right to a say in decisions taken over their lives. Concurrently, the international frameworks such as the Global Compact mentioned in Chapter 6 enable the international community to focus on assistance to make refugees stay in Lebanon rather than focusing on finding a solution to their plight.

We have identified a deep-felt discrimination by all groups of refugees interviewed. The interaction between national and international frameworks and approaches allowed for a hostile discourse towards refugees to take hold. The report has shown that the interaction of the Lebanese state, the international humanitarian community and global policy makers have allowed for the production of vulnerabilities that refugees residing in Lebanon experience. This is the case at all levels we have studied: micro, meso and macro and in all spheres of life and have led to an acceptance that return is the only achievable solution, despite the priorities of refugees themselves. Consequently, the production of vulnerability and the accompanying uncertainty for the future has resulted in what we identified as a temporal injustice towards refugees residing in Lebanon.

The specific ways in which vulnerabilities are constituted and develop over time in a refugee crisis is crucial to establish. In the case of Lebanon, it is hard to separate the general crisis in the country from the refugee crisis. Having described the financial crisis in the country as a 'deliberate depression' (World Bank 2021), the mismanagement and weak state institutions that lies at the heart of the crisis affects refugees in specific ways. Additionally, the Lebanese state is unwilling to protect refugees and allow for legal measures that prevent rather than produce vulnerabilities. Finally, the overstretched humanitarian community seems unable to shift from a short-term assistance mode to a more long-term one. We leave the last word to one our interviewees – a Syrian refugee and representative of one of the organisations we interviewed:

> *I think that one important thing is that in this country we've been providing humanitarian assistance and development aid not only within the framework of the Syrian crisis, but before as well, without actually and effectively from a macro perspective, changing the systems so we're not enabling those systems because of the current regime in country to effectively respond, I mean to effectively ensure their basic rights to all populations* (SH-59).

ANNEX

Appendix 1: State institutions and humanitarian organisations

The following chart from our previous work (see El Daif et al. 2021) is a starting point for understanding the various institutions that protection seekers may encounter.

	Actors	Roles
Security Response: Main Actors	General Security (GS)	The Directorate of the General Security (GS) in Lebanon is tasked with functions relating to collecting data concerning political, economic and social issues for the government, issues relating to media censorship and to the maritime, air and land borders. The GS is the main authority in Lebanon that manages and impacts the lives of foreigners, asylum-seekers and refugees. It acts as the Lebanese government implementing agency of its policies towards refugees
	Lebanese Army Forces (LAF)	LAF plays a leading role in enforcing the security response of the state under the pretext of fighting terrorism. Our interviews during the first phase with lawyers and local NGOs focusing on providing protection to refugees revealed that the LAF arbitrarily detained and tortured refugees in many instances further to raids on refugee camps and shelters.
	Local Authorities: Lebanese Municipalities	In late 2013, following a meeting with over 800 municipalities and municipal unions, the MoIM put forward a security plan 67 that strengthened the role of municipalities in the provision of security. In responding to the refugee presence in local areas, the local authorities in Lebanon assumed mainly a police role towards refugees as imposing lockdown and curfews on them.

Humanitarian Response: Main Actors	Lebanon incorporated the LCRP, a joint plan between the Government of Lebanon and the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in 2014.	Under the plan co-led by UNHCR and UNDP, UN agencies, international and local NGOs are collaborating under the defined 10 sectors. (LCRP 2017-2020). The GoL's Inter-Ministerial Committee on Displaced is the highest national authority for international partners supporting the crisis response inside Lebanese territory, including through the LCRP, in accordance with Lebanese laws and regulations as well as applicable international law. (LCRP 2022). The Ministry of Social Affairs is mandated by the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Displaced to lead and oversee the Government's response to the crisis in Lebanon.

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