

RESEARCHING INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

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On Refuge and Displacement: Challenges to the Provision of Rights and Protection for Syrians Inside and Outside Syrian Borders

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Abstract

Since the outbreak of the Syrian conflict close to one decade ago (2011-present), more than one quarter of its population have fled the country to neighboring Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey. Another 25% of the population has been internally displaced. By the conflict's seventh year, more than 12 million Syrians were forcibly displaced, half of which were now refugees, and the other half of which became internally displaced (IDPs). Lebanon hosts the largest proportion of refugees compared to its population worldwide, with an estimated 1.5 million refugees between those registered and unregistered. IDPs from Syria are among the world's most vulnerable people. Unlike Syrian refugees in neighboring countries, these IDPs have not crossed an international border to receive the humanitarian protection they need, but have remained inside Syria as the conflict goes on. Even though they have fled from the same conflict, IDPs in Syria remain under the protection of the Syrian government. As citizens, though they do not have access to their rights or any form of protection from their government, they are considered entitled to their rights and protection under both human rights and international humanitarian law, and thus have a different legal standing to refugees from Syria who reside in Lebanon. Interestingly, both these populations (refugees and IDPs) are assisted by UNHCR.

The paper discusses the two types of displacement the Syrian population has experienced (across borders and internally) through a comparative approach. The paper intends to challenge the notions of protection and displacement, through shedding light on the Syrian case, while also discussing definitions of refugee and IDP in contemporary conflicts and how these “labels” affect access to labor, citizenship, mobility and rights for the same population.

Keywords

Internal Displacement; Middle East; Syria; Refugees; Protection; Humanitarian Aid

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1. Introduction

The pre-war population of the Syrian Arab Republic was estimated at 22 million, including permanent residents.¹ Of that number, the United Nations and international organizations have identified 13.5 million as displaced persons,² and nearly 11.1 million who require humanitarian assistance.³ Of these, since the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, more than six million were internally displaced, and over five million had crossed into other countries, seeking asylum or placed in Syrian refugee camps worldwide.⁴ Globally, Lebanon currently hosts the largest proportion of Syrian refugees compared to its population, with an estimated 1.5 million refugees, including both those registered and unregistered in a country of 4 million people.⁵

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Syria constitute some of the world's most vulnerable populations.⁶ Unlike Syrian refugees in neighboring countries, these IDPs have not crossed an international border to receive the humanitarian protection they need, but have rather remained inside Syria as the conflict goes on its tenth year now. Despite the fact that they have fled from the same conflict, IDPs in Syria remain under the protection of the Syrian government.⁷ As citizens, they are considered entitled to their rights and protection under both human rights and international humanitarian law, and thus have a different legal standing to the Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon.⁸ Interestingly, both populations (Syrian refugees and Syrian IDPs) are assisted by one agency (UNHCR) that implements very different modalities of delivery depending on the geographic location of these two groups and their status in international law.⁹

This research article compares the two types of displacement the Syrian population has experienced (across borders and internally), focusing on Lebanon given the large numbers of Syrians seeking refuge there. It further intends to challenge the notions of protection and displacement through shedding light on the Syrian case, while also discussing definitions of “refugee” and “IDP” in contemporary conflicts and how these labels affect access to services, mobility and rights for displaced Syrians. Ultimately, comparing these two types of displacement and how these categories manifest themselves in the Syrian case demonstrates that one

¹ The Economist (2015), Syria's Drained Population, Retrieved at: <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2015/09/30/syrias-drained-population>.

² World Vision (2021), Syrian refugee crisis: Facts, FAQs, and how to help, Retrieved at: <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syrian-refugee-crisis-facts>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ UNHCR (2021), Syria Emergency, Retrieved at: <https://www.unhcr.org/syria-emergency.html>.

⁵ Sam Dagher (2021), “Death by a thousand cuts”: Syrian refugees face dire conditions as Lebanon unravels, Middle East Institute, Retrieved at: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/death-thousand-cuts-syrian-refugees-face-dire-conditions-lebanon-unravels>.

⁶ UNHCR (2021), Internally Displaced People, Retrieved at: <https://www.unhcr.org/sy/internally-displaced-people>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ OHCHR (2021), Patterns of displacement continue to be massive in Syria, Retrieved at: <https://newsarchive.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=13791&LangID=E>.

⁹ UNHCR (1995), Internally Displaced Persons: UNHCR's Perspective, Retrieved at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b31cc4.html>.

population experiencing conflict can essentially be managed very differently in two geographic locations.

2. International Protection: IDPs vs. Refugees in International Law

2.1 Refugees

Refugees fleeing protracted conflict, wars or persecution essentially possess no form of protection from their own state, and it is often the case that their own state is persecuting them. It is only in 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees¹⁰ (and then through a broadening of the refugee definition in the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees) that the international community established an international legal framework for the international protection of refugees and the upholding of their rights.¹¹ The 1951 Refugee Convention remains the main source, and foundational legal document of protections for refugees.¹² International Refugee Law (IRL) establishes a specific definition of “refugee”, safeguards the right to seek asylum, and protects against being forcibly returned to a country where an individual’s life would be in likely danger of persecution based on “race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (known as the non-refoulement principle in international law).¹³ The UNHCR (and UNRWA for Palestinian Refugees) is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to provide international protection to refugees at the international level, as well as seek short-term and permanent solutions to their plight and displacement.¹⁴

The 1951 Refugee Convention is the foundation of international refugee law – and remains, along with the 1967 Protocol, the only codified international legal document outlining the rights and duties of states towards refugees specifically, and beyond other international human rights conventions and treaties.¹⁵ The 1967 Protocol is independent of, though intrinsically related to, the 1951 Convention. The 1967 Protocol goes beyond the 1951 Refugee Convention and subsequently removes the temporal and geographic limits found in the Convention.¹⁶ By

¹⁰ Also referred to as the ‘Refugee Convention’.

¹¹ UNHCR (2021), The 1951 Refugee Convention, Retrieved at: <https://www.unhcr.org/1951-refugee-convention.html>.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ A refugee’s right to be protected from forced return, or *refoulement*, is the cornerstone of international refugee protection. It is contained in Article 33(1) of the 1951 Convention, which states: “No Contracting State shall expel or return (‘refouler’) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.” – UNHCR 2020.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ United Nations Audiovisual Library of International Law (2021), Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees New York, 31 January 1967, Retrieved at: <https://legal.un.org/avl/ha/prsr/prsr.html>.

acceding to the Protocol, governments affirm that they will apply the core content of the 1951 Convention (outlined in Articles 2–34) to all individuals covered by the Protocol’s refugee definition, without limitations of time or place of refuge.¹⁷ The majority of states have typically favored to accede to both the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol highlighting that they view both treaties are fundamental to the international refugee protection system.¹⁸ The 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol currently stand as the modern embodiment of the century-old institution of forced migration and asylum. Though criticized for still not being as comprehensive as needed, their main strength remains the non-discriminatory and inclusive nature of the values they uphold – further highlighted by the fact that 145 countries have ratified it.¹⁹

The Convention and its Protocol tackle three main areas: (1) the refugee definition, along with provisions for cessation of, and exclusion from, refugee status; (2) the legal status (rights and obligations) of refugees in their country of asylum, which outlines the duty of refugees to respect the laws and regulations of the country of asylum and their rights in that country, including their right to be protected from *refoulement* (*non-refoulement* principle); and (3) States’ obligations towards refugees, including the obligation to adequately cooperate with UNHCR in the exercise of its functions, and enable its duty of supervising the application of the Convention within a given territory.²⁰

According to the definition enshrined in the 1951 Refugee Convention (and its 1967 Protocol), a refugee is someone who: (1) has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of his/her/their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion; (2) is outside his/her/their country of origin or habitual residence; (3) is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself/themselves of the protection of that country, or to return there, because of fear of persecution; and (4) is not explicitly excluded from refugee protection or whose refugee status has not ceased because of a change of circumstances.²¹

An individual is considered a refugee as soon as the aforementioned criteria contained in this definition are fulfilled.²² Moreover, an individual does not become a refugee as a result of a “positive” decision on an asylum application or any other form of application for protection in states that do not consider themselves countries of asylum (such as in the case of Lebanon for

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ UNHCR (2021), States Parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, Retrieved at: <https://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b73b0d63.pdf>.

¹⁹ Somabha Bandopadhyay (2020), Opinion – Updating the 1951 Convention for Refugees, E-International Relations, Retrieved at: <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/05/28/opinion-updating-the-1951-convention-for-refugees/>.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

example).²³ Recognition of refugee status is declaratory, and is essentially the main argument as to why asylum seekers must not be returned to their countries of origin until after their claims have been carefully validated, examined and processed.²⁴

2.2 Internally Displaced Persons

Despite international calls to establish one for over a decade now, to this day, there is no international convention for IDPs equivalent to what the 1951 Refugee Convention constitutes for refugees²⁵ – though the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement seek to guarantee that IDPs, as citizens or habitual residents of their country, enjoy equally and without discrimination the same rights and freedoms under international and national law.²⁶ Nevertheless, international law and legal frameworks do provide for the protection of persons from displacement, as well as once they are displaced, under multiple bodies of law.²⁷ Despite not being the beneficiaries of one foundational convention, as is the case for refugees and migrants,²⁸ IDPs are protected by various levels of the law including: (1) national law, (2) human rights law and, if they are in a country experiencing a protracted war or armed conflict, (3) international humanitarian law.²⁹ According to the International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, the overwhelming majority of IDPs are nationals of the state in which they find themselves.³⁰ Moving from this reality, they are entitled to the full protection of national law and the rights it grants nationals, without any adverse distinction resulting from the fact of their internal displacement from one region to another within the borders of the same state.³¹

At another level, Human Rights Law (HRL), which remains in effect both in times of peace and in situations of protracted/armed conflict, additionally outlines pivotal protection to IDPs.³² HRL aims to both prevent displacement as well as to safeguard the basic rights of displaced persons

²³ UN News (2016), Lebanon is ‘not a country of permanent asylum,’ Prime Minister tells UN Assembly, Retrieved at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2016/09/540232-lebanon-not-country-permanent-asylum-prime-minister-tells-un-assembly>.

²⁴ UN Migration Agency (IOM) (2012), Asylum Procedures: Report on Policies and Practices in IGC Participating Countries, Retrieved at: https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/asylum_procedures_2012_web_may2015_0.pdf.

²⁵ OHCHR (2009), A global first: a Convention for the displaced, Retrieved at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/ConventionForTheDisplaced.aspx>.

²⁶ UNHCR (n.d.), Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, Retrieved at: <https://www.unhcr.org/uk/protection/idps/43ce1cff2/guiding-principles-internal-displacement.html>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990), Retrieved at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cmw.aspx>.

²⁹ ICRC (2018), Internally displaced persons and international humanitarian law, Retrieved at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/internally-displaced-persons-and-international-humanitarian-law>.

³⁰ ICRC (n.d.), Legal protection of internally displaced persons, Retrieved at: <https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/resources/documents/misc/5dhd82.htm>.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Walter Kälin (2010), The Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons, Brookings, Retrieved at: <https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/the-human-rights-of-internally-displaced-persons-2/>.

after the fact, should displacement take place.³³ Rights of particular importance for the prevention of displacement include: (1) the prohibition on torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and (2) the right to peaceful enjoyment of property and to home and family life.³⁴ Upholding the right to personal safety and to a home, as well as the rights to food, shelter, education and access to work offer vital protection throughout the displacement period.³⁵ Several of these basic rights remain additionally relevant to the issue of return. According to HRL, these and every human right must be upheld and granted to each and every individual without discrimination, including discrimination on the grounds of displacement.³⁶

Furthermore, yet another legal framework pertinent to IDPs, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) applies in situations of armed conflict, whether international or non-international.³⁷ If IDPs are present within the borders of a government that is involved in an armed or protracted conflict then, provided they are actively involved in the violence or hostilities, they are considered civilians and, as such, remain entitled to the protection and human rights afforded to civilians at all levels.³⁸ IHL explicitly forbids forcibly removing civilians from their homes with the exception of when their security is threatened or imperative military necessity deems this essential.³⁹ When upheld, the general rules of IHL that protect civilians may not only prevent displacement from taking place in the first place, but also provide protection after and during displacement.⁴⁰ The following IHL rules are of particular relevance to the case of IDPs: (1) those prohibiting parties to a conflict from targeting civilians and civilian objects or conducting hostilities in an indiscriminate manner; (2) the prohibitions on starvation of the civilian population and on the destruction of objects indispensable to its survival; (3) the prohibitions on collective punishments – which often take the form of destruction of dwellings; as well as (4) the rules requiring parties to a conflict to allow relief consignments to reach civilian populations in need.⁴¹

IHL even goes as far as outlining lawful processes of return in the case of “lawful displacements”, such as: (1) evacuations for reasons of security or (2) imperative military necessity.⁴² Moreover, a right of return can even be inferred *a fortiori*⁴³ following arbitrary

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ OHCHR (n.d.), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Retrieved at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ ICRC (2019), Displacement in Times of Armed Conflict: How International Humanitarian Law Protects in War and Why it Matters, Retrieved at: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5d14746e4.pdf>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ A Latin term meaning literally 'from the stronger'. Translated into English and used in the particular context of legal writing, the term often means 'from [the] stronger [argument]'. If a particular fact is true, then one can infer that a second fact is also true.

displacement.⁴⁴ HRL is binding on States and, in the case of IHL, on organized armed groups as well.⁴⁵ As described, both HRL and IHL provide sufficient and adequate protections to IDPs that are capable of preventing displacement, protecting IDPs throughout displacement, and assisting them in returning to their homes once the period of displacement (and conflict at hand) ends. Existing law at the international level is sufficient to cover individuals’ most important rights, freedoms and needs – subsequently, there are no significant gaps in the provision of legal protection of IDPs.

The main challenge lies in ensuring the implementation of these existing international bodies of law (under International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law) rather than in the development of a stand-alone convention for IDPs. And this realization is pivotal. Namely, due to the fact that it is necessary for one to comprehend that while one population can be essentially constituted of IDPs and refugees (such as in the case of the Syrian population), different barriers exist to the adequate implementation of protection for each group. For IDPs, it is upholding already-existing HRL and IHL principles,⁴⁶ while for refugees, the challenge remains essentially “keeping up” with emerging realities and navigating through layers of both the national laws of host states and international legal principles enshrined in a now “out-dated” international convention.

Moving from the aforementioned, the application of international law is largely tested whilst attempting to frame it within the Syrian Conflict – particularly, in attempting to navigate the various regions inside Syria, as well as the different evolving policies that govern Syrian refugees inside host communities once they cross an international border. In application, international law largely coincides with political, economic, cultural and historical sensitivities when exploring the conflict at the internal level, regional level, and inside Lebanon. As Lebanon continues to maintain a strategic indifference, UN agencies continue to serve as the only entity bridging these gaps. For both IDPs and refugees outside Syria, humanitarian schemes differ in degrees of applicability and effectiveness.

3. Internally Displaced Persons in Syria

3.1 Overview

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ In addition to upholding already-existing IHL and HRL principles, upholding Guiding Principle 25 of the Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement which stipulates that international actors can intervene in cases when authorities concerned are unable or unwilling to provide the required humanitarian assistance is pivotal.

Currently, there are between 6.5 million people, including 2.5 million children, displaced within Syria.⁴⁷ IDPs in Syria constitute the largest internally displaced population in the world.⁴⁸ A significant number of Syrians inside Syria continue to suffer from increasingly localized, intensified hostilities that forcibly remove families from their places of residence, claim lives, destroy basic infrastructure, and further limit the freedom of movement.⁴⁹ OCHA reports that, as of 2021, 35-40% of internally displaced persons and their families have been displaced between two and three times, with every wave of displacement further hindering their coping capacity.⁵⁰ Repeat displacement numbers are especially high for IDPs in the Northwest and Northeast of Syria, where the majority of displacement movements were recorded in 2019.⁵¹ Over 400,000 Syrians were displaced in the Northwest between May and August 2019, many of these people several times.⁵² Some of those displaced were once again uprooted just months later, forming part of the over 950,000 individuals who fled the mounting hostilities in Southern Idlib, and moved predominantly north towards the Turkish-Syrian border between December 2019 and February 2020.⁵³ In Northeast Syria, over 250,000 people were forced to flee their home during a two-week period in October 2019, with over 75,000 people remaining displaced after that two-week period.⁵⁴

Though typically tasked with the support of refugee populations, UNHCR's support to IDPs in Syria began in 2012 – as it begun in many other locations prior.⁵⁵ Its support encompasses the provision of: (1) protection and community services, (2) distribution of relief items, (3) shelter assistance, (4) healthcare services, as well as (5) educational support.⁵⁶ The Syria Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) was developed in consultation with the Government of Syria (GoS) in order to outline the framework through which the humanitarian community will respond to the large-scale humanitarian and protection needs in the country.⁵⁷ The HRP operates on the basis of the prioritization undertaken within and across sectors.⁵⁸ The HRP additionally outlines urgent funding requirements to meet the ever-growing needs, and is anchored by three strategic

⁴⁷ UNHCR (2021), Internally Displaced People, Retrieved at: <https://www.unhcr.org/sy/internally-displaced-people>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ UNHCR (2013), Engaging with Internally Displaced People, Retrieved at: <https://www.unhcr.org/afr/50a9f812b.pdf>.

⁵⁰ OCHA (2021), Syrian Arab Republic: IDP and Spontaneous Returnee Movements - 31 March 2021, Retrieved at: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/stima/infographic/syrian-arab-republic-idp-and-spontaneous-returnee-movements-31-march-0>.

⁵¹ Humanitarian Needs Overview (2019), Syrian Arab Republic, Retrieved at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019_Syr_HNO_Full.pdf.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ OCHA (2021), 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview: Syrian Arab Republic (April 2020), Reliefweb, Retrieved at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/2020-humanitarian-needs-overview-syrian-arab-republic-april-2020>.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ OCHA (2020), Syrian Arab Republic: 2020 Humanitarian Response Plan, Reliefweb, Retrieved at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/syrian-arab-republic-2020-humanitarian-response-plan-december-2020>.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

objectives: (1) focusing on saving lives and alleviating suffering, (2) enhancing protection and (3) building resilience inside Syria.

3.2 External Forces and Triggers

Though it is believed that the Arab Spring remains the main trigger of the Syrian conflict, evidence in the literature highlights that a protracted period of drought and the steady economic decline constituted major factors that led to civil unrest in 2011.⁵⁹ The first three years of the conflict brought about an unparalleled drastic increase in internal displacement.⁶⁰ Violent clashes between armed opposition groups and government forces initially led to 156,000 displacements in 2011, mostly in Idlib and Homs governorates.⁶¹ As armed opposition groups seized new portions of the territory during 2012, by 2013 more than 3.5 million displacements were recorded, the highest annual figure of the conflict.⁶²

Extremist groups across Syria reached full influence and strength in 2014, with the territorial expansion of The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)⁶³ across Iraq and Syria.⁶⁴ The rise of ISIL prompted an international coalition of states to launch a campaign of airstrikes against the group.⁶⁵ The combination of ISIL attacks and the ongoing violent clashes against it drove hundreds of thousands of people from their homes from the Raqqa, Deir ez Zor, Al Hasakah and Homs governorates.⁶⁶ The Syrian government had lost most of its territory to non-state armed groups by 2015, when Russia entered the conflict.⁶⁷ With its military support, Syrian armed forces recaptured key urban centers between 2015 and 2016, including Syria's second largest city of Aleppo.⁶⁸ The Eastern part of the city was almost completely depopulated during the offensive – with internal displacement rates skyrocketing during this year as well, further

⁵⁹ BBC News (2021), Why has the Syrian war lasted 10 years?, Retrieved at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>.

⁶⁰ Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2020), Syria, Retrieved at: <https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/syria>.

⁶¹ IDMC (2020), A Decade of Displacement in the MENA, Retrieved at: https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/IDMC_MenaReport_final.pdf.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, officially known as the Islamic State and also known by its Arabic acronym Daesh, is a militant group and former unrecognized proto-state that follows a Salafi jihadist doctrine.

⁶⁴ Wilson Center (2019), Timeline: the Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State, Retrieved at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state>.

⁶⁵ Karine Bannelier-Christakis (2016), Military Interventions against ISIL in Iraq, Syria and Libya, and the Legal Basis of Consent, *Leiden Journal of International Law* 29(3), 743-775.

⁶⁶ The World Bank Group (2020), The Mobility of Displaced Syrians An Economic and Social Analysis, Retrieved at: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/551681579156620771/pdf/The-Mobility-of-Displaced-Syrians-An-Economic-and-Social-Analysis.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Samuel Charap, Elina Treyger and Edward Geist (2019), RAND Corporation, Retrieved at: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3180.html.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

exacerbating an already-dire situation of internal displacement by the end of 2016.⁶⁹ In June 2018, additional violence clashes in the Daraa and Quneitra governorates prompted more than 285,000 displacements, and a devastating offensive by the Syrian government forces in Idlib triggered another 960,000 new displacements between December 2019 and March 2020.⁷⁰ In 2020, 1.8 million new displacements were recorded alone.⁷¹

A plethora of actors affect internal displacement patterns in Syria are heavily affected by a plethora of factors. These include everything from family ties, to religious and ethnic affiliations, to the territorial control of non-state armed groups, to safety and access to shelter, as well as to basic services and humanitarian assistance.⁷² A large portion of these IDPs are forced to flee with no prior notice and even repeatedly over a given period of time. Moreover, they are subject to living through protracted periods of displacement with long-term family separation as a possible consequence.⁷³ Shifting frontlines across Syria coupled with the subsequent shifts to the security environment, have rendered displacement the norm for a substantial fraction of the population. IDPs leave their places of refuge to “return home” during the temporary suspension of violent clashes only to flee again when these clashes resume, or they keep moving onwards as the conflict catches up with them. As per the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, some IDPs have fled as many as twenty-five times in search of safety, protection and basic services.⁷⁴

3.3 Humanitarian Aid and Intersectional Conflicts

Shelter aid for IDPs inside Syria is primarily coordinated by the Global Shelter Cluster (co-led by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies).⁷⁵ No formal camps are set up; however, a number of public

⁶⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization (2016), Situation Update on Displaced People from eastern Aleppo City As of 16 December, 2016, Reliefweb, Retrieved at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/situation-update-displaced-people-eastern-aleppo-city-16-december-2016>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Rahma Aburas, Amina Najeeb, Laila Baageel and Tim K. Mackey (2018), The Syrian conflict: a case study of the challenges and acute need for medical humanitarian operations for women and children internally displaced persons, BMC Medicine 16, Retrieved at: <https://bmcmedicine.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12916-018-1041-7>.

⁷³ REACH and MMP (2017), Separated Families: Who Stays, Who Goes and Why?, Retrieved at: https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/mmp_report_separated_families_who_stays_who_goes_april_2017.pdf.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Global Shelter Cluster (2021), Global Shelter Cluster, Retrieved at: <https://www.sheltercluster.org/global>.

buildings are converted to collective short-term shelters⁷⁶ – such as the Jibreen⁷⁷ collective shelter.⁷⁸

Syria's displacement crisis remains one of the largest displacements in the world as a direct result of the perpetuated international humanitarian and human rights law violations by all parties to the conflict.⁷⁹ For IDPs in Syria, the proximity to hostilities, increased levels of poverty, family separation and lack of adequate civil documentation all create an intersectional form of vulnerability for these people.⁸⁰ The situation across Syria continues to be critical to this day. As recent as 2020, more than 200,000 people displaced by the offensive that took place in Idlib, and many areas of the governorate, remain both destroyed and uninhabitable.⁸¹ Internal returnees also struggle to gain adequate access to all forms of humanitarian assistance amid a severe economic crisis and an unstable security situation.⁸²

Internally, this has led to substantial overcrowding in shelters, and major hurdles in the areas of repair and reconstruction due to the expensive prices of materials and services amid ongoing insecurity. Syrian families in 75% of the communities where IDPs have returned in Idlib remain incapable of affording basic food items.⁸³ The Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and partners place the number of people living in food insecurity in Idlib at over 4 million people.⁸⁴ Severe and/or complete destruction of infrastructure coupled with the increased price of transportation has meant that half of IDPs are short of water.⁸⁵ IDPs have additionally reported their fear of returning to areas the Syrian government (also referred to in multiple sources as 'the regime') has retaken.⁸⁶ As the European Asylum Support Office reports, there is a well-documented record of Syrian government forces making arbitrary arrests, torturing and forcibly disappearing civilians from territories held by non-state armed groups, and

⁷⁶ UN Habitat (2013), Urban Syria: Urban Snapshots, Retrieved at: <https://mirror.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/UrbanSnapshots2.pdf>.

⁷⁷ In 2016, collective shelters were rehabilitated for 24,000 persons, kits were distributed to 26,000 people, 40,000 benefited from private building upgrades, 12,000 from long-term house repairs, and 5,000 from basic infrastructure repair.

⁷⁸ UNHCR (2017), UNHCR assesses humanitarian situation of new arrivals to Jibreen, Retrieved at: <https://www.unhcr.org/sy/10352-unhcr-assesses-humanitarian-situation-of-new-arrivals-to-jibreen.html>.

⁷⁹ F Ghaddar, M Jawwad, R Abdel Khalik, M Abou Zeid, A Sabouni and H AlNahhas (2018), Violations of international humanitarian law in Syria: A 7-year analysis, European Journal of Public Health 28(4), Retrieved at: https://academic.oup.com/eurpub/article/28/suppl_4/cky218.026/5191974.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Daily Sabah (2020), 204,000 Syrian refugees returned to Idlib since March, Turkey records, Retrieved at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/204000-syrian-refugees-returned-to-idlib-since-march-turkey-records/news>.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Food and Agriculture Organization (2020), 4.3M people in need of food security and livelihoods support in northwest Syria - 23 September 2020, Reliefweb, Retrieved at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/43m-people-need-food-security-and-livelihoods-support-northwest-syria-23>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ European Asylum Support Office (2020), Syria Internally displaced persons, returnees and internal mobility, Retrieved at: <https://easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/easo-coi-report-syria-idps-returnees-internal-mobility.pdf>.

also forcing people into conscription.⁸⁷ In addition to the aforementioned, Syria continues to navigate through a deepening economic and financial crisis and the strict US sanctions put in place since June 2020.⁸⁸ The worsening economic situation, as well as the sanctions, has affected the country's IDPs severely and inequitably.⁸⁹ Markets in Syria rely heavily on imported goods and cross-border movement with Turkey, and the devaluation of the Syrian pound has hindered IDPs' purchasing power.⁹⁰ Since the end of 2019, the costs of basic necessities such as food, water and hygiene products have drastically and steadily increased.⁹¹

4. Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

4.1 Overview

Presently, Lebanon is on the brink of complete and total political and economic collapse. The country continues to navigate through a self-inflicted financial and economic crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the repercussions of the massive blast at the Port of Beirut on August 4, 2021.⁹² Deadlocked within a confessional governance structure and unable to undertake the necessary reforms to unlock international foreign aid, sectarian and social tensions continue to overtake the country as the economy spirals downward, petrol is unavailable, and medications and food continue to permanently disappear from the market.⁹³ The country's GDP decreased 20.3% in 2020 and the World Bank projects it will decline 9.5 percent in 2021.⁹⁴ With the Lebanese pound losing 90% of its value and inflation exceeding 140%, the country's middle class is slowly falling below poverty lines.⁹⁵ The poverty rate doubled to over 55% between 2019 and 2020, while extreme poverty rates tripled to 23% pushing over 840,000 Lebanese under the food poverty line.⁹⁶

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Arshad Mohammed and Daphne Psaledakis (2020), U.S. imposes sanctions on Syrian prisons, officials, Reuters Official, Retrieved at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-imposes-fresh-syria-related-sanctions-treasury-website-2021-07-28/>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Fouad M. Fouad, Andres Barkil-Oteo2 and Jasmin Lilian Diab (2021), Mental Health in Lebanon's Triple-Fold Crisis: The Case of Refugees and Vulnerable Groups in Times of COVID-19, *Frontiers in Public Health*, Retrieved at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2020.589264/full>.

⁹³ Youssef Diab (2021), Lebanon Besieged By Bread, Medicine, Fuel Crises, *Asharq Al-Awsat*, Retrieved at: <https://english.aawsat.com/home/article/1932326/lebanon-besieged-bread-medicine-fuel-crises>.

⁹⁴ The World Bank (2021), Lebanon Sinking into One of the Most Severe Global Crises Episodes, amidst Deliberate Inaction, The World Bank, Retrieved at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/05/01/lebanon-sinking-into-one-of-the-most-severe-global-crises-episodes>.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ UN ESCWA (2020), ESCWA warns: more than half of Lebanon's population trapped in poverty, Retrieved at: <https://www.unescwa.org/news/lebanon-population-trapped-poverty>.

Lebanon's Syrian refugees are faring worse than Lebanese citizens. According to the UNHCR, Lebanon currently hosts 865,530 registered Syrian refugees and estimates all Syrians in Lebanon at 1.5 million individuals, including both registered and unregistered.⁹⁷ Globally, Lebanon is second only to the island of Aruba and in the ratio of refugees to the native population.⁹⁸ An estimated 90% of Syrian refugee households live in extreme poverty in Lebanon, up from 55% in early 2019.⁹⁹ According to the United Nations, these households currently survive on less than half the Lebanese minimum wage, roughly USD 36 per month, and shrinking in terms of purchasing power by the day due to lack of resources.¹⁰⁰ Limited purchasing power essentially means deprivation from basic human needs, including food, shelter, clean drinking water, sanitation and health. Furthermore, since UNHCR was prevented from registering Syrians since 2015, 80% of Syrian refugees lack legal status – meaning they are essentially not officially recognized by the Lebanese government.¹⁰¹ In order to legally register outside the UNHCR database, Syrian refugees require a Lebanese sponsor, the approval of Lebanese authorities, and a USD 200 renewal fee paid annually.¹⁰² This remains both unattainable and unaffordable for the majority of the Syrian refugee population, and receiving the necessary approval from Lebanese authorities remains a constant challenge.¹⁰³ This places a significant portion of the Syrian refugee population unable to access services, unable to move freely throughout the country, and exposed to exploitation, detention, and deportation.¹⁰⁴

A report published by Habitat for Humanity, assessing the economic, social and demographic impacts of the Syrian refugee crisis on Lebanon found that the massive influx of Syrian refugees into the country strained everything from its already limited infrastructure including electricity, water, sanitation, municipal services, transportation and schools.¹⁰⁵ Economically and socially, even the country's most remote communities are feeling the pressure of this massive population growth, with the number of Syrian refugees outweighing local residents in many of the 1,700 regions that they inhabit.¹⁰⁶

4.2 Humanitarian Schemes governing Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

⁹⁷ Omer Karasapan and Sajjad Shah (2021), Why Syrian refugees in Lebanon are a crisis within a crisis, Brookings, Retrieved at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2021/04/15/why-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon-are-a-crisis-within-a-crisis/>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP (2020), Nine out of ten Syrian refugee families in Lebanon are now living in extreme poverty, UN study says, Reliefweb, Retrieved at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/nine-out-ten-syrian-refugee-families-lebanon-are-now-living-extreme-poverty-un-study>.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ UNHCR Lebanon (2021), Protection, Retrieved at: <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/protection>.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Habitat for Humanity (n.d.), Impact of the Refugee Crisis in Lebanon: Who Needs the Most Help? (Part 1), Retrieved at: <https://www.habitatforhumanity.org.uk/blog/2016/10/impact-refugee-crisis-lebanon-who-needs-most-help-part-1/>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Lebanon issued the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) in 2015.¹⁰⁷ The LCRP was then modified and reissued in 2017 in coordination with the UNHCR.¹⁰⁸ The LCRP formed part of the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) that initially set out to outline the response to the refugee crisis in the Levant, Turkey, Iraq, and Egypt.¹⁰⁹ Interestingly, the LCRP reaffirmed that Lebanon was not and could not officially be considered a country of asylum because Lebanon had not ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees nor its 1967 Protocol, and is therefore only bound by the *non-refoulement* principle – a principle the country has largely upheld in its response to the Palestinian and Syrian refugee crises.¹¹⁰

In the 2017 LCRP Lebanon clearly outlines the rights it maintains in light of the influx of Syrian 'refugees' – a term the Lebanese government does not use to describe refugees, and alternatively uses 'temporarily displaced persons' in legal texts and political statements,

*“The UN characterizes the flight of civilians from Syria as a refugee movement, and considers that these Syrians are seeking international protection and are likely to meet the refugee definition. The Government of Lebanon considers that it is being subject to a situation of mass influx. It refers to individuals who fled from Syria into its territory after March 2011 as temporarily displaced individuals, and reserves its sovereign right to determine their status according to Lebanese laws and regulations.”*¹¹¹

— Government of Lebanon, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon, Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017–2020

The Lebanese government upholds its official position as not being a country of asylum despite displaced Palestinians residing in the country for more than seven decades.¹¹² Syrian refugees in Lebanon seeking shelter have been met with a “no camp” policy from the Lebanese government, which has essentially led them to rent cheap land, establish informal settlements and even resort to renting rooms in some of the twelve previously existing Palestinian refugee camps.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Government of Lebanon, OCHA and UNHCR (2016), Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2015-16 - Year Two, Reliefweb, Retrieved at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2015-16-year-two>.

¹⁰⁸ Government of Lebanon and UN RC/HC Lebanon (2017), Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020, Reliefweb, Retrieved at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2017-2020-enar>.

¹⁰⁹ UNHCR (2020), Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan (3RP) Regional Strategic Overview 2021-2022, Reliefweb, Retrieved at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/regional-refugee-resilience-plan-3rp-regional-strategic-overview-2021-2022>.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² DW (2020), Palestinians in Lebanon: 'The world has forgotten us', Retrieved at: <https://www.dw.com/en/palestinians-in-lebanon-the-world-has-forgotten-us/a-57088001>.

¹¹³ Romola Sanyal (2017), A no-camp policy: Interrogating informal settlements in Lebanon, *Geoforum* 84, 117-125.

In an extensive humanitarian network extending across Lebanon’s entire territory, the Lebanese government alongside UN agencies, INGOs and local NGOs provides assistance to the displaced refugees across the country. INGOs provide aid to Syrian refugees in Lebanon through various means and across multiple humanitarian and developmental sectors.¹¹⁴ Housing is supported through the distribution of shelter kits and improvements of living conditions for the refugees who have found a place to stay. Additional sources for access to healthcare and hygiene also fall under the contributions of INGOs and UN agencies to refugees across the country.¹¹⁵ Other INGOs have partners with local NGOs to navigate the Lebanese government’s “no camp policy” by providing materials that could be added to existing structures to create shelter for the refugees as well.¹¹⁶

5. What This Means in Application: Impact of COVID-19 on Humanitarian Assistance as a Case Study

5.1 A Complex Model for IDPs inside Syria

While the COVID-19 pandemic has presented tremendous challenges upon each and every government around the world – the impact of the pandemic remains inequitable and more severe upon some of the world’s most struggling states, as well as those who endured protracted conflicts prior to the emergence of the pandemic. For Syrians, the magnitude and long-term implications of these challenges continue to be felt differently both from within, and from outside the borders of Syria. In Northwest Syria (controlled by anti-GoS armed groups),¹¹⁷ the first cases of COVID-19 were confirmed as late as July of 2020.¹¹⁸ With a population of over 4 million individuals (many of whom have been internally displaced multiple times), the Northwest’s Idlib and Northern Aleppo governorates continue to endure the severe impacts of the virus.¹¹⁹ As many families continue to live in overcrowded camps, or sleep out in the open, access to water is scarce, and the health and civilian infrastructures are completely destroyed.¹²⁰ According to the World Health Organization (WHO), only half of health facilities in this Northwest region of Syria remain partially open and operational.¹²¹

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ European Asylum Support Office (2020), Country Guidance, Syria: Overview of Areas of Control, Retrieved at: <https://easo.europa.eu/country-guidance-syria/overview-areas-control>.

¹¹⁸ OCHA Services: Humanitarian Response (2021), COVID-19 (Northwest Syria), Retrieved at: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/stima/covid-19>.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ World Health Organization (2020), Northwest Syria: Making a decimated health system work – The story of Mohamad, Retrieved at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/northwest-syria-making-decimated-health-system-work-story-mohamad>.

In the Northeast region of the country (a *de facto* autonomous region)¹²² the first cases of COVID-19 were confirmed in April of 2020,¹²³ and according to the WHO, concerns over a lack of preparedness and mismanagement of the health crisis remain high.¹²⁴ The Northeast region was tainted by a lack of COVID-19 testing capacity, chronically underprepared health facilities and inefficient water services.¹²⁵ Similar to the case in the Northwest, upholding preventive measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 remains particularly difficult in the overcrowded camps and informal settlements spread out across the region.¹²⁶ In Government of Syria (GoS)-controlled areas, as in neighboring countries hosting refugees, Syrians are faced with the reality that the threat of COVID-19 has only exacerbated their inability to work amid escalating economic decline.¹²⁷ While INGOs and UN Agencies continue to work in order to reduce the risk of spread by sharing up-to-date information on COVID-19 alongside the delivery of basic essentials to people fleeing conflict, this is not the case in GoS-controlled areas whereby the work of INGOs, NGOs and UN Agencies is largely hindered or restricted by the involvement of pertinent government entities according to INGOs such as Norwegian Refugee Council and Oxfam.¹²⁸

In Northwest Syria, INGOs and UN agencies alike have worked swiftly to mitigate COVID-19 outbreaks in camps, ensure the provision of running water and uphold preventive measures to avoid an outbreak. Humanitarian entities operating on the ground have also distributed COVID-19 information sheets throughout camps and worked on awareness and education sessions with local communities on the risks and safety measures.¹²⁹ Testimonies from organizations present in these regions have depicted instances where families are unable to take the necessary precautions to protect themselves.¹³⁰ According to multiple reports, in displacement camps or mass shelters such as vacant mosques and schools, health infrastructure is reduced to “rubble around them,” and the situation makes this incredibly challenging for the local communities that fall under both the ‘responsibility’ of the Syrian Government (in essence)

¹²² The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), also known as Rojava, is a *de facto* autonomous region in Northeastern Syria. The region gained its *de facto* autonomy in 2012 in the context of the ongoing Rojava conflict and the wider Syrian Civil War, in which its official military force, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), has taken part. While entertaining some foreign relations, the region is not officially recognized as autonomous by the government of Syria or any state or organization.

¹²³ North Press Agency (2021), WHO hands over Syria’s Autonomous Administration Covid-19 vaccine, Retrieved at: <https://npasyria.com/en/59903/>.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (2021), The Politics of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Syria, Retrieved at: <https://www.cspps.org/covid-19-syria>.

¹²⁸ Norwegian Refugee Council and Oxfam (2020), Hard lessons: Delivering assistance in government-held areas of Syria, Retrieved at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/hard-lessons-delivering-assistance-government-held-areas-syria>.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

and international humanitarian organizations in application.¹³¹ As Syria continues to receive its COVID-19 vaccines through a nation-wide strategy (the Whole of Syria COVID-19 Response),¹³² actors on the ground continue to struggle with ensuring that vaccines reach the most vulnerable groups across the country, and that the efforts carried out as part of the COVID-19 response do not affect the delivery of other critical lifesaving forms of humanitarian assistance.¹³³

The situation has worsened as overarching restrictions on all cross-border activities were imposed due to the pandemic, making the price of a typical food basket increase more than 200% in the first six months of 2020.¹³⁴ Other factors such as the widespread insecurity, dwindling economy, inaccessibility of basic services and intervention of foreign actors have ultimately prolonged the conflict and rendered achieving an adequate and durable solution for IDPs even more difficult and uncertain. IDPs currently residing in both official camps and informal settlements continue to endure overcrowding, particularly in Northwest Syria, where many sites are reportedly four times above their ultimate capacity.¹³⁵ Furthermore, due to the limited space in displacement sites, many communities in the Idlib governorate have reported an increase in the number of people living without a roof over their heads.¹³⁶

5.2 A Fragmented National Strategy for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

Lebanon's already fragmented and under-resourced health system continues to attempt to tackle a considerable COVID-19 pandemic spread. While no outbreaks have been reported or made public yet among the country's Syrian refugee community, testing of this population remains very limited and exposure levels remain very high given poor living conditions the refugee community continues to survive in. Crowding within Syrian refugee households and among refugees currently residing in other informal settlements, the insufficient water supply and little-to-no access to hygiene and sanitation, limited use of masks, restricted access to health care, and inadequate access to information are vulnerability factors that directly impact transmission dynamics both inside and outside the camps.¹³⁷ In addition to the realities for Syrian refugees inside their places of residence, at a larger scale they continue to battle with protracted and deep poverty, stigma, restrictions on rights and freedoms, restrictions on mobility, and fear of legal

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² OCHA (2021), Humanitarian Response: Whole of Syria COVID-19 Response Update No. 01, Retrieved at: <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/fr/operations/whole-of-syria/document/whole-syria-covid-19-response-update-no01>.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Handicap International/Humanity and Inclusion (2021), Durable Solutions / Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Retrieved at: https://hi.org/sn_uploads/document/IB-5-refugees-IDPs-finale-2021-V2.pdf.

¹³⁶ Muslim Hands International (2021), UK charity builds homes for Syrian families in Idlib, Reliefweb, Retrieved at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/syrian-arab-republic/uk-charity-builds-homes-syrian-families-idlib>.

¹³⁷ Fouad M. Fouad et al (2021), Vulnerability of Syrian refugees in Lebanon to COVID-19: quantitative insights. *Confl Health* 15, Retrieved at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-021-00349-6>.

consequences if they seek any forms of assistance.¹³⁸ According to a 2021 study published in *Conflict and Health*, the relatively high prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in this population may further affect the severity of COVID-19 and its symptoms among Syrian refugees who are infected.¹³⁹

Since the beginning of the Syria crisis more than ten years ago, and with and in collaboration with the country's Ministry of Public Health, UNHCR continues to support the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon through the national system by the provision of free or subsidized primary, secondary and tertiary health care.¹⁴⁰ UNHCR has navigated the complexities of the Lebanese health system, and worked to strengthen its overall preparedness, prevention and response measures to account for the health and wellbeing of refugees, their Lebanese hosts and humanitarian personnel working for them all over the country.¹⁴¹ Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in Lebanon in February 2020,¹⁴² UNHCR has supported collective efforts to prevent and contain transmissions of the virus, and avoid an overstretching of the health system which could be caused by a surge in cases needing hospitalization and a lack of equipment at the national level.¹⁴³

UNHCR's COVID-19 support to hospitals in Lebanon covers 800 additional beds and 100 additional ICU beds in total.¹⁴⁴ This has included ventilators (amid the country announcing it is at a shortage),¹⁴⁵ and other advanced equipment and medicines amid the country's "medicine crisis" as well.¹⁴⁶ Despite announcements in January 2021 from Lebanon's Minister of Public Health that everyone in Lebanon, regardless of nationality (and legal status), will be eligible for the vaccine according to the country's national strategy, plans to vaccinate 80% of the population by the end of 2021 have fallen dramatically short.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, despite an inclusive approach and vaccines being made available through public and private sources, a number of emerging

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ UNHCR Lebanon (2021), Public Health, Retrieved at: <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/public-health>.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Garda World (2020), Lebanon: First case of coronavirus (COVID-19) confirmed February 21, Retrieved at: <https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/316346/lebanon-first-case-of-coronavirus-covid-19-confirmed-february-21>.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Nabih Bulos (2021), 'We open, people die; we close, people die.' COVID surge leaves Lebanon with no good options, LA Times, Retrieved at: <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-02-05/covid-surge-leaves-lebanon-no-good-options>.

¹⁴⁶ France24 (2021), Pharmacies go on strike in crisis-hit Lebanon over medicine shortages, Retrieved at: <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20210709-pharmacies-go-on-strike-in-crisis-hit-lebanon-over-medicine-shortages>.

¹⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch (2021), Lebanon: Gaps Remain in Vaccine Program Planning, Retrieved at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/28/lebanon-gaps-remain-vaccine-program-planning>.

obstacles have surfaced which are particular to refugees and migrant workers living in Lebanon in the areas of commute, access and communicating information.¹⁴⁸

To combat much of the Lebanese government’s inadequacy in the areas of vaccine provision to refugees, UNHCR has built dedicated hospital expansion facilities and rehabilitated existing unused sections and refurbished them with new medical equipment.¹⁴⁹ The latter will remain the property of the hospitals even after the pandemic.¹⁵⁰

6. Concluding Remarks: When One Conflict is Managed Across Borders

In comparing the management of the COVID-19 pandemic both inside Syria (in its different regions), and inside Lebanon, one can evidently see the interplay of both national and international policy frameworks that “protect” IDPs inside Syria, as opposed to the national and international legal frameworks that intersect to protect refugees inside Lebanon’s borders. While Syrians inside camps in Syria’s various regions live in almost exactly the same material circumstances that the Syrian refugee population lives in inside Lebanon’s informal camps, the extent to which they are provided protection (and essentially their basic human rights) lies at the mercy of the application of different international legal frameworks and instruments, the differences in status (refugee vs. IDP/citizen) between Lebanon and Syria, as well as the duties each of the two states are required to uphold. For IDPs inside Syria who remain at the mercy of the Syrian “government” in its new and fragmented form, their access to protection essentially remains from one decisive source. For Syrian refugees who have managed to cross a border, their access to protection now lies at the mercy of a number of international humanitarian actors, governments and legal frameworks which may mean that they stand a “better chance” at escaping the protracted conflict they have endured.

As the Government of Syria (GoS) continues serve as an impediment to the access to much humanitarian assistance in GoS-controlled areas, the situation for IDPs remains increasingly precarious given ongoing security threats. IDPs inside Syria fare differently depending on the region they are in (whether GoS-controlled or anti-government controlled) as well as the extent to which humanitarian aid is permitted and accessible. Moreover, the economic situation in both Lebanon and Syria remains increasingly challenging, and subsequently serves as an impediment to access to justice and adequate protection in both places. As the international and regional communities continue to navigate the Syrian crisis one decade later, it remains essential to grasp

¹⁴⁸ World Bank (2021), Vaccinating Refugees: Lessons from the Inclusive Lebanon Vaccine Roll-Out Experience, Reliefweb, Retrieved at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/vaccinating-refugees-lessons-inclusive-lebanon-vaccine-roll-out-experience>.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

how one conflict (and one complex humanitarian system) can affect the same population across borders.

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