

# WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME MULTI-PURPOSE CASH ASSISTANCE IN LEBANON

## SOCIAL COHESION AND STABILITY BETWEEN SYRIAN REFUGEES AND HOST COMMUNITIES



ODI for CAMEALEON  
A qualitative study  
June 2020

Photo: Adrian Hartrick



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

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|           |                                                                                    |
|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ATM       | Automated teller machine                                                           |
| CAMEALEON | Cash Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning<br>Organizational Network |
| FCS       | Family case study                                                                  |
| FGD       | Focus group discussion                                                             |
| IDI       | In-depth interviews                                                                |
| I/NGO     | International or national non-government organisation                              |
| ITS       | Informal tented settlement                                                         |
| KII       | Key informant interviews                                                           |
| LCC       | Lebanese Cash Consortium                                                           |
| LCRP      | Lebanon Crisis Response Plan                                                       |
| MEB       | Minimum expenditure basket                                                         |
| MPC       | Multi-purpose cash                                                                 |
| ODI       | Overseas Development Institute                                                     |
| SMEB      | Survival minimum expenditure basket                                                |
| UNDP      | United Nations Development Programme                                               |
| UNHCR     | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees                                      |
| UNICEF    | United Nations Children's Fund                                                     |
| VASyR     | Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees                                        |
| WFP       | World Food Programme                                                               |

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In response to the growing refugee crisis caused by more than nine years of devastating conflict in Syria, the World Food Programme (WFP) provides multi-purpose cash (MPC) assistance to 23,000 Syrian refugee households in Lebanon, supporting some of the most vulnerable refugees in meeting their basic needs. Hosting the largest per capita refugee population in the world, Lebanon has been coping with nine years of refugee influxes and prolonged displacements which has invariably impacted the country's social fabric. This study examines whether and – if so – how, the provision of the WFP MPC to Syrian refugees in Lebanon shapes relations, social cohesion and stability among Syrian refugees as well as between Syrian refugees and their host communities.

The study builds on a growing body of literature on the social cohesion and stability effects of cash assistance, including in contexts of displacement, and draws on 270 interviews with Syrian and Lebanese respondents in three locations in the Bekaa Valley. Over two rounds of fieldwork in 2018-19, respondents were asked whether MPC played any role in influencing their opportunities for interactions and the nature thereof; sources of solidarity, support and tension; and experience and perceptions of discrimination, safety and security. The resulting findings are explored in this report.

As the study is based on interviews with a non-representative sample of Syrian respondents across three sites, and considers a specific MPC programme, the study findings are not nationally representative, nor do they attempt to identify causal effects of cash assistance. Rather, the study sheds light on people's experiences of MPC in practice, and the role of specific MPC design and implementation details and how these are mediated by context. As such, this study aims to complement ongoing research studies, including impact evaluation studies based on large-scale surveys, and contribute to the growing body of literature exploring cash assistance and its effects on social cohesion and stability.

### Key findings

#### **Social cohesion and stability within Syrian communities**

Syrian refugee respondents described the ways in which the MPC influences opportunities to interact and socialise with fellow Syrian refugees. Examples include the MPC enabling recipients to cover transportation costs to visit acquaintances and family, costs associated with inviting friends and family to visit, and to participate in activities such as meeting friends at a café, the market or other public places.

There is a widespread perception that not all those in need are receiving MPC. This, in turn, leads to feelings both of sympathy/compassion as well as discomfort on the part of MPC recipients towards non-recipients or discontinued refugees in similar circumstances. Complex dynamics can arise from requests for loans, with recipients themselves barely able to make ends meet. Among non-recipients and discontinued refugees, while there is some acceptance that the MPC reaches those most in need, there is also discontent and related tensions arising from the lack of clarity regarding who and why some are discontinued and others are not. Some non-recipient respondents pointed out that they are in situations of need as much as, or more than, their neighbour recipients, yet they do not benefit from the assistance.

The point of MPC withdrawal at ATMs is also a source of interaction that fosters both examples of strengthened support/collaboration between Syrian refugees, and of tensions. On the one hand, there is collaboration and support in terms of assisting MPC E-card holders who are illiterate or have difficulties understanding the ATM withdrawal process. On the other, the resulting long queues and waiting times – also in part due to people withdrawing on behalf of a high number of other recipients – can fuel arguments and tensions.

#### **Social cohesion and stability between Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities**

A key potential source of tension between Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities concerns the latter's perceptions of differential treatment between the two groups. In a context with high inequality and poverty levels, a stagnant labour market and weak social service provision, this is especially prominent. Lebanese respondents shared a variety of different views. Some pointed to the MPC, and international aid to Syrian refugees more widely, as unfair in a context in which poor Lebanese in similar contexts are receiving no cash assistance. Others explained that, overall, the MPC and aid to Syrian refugees, is welcome for a number of reasons including that, by assisting the poorest Syrian refugees and helping them meet their basic needs, it weakens potential sources of tension and

additional pressures on local authorities, and that local economies are indirectly benefiting from this inflow of resources. Similar to the findings among Syrian refugee communities, there were examples of the MPC enabling opportunities for exchange and encounter, for instance by enabling recipients to visit markets and facilitating meetings with Lebanese friends. Likewise, a source of tension was also linked to the MPC withdrawal process and the long queues and waiting times at ATMs on the date of the MPC delivery.

### **The labour market and workplace**

A potential source of tension between Lebanese and Syrian refugees, as reported in recent publications, is the perception that Syrian refugees are taking jobs in an already crowded labour market that offers limited opportunities. Cash assistance could aggravate this by enabling Syrian refugees to accept lower paid work, potentially also exerting a downward pressure on work remuneration. Interestingly, as also reported in this study's partner report on protection outcomes, recipient respondents explained that the MPC enables them to turn down exploitative work, indicating that MPC has an emancipatory effect, potentially enabling improved work conditions including regarding pay or for refugees to be more discerning about what jobs they accept. Conversely, being discontinued from MPC was associated with Syrian refugees accepting worse working conditions.

### **The local economy**

Several study respondents saw MPC as beneficial to local economies by enabling vulnerable Syrian refugees to purchase goods in local shops and spend money on local services. In terms of direct economic relations between Syrian refugees and Lebanese, the MPC allowed recipients to reduce previously accumulated debts and repay Lebanese lenders (including shopkeepers, landlords, pharmacists and friends), leading to improved relations and dynamics. Conversely, discontinuation was associated with heightened tensions, with discontinued refugees struggling to pay back debts and Lebanese less willing, or no longer willing, to lend and/or accept delays in debt payments.

### **Shelter and accommodation**

Rent is the first spending priority of recipients, alongside food, and MPC plays a critical role in enabling recipients to pay their rent on time with important implications for relations with Lebanese landlords, including establishing and strengthening dynamics of trust. Discontinuation has a clear adverse impact on the ability to pay rent. In sum, MPC receipt is shown to facilitate timely rent payment, while discontinuation or non-receipt is linked to delayed or partial rent payments, in turn associated with deteriorating relationships and breakdown in trust.

### **Healthcare**

MPC plays a critical role in enabling recipients to meet costs associated with accessing healthcare services, supporting recipients in covering treatment and medication costs, and to repay debts incurred in relation to these expenses, leading to improved relations between Syrian refugees and healthcare service providers. Conversely, discontinuation and non-receipt are associated with healthcare related debts, challenges in repaying debts and related tensions. The additional pressure on local services as a result of the influx of Syrian refugees is considered a potential source of tension with host communities. Some Lebanese respondents pointed to worsening quality of services and overcrowding linked to the increased demand caused by Syrian refugees, however, they did not attribute these to the MPC specifically. In fact, local key informants highlighted how MPC helped alleviate pressure on local authorities and service providers by providing vulnerable refugees with resources to meet their healthcare needs.

### **Education**

With regards to education and schooling, a key barrier to interaction between Syrian and Lebanese students is linked to the nature of the double shift system implemented in response to the influx in students. Respondents largely perceived teachers as fair and reserving equal treatment across different students. Skills and vocational training provide a forum for Syrian refugees and Lebanese to interact, as reported by especially female respondents, with relations largely reported as positive and friendly.



# 1. INTRODUCTION

## Background and objectives

After nine years of civil war and internal displacement in Syria, the ensuing refugee crisis is now one of the worst humanitarian crises of our time. By the end of 2019, Lebanon was hosting around 1.5 million Syrian refugees (Lebanon Crisis Response Plan [LCRP] 2017-2020, 2019 update), making it the highest per capita population of refugees in the world. The 2019 VASyR (Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees) estimated that more than half of this population lived below the survival minimum expenditure basket (SMEB) of \$2.90 per day, and the LCRP classified 195,000 households as economically vulnerable.

To assist the most economically vulnerable of these households in meeting their basic needs, the World Food Programme (WFP) provides multi-purpose cash (MPC) assistance – a monthly unconditional and unrestricted transfer of \$27<sup>1</sup> per person per household and a top-up of \$173.50 to 23,000 Syrian refugee households to stabilise or improve access to food and basic needs over a 12 month cycle. An additional 52,912 households receive \$27 per person per month as a food E-card redeemable in WFP contracted shops.<sup>2</sup> The value of the food E-card was calculated based on the cost to meet the basic nutritional requirements of refugees in 2014.<sup>3</sup>

### WHAT IS WFP MULTI-PURPOSE CASH (MPC) ASSISTANCE?

The WFP MPC package is a 12-month, unrestricted cash transfer, delivered monthly on an E-card, and withdrawn from any ATM:

- \$27 per individual to cover food needs
- \$173.50 per household to cover essential needs as a top-up

**Average: \$332 per household per month.**

The MPC package complements other interventions led by WFP targeting Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

The value of the top-up amount of assistance (\$173.50) is based on the SMEB, a calculation used to estimate how much money it costs for refugee families to maintain existence and cover lifesaving needs in a displacement setting. Also calculated in 2014, the SMEB was determined to be \$435 per household and includes cost estimates for shelter, utilities, non-food items, communications and debt repayment. The calculation for the top-up amount assumes severely vulnerable households can generate \$110 on their own and that every household receiving it is also receiving \$27 per person (averaging \$150 per family). Therefore, the \$173.50 is based on the SMEB (\$435) minus the average E-card amount (\$150) minus the estimated self-generated income (\$110) equalling \$175. It does not include – and therefore is not calculated to cover – health and education costs. However, according to

CAMEALEON's March 2020 study of the impact of MPC on Syrian refugee households, health is one of the top three household expenditures in addition to food and rent.<sup>4</sup> In addition, health and education were also found to be essential expenditures for poor households according to WFP's review of the minimum expenditure basket (MEB) and SMEB.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All dollar amounts are at the official Lebanese Pound (LBP) rate and do not account for the devaluation of the LBP that has taken place over the past year. The field work was conducted before the currency devaluation began. WFP and UNHCR have since adjusted the amount of MPC assistance provided to beneficiaries to account for the currency devaluation.

<sup>2</sup> As of March 2020.

<sup>3</sup> The values indicated are accurate as of when the field work occurred in 2018 and 2019. It does not reflect changes to the amount of money provided that occurred in response to the worsening economic crisis since late 2019. The economic crisis led to a devaluation of the national currency and therefore a switch to providing the MPC transfer in Lebanese Pounds only, instead of dollars, to beneficiaries, as well as an increase in the transfer amount in Lebanese Pounds in order to align with inflation. As of July 2020, MPC beneficiaries receive 70,000 LBP per person to cover food needs and 400,000 LBP per household as a top-up.

<sup>4</sup> CAMEALEON and AUB, Multi-purpose Cash Assistance in Lebanon: Impact Evaluation on the Well-Being of Syrian Refugees, March 2020.

<sup>5</sup> WFP, Minimum Expenditure Basket for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: rights-based vs expenditure-based approaches, March 2020

All households deemed severely vulnerable (scoring below the SMEB) are technically eligible for inclusion in the MPC programme. However, with funding only available to 56,917 families<sup>6</sup>, only about a third of the households that fall below the SMEB are covered by the WFP MPC. Syrian refugee households are targeted for inclusion in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and WFP MPC programmes using a statistical model to calculate their socio-economic vulnerability score. These scores are revised annually and, consequently, each year new households are included in the assistance programme, while others must be discontinued.

A refugee influx of the size experienced by Lebanon will invariably impact the social fabric of a host country, especially in a small and densely populated country with a fragile economy such as Lebanon's. A growing number of studies define both the conceptualisation and measurement of social cohesion, including in the context of Lebanon and the Syrian crisis. REACH, for example, defines social cohesion as "a perceived measure of trust and level of tension between members of community groups as well as between community members and local institutions" (REACH, 2014:7). REACH further identifies the key elements of social cohesion as including: "strengthening social relations, interactions, and ties; building trust and understanding between communities; reducing community inequalities; and adopting a holistic strategy on livelihoods, public services, and other socio-economic interventions to improve community participation."

Social cohesion and social stability are inextricably linked. The 2018 LCRP defines social stability as: "a state of intergroup relations at the community level, where sources of tension between groups are addressed and managed through formal institutions or systems, so as to prevent them from resulting in collective violence, human rights abuses, or further loss of opportunities for vulnerable groups." Building on both this definition and the understanding of social cohesion outlined above, this study views social cohesion as a critical component of, or intermediate objective for achieving, social stability. If social cohesion were fostered among different groups, then tensions between these groups would also lessen, potentially having a positive effect on social stability.

Building on these concepts, and evidence in other contexts relevant to cash assistance and refugee populations, this report presents the findings of a study of WFP's MPC assistance to Syrian refugees in Lebanon, investigating its role in influencing social cohesion and stability between Syrian refugees and their host communities. This study has been commissioned by the Cash Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Organizational Learning Network (CAMEALEON) and is part of a wider effort to conduct independent research and analysis on monitoring and evaluation outcomes of the WFP MPC programme in Lebanon. A partner report, drawing on this same study, examines the impact of WFP MPC on the protection outcomes of Syrian refugees.

The study's primary research question is: Does the WFP MPC play any role in influencing relations, social cohesion and ultimately social stability, between Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities? If so, in what ways and how?

In addressing this question, the study asks:

- What are the existing relations within Syrian refugee households and communities, and between Syrians and Lebanese (what are examples of sources/dynamics of trust and support or of tension)?
- What are the contexts and opportunities for interaction between groups, including for example, at the workplace, shelter/housing, in accessing education and health services?
- What are the perceived pressures and/or benefits on the local economy (including the effect on prices and business opportunities) and on public and private services (including education and health provision)?
- What are the differences and inequalities experienced between groups (including in relation to access to and quality of services, and international assistance)?
- Does/how does MPC mediate all of the above?

Drawing on the experiences of Syrian refugees in three study sites in the Bekaa Valley in Lebanon, where the majority of WFP MPC beneficiaries are found, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of literature exploring the effects of cash assistance to refugees on social cohesion and stability both among refugees as well as between refugees and their host community.

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<sup>6</sup> As of March 2020.



## Methodology

This study complements other ongoing research efforts commissioned by CAMEALEON. It does so by gathering and analysing information about people's experience and perceptions of MPC's role in influencing social cohesion and stability through qualitative data collection tools, designed to capture details that are commonly not observed in large-scale surveys.

Information was collected through in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with vulnerable Syrian refugees (MPC recipients, refugees who have been discontinued, and those who have never received MPC) and Lebanese nationals at three sites in the Bekaa Valley (Baalbek, Qabb Elias and Saadnayel). Key informant interviews (KIIs) were held at the three study localities and in Beirut. Fieldwork was conducted in two rounds: November 2018-January 2019 and July-August 2019. A total of 270 interviews were conducted, of which 254 were with Syrian refugees and Lebanese and 16 were local key informants. Of the Syrian refugees interviewed, their MPC status was as follows: 97 respondents currently receiving MPC (referred to as recipients); 73 respondents who had never received MPC (referred to as non-recipients); and 40 respondents who had been discontinued in November 2018 (referred to as discontinued refugees).

With regards to study scope and approach, this study complements ongoing studies by paying special attention to the experience of particular population groups. Specifically, it aims to capture the experience of young women and girls aged 15-29, as well as that of boys and men in that same age group. Particular attention is paid to variations in experience and perceptions by respondents' sex, age, health status and disability status. The report furthermore draws on a review of literature and official documents.

## Limitations

MPC is only one in a set of humanitarian and wider assistance interventions of which refugees may be in receipt. In some cases, respondents may not be fully aware of which cash assistance programme they are a part. The respondent sample selection process helped to ensure WFP recipients were identified. Moreover, during the interview process, the type of assistance was further verified. Even so, for a small number of respondents, the distinction between different types of assistance may not have been clear, making it, in some cases, difficult to draw out MPC-specific implications.

This is a small-scale study that reports the experience and perceptions of respondents in three localities. It should be read as such, providing examples of how MPC influences the lives of Syrian refugees and the wider Lebanese communities interviewed. These can provide critical insights into how MPC works in practice and the role of contextual factors, perceptions and MPC implementation details in shaping MPC outcomes. At the same time, findings should not be interpreted as nationally representative or as implying a clear and tested causal effect of MPC.

## 2. INTERACTIONS WITHIN SYRIAN REFUGEE COMMUNITIES

This section explores inter-household interactions, including sources of support/solidarity and tension, within Syrian refugee communities, and how MPC shapes such interactions.

Social interactions among Syrian refugees – both men and women – usually take the form of visiting and socialising with Syrian relatives, friends and neighbours. Occasionally, meetings take place in public places such as coffee shops (largely for men) and, for younger male Syrian refugees, in internet cafes. Study respondents of all ages and genders mentioned that they attend social events like weddings and funerals because they are part of their social and cultural duties, but other events are avoided due to financial concerns and worries about interacting with Lebanese. There were also accounts of men attending the mosque, especially during certain holidays (e.g. Ramadan). Proximity often affects the nature and regularity of interactions, with respondents noting that they would spend time at nearby friends' houses.

Female Syrian refugee respondents often have less opportunity to socialise and interact, especially those who have care-giving duties to family members with health problems, disabilities or young children. Some respondents mentioned that if the event/function (e.g. a wedding) is nearby they would attend, otherwise distance is also an obstacle. Most married women are unable to attend mosque, largely because of cultural restrictions, but also because of domestic and care-related responsibilities. Other locations for potential interactions are during skills training courses, which is especially common for women.

A number of Syrian refugees living in informal settlements also described interactions with the *shaweesh* (community leader who often liaises and supervises rent and land related issues). In some cases, the *shaweesh* is the first port of call in case of problems, and for organisations that provide services and material support in the settlements. The *shaweesh* also often plays a role in overseeing and recruiting refugees for manual labour, thus exerting a large degree of control over workers.

Respondents described the ways in which MPC can have positive effects on relationships and dynamics between Syrian refugees. Recipients explained that MPC has improved their social life, giving them more freedom and ability to pay for transportation to visit friends and relatives, and therefore also improving relationships. This effect of MPC is also highlighted by respondents who experienced discontinuation, or never received MPC. For instance, one discontinued respondent spoke about no longer being able to pay for transportation to visit someone, another said he no longer goes out to the market on a daily basis. Other informants noted how MPC discontinuation also affects the activities in which their children can participate.

*"I stay at home and, to be honest, we are psychologically tired. My neighbours invite me over and offer hospitality of coffee and other things that I cannot offer. I won't lie to you, I can offer them a cup of coffee, but nothing more. Therefore, I try to avoid such gatherings."* Male Syrian IDI participant, 16, discontinued household, Saadnayel.

The clear prevailing perception among recipients is that everyone in need should receive MPC, indicating a sense of empathy and compassion, but also discomfort, likely to affect interactions both positively and negatively. Recipients from all study sites also mentioned tensions arising from the perception among some non-recipients and discontinued refugees that they are wrongfully claiming the assistance or should not be receiving MPC. While a few discontinued refugees appeared to accept their circumstances – reporting that they did not feel differently towards MPC recipients, and arguing that it was their destiny or that others may be worse off – most expressed dissatisfaction and scepticism about the targeting process. Many noted a lack of clarity of why some are discontinued and others are not, reporting that families perceived as being better off are still receiving MPC, and are even able to save up money.

There was also a sense among some respondents not living in informal tented settlements (ITS), that ITS residents are better able to 'play the system' and claim assistance, while ITS residents think urban refugees have it easier and are more connected, another potential source of tension.

Tensions also arise due to non-recipients and discontinued refugees borrowing money – or requesting to – from MPC recipients, who, as a result, could feel overwhelmed by loan requests, and who are often unable to lend money after covering their own basic needs.

*"I mean, for example, at first you have to buy for one, the second looks like 'why my brother? Why him?' So there becomes like distinction between them... like discrimination. One needs this item, urgently. He tells me 'Why? You bought for my brother and you did not buy for me'. So he gets upset as if you deprived him of something. I feel upset because there are a lot of requests and I am not providing any of them."* Male Syrian IDI participant, MPC recipient, 31, Baalbek.

Collection of MPC at ATMs can be both a source of positive interaction and collaboration, as well as tension between Syrian refugees. Whereas most recipients happily offer support to those who are illiterate or have difficulties using an ATM, several respondents also reported frustration with the lengthy queuing, as well as with people collecting for multiple recipients. At times, this frustration can lead to arguments and even fighting among Syrian refugees.



Photo: Adrian Hartrick

### 3. INTERACTIONS BETWEEN SYRIAN REFUGEES AND THEIR LEBANESE HOSTS

In a country such as Lebanon, with deteriorating economic conditions and increased pressures on limited services and resources, the high number of Syrian refugees could contribute to tensions and threaten social stability, especially in areas where refugees are concentrated alongside vulnerable Lebanese (LCRP, 2018). This section explores the nature of general interactions between Syrian refugees and Lebanese, and the role MPC plays in these interactions.

#### Triggers of tensions and mediating factors

There is a considerable amount of literature that explores the factors that can trigger tensions between Syrian refugees and members of the Lebanese communities, which are also then likely to impact social cohesion and, ultimately, social stability. In addition to sector-specific concerns explored in section 5 of this report, these include a perception among hosts that Syrian refugees are benefiting disproportionately from international aid and that host communities, who are also vulnerable and in need of assistance, have been excluded (ARK, 2018a,b,c; LCRP, 2018; Oxfam & Research Evaluation Metrics, 2017; Saferworld & LCPS, 2018). There are also perceptions that Syrian refugee girls and women in some Lebanese communities are a potential threat to Lebanese cultural and moral values, by marrying Lebanese men and living in polygamous unions and getting married while they are still underage (Haddad et al., 2018; 2015; Saferworld & LCPS, 2018). These potential triggers, whether perceived or true, are mediated by a number of other factors, which include – as also identified in the ARK regular perception survey reports on social tensions in Lebanon – the following:

- **The amount of interactions between refugees and host communities**, with more interactions likely to result in better impressions of each other, leading to improved social stability. Where interaction is limited, both Syrian refugees and Lebanese fall back on unfavourable stereotypes of the other community, undermining empathy and potential for solidarity (Saferworld & LCPS, 2018).
- **Different locations reporting different levels of tensions**, e.g. Lebanese/Syrian border areas reporting lower tensions since people are used to having contact with each other and are connected through social, economic and family ties (e.g. Haddad et al., 2018; International Alert, 2015).
- **The history of relations between Lebanese and Syrians**, including old grievances and memories of the civil conflict and the Syrian occupation of Lebanon also shape perceptions (ARK, 2018).
- **The role of the media and negative portrayals of refugees**, which shape perceptions and can contribute to hostility and tensions (Al Masri & Abla, 2017; ARK, 2018c; International Alert, 2015).
- **Religion and political affiliation**, which can also influence host perceptions with, for instance Christians and Druze being more likely to consider relations with Syrian refugees as negative compared to Sunni Lebanese (ARK, 2018a; International Alert, 2015).
- **Gender and social status/class**: Men, in some studies, face more competition for employment than women, potentially affecting relationships between refugees and hosts (International Alert, 2015; Mercy Corps, 2015). On the other hand, women are often more concerned about issues of insecurity or morality (Khatab, 2015). It appears that interactions are more likely to be positive among refugees and hosts of similar social status/class (wealth profiles, education) (Haddad et al., 2018).

#### A Syrian perspective on interactions

Existing evidence suggests that social interactions between Syrian refugees and Lebanese are limited and mainly occur on a needs-only basis (CARE, 2014). The tensions monitoring system established by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNHCR and other partners, found that Syrian refugees living in ITS chose to be isolated and close to their own families and, with a desire to 'keep out of trouble', keeping interactions with Lebanese to a minimum. As work is largely segregated it does not support social interaction, whilst the double shift system in public schools means that Syrian refugee and Lebanese children mostly do not mix at school or recreationally (UNDP & Empatika, 2019).

Interactions are shaped by perceptions of the 'other' and, vice versa, perceptions are shaped by interactions. When Syrian refugee respondents of this study were asked how they think Lebanese perceive them, many described the Lebanese as treating them as equals and/or sympathising with the hardships they face. In particular, younger women (aged 25-35) across all three study sites spoke about some Lebanese women being supportive, and that they are able to empathise with each other



as they face the same situation, particularly among the most vulnerable Lebanese. A number of respondents also expressed sympathy towards Lebanese, especially the more vulnerable.

*"We [Lebanese and Syrians] have the same concerns. We have the same financial conditions. She didn't make me feel that we are of different nationalities. For example, she would give me half of the meal she cooked when I didn't have anything to feed my children, despite the fact that their life conditions are bad too. This is the simplest example. When I delivered, she handled me and the baby for eight days."* Female Syrian IDI participant, 30, MPC recipient, Qabb Elias.

According to this study, most social interactions and relationships between Syrian refugees and Lebanese that were seen as largely positive are between neighbours. As a result, Syrian refugees living in houses in host communities are more likely to interact socially with Lebanese than those living in ITS, particularly in the absence of outside work opportunities in informal settings. Interactions, for both men and women, mainly take the form of visits to each other's houses. A couple of respondents noted that Syrian refugee men and Lebanese men also pray alongside each other in mosques, and younger men play football together. Interactions between women are mostly limited to home visits and public places related to their domestic or caring duties. Many respondents also reported interactions in relation to assistance offered by local support organisations, and turning to Lebanese in an emergency was also mentioned. This supports findings of existing literature which suggest that social capital can be built even in situations of relative vulnerability and that 'bridging' capital between individual refugees and Lebanese citizens can be used as a form of basic 'social insurance' (Uzelac et al., 2018).

Some respondents expressed indifference, also observing that it is difficult to generalise, that there are both 'good and bad' people among Syrian refugees and Lebanese alike. There was also the perception that there is not much difference between the two groups, that they share the same culture as well as experiences of poverty. These expressions of indifference mostly came from respondents who do not interact much with Lebanese, for reasons that included living in, and rarely leaving, settlements, or not having the appropriate attire to attend functions such as weddings.

*"We don't go to weddings for Lebanese people. However, we have a duty to go to funerals despite the nationality of the deceased person. We have to stand next to them in such hard times. We met some good people, as you are, whom we visit for such occasions."* Male Syrian IDI participant, 29, non-recipient, Saadnayel.

Negative perceptions and poor treatment of Syrian refugees by Lebanese, according to Syrian refugee respondents, appear to be more prominent in areas with larger numbers of refugees such as Baalbek. While some respondents had personal experiences of poor treatment, a significant proportion of reports were from hearsay. Refugees cited differences in the way they, and other Syrians, are treated and a feeling of submissiveness. There was also some evidence of negative perceptions and hostility towards Sunni Syrians in Shia areas. It was also noted by Syrian respondents that young people are more likely to have negative views than older people.

Several Syrian refugees, men and women, described negative perceptions by Lebanese based on differences in appearances/dress, with some reports by female Syrian refugees of being harassed due to their clothing. Refugees living in ITS often felt spoken about in a more derogatory manner and others more generally felt they are seen as being of lower status. Some female Syrian refugees in turn saw Lebanese women as being arrogant and snobbish. Such perceptions of 'the other' can foster negative feelings and tensions.

*"Lebanese do not want to interact with Syrians living in ITS and those who look like peasants. Outfits do play a role and limit social interactions between Syrian refugees and Lebanese hosts."* Male Syrian FGD participant, 35, MPC recipient, Saadnayel.

Negative interactions were mostly reported as related to street harassment, usually of women, and physical violence, usually by men. In some cases, Syrian refugees make a conscious effort to keep to themselves for fear of conflict with Lebanese. While Syrian refugees face mobility restrictions, which limit opportunities for social interaction with Lebanese, several male Syrian refugees cited a fear of checkpoints as a barrier to mobility, and therefore to making social connections.

## A Lebanese perspective on interactions

Positive attitudes among Lebanese towards Syrian refugees were often voiced by referencing their shared religion and culture, with some describing Syrians like brothers or part of one family. Key informants consistently commented that Syrians are welcome in Lebanon, just as Syrians had welcomed the Lebanese during the 2006 conflict. One respondent described how Syrians in the Saadnayel area are perceived as similar to Lebanese due to the close geographical proximity and religious similarities, and that Syrians had been in Lebanon long before the Syrian crisis, and many appear well integrated into the community.

*"I feel that there is integration because we have lived all our lives with Syrian refugees. It is not something new that Syrian refugees come to Lebanon. Plus, the Bekaa is very close to Syria so there are a lot of common traditions between us. I mean, the Syrian refugees resemble us more in their traditions than the people from Beirut."* Female Lebanese FGD participant, Saadnayel.

Similar to observations made by Syrian refugees, Lebanese respondents noted that social interactions with Syrian refugees usually occur when meeting neighbours in the streets and other public places, and, for young men, in football games. Lebanese respondents also echoed the impression that most interactions are with Syrians living in houses in the host community rather than in ITS. Yet, most Lebanese respondents reported that these interactions rarely go beyond greetings, and only in rare instances do neighbours become friends and visit each other.

*"Our neighbours are Syrian refugees, so naturally you have to greet them. So, the ones living in houses, relationships happen between the neighbours. But people in the tents, because they are far, because they are a community together and more close to each other, this interaction does not happen."* Female Lebanese FGD participant, Saadnayel.

Again, similar to the Syrian perspectives, many Lebanese also found it impossible to generalise, that every person is different. Female respondents generally noted that there are no specific differences between Lebanese and Syrian women, and some noted that younger Syrian children, who have spent much of their childhood in Lebanon, are even more similar to Lebanese.

*"Some of them are people you can interact and live with, and with others you can't. This is the same for the Lebanese people – there are good and bad people."* Female Lebanese IDI participant, 16, Qabb Elias.

When Lebanese respondents had negative perceptions of Syrian refugees, it was largely a result of the perceived negative impact of the Syrian refugee arrival on Lebanon, particularly on jobs and wages. Lebanese respondents also reported, in a similar vein, that social interactions between Syrian refugees and Lebanese – such as at football matches – could trigger tensions and even instances of violence. Most of these perceptions came from Lebanese men speaking of Syrian refugee men. Negative perceptions of Syrian refugees among Lebanese also resulted from Lebanese associating Syrians with raids and terrorism, which leads to distrust of Syrians. Again, negative perceptions appear to be more prominent in areas with larger numbers of refugees, such as Baalbek, and there is also some evidence among Lebanese of negative perceptions and hostility towards Syrians in Shia areas.

*"Their society is different from ours. And you can't trust them. There are camps here in Qabb Elias, and every time the government and the military come, they take out trucks full of weapons. You can't trust them."* Male Lebanese FGD participant, 21, Qabb Elias.

Several Lebanese respondents described Syrians as backward and uneducated, wearing traditional styles of dress, particularly those coming from villages. A large number also described Syrian women as seemingly having greater restrictions than Lebanese women, particularly in terms of mobility and marriage arrangements, and being more under the control of their parents and/or husbands. A frequent comment was that Syrian refugee women have many children, which is usually viewed negatively by Lebanese, as is the perceived link between early marriage and large families due to the lack of education in Syrian women.



*"In our society, the Lebanese woman has contact with others and engages with others, including men. She can go out wherever she wants, can sit in front of the house, she can work...the Lebanese woman has her total freedom, as long as she stays within the limits. Syrian women are forbidden to go out."* Female Lebanese FGD participant, Baalbek.

## Intermarriage between Lebanese and Syrian refugees

According to many study respondents, both Syrian and Lebanese, a key area of interaction is through intermarriage, which is relatively common. Most examples described were marriages between Lebanese men and Syrian refugee women; instances of intermarriage between Syrian men and Lebanese women were cited less frequently.

Early marriage of Syrian refugee girls (below the age of 18) to older Lebanese men, but also to Syrian men, is one coping strategy employed by Syrian refugee families. Reasons – as noted by both Syrian and Lebanese respondents, men and women – for such marriages include wanting to maintain the honour of the Syrian girl, for her physical and financial security and there being fewer Syrian men left as a direct consequence of the civil war. There are some instances, according to Syrian respondents, in which early marriage is reported to be encouraged or even forced by Syrian refugee parents. Other times Syrian respondents spoke about early marriage and inter-marriage as being out of the hands of, or beyond the control of the direct participant. Hence, either it is the parent's decision, seen as the will of God, or the outcome of an emotional connection between two people. Both Syrian and Lebanese study respondents also described how early and inter-marriages can often lead to divorce. Reasons mentioned for divorce included marrying the Syrian girl at a very young age and marrying someone they had never met before.

## How MPC affects social interactions

Existing literature highlights how cash assistance can contribute to tensions between groups. The evaluation of Oxfam's Temporary Cash Assistance Project in Lebanon noted that a small number of Syrian beneficiaries (around nine per cent) reported that the provision of cash created tensions between neighbours and jealousy from Lebanese, who felt that Syrians were assisted more than Lebanese who could also be eligible. The duration of cash assistance also seems to matter; if provided for longer periods, host communities can perceive that refugees are motivated to extend their stay (CARE, 2014).

However, studies also show that cash assistance can have a number of positive effects on social cohesion and stability, improving relationships between beneficiaries and hosts and increasing mutual support (Lehmann & Masterson, 2014). The principal finding of Wave IV of the 2018 ARK survey was that higher levels of cash assistance was associated with lower levels of all negative outcomes examined. However, whilst assistance had a positive effect on the quality of relations between Syrian refugees and Lebanese, this effect was the least positive of the three measured, suggesting that "the likely impact of cash assistance is therefore more on alleviating the perceived pressure on services that Syrians pose in Lebanon...than on changing the structural nature of the relationship towards the more positive" (p7).

It was common for Lebanese respondents to report it was unfair that Syrian refugees are receiving aid while it is perceived that vulnerable Lebanese are not. They felt there are even more poor or vulnerable Lebanese than Syrians, and that this preferential treatment towards Syrian refugees could only result in negative feelings among Lebanese towards Syrians. One adolescent Lebanese male even perceived Syrian refugees to be living a better lifestyle than Lebanese.

*"There are poor Lebanese who do not receive assistance, and their situation is miserable. There is a grudge because we are poor and nobody looks at us, while everything is secured for them [the Syrian refugees]. They can go back but they are not going back because of the assistance here in Lebanon."* Female Lebanese FGD participant, Saadnayel.

Just as MPC withdrawal at ATMs was seen as a source of tension among Syrian refugees, it seems to also be the most visible display of tensions between Lebanese and Syrians recipients, according to both Lebanese and Syrian refugee respondents. Most government salaries are paid at the start of the month, resulting in high numbers of people converging at the same time, with reports of queues,

overcrowding, people jumping queues and fights breaking out. Syrian refugees reported allowing Lebanese people to enter the queue in front of them to avoid tensions sensing they wanted 'to pick a fight', and a few also reported receiving verbal abuse from Lebanese. Some Lebanese observed that Syrians could behave in an 'uncivilised' manner at the ATMs.

A number of more neutral and positive perceptions were also observed by the Lebanese. For instance, rather than laying the blame only on Syrian refugees, in one Lebanese FGD in Baalbek, respondents reported resentment towards the Lebanese government's handling of the refugee crisis (including perceived corruption and misuse of UN funds). They suggested that if the state were perhaps less corrupt, Lebanese people generally would be better off. One adolescent Lebanese male respondent suggested that his Syrian friends rightly deserve this support given the situation in which they find themselves.

*"Our problem is not with the Syrian people, but with the Lebanese state. If the state is not allowing the Lebanese to live properly, then why would I bear a grudge against the Syrian if the UN is giving him aid? The Lebanese state should be giving us assistance as the UN is giving the Syrian refugee."* Male Lebanese FGD participant, Baalbek.

In addition, many Lebanese – such as shopkeepers, landlords and pharmacists – generally feel more inclined to lend/provide credit to Syrian refugees if aware that they receive MPC, knowing it will allow them to repay their loans.

Most Syrian recipient respondents observed that MPC has limited effect on interactions or the ability to socialise more with Lebanese, among other reasons because the value of MPC is too low to be spent on anything other than basic/urgent needs such as medication, food and water. Generally, it was noted that Syrians avoid going out and stay in their neighbourhood in order to reduce spending, and this is the case also for MPC recipients. Other than neighbours who may be Lebanese, especially for those living in houses, if Syrians do socialise it will most likely be with other Syrians, but as 'there is no money to be wasted' this also happens rarely.

Drawing from interviews with non-recipients and discontinued refugees, there are examples of how MPC can influence opportunities for social interactions. Two male respondents, a father and son, reported that discontinuation has reduced their social interactions in general, including with Lebanese, as they are no longer making daily trips to the vegetable market or weekly visits to the internet café. On the other hand, a Syrian woman stated the discontinuation has not changed her interactions with her Lebanese friend.

*"What changed is that I used to receive the 260,000 [MPC]. I would get up in the morning, buy a bag of bread, plan that today I need to spend 6,000-7,000 to cook and have breakfast, lunch and dinner from. Now this is missing... Now we don't have the 260,000, so outings have become a lot less."* Male Syrian FCS participant, 60, discontinued, Baalbek.

## 4. MPC AND SAFETY CHALLENGES

According to a number of studies, perceptions of increased insecurity in areas with a high concentration of Syrian refugees constitute an important potential trigger of tensions between Syrian refugees and host communities (Aktis Strategy, 2016; Al Masri & Abla, 2017; ARK, 2018a,b,c; CARE, 2014; Christophersen et al., 2013; Haddad et al., 2018; Harb & Saab, 2014; Khattab, 2015; Saferworld & LCPS, 2018; Search for Common Ground, 2014; World Vision, 2013; World Vision, 2015). The literature indicates that for Syrian refugee women, harassment and physical assault are the primary causes of insecurity, whilst Syrian men who experience insecurity primarily face harassment, arrest and community violence (LCRP, 2018). Men are also likely to self-impose movement restrictions to minimise the risk of being detained (UNDP & Empatika, 2019). This study largely echoes findings from the referenced literature.

### A Syrian perspective on safety and security

According to the perception of Syrian refugee respondents, incidences of violence and insecurity outside the household are relatively low. Where they do occur, they appear to be more prevalent at night than during the day – with differences particularly pronounced in ITS settings – and affect men and women and families as a whole across all three study sites. Forms of violence and insecurity reported by Syrian respondents include: theft, gunshots or fights happening in their area – either indiscriminately or as a result of violent confrontations between Lebanese households – and attacks on businesses, people on the streets and on property – some seemingly indiscriminate, and some which appear to specifically target Syrian refugees. Several male respondents also reported a general lack of sense of safety and security, especially in Baalbek, due to tensions and violent confrontations between different Lebanese groups, noting that the political and social situation in Lebanon is volatile and makes them feel insecure.

*“In general, inside the informal tented settlement, during the day there is nothing. After 6pm, no one dares to go outside, because there are bad people around. If they saw a child or a young man they would hit him and run away.”* Female Syrian IDI participant, 19, discontinued, Saadnayel.

In Saadnayel and, Baalbek especially, some of these attacks appear to specifically target Syrian refugees, including violence by Lebanese youth on Syrian refugee youth. Harassment experienced by Syrian women, on the streets or on public transport, is sometimes triggered by their traditional dress. It was also suggested, both by key informants and Syrian refugee women themselves, that some Lebanese perceive Syrian refugee women as inclined to undertake sex work and engage in transactional sex, which is another trigger for harassment.

*“A man stopped me in the middle of the street and asked me to remove the veil from my face and told me ‘next time, I don’t want to see you wearing it’. I was alone in the street, and when you walk on the street there you feel lonely, so I had to remove it, I was scared. Next time he might shoot me and my son or scare me or kidnap me. Once, they followed my sister-in-law, and they were calling her ‘Daesh Daesh’. She also had to remove the veil.”* Female Syrian FGD participant, 40, non-recipient, Baalbek.

*“The security of Syrian women, specifically, is very bad. Security at night for women in Baalbek is nearly non-existent. You would hardly find a woman going out alone without a male. Unfortunately, there is a stereotype of Syrian women that they work in prostitution. That’s because of the financial and economic background. Some people were accused of prostitution because of their bad living conditions. They believe that a Syrian woman at night is a woman working in prostitution.”* Male Lebanese KI, Baalbek.

A few young Syrian refugee male respondents mentioned that their sisters are more vulnerable to violence and, as a precautionary step, suggest they only go out during the day. There are also concerns about the safety of girls when walking back from school in the evenings, if the school is located far away and transport is unavailable/unaffordable. In such cases, parents or brothers escort the girls back from school where possible. Finally, it was suggested that single women or female-headed households are more vulnerable to violence, as married women have the protection of their husbands.

As a result of these perceived and real security threats, coupled with domestic responsibilities, many Syrian refugee women tend to spend most of their time at home with limited social networks, particularly during winter. Those living in ITS have particularly limited boundaries, with many women reporting not going beyond the settlement. A few married women reported being prevented from going

out by their husbands, or daughters being prevented from going out by their mothers, the latter view was also shared by some key informants.

Several young Syrian refugee men also mentioned that they feel unsafe due to physical violence they have experienced by Lebanese men. These include random assaults by civilians, as well as attacks by army and security personnel. They also fear being arrested at checkpoints due to not having valid residence permits or ID. Syrian refugees living in Baalbek are particularly concerned about the gun culture and use of arms among the Lebanese clans there.

*"A fight once happened here in the neighbourhood. They gathered, and they wanted to attack me. One of them said 'You are the only Syrian here and we can step on your face'. I just didn't answer him. I can't answer him. I would be beaten if I defended myself. He was a guy of the military. You can't do anything to him."* Male Syrian FGD participant, recipient, Qabb Elias.

Few respondents have reported crimes to the authorities, as they feel nothing would be achieved, particularly given their status as Syrian refugees. In some cases, when reporting assaults to the police, they were told to do nothing; there was the suggestion that if they did something there would be retaliation.

### A Lebanese perspective on safety and security

Lebanese respondents described instances of experiencing harassment or attacks from Syrian refugees. Several young Lebanese men in a Baalbek FGD highlighted social tensions and security problems as perceived to be created and/or heightened by the arrival of Syrian refugees. Similarly, the presence of Syrian refugees has led some female Lebanese respondents to feel unsafe, reporting harassment and being followed by male Syrian refugees. Lebanese key informants also spoke of security issues in terms of refugees being the instigators of crime against Lebanese due to poverty, including theft and aggressive begging.

*"The crime rate has increased. There have been cases of rape and sexual assault. The hard conditions, and also different cultures clashing, play a big role. When a person has needs that aren't met, it makes them steal. If their [Syrian refugees'] conditions were different, they wouldn't have stolen."* Male Lebanese KII, Baalbek.

### How MPC affects safety and security

A 2016 impact evaluation of the LCC MPC programme found that cash assistance improved community relations and interactions, as recipients reported feeling significantly more secure than non-recipients in their communities. Violence at the community level was also perceived as declining when beneficiaries were able to pay their rent and spend their money on goods and services in the local community (Lehmann & Masterson, 2014).

Wave IV of the 2018 ARK survey noted a decline in the quality of relations between Syrians and Lebanese from Wave III, which the study suggested to be linked to Syrians reportedly facing an increase in levels of harassment, being more affected by raids and witnessing increasing confiscations of identity papers between Wave III and IV. Additionally, over the four waves of the survey a decline in the frequency of inter-community interactions was seen, which is likely to have a negative effect on social cohesion and, therefore, social stability. They noted that while cash assistance does alleviate some social tensions, it is insufficient on its own and needs to be coupled with social stability interventions.

In this study, the general perspective among recipients was that MPC had little direct effect on security. While it makes recipients feel more stable and safer because, for instance, they can feed their children, it does not impact on their wider safety outside the household. One respondent also commented that while she can use the MPC on transport, and thereby reduce potential security risks faced whilst walking, she would rather spend the MPC on more pressing needs.

Although not mentioned by Syrian refugees themselves, a Lebanese key informant did suggest, in line with existing evidence, that MPC assistance may reduce levels of crime in the Syrian refugee population since, according to him, poverty drives crime.



*"Improving the economic situation leads to a decrease in the rate of crime. If someone had a child in the hospital and he couldn't cover the expenses, he would steal to pay. He would deal drugs to pay the rent. He would do illegal actions if he doesn't have a source of money. This 260,000 [MPC] won't make miracles, but it would reduce the suffering." Male Lebanese KII, Baalbek.*

There were also cases of MPC having the adverse effect, with some accounts of recipients being burgled.

Among discontinued refugees, there were accounts by women of feeling more empowered and better able to take care of themselves when they received MPC. Discontinued female respondents commonly explained that they now experience a general lack of safety given a change in the political atmosphere of the country. They expressed a sense that Syrian refugees are no longer welcome in Lebanon and that the Lebanese authorities carry out unfair police checks and arrests of Syrian refugees. While this is a general issue, it appears to be felt particularly keenly by those who have been discontinued from MPC, presumably because they had previously felt the empowerment-related effect of receiving MPC. Most non-recipient respondents reported similar safety and security-related challenges to other respondents. One female non-recipient explained that she thought the MPC could help her family save money to renew her husband's permit. This in turn would provide more security for her family given that lack of permits is a key reason for Syrian refugee men being searched and arrested. More generally, non-recipients felt it was difficult for them to comment on how life might be different with MPC since, while they could observe recipients from a distance, they could not fully comprehend the difference, if any, it makes to people's lives.



Photo: Adrian Hartrick

## 5. INTERACTIONS BY SECTOR

This section explores interactions between Syrian refugees and their Lebanese hosts with a focus on five key sectors: the labour market and workplace, local economy, shelter, healthcare and education.

Available evidence highlights a number of sector-specific pressure points for tensions between Syrian refugees and members of Lebanese host communities, most notably a weak and bifurcated labour market and overburdened public services (World Bank, 2019). As noted above, both potential triggers of tensions, and the impact of cash assistance on social cohesion and social stability, are mediated by a number of other factors, many of them also sector-specific. These include: the economic profiles of the areas and the availability of casual employment, with more tensions reported in poorer areas with less employment opportunities and/or large numbers of Syrian refugees (Haddad et al., 2018); and the availability and quality of public services and infrastructure, with areas where public services are limited or of poorer quality more likely to experience tensions between the two groups (Aktis Strategy, 2016; CARE, 2014; Haddad et al., 2018; Mercy Corps, 2015).

### The labour market and workplace

#### Sources of tensions

Perceived increased job/labour market competition, particularly for lower-skilled jobs, between hosts and refugees was identified by a number of sources as the primary trigger of tensions between the two communities, with Lebanese perceiving that the influx of refugees has resulted in fewer economic and livelihoods opportunities for Lebanese, as well as lower wages (Aktis Strategy, 2016; Al Masri & Abla, 2017; ARK, 2018a,b,c; CARE, 2014; Christophersen et al., 2013; Haddad et al., 2018; Harb & Saab, 2014; Khattab, 2015; Search for Common Ground, 2014; UNICEF, OCHA & REACH, 2015; World Vision, 2013; World Vision, 2015). However, it is worth noting that this tension factor has declined somewhat over the most recent three rounds of the ARK survey, possibly because, over time, sector employment between Lebanese and Syrians has become increasingly differentiated, with Syrian employment most heavily concentrated in the sectors of construction, agriculture and manufacturing – sectors in which Lebanese are less likely to seek employment (ARK, 2019).

In this study, too, the most notable source of tension was the view – real or perceived – that (largely male, but also female) Syrian refugees are taking jobs away from their Lebanese counterparts, particularly those who are poor or otherwise vulnerable. A related prevalent view was that Syrian refugees are also driving down wages. This was the case both for those engaged in casual manual labour, but also those more involved in professional roles in the education or healthcare sector. Young people are especially affected by this dynamic, according to (particularly young, male) Lebanese respondents. At the same time, a number of Lebanese respondents acknowledged that they would prefer to hire Syrian refugees, who will accept lower wages, over Lebanese workers.

*“But now it’s like everywhere you go, the worker is Syrian... the pharmacy, the grocery store, the hospitals. I have three sons, and they’re all jobless, because all the Syrians are taking the job opportunities.”* Female Lebanese IDI participant, Saadnayel.

*“My husband used to work in a company where they paid him 800,000 LBP a month. When the Syrians came, they fired him, because they pay the Syrians 450,000 LBP instead.”* Female Lebanese IDI participant, Saadnayel.

Self-employed Lebanese – such as taxi drivers, private tutors, market stall or barber shop owners – also reported facing increased competition for clients from Syrian refugees, whose services are usually cheaper. One young Lebanese man also mentioned that competition is particularly fierce in Baalbek’s smaller economy, compared to larger cities such as Beirut.

The impact of Syrian refugees on local job markets has been exacerbated by nationwide high rates of unemployment. Several Syrian refugees, men and women, described competition for jobs as a common theme in verbal abuse levelled at them by Lebanese people, and one respondent attributed violent attacks on ITSS to Lebanese resentment around competition for jobs.

Syrian refugees argued that they were taking on jobs the Lebanese are unwilling to do themselves, a view supported by Lebanese key informants. This is particularly true for agricultural work, but also other unskilled jobs such as cleaning and garbage collection – sectors in which Lebanese also work but tend to be in better-paid roles. Indeed, recent findings of the UNDP tensions monitoring system



note that actual competition for work is limited and only seems to threaten self-employed Lebanese, who are also the most vulnerable to downturns in the economy (UNDP & Empatika, 2019).

*"I receive a lot of requests, they want a baker, or someone to work in agriculture, and all these jobs get filled by Syrians. No Lebanese accepts the work."* Female Lebanese KII (community leader), Qabb Elias.

### **Interactions**

Syrian respondents who are formally employed, both men and women, were more likely to report positive relationships with their Lebanese employer, compared to those who carry out casual informal work. However, the fact that Syrian refugees must be sponsored by a Lebanese employer to gain formal employment opens up opportunities for exploitation, as noted by study respondents. In fact, many young Syrian refugee men (working both formally and, more commonly, informally) reported mistreatment or discrimination by Lebanese employers, such as salaries not being paid on time or at all, verbal abuse, and generally exploitative and abusive behaviours. More specifically, some Syrian refugees described their papers being confiscated, while others reported having to work in unsafe conditions, including instances where sustaining an injury at work made it difficult to work or prevented working altogether. Syrian refugee workers perceived themselves to have little recourse in cases of exploitation or abuse due to their refugee status, and also fear negative reactions by security forces, thus preferring to avoid any kind of conflict with Lebanese employers where possible.

*"I was once on the street and a man offered me some cleaning work. I worked all day and he didn't pay me anything. I told him to pay and that I have kids. He is a bad person and I don't know him, I just went with him to earn some money. I went back home, what could I do? I cannot say anything, him being a Lebanese and me as a Syrian. I cannot say anything."* Male Syrian IDI participant, 29, non-recipient, Baalbek.

Most Syrian respondents either work independently or alongside other Syrian refugees only. For those with Lebanese colleagues, relationships between them seem to vary mostly according to individual personalities. However, negative experiences of Syrian refugees feeling 'spoken down to' and bossed around by Lebanese colleagues are the most common. Even Lebanese who reported having good relationships with their Syrian colleagues, admitted that this is not the norm, that Lebanese are more likely to treat Syrian colleagues as 'less than' Lebanese. As is the case with relations to employers, those Syrian refugees in casual jobs – such as construction or agriculture – were more likely to report negative interactions with Lebanese colleagues than those in formal employment.

*"You find some people are good, and some are not, it depends. Some people mind their own business and don't like to mingle with others, and others do. Even for Syrians, not everyone is the same... you see bad people and good people. I find some Lebanese better than Syrians when I work with them."* Female Syrian IDI participant, 20, non-recipient, Saadnayel.

There was also some evidence of positive interactions between, particularly female, Syrian refugees working in customer facing roles in shops or hairdressers, and Lebanese clients – to the extent that clients will ask to be served by them. Although such interactions may contribute to developing positive views of Syrian refugees against negative stereotypes, these exchanges do not usually lead to social interactions outside the workplace.

### **How MPC affects interactions and sources of tensions**

Existing evidence indicates that cash assistance can exacerbate host resentment when hosts perceive that this regular source of income allows refugees to accept work for lower salaries (Haddad et al., 2018; Harb & Saab, 2014). Likewise, in this study, Lebanese respondents suggested that assistance to Syrian refugees offers them various financial advantages, which means they can accept jobs at lower wages, whereas low-income Lebanese workers who do not receive any financial support need higher wages to cover their basic needs. In addition, they commented that many Syrian refugee families often live together alongside other families in the same property to split the rent, again allowing them to survive on lower wages.

*"Syrian refugees' salaries are lower because they have the basics provided for them... diesel, rent, bills, everything paid from the aid, not the jobs. If I just had the rent covered, or healthcare for my children, and their tuition, that would be perfect."* Male Lebanese FGD participant, Baalbek.

As a result of recent changes to labour regulations, which require Syrians to have work permits, Syrian refugees were, particularly in the second round of data collection, increasingly struggling to find work – regardless of MPC status. In this context, receiving MPC has relatively little effect on the nature and quality of interactions or frequency of tensions between Syrian refugees and Lebanese in the workplace. The most visible impact of MPC on interactions in the workplace is that, in this context, MPC discontinuation means less choice in the types of work that, usually male, Syrian refugees perform, leaving them even more vulnerable to exploitation by Lebanese employers. For female-headed households, discontinuation affects women by increasing their need to take up paid work, making their domestic and care-giving duties difficult. A key informant noted that discontinuation could also expose women to increased risk of harassment or abuse by Lebanese employers. Although no discontinued respondents corroborated this, a female recipient did report that she now no longer has to work in settings where she can be harassed by an employer. Similar experiences were also expressed by non-recipients where the inability to find casual work in the current context places them in ever increasing degrees of vulnerability.

*“I work for myself. I don't work daily. Now, almost two years ago, things changed. Work became less because Syrian refugees became more in number, so there is less work. I earn almost \$40 to \$50 per day. When I work. And when I don't work I don't get anything. But during the winter I'm broke... It is cold and snowy, there is no work.”* Male Syrian IDI participant, 25, non-recipient, Baalbek.

## The local economy

### Sources of tensions

On the one hand there was a perception, held largely by key informants, that Syrian refugees spend income, such as MPC, in Lebanese shops thus benefitting the local economy. Similarly, some Lebanese respondents observed that the influx of Syrian refugees has boosted demand for certain types of domestically produced goods. On the other hand, a number of Lebanese respondents reported that only shopkeepers benefit whilst poorer, and more vulnerable, Lebanese do not. This supports the findings of existing studies, which suggest that the effect on local economies has been uneven (Saferworld & LCPC, 2018). In this study, some Lebanese commented that the price of goods has increased since the arrival of Syrian refugees, as demand is usually higher than supply. Some respondents argued that Syrian refugees are not spending their money in Lebanese shops, but rather in Syrian-owned shops – some of them newly-owned by recent arrivals – or on items sent from Syria sold at lower prices. The latter, in particular, results in tensions with Lebanese shop owners who feel their businesses are being threatened by new and competing shops run by Syrian refugees. In one reported instance, a Syrian shop owner had been harassed by Lebanese for this reason and, in another, Lebanese barbers unionised themselves and were able to bring about the closure of Syrian-run barber shops.

*“It's positive in one aspect. Suppose that I have a grocery store and the population of the neighbourhood is 1000. When an additional 2000 come to live in the same neighbourhood where they withdraw the money using this card and have the ability to buy goods from my store, it will improve the economy.”* Lebanese KII, Baalbek.

*“Now, since the population increased, there is a major increase in prices since the demand is more than the supply. So the Syrian crisis affected the Lebanese economy a lot.”* Female Lebanese FGD participant, Baalbek.

*“They are receiving the money and opening their own businesses; they are not using the money to rent or buy things; they open bakeries, mini-markets...”* Male Lebanese FGD participants, Baalbek.

In a previous study on interactions between the host and Syrian populations in Lebanon, the most common type of interaction between population groups was of an economic nature (e.g. in markets or shops) (UNICEF, OCHA & REACH, 2015). In this study, it was female Syrian refugees who usually interact with Lebanese in supermarkets and other shops. The majority reported they have 'normal' or neutral, albeit mainly transactional, interactions with Lebanese shopkeepers and at the supermarket generally. They also added that these interactions are not affected by issues of nationality, and that they make decisions about where to shop based on price.

*"I notice that there is social interaction with the Syrians in places where economic interaction takes place. For example, people who sell goods to Syrians, or have Syrians renting their houses, they are the ones who have positive interactions with the Syrians. They say that the Syrian crisis had a positive impact on them and not the opposite." Lebanese KII, Baalbek.*

The most frequent coping strategy used by Syrian refugees is borrowing money to pay for rent, medical needs, food supplies and household emergencies. After family members, the most common sources for borrowing are shopkeepers and pharmacists (as well as landlords), either in the form of buying on credit or, less commonly, borrowing cash. The quality of borrowing relationships varies considerably: A small number of Syrian refugees reported some tensions with Lebanese shopkeepers stemming from unpaid debts. However, positive interactions are more common, with Syrian refugees describing that shopkeepers offer them flexibility around delayed repayments.

### **How MPC affects interactions and sources of tensions**

The LCRP 2017-2020 (2018 update) notes that cash assistance to Syrians is improving their access to goods and services in the local economy, thus also benefiting local businesses. Similarly, it notes that regular cash assistance also improves community relationships as Syrians' improved purchasing power allows them to better interact with Lebanese at local markets, adding that "direct assistance to displaced Syrians and vulnerable host communities represent an alleviator of social tensions" and is "the pre-requisite as well as the enabler of stability in the country." The ARK surveys suggest that cash assistance provided to Syrians is "very likely" to have a positive effect on Lebanese through injecting cash into the local economy and alleviating pressure on the economy through addressing competition over jobs, most likely leading to a decline in negative perception of Syrian refugees by Lebanese (ARK, 2018c).

In this study, for the majority of respondents, and as suggested by the existing evidence around cash assistance in Lebanon, receiving MPC allows refugees to reduce previously accumulated debts and to start making monthly repayments to Lebanese lenders. One respondent indicated that their borrowing reduced by around half after they started receiving MPC. Others reported building relationships of trust with shop owners who are more willing to lend to them, as they are aware of the MPC and therefore more confident they are able to repay the debt.

*"I reached a stage where I had accumulated big debts at the supermarket. The owner told me that I couldn't borrow anymore before paying part of the debt. Thank God, I started to receive the 260,000 LBP [MPC] and I was able to pay part of the debt every month." Male Syrian IDI participant, 30, recipient, Baalbek.*

Discontinuation from MPC results in difficulties in paying back debts, leading to tensions. Discontinued refugees also have to resort to increased borrowing, becoming even more indebted to shopkeepers, who they are then often unable to repay – again resulting in deteriorating relationships. Once a sizeable debt has amounted, relationships of trust usually break down, with shopkeepers or pharmacists refusing more lending altogether, or imposing stricter conditions around borrowing.

*"I used to tell him [before discontinuation] that whenever the 5th of the month arrives, I will pay him. He still asks for his money and why we aren't paying him... we owe him over two million LBP. Most of the days now, he does not give us [credit]. My son goes, but he tells him off and asks him not to come back. If I need to get medicine, if my kids get sick, the pharmacist lets me pay him back in instalments, but only for two or three days." Female Syrian FDG participant, 32, discontinued, Saadnayel.*

## **Shelter and accommodation**

### **Sources of tensions**

Perceptions that Syrians are crowding out the housing market is an important sector-specific trigger of tensions between Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities, particularly in terms of pushing up rent prices (Al Masri & Abla, 2017; CARE, 2014; Search for Common Ground, 2014; World Vision, 2013; World Vision, 2015). Al Masri and Abla (2017) note, for instance, that several Lebanese respondents in the Bekaa claimed that large numbers of Syrian refugees renting residential spaces made it expensive for host youth to rent a house, marry and start a family. A recent study (IDS, 2018) found that the Lebanese government's 'no-camp' policy for Syrian refugees has exacerbated existing shortages of affordable housing in an already dysfunctional housing market, causing major worries for

both host and refugee communities. Additionally, frequent moves in search of affordable housing makes it difficult to maintain social networks that could contribute to improved social cohesion (IDS, 2018).

These findings are supported by this study, in which Lebanese respondents in urban settings reported that the arrival of Syrian refugees has changed the housing demographic significantly, with certain buildings and areas previously inhabited by Lebanese now occupied mainly by Syrian refugee tenants. Also consistent with the existing literature is that many Lebanese argued that the influx of Syrians has increased property rents. As with the impact on the local economy, it was noted that this increase benefits landlords and property developers, who, according to study respondents, tend to be already better off, but adversely affects Lebanese tenants.

Other changes perceived as negative by Lebanese, include the increase in population density and associated problems such as noise pollution and the inability of municipal waste management services to cope. This supports the findings of previous studies that a major challenge to social stability stems from the knock-on effects that population pressure has on the already limited ability of municipalities to provide basic services to host and displaced populations (LCRP, 2018).

*"The rent is too expensive. It got expensive when the Syrian refugees came. And it became expensive for both Lebanese and Syrians. For example, if I have a big Syrian family, they can rent for \$500-600. We own a house, so we don't have any problem, but the rents are expensive, even the shop rents are expensive. If I want to open a shop, it costs me around \$500 on average, including water and electricity. And still you can't open a shop because all Syrians already opened their own."* Male Lebanese FGD participant, 21, Qabb Elias.

### **Interactions**

Findings from round 1 of the UNDP tensions monitoring system suggest that the relationships between Syrians refugees and Lebanese can be described as weak and defined by unequal power relations – most notably between landlords and tenants, and small business owners and employees (UNDP & Empatika, 2019). In this study, most interactions between Syrian refugees and their Lebanese landlords were largely described as positive to neutral. However, given that the main shelter-related challenge mentioned by the majority of Syrian refugee respondents is being able to afford the rent, or to pay the rent on time, a large number of negative interactions were also reported. Late payment of rent is a particular sticking point in the relationship between landlords and tenants for those living in rented accommodation in host communities, but notably also in ITS. Negative interactions include name calling or reacting with anger when tenants are unable to pay the rent, unwillingness to compromise on rental costs, implementing unreasonable restrictions (particularly on noise made by children), and, in some cases, evicting tenants, usually because they have not paid their rent. However, some Syrians living in rented apartments or houses in host communities in Baalbek and Saadnayel reported patient landlords who are willing to wait for delayed payments and/or show acts of kindness, such as providing household items.

Relationships between Lebanese and Syrian refugee neighbours range from being quite limited and neutral, to positive and close, with only a few accounts of negative interactions between neighbours. Syrian refugees living in ITS usually have only Syrian neighbours. Syrian-Lebanese friendships were reported most often by Syrian refugee women living in host communities, who establish friendly relationships with female neighbours, most often through their children.

*"Our neighbours, well, the way they treated us was like no other, they were so nice. Not everyone is the same but those in particular their treatment was amazing."* Female Syrian FGD participant, recipient, Saadnayel.

*"My kids play with the kids of the [Lebanese] neighbours. But if anything bad happens they blame my kids. And the landlord tells us that my kids are not supposed to go out of the house. My son didn't obey once, and he told me 'I will have to lock you in the house'. They don't go out unless with their father a bit. Because if they go out, immediately they come and accuse them of things."* Female Syrian FGD participant, discontinued, Saadnayel.

## How MPC affects interactions and sources of tensions

For many recipient respondents, the rent is their first spending priority. As suggested by available evidence, receiving MPC enables Syrian refugees to pay their rent on time, with some reporting explicitly that being able to pay their rent regularly has built trust between themselves and their landlord. For others, this merely maintained the status quo, not improving their relationship with the landlord but also preventing its deterioration. In a small number of cases however, receiving MPC has an adverse effect on the relationship, with respondents fearing that landlords will pressure them to pay the rent on the 5<sup>th</sup> of the month when the MPC is received.

Conversely, discontinuation of MPC has an adverse impact on many Syrian families' ability to pay rent, resulting in tensions over rent payments between Syrian tenants and their landlords and, sometimes, evictions. Indeed, one respondent said that the *first* issue faced after discontinuation would likely be dealing with how to pay the rent and the consequences of this in relation to the landlord. Among non-recipients, although it was noted that if they were to receive MPC they would use it to cover the rent as this is the most important monthly household expenditure, they largely did not comment on how they thought this would affect relationships with landlords, with just one respondent noting that having the MPC would improve their relationship with their landlord (albeit by making him 'shut up') by enabling them to pay the rent.

*"I didn't expect to be discontinued. I don't have anyone to support me. I'm sick and I can't work, and we have to pay rent. I haven't been able to pay the rent to the landlord for four months now. He gave me a grace period of two months, and I asked him to extend the period since I have no means to pay. He said that he won't be extending it any further and that I should pay what everyone else is paying."* Female Syrian FDG participant, 46, discontinued, Saadnayel.

## Healthcare services

### Sources of tensions

In this study, Lebanese respondents explained that health centres have become crowded since the Syrian crisis began, and that it is increasingly difficult to be seen by a doctor. Similarly, they described health services as having insufficient capacity to respond to the increased demand, specifically on emergency services, indicating pressure on public health services which affect Lebanese as well as Syrian refugees. Another, less common, observation was that some Lebanese doctors are being replaced by Syrian refugee doctors, although respondents also noted that there are no changes in the quality of the healthcare as a result. Whilst key informants noted that Lebanese hospitals benefit from Syrian refugee patients, whose healthcare is partly funded by the UN, 'ordinary' Lebanese, supporting the existing literature, expressed resentment about the subsidised provision of healthcare to Syrian refugees. Lebanese also commented on cultural differences in health-seeking behaviour, arguing Syrian refugee women to be more likely to ask for help than Lebanese women and thus exacerbating the already stretched healthcare services, a cause for potential tensions. Lebanese respondents also noted that Syrian refugees benefit from better access or a higher level of service.

*"UN covers their healthcare, we can't even rely on our Ministry of Health. There's a law for hospitals that states if a patient is at a hospital being treated, the medicine he is required to take is not covered, you'd have to go get it yourself, at your own expense, even if you are taking it while still in the hospital. Whereas the Syrian patient is not required to pay for it."* Male Lebanese FGD participant, Baalbek.

### Interactions

Syrian refugee women had the most exposure to health services, both in relation to their own health problems and those of their children or, less frequently, husbands. Generally, Syrian refugees felt they are treated fairly and equally when accessing health services. However, a minority reported being treated poorly by Lebanese doctors. In some cases, respondents felt that the healthcare professionals are only interested in taking their money and therefore compromise on the quality of the treatment. Some felt that they had received sub-standard treatment because they are Syrian, and a handful of others did not trust that Lebanese doctors would treat their health issues properly. A few Syrian refugee respondents felt that Lebanese patients enjoy shorter waiting times, and therefore preferential treatment, and that some healthcare staff speak down to them because they are refugees. In rare instances, difficulties in being seen by doctors leads to disagreements and fights between Syrian refugees and Lebanese. However, a couple of Syrian refugees reported that whilst they are not treated well by healthcare staff, Lebanese are not treated any better.



*"My mother is an old woman. A while ago, she had hypertension, hyperglycaemia, and diarrhoea. We called for an ambulance and took her to hospital. She was having her last breaths and they still didn't accept to touch her before I paid 550,000 LBP to the cashier. They didn't care whether she died or not. They just cared about the money."* Female Syrian FCS participant, 45, recipient, Baalbek.

Syrian refugees frequently seek medical advice for common illnesses from pharmacies or dispensaries as a cheaper alternative to consulting a doctor. Most Syrian refugees reported being well treated by Lebanese staff in pharmacies and dispensaries, particularly with members of staff allowing them to buy medication on credit. There was one reported case of differential treatment, and some Syrian refugee women felt they had been discriminated against in the Social Development Centre, as the medical staff would not prescribe them the medication they needed.

*"At the end, I took him to a nearby pharmacy. The pharmacist injected him with a serum and told me that I am able to pay him later. The pharmacist knows me and he treated him. He also told me that I can come again in case the situation doesn't get any better."* Female Syrian FGD participant, discontinued, Baalbek.

### **How MPC affects interactions and sources of tensions**

The MPC consistently helps recipients cover the costs of prescription medicines and improved access to health services and treatments by providing cash paid directly to health centres or to cover transport services to reach health facilities. Receiving MPC also enables easier borrowing and repaying of debts to pharmacies for medications, which also, according to study respondents, helps maintain good relationships with the Lebanese staff working there.

*"A change happened. My mother used to become sick and we weren't able to take her to the doctor. We were able to take her to the doctor when we started receiving the 260,000 LBP [MPC]. If any of my younger siblings gets the flu or something, we will take them to the doctor."* Female Syrian respondent, 21, MPC recipient, Saadnayel.

*"We are now able to borrow because we are receiving the 260,000 LBP [MPC] and we can pay back the money. The owner of the supermarket is Syrian, and he knows that we receive the MPC."* Female Syrian respondent, MPC recipient, Saadnayel.

However, although not directly mentioned by respondents, the fact that the MPC facilitates access to health services may have contributed to tensions between Syrian refugees and Lebanese seeking health services because of the increasing numbers of Syrians being able to access already overstretched health services. In terms of the quality of care received, treatment by and interactions with healthcare professionals does not appear to vary according to MPC status. However, while for recipients the MPC is insufficient to cover all medical costs, those discontinued and non-recipients are more likely to stop taking medicines, not take treatment in the first place or to seek treatment late and to borrow more and incur more debts, including being more likely to obtain items on credit from pharmacies. All of this could lead to potential tensions when incurring debts but also when presenting late to health centres with more severe health needs.

*"As I told you, the medication, it broke me the most. When I was taking it, I had low platelet count, and they wanted to remove my spleen and give me cortisone, now I stopped the medication because there is no money."* Female Syrian IDI participant, discontinued, Qabb Elias.

*"I do not have money, so I sleep on my sickness. I got a cold and it was heavy so I started feeling pain in my chest and I started having short breaths and I could not breathe. I tried to push myself for around two months until I went to the doctor. If my situation was different, would I sleep on my sickness?"* Female Syrian IDI participant, 26, non-recipient, Baalbek.

## **Education**

### **Sources of tensions**

Available studies point to a decline, real or perceived, in quality of education (e.g. Haddad et al., 2018) as a result of the increasing number of refugees, overcrowding at schools (leading to double shifts), and associated bullying of Syrian children by Lebanese children (CARE, 2014; Khatlab, 2017). They also highlight negative stigma associated with the second shift classes that Syrian children attend; this



stigma was perpetuated by some Lebanese teachers and principals and picked up on by Syrian parents, who felt their children were discriminated against and humiliated (de Hoop et al., 2018).

In this study, there were a few examples of Syrian refugees reporting discrimination from Lebanese teachers not wanting to enrol their children. There were also perceived price discrepancies, with Lebanese parents complaining that Syrian refugees often receive cheaper, and sometimes free, education, while Lebanese have to pay. Several parents, both Lebanese and Syrian, expressed a desire for their children to have classes together, although one Lebanese mother believed Syrian refugee children would pass diseases onto her children were they to be in the same class. A handful of Syrian refugee mothers expressed concerns of sending their daughters to school in the winter months because the second shift ends after dark. These mothers found it to be unfair and discriminatory that Lebanese students are able to attend the same school during the daytime.

Of particular note is one account given by a Lebanese teacher in Saadnayel, who described the pressures on relationships in his school which consists entirely of Syrian refugee students. The teacher reported high levels of bullying and disruptive behaviour, which he attributed to Syrian refugee children's experience of the war in Syria and the unstable environment in which they are growing up. There were also some other, limited reports of name calling and bullying of Syrian pupils by Lebanese pupils.

### **Interactions**

Most Lebanese and Syrian refugee students have limited or no interactions with each other, either due to double-shift arrangements in public schools, or to attending schools opened specifically to accommodate Syrian refugee children. For those Syrian refugees attending school alongside Lebanese classmates, some (either themselves or parents on behalf of school children) reported to have both Syrian and Lebanese friends.

*"The teacher talks to all of them [Syrian refugee and Lebanese students]. He tells them that they are the same and that they should love each other. My son has some Lebanese friends. There is no such discrimination you find in public schools."* Female Syrian FCS participant, recipient, Baalbek.

The majority of Syrian parents and students felt they have positive relationships with their Lebanese teachers. Two Syrian parents, who pay for their children to attend private school, particularly praised the teachers there for actively encouraging social interactions between Syrian and Lebanese students. As regards negative interactions, the most common complaint was that teachers in public schools do not explain topics properly, though this affects both Syrian and Lebanese students. A minority of Syrian students reported instances of discrimination by teachers in public, NGO and Islamic schools. These included differential treatment of Syrian and Lebanese students in mixed classes. More extreme negative interactions included verbal abuse and corporal punishment for disobedience.

*"Yes, there is discrimination. The teacher, if I did not bring my dictation copybook, she treats me differently from the others in class. She dictates to them but not to me."* Female Syrian IDI participant, recipient, Baalbek.

Skills and vocational training is the second type of educational forum in which, mostly, female Syrian refugees and Lebanese interact. Some women also attend events organised by associations and NGOs. These interactions are generally reported to be positive with some developing into genuine friendships.

### **How MPC affects interactions and sources of tensions**

Many recipient families use the MPC to cover school-related expenses, including tuition fees for private or semi-private schools, books and stationery, uniforms, snacks and transport. In some cases, MPC has a direct effect on a family deciding whether or not to enrol their children in school. Several non-recipients said that, if they did receive MPC, they would send their children to school. A few recipients also noticed that their children had progressed in school as a result of MPC. While most did not explain the correlation, one respondent said that in exchange for her children to get good grades, she offers them an allowance made possible by the MPC. There did not appear to be a relationship between receipt of MPC and interactions in an education setting – that is, treatment by teachers or classmates. As with healthcare services, the MPC's role relates to overcoming barriers to accessing education in the first place.

In cases where recipients are better able to enrol children as a result of MPC, while not mentioned by respondents, it can be suggested that this could aggravate situations where Lebanese perceive quality of teaching declining because of the influx of Syrians refugees and therefore creating a potential or trigger for tensions. There were also reports of those discontinued having to take their children out of school because of, among other things, the need for them to contribute to households through employment and, for girls, to marry early in order to reduce financial burdens on households (as discussed in the partner report on protection). Interestingly, boys are dropping out of school at a higher rate than girls. Being withdrawn from school may lead to even less interaction with Lebanese counterparts, but also fellow Syrians who continue to go to school. Additionally, with more young male Syrians being taken out of school, the increased number of men seeking employment could also aggravate tensions around employment as well as security issues.



Photo: Adrian Hartrick

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

### Key findings

This section discusses the study's main findings and how it contributes to the growing literature on the role of cash assistance in mediating social stability and social cohesion in refugee contexts. Firstly, it is important to note that, in the study sites, as is common throughout the Bekaa region, there are relatively few contexts/situations in which Syrian refugees and Lebanese members of the host community interact. This is especially the case for Syrian refugees living in ITS, and for Syrian women who generally have limited interactions beyond their family members and are often isolated in their homes. This isolation is driven by a combination of social norms which limit their mobility, fear of being harassed in the streets and having few financial resources to cover the costs of travel. These limitations on interactions can create perceptions of 'the other', which affect opportunities for, and the nature of, relationships and, as a result, also act as potential triggers of tension. The MPC was seen to have little effect on these specific dynamics since Syrian refugees, especially women, interact so little, often even not attending events (including religious events, weddings and funerals) organised by members of their own Syrian community (often because of costs incurred) let alone attending events with Lebanese.

Where stronger feelings did emerge is in relation to the effects that Syrian refugees are having on the labour market and local economy and in terms of access to services (health, education and accommodation/shelter), since in these domains, while face-to-face interactions between Syrians and Lebanese are still limited, perceptions of behaviours of 'the other' led to strong feelings. Thus, Syrians perceived as taking jobs from Lebanese is a trigger for discontent and tensions and therefore potentially has an effect on social cohesion and wider social stability. Though it is also important to note that some Syrian refugees, both men and women, spoke of good treatment by Lebanese employers and customers (e.g. in customer-facing employment such as hair salons). The MPC is seen to further fuel these tensions due to perceptions of Syrians being able to take on jobs with even lower salaries because they have this additional cash assistance. While this is mirrored in the secondary literature, what this study is able to uncover is that while the majority of labour force participation is male, there are some women, especially those from female-headed households, taking on paid work as a result of extreme financial necessity. Among other things, this can place women at increased risk of harassment by employers but also en route to workplaces. While there was some evidence that MPC allows women to not work, those who are discontinued have to take on work, with the associated challenges.

On a positive note, and potentially contributing to social cohesion and social stability, Syrian refugees are seen to contribute to the local economy through purchasing goods, which often leads to improved relationships with Lebanese shop owners; and MPC recipients experience even more positive interactions as they are better able to borrow/obtain items on credit from shopkeepers and pharmacies. Hence, trust among Syrian refugees and shopkeepers (including pharmacists) increases, and while this mirrors existing evidence, this study adds further depth to understanding the content and extent of these relationships of trust. However, these positive dimensions are juxtaposed with perceptions that more Syrian refugees purchasing goods (also as a result of MPC) leads to increases in prices; that they purchase largely from Syrian owned shops; that this benefits only wealthier Lebanese and, for those discontinued (as well as non-recipients), borrowing and getting in debt sours relationships (again).

Perceptions of Syrians crowding out the housing market, pushing up rents, causing a decline in the quality of education because of increasing numbers of children accessing schools, and overwhelming health services are also potential arenas where tensions can arise. As has been documented in this study, as well as elsewhere, one of the main uses of the MPC is to pay for rent and, as such, good relationships are built between tenants and landlords. However, again, this positive dynamic is established between a small group of most likely wealthier Lebanese, a dynamic which could be explored further in a next round of study.

While there is some evidence that MPC leads to increased enrolment in schools, especially of girls (non-recipients noted that if they were to receive MPC, it may encourage them to send their children to school), it is seen to have little effect on interactions and, therefore, potentially social cohesion and social stability between Syrians and Lebanese students, largely because of the double shift system. Where MPC may have an effect in that it encourages enrolment in school, it arguably contributes to the perception that the increasing influx of refugees affects the quality of teaching, thus perhaps adding to underlying tensions. Interestingly, this study, along with evidence from similar contexts, shows that



when households face financial difficulties and, importantly, also as a result of being discontinued from MPC, children are withdrawn from school, most often boys as they can contribute financially to the household in line with the established social norm of the male breadwinner. Girls are also withdrawn from school to save on education related costs (e.g. transport) and also, in some cases, to be married early, something which was also identified in the secondary literature. This all could lead to potentially increasing tensions with boys searching for jobs (that may otherwise have gone to Lebanese) often exposed to discrimination and poor treatment by employers (also because of being underage) and also, perhaps, of being on the street more and therefore potentially at increased risk of being stopped and searched by authorities or harassed and assaulted by host youth.

Similar to experiences around education, while MPC may have some effect on allowing easier access to health services, and its discontinuation similarly also threatens continued health access and treatment, it makes little/no difference to interactions between Lebanese service providers and Syrian refugees. Where it may have an effect, as highlighted in other studies, is that it could contribute to already overcrowded health centres and therefore also fuel tensions between Lebanese and Syrians, the former of whom often perceive Syrians as already having better and/or subsidised access to health care.

This study highlights that, while MPC can contribute to fostering social cohesion and therefore social stability between Syrian refugees and the Lebanese host population, its effect is limited and arguably especially so for women and girls who have relatively fewer interactions than their male counterparts. It is also important to note that social cohesion and stability are commonly not primary objectives of cash assistance because of the scale of transfers (amount and total population coverage) as well as how such outcomes are in fact mediated by the wider context, including wider national social and labour policies. Thus, while some negative effects on social cohesion, and therefore social stability, were seen as associated with MPC, perhaps more important are the underlying economic, infrastructural and political circumstances of Lebanon which hinder increased social cohesion and stability between these two groups. If there were more jobs available to everyone; more (affordable) housing available to everyone; affordable and good quality health service provision; and, more generally, if the needs of all those facing poverty and exclusion were addressed, i.e. vulnerable Syrian refugees and hosts, this is likely to have a much stronger effect on these dimensions than the MPC. Clearly, this is beyond the scope of MPC programming, nevertheless, there are some ways in which such programming can be designed to help address some of these issues.

## Policy implications

### MPC transfer

Disparities in cash assistance available for Syrian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese is a source of tension between the two groups, as reported by both Syrian refugees and Lebanese study respondents. Some Lebanese respondents also expressed resentment about the lack of adequate social protection and wider social services for vulnerable Lebanese. WFP supports the government run National Poverty Targeting Programme to provide 15,000 poor Lebanese households<sup>7</sup> with an E-card food voucher of \$27 per person per household, a significantly smaller scale caseload compared to MPC assistance for Syrian refugees.<sup>8</sup> The research also highlighted some misunderstandings about the scope of the MPC, the amount and what it can/cannot achieve among Lebanese participants, which appeared to contribute to this resentment.

Another area in which social cohesion and stability dynamics play out concerns work and employment. In the context of a low growth economy with high inequality, host communities' concerns that the MPC may further promote low paid work may be heightened. At the same time, restrictions on the conditions under which Syrian refugees work, and the type of work they carry out, will affect what the MPC can achieve. This wider policy and labour market context should be taken into account when planning and designing programmes related to cash assistance in order to have clarity among all stakeholders (government, NGOs, donors and citizens) and set expectations about what MPC can achieve and when to consider broader initiatives to promote social stability.

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<sup>7</sup> National Poverty Targeting Programme Factsheet, Targeting Poor Households in Lebanon

<sup>8</sup> This information was accurate at the time of data collection. However, additional services were included, and the case load expanded in 2020 in response to the economic crisis and COVID-19.

Strategies to address these issues include:

- Improve communication to the public (Syrians and Lebanese) of the scope of MPC and what it can/cannot achieve. This could be carried out through, for instance, organising (continue to organise) meetings at different fora with members of the Lebanese community including local leaders (e.g. religious leaders, community and youth group leaders) to clarify what MPC is, what its objectives are and what it can/cannot achieve.
- Linked to the above, continue to invest in generating evidence to understand the impact of MPC on employment/the labour market to raise awareness about what the MPC can achieve and what broader national policies need to address.
- Provide simple written information/flyers on MPC in key locations (e.g. shops, pharmacies, health centres and schools) with basic information of who is entitled, why, etc.
- Explore options for coordination with and strengthening of national social policies (see below).

### **MPC collection/delivery**

MPC collection is associated with both examples of solidarity/collaboration and tension, both among Syrians and between Syrian refugees and Lebanese. Long wait times and queues at ATMs were reported by respondents to be linked to episodes of tension.

- Continue to invest in scaling up staff presence, monitoring and crowd management at ATMs to reduce risks of community tension. This could include expanding the hours that staff are present and expanding to additional ATMs.
- Consider providing additional support on withdrawing MPC to vulnerable Syrian refugees to facilitate faster and easier withdrawal and less time spent at the ATM, including for women and/or people with low literacy and older people, whether at point of withdrawal or in advance. This could consist of, for instance, setting specific times/days for such groups to withdraw the cash, to also be supported by a member of staff on hand to assist (this could be, for instance, a member of the bank), withdrawing of cash inside banks in smaller groups of people might also be considered, as well as financial literacy training opportunities to improve knowledge on how to use the ATM.

### **MPC and coordination with national social services and social protection**

The potential for MPC to lead to resentment among vulnerable Lebanese of Syrian refugee recipients, which could therefore also impact social cohesion and stability, is influenced by national policy. Weak, largely absent, social assistance policies for vulnerable Lebanese have implications for how Lebanese perceive MPC and wider international aid efforts. The MPC and related efforts in the humanitarian sector present an opportunity to continue to strengthen national policy, with the donor community continuing to collaborate with relevant government departments in developing strategies and approaches to strengthen such policies, which is also supported by the existing evidence base. In the case of in-kind transfers, some degree of coordination and alignment around delivery is taking place. Opportunities for extending such efforts to other types of transfers may be beneficial in terms of fostering social cohesion. For instance, Valli et al., 2019 show that when members of refugee and vulnerable host communities take part in joint programmes, this fosters social cohesion.

- Building on experience to date and on national dialogue underway on strengthening Lebanon's social safety net, humanitarian stakeholders could step up efforts to contribute to such initiatives by identifying opportunities for improved coordination and potential collaboration in the provision of social protection and social policies, including, for instance, in the form of in-kind and cash transfers. Continuing to provide assistance to both Lebanese and Syrian refugee households through Social Development Centres is one area that could be further strengthened.
- Identify opportunities to run social service programmes jointly for Syrians and vulnerable Lebanese, including on skills-building and nutrition for instance.

### **MPC linkages to other programmes fostering social cohesion and social stability**

As mentioned above, the objectives of the WFP MPC programme are not aimed at fostering social cohesion and social stability per se. However, it is possible to link to and stimulate other programmes which aim to build and foster such elements. Three main areas are proposed here:



Given that, as a result of social norms and safety concerns, there appears to be relatively little opportunity for Syrian adolescent girls and young women to go outside their homes and to socialise (build social capital/social cohesion) both among themselves and with Lebanese, a number of actions could be taken to encourage this and/or if these programmes exist, MPC recipients could be linked to such programmes.

- Encourage/facilitate women's groups as spaces to interact and socialise. These groups can be both groups for Syrian refugee women but also existing mixed Syrian refugee and Lebanese women's groups, and may be linked to religious institutions, to neighbourhood committees and/or to skills-building activities (see also protection report).
- Linked to the above, facilitate/set-up spaces for adolescent girls to meet/interact, again among themselves and with Lebanese adolescent girls. These might be linked to schools, (e.g. after school clubs), to youth centres, to religious institutions, and/or to skills-building activities.
- Raise awareness among service providers (government, including the justice sector, and NGOs) on security threats within Syrian refugee communities and their potential role in providing a response.
- Work with boys and men to discuss and raise their awareness around negative gendered norms which often increase the vulnerability and limit adolescent girls and young women from achieving their full capacities, as well as the potential role of boys and men in empowering girls and women, including through the critical role of male role models.

Tensions between Syrian and Lebanese male youth persist and can result in physical violence. These tensions often result from a perception by Lebanese that Syrians are taking their jobs, but also there appears to be relatively few spaces where they can interact neutrally.

- Provide/facilitate linkages to other technical and vocational education/training opportunities for Syrian and Lebanese male adolescents and youth.
- Work with local authorities and community leaders, including religious leaders and youth role models, to identify neutral spaces and ways in which members of the two communities can interact and ensure buy-in and ownership.
- Organise mixed activities/sporting or cultural events with mixed teams (these can also include activities between Syrian refugee and Lebanese girls) bringing together Syrian and host youth.
- Where employers or public work initiatives hire both Syrian refugee and Lebanese workers, encourage forms of mentorship, job-sharing, shadowing between Syrian refugees and Lebanese, thus allowing more opportunities to interact in a constructive way.

Although limited, there are accounts of differential treatment between Syrian refugees and members of Lebanese host communities when accessing services, including in relation to health and education.

- Work with relevant Lebanese authorities (ministries and municipalities) and local service providers to raise awareness of the perceptions Syrian refugees may have of them and/or the need to treat all service users in the same way.

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