INFORMING POLICY ON LOCAL SECURITY PROVISION IN LEBANESE COMMUNITIES HOSTING SYRIAN REFUGEES
Executive Summary

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Executive summary

The purpose of this policy brief is to inform policy formulation on local level security provision and refugee protection, and to propose modalities for upgrading the systems of the Lebanese security institutions in a way that strengthens protection of the Lebanese communities and the Syrian refugees they host. Based on field research conducted between February and May 2016 in three locations across Lebanon, this brief analyses the challenges to protecting local communities and refugees in a hybrid system, in which formal and informal security actors coexist and implement a mix of security measures. It also argues that the current securitisation approach, which relies on negative deterrence, enhances perceptions of insecurity among the Lebanese and infringes on the rights and dignity of the refugees.

To effectively prevent conflict and criminality, security provision at the local level requires an adaptation of the approach to policing to make it more community-oriented, proactive and accessible. This policy brief recommends that continued support to the municipal police capitalising on the high degree of trust in the institution among the communities, as well as its demonstrated accessibility to refugees. To tailor security measures to the actual level of threat and existing concerns, coordination between the security agencies should involve and take into account the voices representing the security needs of both Lebanese citizens and Syrian refugees. For example, security agencies could engage in dialogue at the local and regional levels with humanitarian and human rights organisations, including those working on refugee rights and protection, as well as parents’ committees of public schools. Revision of the regulations on the legal stay of Syrian refugees should be considered as a step towards removing a burden from the Lebanese security and justice system, allowing Syrian nationals to report crimes and violation without fear of detention, while reassuring the Lebanese that foreigners are traceable and accountable to the law.
INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the civil war in Lebanon, political instability has often translated into episodes of increased tension, insecurity and outbursts of violence. At the local level, insecurity has generally been related to the political climate in the country and has reflected the stalemates or shifts in political alignment. The influx of Syrian refugees from 2011 until 2014 has posed a new challenge to security. According to a 2014 study, a sample of the Lebanese population reported a perception that the Syrians are posing a security threat, although there is little evidence of actual security challenges emerging from the presence of Syrian refugees. Following the Arsal crisis of August 2014, the Lebanese government introduced a series of security measures such as checkpoints and army raids, and shortly after, in January 2015, enforced regulations requiring all Syrian nationals to register with the General Security Office (GSO) at a prohibitive cost and on conditions difficult to fulfil.

At the local level, security is provided by a hybrid system of formal and informal actors, which coexist and complement each other, enforcing an erratic mix of measures. The formal security agencies – the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), the Internal Security Forces (ISF), the GSO, the military intelligence and the municipal police – often have overlapping mandates. In addition to these, a range of informal actors are involved in security provision at the local level: private security companies, citizen groups and political party militia wings often conduct street patrols, collect information, intervene to resolve disputes and enforce local curfews. In the official discourse of local security providers, these measures are often taken to protect the Lebanese as well as the refugees.

The aim of this policy brief is to inform policy formulation on local level security provision and refugee protection. Specifically, the brief discusses modalities for upgrading the systems of the Lebanese security institutions aimed at providing safety and protection to the Lebanese communities and the Syrian refugees they host. It is based on field research conducted between February and May 2016 in the village of Ebrine in North Lebanon, the village of Shebaa in South Lebanon and the town of Aley in Mount Lebanon. These locations were selected because of their different political histories, as well as their socio-economic and demographic characteristics.

This policy brief consists of three parts. In the first part, the key challenges to providing security at the local level in a hybrid system are discussed. In the second part, specific policy options are presented focusing on providing unbiased and professional security services to Lebanese citizens and to the Syrian refugees settled in host communities. In the third part, specific recommendations for security institutions, government and political leaders, as well as for donor agencies, United Nations (UN) agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), are outlined. This brief is accompanied by a research report, which discusses in detail the findings from the research conducted by Lebanon Support in the three localities in North Lebanon, South Lebanon and Mount Lebanon.
Security Responses in a Hybrid System

“The Lebanese state is lax and troublesome for the Lebanese themselves, and secondly for Syrians ... We all hear more about the latter because we’re talking of refugees: everywhere displacement is disempowerment; it’s the litmus paper of any pre-existing social issue.” Syrian refugee, Aley

“PREVENTION” THROUGH SECURITISATION

Security measures at the local level are implemented in the framework of an overall government policy towards Syrian refugees in Lebanon, which adopts a securitisation approach – the use of deterrence and intimidation to inhibit criminal or militant behaviour. Local and national authorities often inaccurately describe this approach as “conflict prevention” and “crime prevention” – terms that usually imply multisectoral interventions targeting the underlying causes of conflict and criminality.

Legal and security measures enforced against Syrian refugees range from cumbersome requirements for obtaining residency permits, to army raids, short-term detentions, local curfews and oversight by citizen groups. These measures have been instituted to protect the local community from external threats, namely the Syrian refugees who the authorities fear may become “radicalised” and cause insecurity in the “host” space, however, without strong evidence of the actual need or effect thereof.

Since 2014, the LAF has increased the number of checkpoints, and both LAF and ISF have strengthened their field presence in strategically important areas in the vicinity of borders and major roads. Many informal tented settlements where Syrian refugees live on rented land have been forcefully relocated on the grounds that they are positioned alongside main roads used by the army. Raids have mostly affected such informal settlements, usually resulting in the detention of male Syrians with missing or expired documents. While raids are not illegal, some are reported to be accompanied by illegal arrests and confiscation of property conducted without a prosecutor’s warrant and in the absence of the mukhtar. In the areas of our research, the military intelligence was said to conduct regular raids on Syrian refugees’ houses in Shebaa (so-called “security days”), targeting mainly young men suspected of being affiliated with militant groups, which are active across the border in Syria.

Ironically, the securitisation approach strengthens the perception of insecurity among the Lebanese population and feeds into the alienation between the local Lebanese and the Syrian refugees, thus undermining social stability. At the same time, security measures are often discriminatory as they target individuals based on nationality and are perceived as an attack on the dignity and self-worth of Syrian nationals. Such measures risk driving some individuals into groups claiming to protect the refugees, venturing into a dangerous return to Syria or making the illegal and deadly trip to Europe.
FORMAL, INFORMAL OR HYBRID POLICING

The ISF and the municipal police share the responsibility for policing in Lebanon. The ISF is in charge of preserving order and supporting security, providing communal peace, preserving freedoms within the law and protecting public properties. The municipal police – as the executive arm of the municipalities – is responsible for “safeguarding public wellbeing, public safety and health, provided that their tasks do not conflict with the mandate of central security agencies”. While the municipal police has the right to investigate a crime scene prior to the arrival of the ISF, the mayor as the head of the municipal police is responsible for calling for the ISF’s support (Article 74 of Law 118/1977), and any arrested persons need to be handed over to the ISF. With the arrival of the Syrian refugees, municipal police officers have taken on new responsibilities, such as “coordinating and assisting aid distribution and showing organisations the location of Syrian refugee camps or [other] locations, when they exist in the municipality”.

The municipal police is unarmed and its capacities vary significantly across locations; towns with comparable populations of Lebanese residents and Syrian refugees may have an entirely different police force. Even in locations where the municipal police force is small, such as in Ebrine, it enjoys high levels of trust in the community. Syrian refugees also access the municipal police: according to the research findings, refugees in Ebrine and Aley, who are mostly registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), tend to refer to the municipal police. One of the main reasons for the positive attitudes towards the institution is that municipal police officers are locally recruited, contrary to the rotation of staff seen at the ISF. Efforts to enlarge the municipal police – an institution at the forefront of the refugee crisis – are underway and need to continue.

Informal actors also engage in ‘policing’: findings from Ebrine and Shebaa point to local groups of citizens or members of influential families organising street patrols, intervening in disputes, and monitoring and enforcing local curfews. Despite their frequent alignment with state policies, especially vis-à-vis Syrian refugees, informal security providers respond situationally and at times illegally. Their actions should therefore be monitored by the ISF and any criminal acts should be prosecuted.

Security measures, such as the enforcement of municipal curfews, are implemented within a hybrid security system: a curfew imposed by the municipality is coordinated with the LAF and often happens to be implemented by groups of citizens with the clout of local political parties. Although the legality of the curfews themselves is disputed, their enforcement by informal actors is clearly illegal. The use of threats and assault is considered a crime, and the practice of local vigilantes handing over Syrians to the municipal police is illegal since violation of a curfew is not punishable by the Lebanese law. This hybrid implementation of curfews largely explains the lack of clear information about their validity and enforcement among the population. In the case of Ebrine, for example, “both refugees and local people prove not to be fully aware whether the curfews are still enacted, at what time of
the day such measures are enacted, whether such measures are institutional or illegal, and if initially introduced by the army, the ISF, the political parties, or the municipal police".22
This section outlines policy options for strengthening the security of Lebanese communities and Syrian refugees at the local level. The analysis is based on the understanding that security needs to be provided in a professional and unbiased manner in order to efficiently protect (the rights of) Lebanese citizens and displaced Syrians, and enhance social stability.

ADAPTING THE APPROACH TO POLICING

As discussed in the previous section, the municipal police has potential to play a more central role in the communities, provide daily protection, coordinate closely with the ISF and the LAF, and liaise with local interlocutors (including political parties and citizen groups that act as informal security providers). Harnessing the trust of the local community and the refugees’ acceptance of municipal police officers as a primary point of contact on security issues, the municipal police needs to be equipped to engage with the population using principles of community policing or proximity policing. While there is no consensus on the definition of community policing, core principles include partnership, community consent, accountability, service orientation, proactiveness, problem solving and accessibility.24 “Proximity policing” (or “neighbourhood policing”) is the term preferred in France, and is more concerned with the operational presence of the police in the communities than with the change in policing culture.25

Community or proximity policing in villages such as Ebrihe or Shebaa – involving foot patrols and regular communication with local residents and refugees – should be aimed at maintaining contact, responding to local concerns and complaints, referring to relevant institutions when complaints are not related to crime and security, mediating local disputes and collecting relevant information. In order to engage with the community in this way, the municipal police would require not only an additional set of skills, but also a new understanding of security service provision and the different security needs of men and women. For instance, professional training would emphasise the integrity of the institution, its apolitical action and its commitment to the respect and the upholding of human rights. Officers will further need to be sensitised on working with vulnerable groups and individuals, including refugees, sexual and gender-based violence survivors, as well as others. Professional codes of conduct can also support the development of a professional municipal police.

The benefits of community or proximity policing justify such a shift: community policing can strengthen state legitimacy at the local level, build trust in the formal institutions, provide intelligence insights from the community and provide an opportunity
for the police to inform and educate the community about existing dangers. In the communities hosting Syrian refugees, the new approach can result in the institutions having regular contact with and gaining information from the refugees, while at the same time providing protection and addressing refugees’ concerns before they aggravate and become a source of tension. The existing political will to strengthen the municipal police and the available examples from piloting community policing in Lebanon and the region present an opportunity for action. Community and proximity policing approaches can be tested in different communities and a local Lebanese model can be tailored based on evidence from the field.

ISF SUPPORTING THE MUNICIPAL POLICE
Local residents in many locations, especially in smaller ones such as Ebrine and Shebaa, report a lack of or very limited ISF presence. In fact, with the prospect of a stronger municipal police, the ISF may not need to be heavily present in each community. With a stronger municipal police force, the main focus would be on making the ISF readily available to respond to signals from the municipal police in cases of criminal activity or civil disorder. In areas of low security risk, the ISF should prioritise coordinating with the municipal police and other security actors, engaging in professional conduct and respecting the human rights of all, including non-nationals. In areas of higher security risk, the ISF should be part of broader coordinated security strategies developed and implemented jointly with other security institutions and civil authorities.

The informal role of formal security actors, such as the informal mediation of disputes by police officers, also needs to be recognised and valued. Informal interventions of police officers are timely, context-sensitive and cost-effective, and when done without bias have the potential to positively influence citizens’ perceptions of the security institution. While informal interventions are common practice in many countries, it is perhaps even more relevant in a hybrid system, where informal resolution of disputes is likely to be the norm. Security institutions need to support the development of dispute resolution skills for their personnel, openly discuss their formal and informal roles, and set up safeguards against possible abuses of power in informal settings.

INSTITUTIONAL AWARENESS AND COORDINATION IN A HYBRID SYSTEM
In security systems with multiple formal actors, coordination is critical and, as indicated by the security cell in the Nabatieh governorate, which consists of representatives of nine entities, coordination mechanisms can be “the point of reference for key policy related to Syrian refugees locally”. Such coordination mechanisms at the regional level can directly inform local security policies and therefore need to ensure they have access to information from all relevant sources. Informal security actors such as political parties, local citizen groups or heads of influential families can bring in valuable information on local security challenges. Humanitarian and human rights
organisations, including those working on refugee protection, are well positioned to present information and discuss the security needs of the communities they serve.

Informal coordination is also in place at the municipal level, between the municipal police, the ISF and informal security actors, such as citizen groups providing street patrols. The municipal police would benefit by further striving to include displaced Syrians in this coordination in order to ensure that their security concerns and actual threats are addressed. A good starting point for such coordination can be the mechanisms for community-based protection established by humanitarian actors in communities across Lebanon, such as community groups and protection focal points. Parents’ committees from local public schools – being the only institution in which Syrian refugees are formally represented, and women’s voices included – can also be invited to highlight perspectives from both Syrian and Lebanese communities. Furthermore, local community dialogues involving security and administrative institutions alongside the host and refugee communities can pave the way for a shared understanding of local security concerns and the required security measures.

DECRIMINALISATION OF DISPLACEMENT
Effective protection of displaced Syrians requires a regulation of their stay in the country. This measure will also reassure the hosting population that the state is able to manage both the security and humanitarian implications of the refugee crisis. On the one hand, introducing a temporary status for refugees will remove a burden from the Lebanese security and justice systems, which are currently detaining ‘illegal’ Syrians, pressing charges, and suing and punishing them (often with both prison time and fines) for lack of regular documentation. On the other hand, it will encourage Syrian men and women to more readily engage with and report to Lebanese security institutions, thus effectively protecting Lebanese communities. A revised regulation and documentation of Syrian refugees will also facilitate authorities’ response in the case a refugee commits a crime and will reassure the Lebanese that foreign nationals are traceable and accountable to the law.
Recommendations

The provision of safety and protection to the Lebanese communities and to the refugees living among them requires a reassessment of the security and safety threats posed by the refugees and the adaptation of security approaches. For example, local security measures such as curfews, street patrols or withholding personal documents could be gradually phased out and replaced with a professional and unbiased local (municipal) police force, equipped to proactively engage with residents and refugees, problem solve and prevent violations. Providing adequate protection of the refugees - with consideration of the different needs and vulnerabilities of men and women - through temporary legalisation of their stay and community or proximity policing will guarantee security to the Lebanese communities.

Based on the discussed policy options, the following recommendations are addressed to state security institutions, the Lebanese government and political leaders, and UN agencies and NGOs.

To state security institutions

The ISF, LAF, GSO and the municipal police should actively engage in regular community security dialogues with the participation of all relevant security institutions, local authorities, civil society, political parties and representatives of the local community and Syrian refugees. Such dialogues can help institutions and communities arrive at a shared assessment of security needs and share responsibility for security provision.

The Ministry of Interior and the ISF should invest in the professionalisation of the municipal police force, capitalising on the existing trust within communities. Integrate the principles of community or proximity policing (partnership, proactiveness, accessibility and accountability) in the mandate of the municipal police and build the capacities of the personnel to engage with local communities and refugees by listening to the concerns of men and women and solving problems.

The Ministry of Interior and the ISF should support training for police officers in mediation, arbitration, human rights and conflict-sensitivity, and skill development for working with vulnerable groups, including displaced women and men. Ensure that the municipal police code of conduct, which is currently being developed by the Ministry of Interior with support from other agencies, includes a commitment to performing duties with integrity and respect for the human rights of all.

All security institutions should ensure that security services are accessible to all, including women, foreign nationals and gender minorities, and sanction the use of unjustified threats and intimidation, arbitrary arrests or denial of services on the basis of nationality, social status, gender or other identity markers by their personnel.

Security institutions should acknowledge the role of informal security providers such as local citizen groups and their ability to assist in community self-protection and local level dispute resolution. Maintain strong relations with the informal security providers to ensure that crimes and violations are duly referred to the relevant state...
authority. Actively discourage and, when necessary, take action to terminate and punish illegal security measures initiated by informal actors.

To the Lebanese government and political leaders

Revise regulations on the legal stay of Syrian refugees and take steps to grant a temporary legal status for all those displaced by violence until they are able to return to Syria or resettle in another country that meets safety conditions.

Actively promote cooperation among the security institutions, as well as between security institutions, local authorities and communities. Encourage the adoption of community policing or proximity policing principles by the municipal police and support pilot projects in municipalities with a sizeable presence of Syrian refugees.

Recognise that the instrumentalisation of community fears through the continuous scapegoating of Syrian refugees is enhancing perceived insecurity and breeding tensions between the local population and the refugees. Develop the security sector’s ability to compile, verify and publish data on security incidents and threats. Use verified data in public statements and clearly differentiate between militants and the civilian population.

To donor agencies, UN agencies, and local and international NGOs

Advocate more vocally with the Lebanese government regarding the revision of the regulations on the legal stay of refugees from Syria and providing protection.

In the short term, facilitate temporary solutions to protect the refugees, for example, by linking vulnerable individuals with local formal and informal security actors willing to support ad hoc solutions to avoid detention or facilitate release in cases of missing or invalid registration documents. Continue efforts to strengthen community-based protection and put pressure on security institutions that openly discriminate against refugees.

Design programmes and provide services based on a sound understanding of the difference between security perceptions and actual security threats. Challenge inaccurate perceptions of security threats with relevant interventions, such as community security dialogues, expert discussions of real and perceived insecurity, targeted outreach and media engagement. Ensure that social stability programmes address drivers of tensions between the host and refugee communities, including ungrounded perceptions about insecurity and threats.

Support security institutions to develop a gender-sensitive security force that protects all. Ensure that community-based protection programming responds to the different protection needs of men and boys, and women and girls.
1 | Beirut Research and Innovation Center, Citizens’ perceptions of security threats stemming from the Syrian refugee presence in Lebanon, Background Paper, London: International Alert, February 2015

2 | In Arsal, the Lebanese Army and the Internal Security Forces clashed with militants in the border areas and over 20 “servicemen” were kidnapped. See Lebanon Support’s timeline of the Arsal conflict: Arsal Conflict (starting August 2, 2014), Lebanon Support, Civil Society Knowledge Centre, http://cskc.daleel-madani.org/timelines/27778, accessed 13 June 2016

3 | The annual fee for renewing residency documents is USD 200 per person, plus notary and mukhtar fees. Required documents for Syrians registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) include a housing lease signed by a landlord and stamped by a mukhtar, certified copies of the Lebanese landlord’s ID and lease agreement or real estate deed, a UNHCR registration certificate, proof of income or financial means, and a pledge not to work. For additional details, see Lebanon Support, Formal informality, brokering mechanisms, and illegality: The impact of Lebanese state’s policies on Syrians’ everyday life, Beirut: Lebanon Support, July 2016 (forthcoming)


6 | Thirty in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in the three localities with local male and female residents, Syrian refugees and long-term migrant workers, mukhitar formally in charge of local administrative affairs, municipalities, the municipal police, local branches of political parties, and local and international NGOs operating in the areas. A limitation of the research was that all three localities proved to be quite safe — although marked by an overall climate of fear, mistrust and social intimidation — and the findings do not capture the challenges faced by areas with more pronounced insecurity. The brief also draws from a roundtable discussing preliminary research findings held in May 2016.


15 | Ibid.

16 | Ibid.

17 | For example, research conducted by International Alert in 2015 found that Al Marj in Western Bekaa had only three police officers covering a population of 20,000 locals and 10,000 Syrian refugees, while Byblos in Mount Lebanon had 42 police officers and 30 municipal guards for a population of 40,000 locals and 5,000 refugees. See Municipal Police and Security Provision, 2015, Op. cit.


20 | The argument revolves around the fact that curfews can only be implemented by the High Military Command and municipal law does not stipulate that municipalities have the jurisdiction to introduce curfews. See Y. Al-Saadi, Examining curfews against Syrians in Lebanon, Civil Society Knowledge Centre, Beirut: Lebanon Support, 2014, http://cskc.daleel-madani.org/content/examining-curfews-against-syrians-lebanon-0

21 | Hybrid security provision for Syrian refugees: Learning from research and experience, presentation at a roundtable organized by the authors to collect feedback on the preliminary findings of the field research, 12 May 2016, Beirut


25 | Ibid.


27 | For example, the work of Siren Associates with the Ras Beirut Police Station (ISF) in Beirut and with Jordan’s Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate in the Zaatari and Azraq refugee camps in Jordan. See: Municipal Police and Security Provision, 2015, Op. cit.

28 | The security cell in Nabatieh is composed of officers from five security institutions and three ministries, as well as one civil society representative. See M. Al-Maar, The social stability context in the Nabatieh & Bint Jbeil Qanas, Conflict Analysis Report, United Nations Development Programme, March 2016, p.8, https://data.unhcr.org/syriarefugees/download.php?id=10748

29 | Ibid, p.9