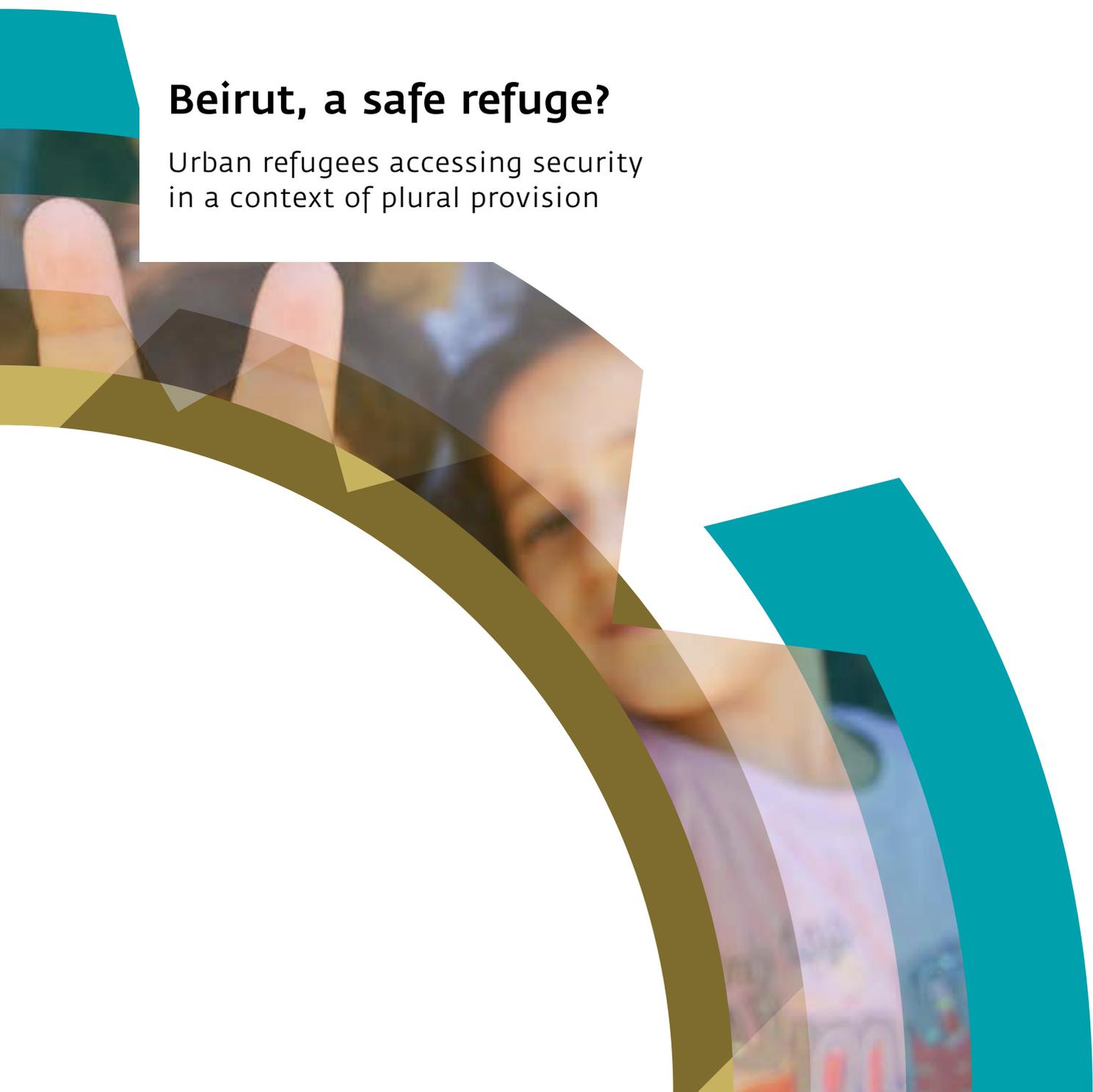




Plural  
Security  
Insights

## **Beirut, a safe refuge?**

Urban refugees accessing security  
in a context of plural provision



## SECURITY PLURALISM IN THE CITY

This paper, funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), seeks to foster effective security and rule of law policy and practice by producing empirically-based insights into how structures of local governance might interact with plural security providers in ways that deliver improved security outcomes for urban residents. This approach privileges a bottom-up perspective, challenging both conventional state-centric international security and rule of law assistance and local policymakers to better engage with modes of security provision that people view as legitimate, effective, or at least the best available. More can be found at [www.pluralsecurityinsights.org](http://www.pluralsecurityinsights.org).

Comparative research was conducted in three urban contexts: Beirut, Lebanon; Nairobi, Kenya; and Tunis, Tunisia. These cities are characterised by differing degrees of security pluralism, unequal levels of human development, distinct historical trajectories of state formation, and diverse patterns of social cleavages. As such, they reflect a range of contextual factors, and a microcosm of a larger global set. Insights drawn from individual case studies will inform preliminary research agenda-setting and recommendations for policymakers to respond more effectively to security challenges in urban settings.

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# Beirut, a safe refuge?

## Urban refugees accessing security in a context of plural provision

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### Summary

In contexts of plural security provision, security is produced and distributed by an array of actors asserting claims on the use of force, operating simultaneously and with varying relationships to the state. This paper describes how a vulnerable urban population, Syrian refugees in Beirut, Lebanon, realises its security interests within plural provision arrangements. Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, as many as 1.5-million Syrians have fled into Lebanon. Fieldwork in the Beirut neighbourhoods of Naba'a and Sabra revealed that refugees experience a precarious security environment in the city, characterised by constant fear of harassment and detention, lack of protection, and limited mobility. Research identified a diverse repertoire of strategies upon which Syrians draw to access security, from avoidance to reliance on in-group problem-solving and affiliation with sympathetic local security providers.

The paper concludes that Lebanon's current policy framework exacerbates the vulnerability of Syrian refugees, and that the very nature of security pluralism in Beirut is unlikely to promote equitable distribution of security as a public good, especially to newcomers. It proposes changes to the regulatory and security regime applied to control Syrian communities, and advises the Lebanese state to address the security gap for refugees within the parameters of the existing consociational power-sharing framework.

### Acknowledgments

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## Contents

Introduction	P 6
1 Citizens, migrants and refugees in a fragmented city	9
2 Security pluralism in Beirut	10
3 The social basis of security provision and accountability	12
4 The security environment for Syrian refugees in Beirut	15
5 How do refugees access security? From avoidance to the security gap	18
6 Conclusions and policy recommendations	21
Works Cited	24

## Introduction

**This paper explores on how one of the most vulnerable populations in Beirut, Syrian refugees,<sup>1</sup> realise their security interests in the face of both the threat and actuality of violence, within plural provision arrangements.**

It focuses on the local dynamics in two neighbourhoods of metropolitan Beirut, which are not necessarily found elsewhere in Lebanon; contrasts Syrian security perceptions and practices with those of Lebanese citizens in the same urban spaces; and highlights the role of local governance actors in the politics of security provision, specifically their role in facilitating access to security and the accountability of security providers.

The provision of security through the maintenance of order, prevention of crime, and restoration following violations and disorder involves practices, discourses, and modes of governance that affect how power is exercised, by whom and for whose benefit. In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, security is often provided by an array of actors asserting claims on the use of force, operating simultaneously and with varying relationships to the state, a situation described here as *plural security provision*.<sup>2</sup> In contexts of security pluralism, both uniformed security providers directly authorised by the state (police, army) and a multitude of other coercive actors engage in producing and reproducing order based on end-user demand, and enjoy contingent and mutable degrees of public authority and local legitimation.

In a context of pluralism, providers of security may acquire legitimacy by proving more effective, efficient, and culturally relevant to the needs of local populations, as well as cheaper and more proximate than state alternatives. Notwithstanding these advantages, the risks to local populations associated with this form of security provision include perverse and symbiotic interface with the state, and an almost ineluctable tendency toward net production of insecurity over time; plural security providers may undermine state consolidation by engaging in "competitive state-building" that tests the legitimacy of formal structures.<sup>3</sup> Plural security provision has also been associated with the perpetration of abuses against subaltern and marginalised communities.

### Methodology

Conducted in March and April 2016, fieldwork consisted of semi-structured key informant interviews in Beirut, covering representatives of central and local government, community-based organisations, think tanks, the UN, and international organisations. Focus group discussions and randomised interviews with respondents (including both Lebanese citizens and Syrian refugees) were conducted at two sites in metropolitan Beirut. Fieldwork was carried out by a mixed team of international and Lebanese experts in security, conflict, and urban governance, and complemented by an extensive desk review of relevant academic and policy literature.

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1 The term "refugee" is used here in line with common usage by Lebanese and Syrians to describe the predicament of the majority of Syrians currently residing in Lebanon as a result of the war in Syria, rather than as a term with particular legal meaning in Lebanon or in relation to international law.

2 See the early definitional work of Baker (2008), who deploys the term multi-choice policing.

3 See, for examples, Albrecht & Kyed (2015), Schuberth (2013), Felbab-Brown (2012).

The sites at which focus groups and randomised interviews with respondents were conducted are:

- Naba'a, a low-income and heterogeneous neighbourhood in the municipality of Bourj Hammoud, to the east of Beirut. Naba'a is the closest slum to downtown Beirut, historically a destination for newcomers, and characterised by very high population mobility and poor integration with the rest of Bourj Hammoud. Residents hail from many parts of Lebanon and include Armenians, Kurds, South Asian migrant workers, and a large population of Syrian guest workers and refugees.<sup>4</sup>
- Sabra, a mixed neighbourhood in Tarik Jdidi, West Beirut. The population of Sabra includes mainly Sunni Lebanese as well as many Palestinian and Syrian refugees. Sabra abuts a major Palestinian refugee camp, Shatila, secured by Palestinian armed groups, and which Lebanese security forces seldom enter.

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4 For more on Naba'a, see Fawaz et al. (2014).



# 1 Citizens, migrants and refugees in a fragmented city

**Lebanon's political and economic centre of gravity, metropolitan Beirut is a cosmopolitan city where most of the country's confessional (i.e. sectarian) communities are represented.**

Beirut has been a city of migrants for many generations, with rapid growth throughout the 20th century powered by the arrival of newcomers en masse, ranging from economic migrants from the hinterlands to Armenian, Kurdish, Palestinian and, most recently, Syrian refugees. Newcomers transformed the city by generating autonomous patterns of social, economic and (eventually) political self-organisation, many of which involved assertion through armed power.<sup>5</sup> The intensification of social and political contestations related to the arrival of newcomers to the city was among many factors that precipitated Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war. That urban demographic change has led to such violent political contestations explains, at least in part, many Beirut residents' marked anxiety regarding the on-going Syrian influx.

The present situation in Beirut also reflects the prevailing sense of insecurity in Lebanon. In the face of mounting public frustration with deep political paralysis and state dysfunction, exemplified by the 2015 #YouStink protests against a seemingly intractable garbage crisis, Lebanon's brand of consociational power-sharing has proven curiously resilient.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, all levels of this static, entrenched political system recognise the risk of spill over from the Syrian conflict. Beirut is fragmented by ubiquitous checkpoints, access restrictions, fortifications, vehicle inspections, visible surveillance, and other security measures constraining everyday practices of urban life. This sustains a widespread sense of elevated risk that tends to validate reactive and coercive behaviour by security providers, despite public scepticism.<sup>7</sup>

Yet there is a marked divergence between the prevailing sense of instability and the reality of Beirut as a city that is "safe," insofar as public disorder and violent crime is uncommon, and excepting occasional seizures of the high-level Lebanese political settlement that maintains peace. Research respondents frequently reported the security situation to be very poor but then indicated that they, and those in their immediate vicinities, had not experienced disorder or crime, nor themselves felt unsafe. This contradiction may result from sensational media coverage of crime and violence, or Lebanese politicians' hyperbole when discussing current threats. Alternatively, it may be the case that Beirut, like Lebanon, is more fragile than it appears. It may also result from the resilience of embedded micro-level orders that do not reflect the pressures bringing the country as a whole to the brink: insecurity is not evenly distributed, spatially or socio-economically, and some sectarian constituencies feel more at risk than others.

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5 Fawaz (2009).

6 Salloukh et al. (2015).

7 Fawaz et al. (2012).

## 2 Security pluralism in Beirut

Earlier research described four key characteristics of the plural security provision landscape in Beirut,<sup>8</sup> outlined below for reference:

- Neighbourhood-level conflict management and enforcement is tightly linked to Lebanese and regional political dynamics, and reflects the national post-war political settlement maintaining stability;
- Intricate networking engages and connects security providers and other actors in a functional division of labour, in which political parties play a linchpin role;
- Security provision tends to amount to the rapid and discrete quelling of local sectarian and political conflict; and,
- A high level of in-group social cohesion enables plural security provision and (crucially) mitigates risk factors that might otherwise contribute to everyday crime and disorder.

Among state security providers, the army (Lebanese Armed Forces, LAF), the national police (Internal Security Forces, ISF), intelligence (General Security), and municipal police are most visible. In many neighbourhoods, LAF enjoys public esteem and a reputation for professionalism, while ISF is generally regarded as corrupt and ineffective (“the most delinquent public service,” according to one respondent). Security in Beirut, like any other public service, is strongly linked to confessional affiliation, of both individuals and the political parties that share local and national power. State institutions are relatively weak, and cannot be analysed outside of the political context in which they function.

A tacit agreement among political parties, many of which perform functions related to security provision, ensures ISF cannot establish a monopoly on legitimate force or exceed certain political red-lines, like dealing directly with sectarian clashes. Likewise, municipal police are appointed by and responsive to mayors; they represent the communal and political entente in a given area. Responsible for tasks such as bylaw enforcement and night-guarding, municipal police are sometimes subsumed into local networks and structures of political power. Surveys reflect a normative preference among Lebanese citizens for a state monopoly on security provision at odds with everyday modes of accessing security that reflect low trust in the ISF and tend toward pluralism and informality.<sup>9</sup>

Lebanon’s political economy of sectarianism and partisanship plays a major role in the distribution of resources, including security. People’s relations with state institutions are mediated by influential political authorities, supported by and legitimised through their relations with sectarian leaders, who act as autonomous providers of public services to their confessional

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8 Belhadj et. al (2015).

9 Geha (2015).

constituencies through para-institutional mechanisms.<sup>10</sup> As such, political parties play a crucial role in brokering access to security for most people. They do so either indirectly, by mediating relations with state security agencies, or directly, through the operation of armed militias and other partisan security structures that remain fully mobilised or dormant.<sup>11</sup>

The panorama of security providers present in Beirut also includes the self-appointed, mostly-male local neighbourhood committees organised to patrol sectarian territories; commercial private security companies,<sup>12</sup> including the local arms of international security firms; concierges and parking valets who serve as antennae on the streets for political and criminal structures and networks; and those involved in organised crime, ranging from street gangs to entrenched transnational mafias.

These modes of security provision are in some instances enabled by state security providers like the ISF and municipal police, which furnish a rubric for the legitimation of their activities. Plural security providers linked to political parties, for example, understand themselves to operate within some form of state authorisation, as political parties are inside the constellation of state authority. One political party security coordinator interviewed noted that his party engages routinely with ISF and municipal police in each neighbourhood where it is present. Thus, these actors are neither entirely public nor entirely private, but something in between—a reality that has been described as “twilight policing”.<sup>13</sup> As is the case with state agencies, their performances of security are mainly punitive, disciplinary, and reinforcing of confessional divisions and class-based inequalities.

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10 Fakhoury (2014).

11 El-Hokayem & McGovern (2008).

12 Note that the research did not cover commercial private security provision.

13 Diphorn (2015).

### 3 The social basis of security provision and accountability

Beirut's everyday safety is mainly attributable to social cohesion, here meaning the confluence of factors including territorial and sectarian community norms and solidarity, strong family ties, compact multi-generational neighbourhoods characterised by rootedness and connectedness, and cultural values of friendliness and hospitality that maintain order at micro-level. Robust evidence suggests that social cohesion is negatively associated with variations in crime and disorder.<sup>14</sup> In Beirut, people operate within dense social networks that deploy care and control in equal measure, contributing to resilience and militating against disorder. Social cohesion helps mitigate the deleterious effects of an otherwise complex and unstable system.

The "strong society" described by respondents is also a fragmented one. It has limited capacity to bridge identity groups and institutionalise inter-confessional relations through an impartial state apparatus and the rule of law. This can manifest as "group closure," or exclusive in-group trust and dependence. It can also take on perniciously coercive forms. In Naba'a, for example, the response of the community to petty crime and other deviance is spontaneous collective action—local self-organised interventions, sometimes but not always violent, that precede or preclude any involvement of LAF, ISF, or municipal police. It also limits the extent to which newcomers (whether Syrian refugees, migrant workers, or others) can benefit from the positive externalities of Beirut's cohesiveness.

If social cohesion is the foundation of citizen safety in Beirut, and thus the underpinning of its security system's effectiveness and durability from a social perspective, the related phenomenon of *wasta* is the key determinant of how security provision is organised and instantiated from a user perspective. *Wasta* is the pervasive quantification of influence via family or other interpersonal connections, and a fixture of everyday life in Lebanese society. *Wasta* may mean either mediation or intercession, and denotes both the person who mediates or intercedes and the act of mediation or intercession itself. To possess *wasta* is to be capable of leveraging influence that gets things done, either in relation to an existing issue, or retroactively, to gain some semblance of informal or institutional benefit.

The informal and relational nature of Lebanese society is reflected in modalities of accessing security: Lebanese use *wasta* to solve problems, organise protection, and mobilise state or other resources to their advantage. The systems of clientelism and patronage that disburse *wasta* are

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<sup>14</sup> For example, Sampson et. al (1997); for recent research on this topic, see Barolsky (2016).

organised around political parties, families and business interests, and vertically integrated from the local to national levels. In relation to security providers, people do not possess agency other than through the activation of *wasta* via family relations, links to ministers or MPs, etc. *Wasta* thus privileges those with the right connections and exposes those without to exclusion and injustice. That Lebanese can extract advantage from a weak state only through influential contacts seems to be at the root of the profound lack of trust between people and institutions.

Associated with the informal and relational nature of society is the severe limitation of institutional accountability. There are few opportunities for citizens to offer input on security governance or exercise oversight over security providers. ISF operates a 24/7 hotline for citizen feedback, but serious complaints must be presented via interview at the Ministry of the Interior — a significant deterrent. Hence, citizens are more likely to resort to social media to voice grievances. Local government, often viewed as closer and more responsive to citizens, does not provide a consistently superior avenue for accountability. As citizens are required to vote in the districts from which they originate, rather than those in which they reside, urban electorates are seldom reflective of actual, much larger populations, reducing the utility of elections as means to punish poor administrative performance. In Naba'a, for example, 90% of residents do not elect municipal leaders where they reside, according to one respondent.

People do not believe they can foster meaningful change through complaint mechanisms or electoral processes. The narrow impact of popular mobilisation around the garbage crisis in 2015 is consistent with recent history, and demonstrates that protesting is also a dead-end. Nevertheless, parallel forms of accountability exist through political parties, which can be used as channels for the articulation of grievances. If local people are frustrated with a security checkpoint, for example, they might report it to a political party, rather than the municipality (and without regard to who established it). Several respondents speculated that structures like political parties might be more accountable, as leaders want to be perceived as responsive to their supporters and clients. Overall, the lack of accountability upwards to state authorities that permeates Lebanese society feeds passivity and apathy.



## 4 The security environment for Syrian refugees in Beirut

**Lebanon has the highest per capita concentration of displaced people in the world, with refugees now accounting for as many as one in four people in the country. As of February 2016, there were 1.05-million registered Syrian refugees, 307 850 of them in metropolitan Beirut.<sup>15</sup> Some estimates of the total number of Syrians in Lebanon are as high as two million.**

Syrians constitute a marginalised population defined in relation to the specific characteristics of the country in which they now find themselves and to the war in their homeland, which has sub-divided them into disparate communities with ideological, sectarian, and class identities. Challenges associated with these definitions impede the ability of Syrians in Lebanon to take collective action in relation both to their own security and other aspects of everyday life.

When the Syrian war began in 2011, Syrians fleeing to Lebanon were welcomed with sympathy and hospitality. While this remains the case in some parts of the country, degrees of polarisation and tension now characterise relations between host communities and the newcomers in many areas. The focus of international aid agencies on Syrian refugees, even in those communities where Lebanese are also deprived, fosters resentment and antipathy in many quarters. Lebanese political leaders and ordinary citizens fret about the mainly Sunni refugees' impact on Lebanon's delicate confessional balance, and refer to the precedent of Palestinian refugees who arrived more than 60 years ago and today live in permanent, militarised slums. Lebanese respondents in Naba'a and Sabra complained that Syrian refugees compete for jobs with local people, drive down wages, saturate the rental market for housing, overload hospitals and other public services, and strain the social fabric. One Lebanese respondent in Naba'a referred to the migration of Syrians as an "invasion".

Lebanese widely assume that Syrian refugees pose a security threat and have contributed to an increase in crime, despite the lack of concrete evidence that this is the case.<sup>16</sup> Due to cramped living conditions, Syrians are very present in public space and likely to participate in informal economic activity; the media speculates about Syrian involvement in trafficking, prostitution, and petty crime. Lebanese respondents in Naba'a and Sabra described what they perceived as the negative social and cultural influences exerted by Syrians, such as indecency and vulgarity. "One father noted he had placed his children in a new school, where they are all Lebanese, so I won't have to hear the word '*idba*' (slaughter)". Another reported, "I don't feel I am in Lebanon anymore." Many Lebanese respondents indicated concerns about the radicalisation of refugees, and the risk of refugees attracting and / or committing terror attacks.

In response to these public anxieties, Lebanese security providers have implemented a vast and haphazard regime of coercive measures targeting Syrian refugees. Curfews, checkpoints and raids

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<sup>15</sup> UNHCR (2016).

<sup>16</sup> International Alert (2015).

are three of the most egregious examples of this regime:

- Dozens of municipalities (including Bourj Hammoud) have unilaterally imposed curfews specifically applicable to “foreigners,” in almost all cases aimed exclusively at Syrian refugees, and in contravention of the applicable law.<sup>17</sup> Curfews are typically enforced by municipal police. In some cases, local Lebanese youth enforce curfews on behalf of their communities, with everyone involved recognising the legal ambiguity of these practices.
- Checkpoints have become a major symbolic as well as practical reference point in the lives of Syrian refugees; 34% of Syrians in Beirut reported having problems at checkpoints.<sup>18</sup> Checkpoints often target only men in a certain age category, and as such are mainly obstacles to mobility for men and boys. Detentions resulting from stops at checkpoints (whether maintained by LAF, ISF or other actors) are commonplace.
- LAF conducts regular raids on Syrian settlements, mainly refugee camps, but also in urban areas like Beirut. Army personnel are empowered to detain Syrians encountered during raids for any number of reasons, for up to 72 hours. Syrians are frequently detained merely because their residency documents have expired or because they do not have legal status. There is also widespread evidence of ill-treatment and torture of Syrian refugees during raids, at the point of arrest, in detention, and during interrogations.<sup>19</sup>

Legal status is a vital issue for Syrian refugees. As Lebanon is not a signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, Syrians are considered visitors, and rules adopted in January 2015 require Syrians entering Lebanon to obtain visas. The process for renewing residency permits every six months includes a requirement of sponsorship (*kafil*), documentation pledging not to work, and/or valid rental agreements, as well as payment of a \$200 fee. In light of dwindling personal resources, renewal costs are prohibitive for most refugees.

A survey found that 70% of Syrians do not have papers, and 88% reported that not having legal residence papers negatively impacts their safety.<sup>20</sup> Without the proper documentation, Syrians can be arrested and detained for weeks. The ISF has no jurisdiction over papers for foreigners, thus Syrian refugees who do not have papers are passed on to General Security. Despite rumours to the contrary, there is no policy of deportation to Syria. Instead, Syrians who have been detained without papers are released after lengthy investigations have been implemented.

Lack of papers renders Syrian refugees vulnerable to harassment and exploitation, by discouraging them from seeking recourse from police or other authorities. While solid evidence is hard to obtain, many respondents speculated that Syrians suffer from a considerable volume of un-reported petty and serious crime. Lack of proper documentation also drastically impedes mobility, since those without papers are reluctant to move about a cityscape cluttered with checkpoints and state security surveillance.

Focus group discussions in Naba'a and Sabra detected a pervasive sense of vulnerability among Syrian respondents, who described routine verbal harassment and threats; the ever-present risk of eviction or violence; and discrimination and coercion in relations with landlords, police, and the general public. “If a Lebanese kid makes a loud noise, no one says anything,” reported a Syrian respondent in Naba'a, but “when my son made some noise, the landlord told me to leave.” The sense that Lebanese patience had run out was prevalent. According to another Syrian

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17 al-Saadi (2014).

18 Alsharabati & Nammour (2015), p. 16.

19 Human Rights Watch (2016).

20 Alsharabati & Nammour (2015), p. 12.

respondent in Naba'a, "There is no more mercy." Security is the top concern for Syrians in Lebanon, and Syrians in Beirut feel less safe than anywhere else in the country, with more than 30% reporting that they or family members or friends have been assaulted.<sup>21</sup>

That Syrian refugees in Beirut feel more insecure than Syrian refugees elsewhere in Lebanon is due to several factors. In Beirut, there is intense competition for resources; omnipresent security intensifies risks for those without papers; and the city's heterogeneity means that refugees are often compelled to reside in neighbourhoods with an unfriendly sectarian or political character. An indicator of the heightened urgency of departure created by conditions for refugees is the presence of human trafficking networks, which tend to be more active in urban areas like Beirut.

There is also a gendered dimension to the vulnerability of Syrian refugees. In addition to their greater insecurity at checkpoints, men and boys are more often subject to stops and searches, with the research finding that most Syrian young men and boys have been stopped and searched multiple times; are more likely to be detained; and are more often subject to random acts of violence. For these reasons, Syrian women and girls are increasingly employed outside the home, as they are less likely than men to be stopped by ISF or municipal police. Respondents indicated that Syrian women and girls face specific challenges such as widespread sexualised harassment in the streets and the workplace. There are also reports of early marriage emerging as a mechanism for securing a form of protection for girls and young women in Syrian communities, and of a growing incidence of survival sex, although the extent of either phenomenon is not clear.

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21 Ibid., p. 12.

## 5 How do refugees access security? From avoidance to the security gap

**Drawing on the findings from focus group discussions and diverse open-source data, this study identifies a repertoire of strategies that Syrians use to access security in the context of Beirut's security pluralism.**

Pervasive anxiety and fear among the refugees has resulted in the adoption of one over-riding survival strategy across the country: maintaining a low profile. Desiring safety and stability above all else, Syrians do not feel entitled to make a claim on rights and services, or exercise agency in relation to service providers, especially those that produce and distribute security. In the face of security threats like harassment or evictions, refugees often determine that it is preferable not to seek any assistance through formal or informal security providers. Some 70% of respondents to a recent survey indicated that their response to a security incident was to "do nothing".<sup>22</sup> One respondent in Naba'a, asked to whom she could resort in case of harassment, said, "Only God."

For the reasons outlined previously, state actors are the last resort of most Syrian refugees. Indeed, to some extent the avoidance of formal security providers can be observed as a strategy central to Syrian survival in Beirut. Negative perceptions of authorities like LAF, ISF, and General Security are higher in Beirut than elsewhere in Lebanon.<sup>23</sup> Generally, though not in all cases, Syrians do not possess sufficient *wasta* to mobilise effective responses from state security providers in the way that many Lebanese can.

Rather, the first resort of most Syrian adults is to other Syrians. Many refugees from Syria came to Lebanon as intact extended families, and some even reconstituted entire neighbourhoods in Beirut that can serve as a resource. Syrian communities in Lebanon maintain the informal dispute resolution and justice mechanisms that operated in Syria, though this has proven harder in urban areas where traditional norms have been more disrupted. There are also established communities of Syrian guest workers in Lebanon (of whom there may have been 300-500 000 pre-crisis), many of whom can access local networks and structures valuable in a security context. For example, Naba'a had a large Syrian population before the war, mostly guest workers, and its residual networks and structures related to the period of Syrian occupation in Lebanon act as a buffer for newly-arrived Syrian refugees.

The burden of dealing with refugees has fallen disproportionately on Lebanon's 1200 municipalities. In the Lebanese Crisis Response Plan, formulated by the government with support from the UN agencies, municipalities are called upon to perform a wide variety of service provision tasks without much financial or administrative autonomy. Mayors have been overwhelmed, and torn between the needs of the local population and the needs of refugees. The nexus of political parties and the infrastructure of the state at the local level means that municipalities are often influential institutions in the lives of refugees. Due to their roles as first-responders and enforcers

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

of curfews and bylaws in public space, municipal police have become front-line interlocutors with Syrian refugees within a limited legal framework. According to UNHCR and UN-Habitat, some Syrians have been able to develop beneficial relationships with municipal officials and police, and are thus able to resort to them when they face problems.

Respondents indicate that Syrian refugees can access friendly Lebanese sources for security, utilising whatever *wasta* they can accumulate. Refugees have tended to seek out neighbourhoods considered sympathetic on the basis of perceived political and sectarian affiliations. Security for refugees is generally better where one security provider is preponderant, as refugees know whom to resort to if necessary. Hence, Syrian refugees are sometimes able to shelter under the protection of existing local structures and networks, either based on a political or confessional calculus, or those that are preponderant in the neighbourhood where they reside.

As is the case with Lebanese, Syrians tend to tap different providers to maximise advantage depending on the specific situation, though the space for choice is often limited and contingent. Access is facilitated by local party officials or *mukhtars* (elected representatives of the state at local level) acting as intermediaries and brokers, and who often acquire power over refugees in exchange for their services. Refugees may also resort to Lebanese *kafils* with *wasta* in situations where their interests intersect: for example, UNHCR has noted cases of potential eviction from informal settlements where Syrians were able to appeal to Lebanese landowners profiting from their rents for assistance.

Through all of the aforementioned practices, Syrian refugees reproduce the patterns of behaviour exhibited by Lebanese citizens in accessing security. But as newcomers largely bereft of the inter-personal, confessional, and political ties that Lebanese people mobilise to protect themselves and solve problems, the powerlessness of Syrian refugees becomes an acute vulnerability. Syrians are organised largely in relation to the local structures and networks of Lebanese society, but on its margins. Border demarcation remains important to both populations as they confront accelerating social change unleashed by the crisis, and this restricts Syrians to the role of outsiders. Lebanese and international NGOs, UN agencies, and local religious organisations provide alternative resources for Syrians, especially in the cities, but cannot substitute for either formal state protection or the protective and problem-solving power of *wasta*.

Given the alienation of Syrian refugees from most varieties of security provision in Lebanon, it might be expected that the resulting security gap would be filled by some form of self-organisation. Yet all respondents indicated that Syrians have not organised in any significant way to tackle security issues facing their own communities. The reason for this lack of self-organisation may be that Syrians are acutely vulnerable, determined to safeguard their precarious residency status and livelihoods and to avoid forcible return to Syria. Class and sectarian divisions, and the dispersion and mobility of Syrians across Beirut, thwart consolidation and mobilisation.

The coercive preventive security measures deployed by both state and other actors against Syrian communities mean that development of a Syrian security actor would come at a very high cost; fear of reprisals for any sort of collective action is widespread and results in paralysis.<sup>24</sup> Syrian civil society tends to organise around aid rather than advocacy. Without representation, voice or agency, Syrians are isolated, and have largely internalised their social and political marginalisation (reflected in the extremely cautious statements of Syrian respondents in Naba'a and Sabra).

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24 al-Saadi (2015).



## 6 Conclusions and policy recommendations

**As illustrated by the predicament of Syrian refugees in Beirut, the security produced by actors in a context of security pluralism is not distributed to all groups objectively, fairly, or equitably. The literature confirms that plural security providers tend to follow sectional interests and are ill-suited to providing a public good to out-group members or addressing transactions that extend beyond their own constituencies.<sup>25</sup>**

When security is produced and distributed on the basis of sectarian or political privilege and accumulation of *wasta*, rather than as a public good, newcomers are subject to exclusion and exercises of arbitrary local power to an even greater extent than those embedded in the existing security system. While state-authorized policing has, in some countries, enabled minorities and the subaltern to demand protection using an accepted vocabulary of claims against the state itself, it would be ahistorical to imply that the state and its impartial enforcement of the law is always a resource for less-powerful constituencies to gain agency and dignity in complex societies.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the enhancement of ISF or municipal police professionalism and capacities vis-à-vis other security providers cannot be considered a solution to the security predicament of Syrian refugees per se.

The study ratifies the conclusion of earlier research identifying social cohesion as a vital element of security pluralism in Beirut.<sup>27</sup> The existence of a 'strong society' not only facilitates the operation of the plural security system, but mitigates those risks that might otherwise contribute to widespread everyday crime and disorder. In a sense, Syrian refugees are the passive beneficiaries of the institutions, practices and discourses that keep Beirut safe notwithstanding the stasis, brittleness, and unaccountability of its security system. Yet it is also the case that their inherent powerlessness and lack of agency as refugees is aggravated by their status as outsiders in a highly informal, relational society that distributes resources based on confessional identity. It is also important to recognise that the powerlessness and lack of agency experienced by Syrian refugees in Beirut is also experienced by many Lebanese citizens who are without the *wasta* to adequately access security in the present context of pluralism.

The study problematizes assumptions about the role of local governance actors. Previous research suggested that these actors and brokers might play an important role in improving the end-user outcomes of localised security arrangements, by fostering access and accountability. In the case of Syrian refugees, the nexus of political and sectarian power at the local level appears to diminish the utility of brokers like *mukhtars* to newcomers in accessing security or holding security providers to account.

Finally, the research lays bare the short-sightedness of Lebanese policy regarding the refugee crisis. The punitive regulatory and security regime applied to control Syrian communities in

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25 For example, Meagher (2012), Hills (2011), Kirsch & Gratz (2010).

26 Giustozzi (2011).

27 Belhadj et. al (2015).

Lebanon has so far fostered vulnerability and fear, and produced a security gap in which Syrians are deprived of almost any form of protection, either external or endogenous to their communities. This is an unsustainable situation, and it is likely that at some point in the future a Syrian security actor will materialise to fill the gap in the absence of satisfactory alternative measures, salient risks notwithstanding.

Beirut's history indicates that newcomers to the city always generate new forms of communal social organisation and contestation for power. It would be in the interest of Lebanon's long-term stability, and of the political actors who defend its existing consociational power-sharing framework, to address the security gap for Syrian refugees within the parameters of that framework, rather than risk the emergence of an actor or actors able and motivated to disrupt it.

On the basis of these conclusions, the following recommendations are offered to Lebanese state authorities, and international humanitarian actors that support and influence the Lebanese response to the crisis:

- Support further research and consultation to understand how refugees access everyday security within the specific contexts of life in Lebanon, both in Beirut and in other urban and rural areas.
- Map the spatial and temporal specificities of security providers to which people resort in areas where Syrian refugee communities are present.
- Provide Syrian refugees with a rights-based, transparent legal status. The sponsorship requirement for Syrians not registered with UNCHR, and the pledge not to work for Syrians registered with UNCHR, should be cancelled; conditions for issuance and renewal of Syrian refugee legal papers should be loosened; and Syrians who currently do not have legal residency should be enabled to regularise their status. Legalisation of status will render Syrians more liable to engage with state security providers.
- Rescind illegal municipal curfews and the practice of detaining refugees merely because their residency documents have expired or because they do not possess legal status. All security personnel who ill-treat Syrian refugees during raids, at the point of arrest, in detention, and during interrogations should be held to account by a designated duty-bearer, such as a purpose-built joint working body at municipal level.
- Design and implement initiatives that allow Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities (rather than refugees only) to benefit from infrastructure and service enhancements; design and implement activities that strengthen contact, dialogue, and cooperation between Syrian refugees and members of Lebanese host communities (youth projects, cultural exchanges, festivals, etc.), so as to build social cohesion.
- Experiment with novel institutional interfaces at the municipal level that enable residents to provide input to municipal authorities and exercise oversight over policymaking, and which are proximate and accessible to both Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities.
- Establish mechanisms for routine engagement between ISF and municipal police on the one hand, and Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities on the other; and provide front-line personnel with training in practical strategies of community-oriented policing.
- Support innovative modes of non-violent self-organisation at neighbourhood level that will enable Syrian communities to mitigate perceived security threats.



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