Responding to the Syrian crisis in Lebanon

Collaboration between aid agencies and local governance structures

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Working Paper
September 2016

Policy and planning; Urban

Keywords:
local governance, emergencies, refugees, aid, urban crises learning fund

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Lebanon's refugee crisis has highlighted the need for much closer coordination among the various organisations and local authorities involved in the response. This paper analyses existing collaboration mechanisms in relation to the Syrian crisis in Lebanon and provides a series of recommendations, on how national, local and international humanitarian actors can work together more effectively to enhance urban refugee responses in Lebanon and perhaps in other countries. In the context of a protracted urban crisis, this paper argues that humanitarians will only be able to ensure their responses are sustainable and meet needs on the ground if they work closely with local authorities.

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Acronyms

CDR	Council for Development and Reconstruction
DGUP	Directorate General of Urban Planning
GoL	Government of Lebanon
HCUP	Higher Council for Urban Planning
IFI	Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan
MoSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
RRP	Regional response plan
RTO	Regional technical office
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UoM	Union of municipalities

Executive summary

This working paper seeks to document and analyse collaboration mechanisms between local authorities and humanitarian actors in addressing the Syrian refugee crisis in urban and peri-urban settings in Lebanon. It outlines existing mechanisms of collaboration, analyses their potential strengths and weaknesses, and derives lessons and recommendations for improving refugee responses in Lebanon, and potentially in other national settings. The report focuses on two case studies: the largely hybrid urban district of Bourj Hammoud, one of the main commercial hubs of Greater Beirut, and the peri-urban coastal region of Sahel El Zahrani, located between Saida and Tyre in South Lebanon.

The response to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon, which broke out in 2011, faced many challenges initially; namely the lack of a solid national response strategy and weak local governance capacities, which were needed to respond to a large-scale crisis. International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies took the initial lead in responding to the crisis. Local authorities, who were at the forefront of the response, lacked the adequate capacities to respond and thus were involved in a less organised manner. The humanitarian response suffered overall from weak coordination between international actors, the central government, and (in)formal local authorities, resulting in unequal and scattered aid distribution.

As the crisis prolonged, the government of Lebanon (GoL) became increasingly involved and eventually, in 2015, led the development of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) jointly with UN agencies. Various ministries took a more proactive role in the response, in particular the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA), which was designated by the Council of Ministers to take on an official role in the response. At the local level, municipalities and unions of municipalities, despite lacking an official responsibility, made serious efforts to respond to the refugees due to increasing pressures in their localities and based on moral imperatives. International and UN agencies initially targeted Syrian refugees on the basis of the humanitarian principle of immediate alleviation of suffering following displacement. Local host communities, who were impacted by the crisis due to the increase in the local population and a higher demand on limited basic services, were initially less involved and addressed in the response.

This working paper explores the various formal and informal levels of collaboration, or lack thereof, between international and local organisations, UN agencies and local authorities. In Lebanon, establishing successful coordination mechanisms between national and local authorities and aid agencies is politically and logistically challenging. Due to funding constraints and limited programme timeframes, humanitarian organisations find it difficult to maintain a continuous long-term relationship with local municipalities and unions of municipalities. Moreover, aid agencies often opt to bypass local authorities in project implementation in order to avoid local bureaucracy. Internal politics also create another challenge for coordination with local authorities, as this can interfere with the orientation of aid.

UN agencies and INGOs are now mostly turning short-term relief programmes into longer- term projects for development, and have shown serious efforts to adapt their responses to address local contexts more adequately. However, clearly defining roles among international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and UN agencies and establishing solid coordination mechanisms remains a challenge and is important to enhancing overall public management in urban crisis contexts.

The research concludes that complementing sectoral approaches by adopting area-based approaches to

respond to emergency crises allows humanitarian and development programmes to address the needs of different vulnerable groups, including refugees and local communities, in a more efficient and sustainable manner. This allows the implementation of more inclusive needs-based responses, whilst also preventing unequal aid distribution and the 'compartmentalisation' of society. Moreover, this working paper highlights the weakness in focusing and adapting responses to respond to urban settings which host the majority of refugees. As such, it is important to raise awareness and develop the necessary tools and coordination mechanisms to optimally address refugees in urban contexts, especially with more refugees settling in urban areas worldwide.

Finally, coordination efforts and mutual aid agreements for emergency service provision can provide a solid ground for local actors to know: first, how to turn international aid into an opportunity rather than financial and political dependency or reason for domestic marginalisation, and, second, to learn the advantages of domestic coordination, internal agreement, and develop the capacities to manage foreign aid. Overall, reinforcing the role of local authorities and actors has proven to be more efficient and manageable in the short-term; however, over time, it also faces political limitations thus challenging the ability to reach a broader consensus on the management of domestic issues. This paper proposes a multi-scalar coordination approach to respond to crises and address diverse social vulnerabilities.

1 Introduction

The Syrian crisis has led to the highest level of refugee population displacement since World War II. By July 2015, the majority of refugees have settled in Turkey (1.8 million), followed by Lebanon (1.2 million), which currently hosts the highest refugee population per capita in the world (one refugee to every four Lebanese), and Jordan (629.128 thousand) (UNHCR, 2015). The Syrian crisis also caused devastating economic losses to host countries. Lebanon, for example, was estimated to have been affected with 10 billion dollars in economic losses, which lead the government to urge the international community to increase the international aid entering the country (Hassan, 2016).

In the absence of a solid national response strategy to the challenges posed by the influx of refugees and in the context of weak governance and a crumbling system of public service provision in Lebanon, international organisations including United Nations (UN) agencies took the initial lead in responding to the Syrian refugee crisis in 2011. This was done in the absence of a national coordination strategy, poor knowledge of current conditions, lack of mechanisms for regulating or coordinating responses, and dire human needs to which they had to respond urgently. The difficulty of coordinating the refugee crisis was further exacerbated by the fact that Lebanon has neither signed the 1951 Refugee Convention nor the 1967 Protocol, forcing United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) operations to go instead through informal agreements. It was also rendered more complicated by the informal nature of refugee settlement in the country, which followed refugees' personal social networks and their ability to fend for themselves outside of nationally organised settlement strategies. As a result, the humanitarian response became ad hoc, resulting in lower efficiency and an unequal distribution of regional and social aid.

As the Syrian crisis took a protracted form, it began to have implications for Lebanon's demographic, economic, security, and political situation. An increase in vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian populations and higher unemployment rates led to negative economic consequences. The tourism sector was adversely affected due to the rise in security threats related to terrorism and conflicts. The strain on various sectors of the national economy and the pressure on infrastructure and basic services at the national level became challenging, particularly given the political stalemate that had paralysed the country for several years.

In addition, local authorities struggled to deal with the challenges posed by the presence of refugees. Despite poor financial and human resources (Atallah, 2016), tight administrative restrictions, and the pressure exerted by their own voters who viewed the refugee influx as a threat to their livelihoods, many municipalities and unions of municipalities stepped up to the challenge with the meagre resources they had. Their efforts to respond to the crisis can be explained by the sheer physical pressure of the refugees and moral imperatives that were frequently expressed by respondents in many areas of the country, as well as security concerns that caused them to monitor and channel refugee settlements. With uneven levels of capacity, typically connected to size (more than 70 per cent of the 1,000 registered municipalities in Lebanon have fewer than 4,000 residents registered in their area), it is impossible to evaluate the performances of municipalities on equal grounds. However, when looking at their relationship with international organisations, it is clear that these local authorities respond to the refugee crisis in a

more difficult manner, such as when they are ignored or bypassed by the organisations. These may, in some instances, pay them a 'reconnaissance' visit when they first enter their areas, but fail to coordinate with their interventions, even when these interventions fall directly within their jurisdiction.

By 2014, the crisis had clearly taken a protracted form. The Lebanese authorities, international and local aid organisations, as well as UN agencies, began to initiate long-term efforts to shift to more sustainable forms of intervention. This required them to acknowledge the importance of coordination and collaboration given the scale of the crisis and the recognition that none of the actors could act alone – particularly with the dwindling volume of international aid. In 2012, the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) was officially designated by the Council of Ministers to be actively involved in the crisis response and Lebanon's Prime Minister established an Inter-Ministerial Committee responsible for managing the refugee response with the Minister of Social affairs as the co-originator (UNHCR, 2015). MoSA thus stepped up its role by committing to co-leading sectoral meetings, and strengthening partnerships with international organisations in the response. The government also increased its involvement which, in 2015, led to the creation of the first Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP). Despite such efforts, the adopted mechanisms of coordination and collaboration needed to be revisited, especially because the incentives for aid organisations to collaborate remained contingent on other factors, such as donor agendas. Hence, a number of organisations had developed solid relations with local authorities and considered them their entry points to areas where they operate, while others had 'learned to bypass them'. This is not to say that things worked well in the absence of collaboration, but to recognise that collaboration mechanisms remain weak and that incentives and reassurances will have to be provided if mechanisms are to be set in place in a reliable way.

As such, despite the intervention of MoSA and numerous coordination efforts undertaken since the beginning of the crisis, the mechanisms put in place have remained flaky. Therfore, international organisations and local authorities recognise that they need to articulate 'urban' responses to the high concentration of refugees in cities, however they fail to identify the institutions that can take charge and coordinate or agree on the mechanisms through which this coordination will occur. Neither is there agreement on the regional scale at which this collaboration will occur (eg urban, peri-urban, and rural), the institutional levels at which to operate (eg unions of municipalities, individual municipalities, ministries), the mechanisms through which priorities will be identified, or, finally, whether responses will optimally target only refugees, or when they will also include host communities.

1.1 Objectives

The challenges outlined in the opening section of this paper reflect the need to pause and reconsider humanitarian actors' collaboration mechanisms with national and particularly local authorities in Lebanon. This working paper aims to document and analyse collaboration mechanisms between local authorities and humanitarian actors in addressing the Syrian refugee crisis in urban and peri-urban settings in Lebanon. It seeks to outline existing mechanisms of collaboration, to analyse their potential strengths and weaknesses, and to derive lessons and recommendations for improving refugee responses in Lebanon and potentially in other national settings.

1.2 Aid coordination

The importance of improving coordination of the management of international aid in times of crisis has increasingly gained visibility over the past decade amongst donors, aid agencies, and national governments. In fact, there has been a noticeable policy shift in aid effectiveness and coordination, starting with the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* in 1995 (Bourguignon, 2007). The prime focus of this declaration was to enhance the delivery and management of aid through upgrading mechanisms between official development agencies and partner countries, including aligning donor support to partner countries, harmonising developmental actions, and improving mutual accountability for the more efficient development results.

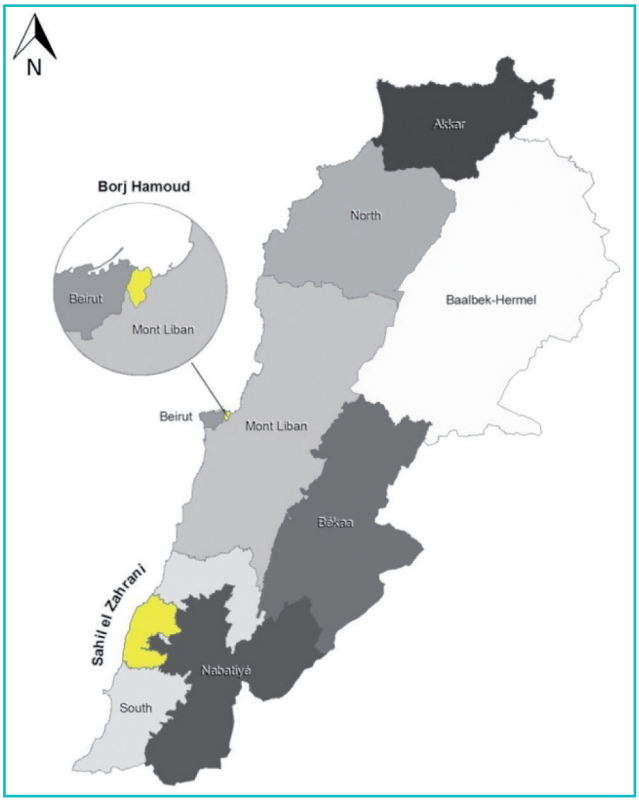
Following the Paris Declaration, several forums and interventions have taken place that recognise local governments as the main actors in aid coordination and effectiveness. For example, the *Accra Agenda for Action* (AAA, 2008), which is the outcome of the Accra 3rd High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, called for the need to develop capacity building initiatives for local authorities and emphasised the importance of local resources in the provision of technical cooperation.

Despite these efforts, there is a common consensus that the Paris Declaration has not achieved the objective of enhancing aid effectiveness. Part of this failure can be attributed to the emphasis placed by donors on the mechanisms of aid delivery, rather than the development impact generated by the aid. Another key weakness that has been highlighted is the absence of civil society and local governments in the policy discussions. As local authorities are closest to community concerns and are able to voice local concerns, they should be provided with the platform to become main stakeholders in aid provision and coordination by strengthening their capacities and paving the way for their involvement (UCLG, 2009).

1.3 Methodology

An in-depth desk review was carried out which explored the literature on aid coordination, collaborative approaches, and scales of governance. Around 30 interviews were conducted with informants from ministries, local authority representatives (such as mayors and deputy mayors), international organisations and UN agencies, and local non-governmental organisations. Four focus group discussions were organized in the two areas identified as case studies for this paper: the union of municipalities (UoM) of Sahel Zahrani and Bourj Hammoud. In each area, a separate discussion took place with Syrian refugees (10-15 people), and another with Lebanese host communities (10-15 people). Participants in the focus group discussion were selected based on nationality (Syrian/Lebanese) and gender (50 per cent females/50 per cent males). The discussions were carried out separately to ensure that both communities were able to openly discuss challenges they were facing in relation to the 'other community', especially with the rise of tension between Syrian refugees and host communities. The identification of participants was facilitated by the UoM in Sahel el Zahrani and by a community gatekeeper in Bourj Hammoud. Once the data had been compiled and analysed, a first draft report was finalised and reviewed by the team. The revised draft was then presented in the validation workshop, which hosted around 20 experts and representatives of ministries, local authorities, international organisations and UN agencies, local non-governmental organisation and academics. The comments made by the experts and during the lively discussion generated at the workshop were then included in the final version of the report.

Figure 1: Location of the two case study areas, Bourj Hammoud and Sahel El-Zahrani, 2015



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1.4 Document structure

This working paper is divided into six chapters. Chapter One is an introduction. Chapeter Two provides a brief overview of the Lebanese context and response to the Syrian crisis. Chapter Three provides a framework of reflection on the coordination between local and international actors in the response to the refugee crisis in Lebanon. Chapter Four presents the case of refugees in Sahel el Zahrani, and Chapter Five presents the case of refugees in Bourj Hammoud; in both these chapters existing coordination mechanisms and challenges to coordination are discussed. Finally, Chapter Six concludes the overall challenges, lessons learned and recommendations.

2

the Lebanese context and response to the Syrian crisis

Lebanon's modern history is plagued with violent local and regional conflict that marks its national boundaries, its social and economic organisation, and its political administration. Most recently, in 2006, Lebanon plunged into a 34-day war with Israel following a violent exchange on the Lebanon/Israel-Palestine borders. Israeli forces destroyed infrastructure, killed innocent civilians, and shattered the Lebanese economy (Kotia and Edu-Afful, 2014). According to the Lebanese Higher Relief Committee, 1,190 Lebanese were killed and 4,409 injured, 15 per cent of whom were permanently disabled (Mercy Corps, 2007). The aftermath of the war cannot, however, only be summed up by human and material losses; the war also exposed crude political divisions in the country that eventually precipitated the ongoing political paralysis.

The ramifications of the 2006 war had not faded when the Syrian refugee crisis began five years later. On the one hand, the ineptitude of the Lebanese national government in responding to the crisis is largely derived from the political paralysis that plagued the country since the war (Atallah, 2016). Thus, the response plan launched by the Lebanese government on 3 December 2012 to distribute responsibilities between the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and the Higher Relief Council, was never adopted because the then Prime Minister Najib Mikati resigned and the new cabinet failed to adopt the plan (Boustani, 2014). Furthermore, the country had not fully recovered from the destruction of infrastructure and economy when it had to deal with the large influx of a new population. On the other hand, international organisations had already established their presence in the country before the arrival of Syrian refugees. This was in response to the United Nations Security Council call for the international community to extend humanitarian and financial support to the Lebanese reconstruction process. As a result, several international organisations and NGOs had a presence and systems in place at the time of the refugee influx. The ongoing refugee crisis and its response need to be read in this context. Before however moving to the discussion of the crisis response, this chapter provides a brief background to Lebanon's municipal organisation and its demographic distribution that will inform later discussions of refugee responses.

2.1 Governance mechanisms in Lebanon

A decentralised framework?

Lebanon has historically developed a commitment to decentralisation that dates back to the late Ottoman periods (Favier, 2001). In 1977, Lebanon passed a progressive decentralisation law that empowered municipalities with financial autonomy, responsibilities and authorities that clearly reflected this commitment and entitled it to "exercise prerogatives […] within its own geographical boundaries" (Atallah, 2012a; Atallah, 2012b). The 1977 Law on Municipalities further states that any public work meant to produce public benefit within the area of the municipality falls under the jurisdiction of the municipal council. This same commitment to decentralisation was again reflected in the 1989 Ta'if Agreement of National Reconciliation, which reshifted power to strengthen administrative decentralisation at the governorate and municipal levels.

In practice, however, decentralisation never materialised and the central government controls local authorities and dominates practices of regional and local planning in numerous ways. Hence, all 1,100 elected mayors report to appointed regional governors known as *Muhafiz* who govern over their areas within spatial jurisdictions known as *cazas*.[1] Furthermore, municipalities are supervised by the Ministry of the Interior and Municipalities, which oversees issues related to governorates, districts, municipalities, unions of municipalities, the Independent Municipal Fund, local mayors and municipal councils, and other elected local councils. Within these hierarchies, municipalities are the only elected representatives and hence act as mediators between citizens and the central government, as part of the official framework of the state. Their decisions, however, are subject to numerous approvals: the district mayor, the governor and the minister of the interior are entrusted with the administrative supervision of the decisions made by a municipal council. The district mayor (*Qaimmaqam*) and the governor ratify all municipal council decisions, thus subjecting municipal councils in many cases to the constraints of the central authority.

Furthermore, and despite the fact that the law grants authority for municipalities to rule their territories, planning in Lebanon is executed in a centralised manner and through an array of unelected technical agencies such as the Directorate General of Urban Planning (DGUP), the Higher Council for Urban Planning (HCUP), and the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR).[2] According to the DGUP, municipalities and unions of municipalities can draft their master plans or detailed plans, designs, as well as regulation and parcelling projects. However, all these plans need the final approval of planning authorities and regional governments.

Understanding municipalities; A brief introduction

Municipalities in Lebanon are elected for six years on a regular basis and are constituted of two administrative bodies: the municipal council (MC) for decision making, and the president of the municipal council, which has executive power. The municipal council is elected directly by citizens registered as 'voters' within the geographic jurisdiction, and, in turn, designates or elects a president.

In recognition of the scattered structure of local government, the 1977 law provided incentives for municipalities to pool together in the form of unions of municipalities.[3] Since then, more than 800 municipalities (more than two-thirds of the total) have jointly formed 53 UoMs, enabling them to act on a larger regional scale and increasing their capacities, particularly when they are able to form regional technical offices that empower them to take decisions regarding building and planning activities within their jurisdictions. However, UoMs continue to face several challenges that somewhat recall those faced by municipalities, such as weak administrative capacities, inability to collect membership fees, high dependence on the Independent Municipal Fund for revenues, and overlapping competencies with individual municipalities. These were among the key challenges that have also limited the potential of UoMs to respond to the large scale of the refugee crisis.

[1] Lebanon is divided into eight governorates and 25 *cazas*.
[2] The Directorate General of Urban Planning (DGUP) is responsible for developing and reviewing master plans throughout Lebanon. As for the Higher Council for Urban Planning (HCUP), it is responsible for advancing recommendations that guide urban planning at a national level. Finally, the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) was founded in 1977 to take charge of reconstruction and rehabilitation projects and other sector ministries. It also includes the local authorities: municipalities and unions of municipalities, actors with a leading however unfortunately paralysed role in local planning processes.
[3] Unions of municipalities (UoMs) are formed based on a voluntary municipal effort to join forces and establish a regional political space for development purposes. There have been numerous national incentives for municipalities to form since 1977, with Article 114 of Law no. 118/1977 recognising the importance of unions and their formation for the purpose of greater cooperation between municipalities in order to comprehensively work towards the greater 'public interest'.

In terms of financial support, officials from the central government highlighted that the annual revenues collected from the municipalities have often not been fully allocated (merely 32 per cent of the US$1.6 billion until 2013). Municipalities in fact depend on the revenues annually redistributed by the central government (Ghanem, 2016) in order to cope with daily public management (UCLG, 2009).

It is in this context that we need to read the role of local authorities in refugee response: largely disempowered yet burdened with heavy responsibilities, local authorities play a critical role in articulating a refugee response. These will be explored further in the next chapters.

2.2 A complex urban context

Lebanon has been classified as a highly urbanised country, since more than 87 per cent of its population lives in urban areas and 64 per cent lives in large urban agglomerations of Beirut and its suburbs, Tripoli, Sidon, Zahle, and Tyre (Habitat III National Report for Lebanon, forthcoming 2016). Rural to urban migration picked the pace in the 1960s, virtually doubling between 1963 and 1994 and between 1994 and 2005 (Faour, 2015). While growth has primarily affected large cities, particularly Beirut and Tripoli, it has also spread to secondary cities over time. Between 1963 and 2005, urban areas have grown by a factor of 1.92 in Beirut, and 5.46 in Sidon (*ibid.*, forthcoming 2016).

The urban development process in Lebanon was fuelled by a large number of historical factors that sometimes preceded the formation of the modern national state. The trend was nonetheless precipitated by independence and the ensuing centrality of cities, particularly Beirut, where administrative and economic institutions were established. Most specifically, the Lebanese capital city attracted, as of the 1950s, a large section of the international gold trade (Issawi, 1950) as well as capital generated by the oil boom in Gulf countries that eventually financed large building activities to support a growing urban service centre. As of the 1960s, most of the large cities began to witness an influx of rural migrants who arrived in the city looking for employment and educational opportunities for their children. While some made it to the city centre, benefitting from the protection of a rent control system which was then in operation, others settled in the peripheries, forming the first hubs of informal settlements that would eventually become the so-called poverty belts of large cities, particularly in Beirut (Fawaz and Peillen, 2002; UN-Habitat, UNHCR, 2014). These neighbourhoods continued to grow, attracting in every decade the poorest segment of urban populations, including Palestinian refugees, Lebanese families fleeing Israeli violence in the south or displaced by violence in other sections of the country, or, more recently, Syrian and Iraqi refugees. Other sections of the city remain attractive to capital where policies encourage real estate investment which is considered particularly lucrative in the country. Needless to say, the combination of war and real estate speculation has produced a flaky framework of planning and a scattered and sprawling urbanisation which is only vaguely controlled.

3

The refugee crisis in Lebanon: coordination between local and international actors – a framework for reflection

This chapter outlines the main stakes attached to coordinating the response to the Syrian refugee influx in Lebanon. It is divided into three sections: the first addresses the coordination of the Syrian refugee crisis response in Lebanon and the steps to achieving coordination. The second section addresses the coordination mechanisms in response to the refugee crisis on the different levels and between the different actors, including International and local NGOs, UN agencies, and local authorities. The final section outlines the challenges to coordination.

3.1 Coordinating the Syrian refugee crisis response

The humanitarian crisis in Lebanon is huge, particularly in relation to the size of the host country, where one in four individuals is considered a refugee – the highest refugee population ratio in the world. Its impacts extend to both refugee and host communities who have suffered severe livelihood challenges, including difficulties accessing economic opportunities, sustainable incomes, educational opportunities, and basic health services. Legal restrictions, the lack of refugee status in Lebanon, and lack of security and assistance for many, are among the challenges.

From the outset, the national Lebanese response to the refugee influx was scattered and uncoordinated. To begin with, the decision of the country to open its borders and allow refugees to enter the country appeared ad hoc, as part of a laissez-faire common sense approach towards refugees fleeing war-torn areas, rather than a commitment to international law within a policy framework. The decision was somewhat informal, as the refugee influx was simply 'tolerated' outside a framework of clear international agreements. It echoed the feeling that most people in the country felt at the time, being sensitive to a humanitarian plight, particularly as Syrians had opened their doors to Lebanese refugees during the 2006 war. Refugees arrived in large numbers and, in the absence of a response strategy, sought shelter, work, and other vital ingredients of livelihoods through the same channels of other destitute social groups in the country, including Lebanese individuals, but also the scores of Palestinian, Iraqi, and other refugees, as well as foreign migrant workers whose numbers exceeded 500,000 individuals in the country.

Furthermore, the mandate of many humanitarian organisations in the country remained poorly defined at several levels. Indeed, Lebanon is neither a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention, nor the 1967 Protocol. The country has nonetheless ratified most other human rights treaties that directly or indirectly commit it to the protection of refugees. As a result, and in the absence of a framework of international law, UNHCR has had to operate through bilateral agreements with the government. The latter, however, failed to articulate a clear policy, adopting instead what is sometimes described as a policy of 'dissociation', where its main role consisted of blocking particularly undesirable options.[4] As a result, international organisations operated in a framework where their mandate and relations were gradually developed, consolidated and clarified, through trial and error. This is how a staff member of an International NGO in Lebanon described the situation (2016): "the mandate of each actor is unclear. It is harder to set out policies once and for all and hold certain actors more responsible than others […]. Our mandate is itself 'informal' in a country which is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention of Geneva."

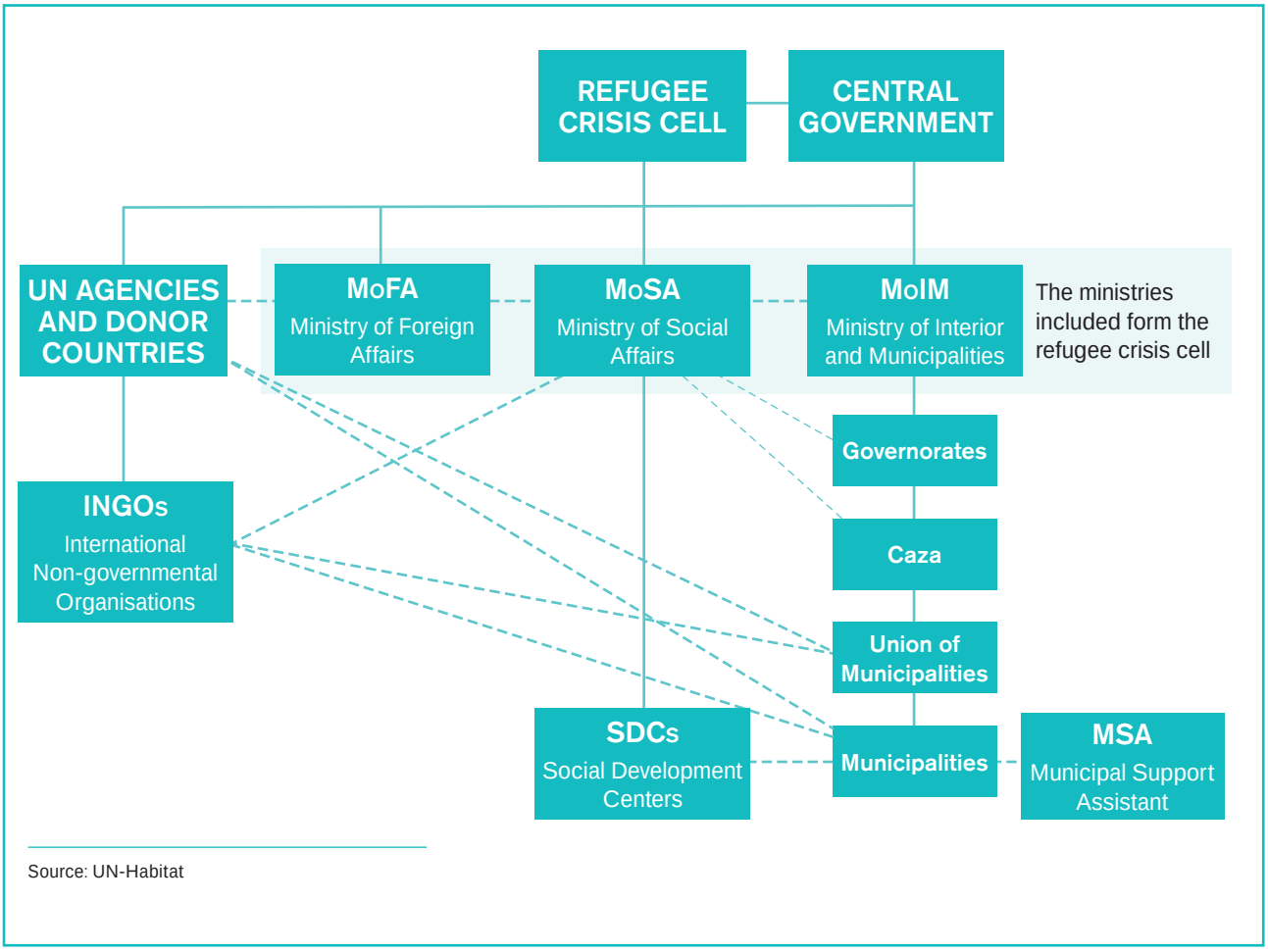
The challenges towards articulating a coordinated relief response were further exacerbated by the lack of consensus among Lebanese national agencies towards addressing the crisis in Lebanon, as well as between these agencies and the multitude of stakeholders involved in the response, including international, regional, and local actors, each of whom displayed a different political agenda. Coordination problems furthermore extended beyond relief agencies to donor agencies who found it difficult to bridge the divides, particularly between so called 'traditional' (Western) and 'non-traditional' (Gulf States) donors, who displayed differences in their value systems and frameworks of operation. Ultimately, Gulf countries, local NGOs, and the constellation of philanthropic associations and wealthy individual donors found it impossible to integrate their work into the broader collective engagement of the international community or even ensure that there was neither duplication nor competition. Moreover, the political and religious motivations of some of these stakeholders, as well as their confessional solidarity with some of the refugees, further complicated the possibilities of cooperation between various relief and donor agencies and local authorities.

It was in this context that UNHCR took the lead in articulating and coordinating the response.[5] The presence of numerous UN agencies in Lebanon prior to the conflict eased the process of setting up the humanitarian coordination structure. With the support of other UN agencies and international organisations, UNHCR developed a series of regional response plans (RRP) that addressed the countries most affected by the Syrian refugee crisis (namely Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon). RRP1 to RRP6 were mainly focused on the provision of a humanitarian emergency response, while the regional refugee and resilience plan (3RP) introduced a 'resilience' component to the response (in Lebanon it was adopted as the Lebanon crisis response plan - LCRP) (UNHCR & UNDP, 2016-2017). The 3RP was a country-driven, regionally coherent planning process, drawing together the national crisis response plan for humanitarian relief, resilience and stabilisation in five of the most affected countries neighbouring Syria (Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Turkey and Egypt). It was designed to encourage donors to support a new aid architecture by significantly expanding and harmonising funding allocations from their different funding streams.

[4] Perhaps the most important decision made at the time by the Lebanese government was in blocking the establishment of refugee camps, which were viewed as a threat to security and a potential institutionalisation of the refugee presence by Lebanese officials, when some INGOs/UN agencies argued that this was the only viable shelter strategy given the number of refugees in the country. Ultimately, the government has managed to block the development of formal camps.
[5] The UNHCR, through a collaborative approach, works in partnership with governments, regional organisations, international and non-governmental organisations (UNDP, 2014).

Over time, however, the Lebanese government's role became increasingly important. At first, only a few ministries provided input to the response plans, while others were practically absent. As the crisis prolonged, however, ministries began to play more central roles in relation to their sectors and a number of them, particularly the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) which was officially designated by the Council of Ministers to be actively involved in all sectors, played a central role. Moreover, international organisations saw the importance of rigorously involving national and local authorities and host communities in the response, resulting in joining efforts to develop the LCRP, "a multi-year plan to address the stabilisation challenges of the country, while taking into account key protection and humanitarian issues, livelihoods and countering threats to security"[6] (LCRP, 2016). The first LCRP (2015-2016) was drafted in late 2014 by the government and UN responding agencies. It was updated at the end of 2015 to LCRP 2016. In LCRP 2015, appeals were calculated based on the inputs of the agencies; while in LCRP 2016, appeals were calculated based on needs and targets specified according to sectors. The humanitarian country team and the government of Lebanon (GoL) are also planning to jointly develop a 2017-2020 LCRP for four years. The LCRP reflects the shift from an emergency response to a longer-term development approach, which gives prominence to the role of national and local authorities. Funding mechanisms are mainly allocated towards the provision of support and developmental goals that go beyond mere emergency responses. However, the Lebanese government is not receiving direct budget support, which, according to statements by donor agencies, is due to the political vacuum created by the inability of parliament to elect a president of the republic and ratify resolutions in addition to widespread and flagrant charges of corruption.

Diagram A: Current governance structure in response to the Syrian structure



Source: UN-Habitat

[6] The LCRP is designed to firstly ensure humanitarian assistance and protection for the most vulnerable among persons displaced from Syria and the poorest Lebanese. Secondly, it aims at strengthening the capacity of national and local service delivery systems to expand access to and quality of basic public services. Finally, it seeks to reinforce Lebanon's economic, social, environmental, and institutional stability.

3.2 Coordination mechanisms

When speaking of coordination mechanisms between international and local organisations, the expectation is typically that of an improvisation phase among agents who have never collaborated before in order to reach an organised response. In Lebanon, however, where crises are cyclic, the situation is more complicated. To begin with, informal strategies to anticipate violence and cope with disorders are already set in place among local actors (Hermez, 2012). Furthermore, some of the international organisations who are working in relief operations were already in place at the time of the refugee influx, and they simply shifted their systems of relations and operations to respond to new conditions. As a result, coordination in this case is not an unexplored interaction between an international and a domestic network of responses (Boin and Bynander, 2015: 124), as this coordination involves actors who mostly operated prior to the Syrian crisis. Despite this long collaboration, however, the strategies set in place in Lebanon left the distribution of responsibilities between international organisations and local actors unclear and blurred. As such, various individual and joint initiatives surfaced to set in place both formal and informal coordination mechanisms at different levels, but these initiatives were ultimately not always synchronised and mainstreamed, thus impacting the possibility of their success. Thus, collaboration mechanisms remained hybrid, depending on the social, political, and cultural contexts and the nature of involvement of different ministries.

In order to unbundle and investigate 'coordination mechanisms' between relief agencies and Lebanese public agencies, we need to unpack the mechanisms and relations that have been set in place across both 'sectoral' and 'regional' frameworks and connect each to the level of government at which they have occurred and the agencies that have been involved. Some of these relations have in fact been structured through the frameworks of operation of international organisations, particularly UNHCR, while others have been improvised gradually.

UN agencies and national frameworks of collaboration

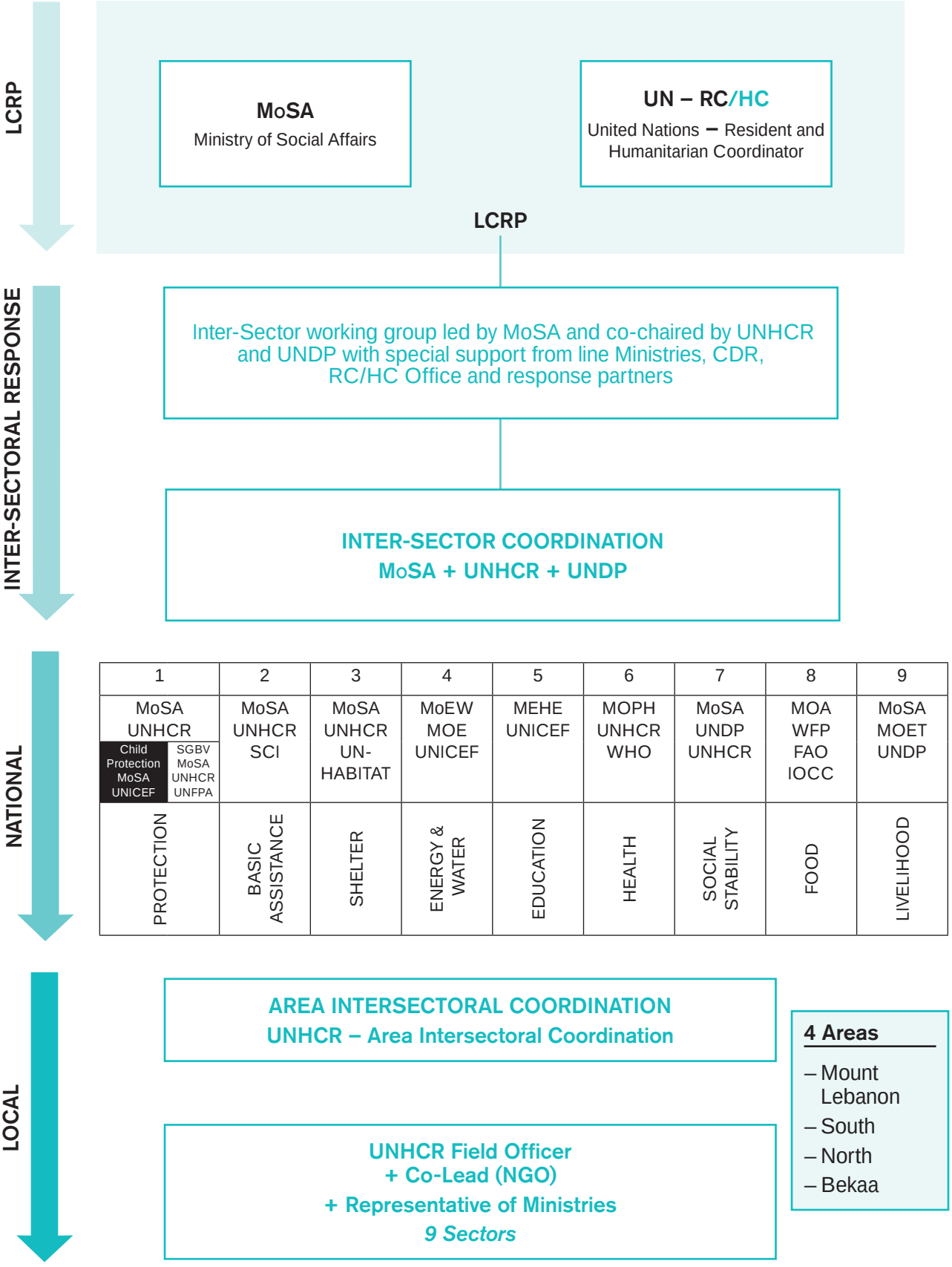
UN agencies follow an established structure that is based on many years of global experience in order to set in place coordination mechanisms. In principle, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is the lead agency responsible for bringing together humanitarian actors and ensuring coherent emergency responses.[7] Generally, the humanitarian country team (HCT) coordinates the efforts of humanitarian organisations (UN and non-UN) jointly with the national government. This 'global cluster' approach seeks to ensure, on the one hand, that all sectors of humanitarian responses are organised and accountable, and, on the other hand, that capacities for humanitarian emergency responses are being strengthened.

In Lebanon, coordination between these organisations and the Lebanese national government was to come later. Eventually, however, the HCT, which was composed of UN agencies and Lebanese NGOs, established a framework of collaboration with the government, which enabled it to draft the joint LCRP. The HCT appointed UNHCR, together with UNDP, to lead the inter-sectorial coordination and also to coordinate the activities in each of the nine sectors: livelihoods, shelter, WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene), protection (sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)/child protection), health, food security, education, basic assistance and social stability.[8] Field level coordination was also split into five regions: Akkar, Beq'a, South, Beirut, Mount Lebanon, and the so-called T+5 districts that include the city of Tripoli and its surroundings. Each of the sector-specific tasks is jointly led by UNHCR, a sector-specific agency (eg UN-Habitat in the case of the shelter sector), and a national ministry whose presence is mandatory. The humanitarian crisis response structure also includes inter-sector units, which are leading units for each sector and inter-agency coordination units that encompass all NGOs and UN agencies.

The participation of national ministries in the process was eventually formalised and strengthened when LCRP 2015 required that each intervention sector be co-led by a ministry, giving a number of ministries, particularly the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education, central role in relief organisation and coordination. The outcomes of this coordination and the requirement to include Lebanese ministries in coordinating the activities

[7] The OCHA aims at mobilising and coordinating effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors in order to alleviate human suffering in disasters and emergencies. It also advocates the rights of people in need, promotes preparedness and prevention, and facilitates sustainable solutions.
[8] These sectors are often referred to as 'working groups' to underline the longer term approach and distinguish them from the 'clusters' normally set up in short-term emergencies.

Diagram B: The LCRP interagency/intersector coordination structure



Source: UN-Habitat

of the various sectors have however not been as positive as they may seem. While coordination with central national authorities has enhanced the response in some cases, it has proved to be a challenge depending on the level of participation of the ministries.

The MoSA also strengthened its role in coordination through more than 200 social development centres (SDCs) existing throughout the country, which were further expanded and supported in the wake of the refugee crisis. These centres, which provide various social services, such as provision of care services for people with disabilities, orphans, homeless, refugees, delinquents, and the elderly, are accessible to host communities and refugees alike.

Finally, the United Nations country team (UNCT) is responsible for facilitating and providing coordination between all UN agencies and providing responses to the assigned action plan at the national, progressive, humanitarian, and political level. The UNCT in Lebanon includes 25 UN agencies which mainly address security and development issues and humanitarian responses with several working groups, and carry out programme management.

Inter-agency collaboration among INGOs

As noted above, coordination between international NGOs, UN agencies, and Lebanese government agencies is mainly organised through national level coordination mechanisms that operate at sector level. These coordination mechanisms build on earlier, inter-agency coordination mechanisms that allow UN and other INGOs to coordinate their activities at regular inter-sectoral meetings. They subsequently set up working groups across sectors, be it at the level of the HCT or at the level of the sector working groups (such as protection, shelter, WASH, livelihoods, and others). These working groups met regularly and members of these different organisations discussed and coordinated their ongoing programmes and activities within specific sectors (eg shelter, security) and/or types of problems (eg eviction). They also recorded and posted the minutes of their meetings online, allowing for coordination. As such, international agencies and UN agencies used these meetings as platforms for information sharing, including key updates regarding emergent issues and the implementation of programmes across various sectors. The meetings were regular and efficient, owing particularly to the level of members' commitment in terms of attendance and participation in the discussions. However, local authorities were not invited to participate in the meetings, even when groups were discussing specific areas affected by the crisis, despite the fact that local authorities were the first local actors to be involved in the response to the refugee presence and that they had stronger awareness of the needs and challenges faced by refugee and host communities.

Collaboration among INGOs and local authorities

In contrast with the relatively formal structures through which coordination occurs at the sectoral level, regional and local level coordination mechanisms are mostly informal and developed on a voluntary basis with no frameworks to monitor, regulate, or ensure their continuity and efficiency. At the level of the governorates, a number of governors have taken the initiative to coordinate between different international organisations through monthly meetings. Yet, organisations have considered the frequency of such meetings to be too low, and have also voiced concerns about the nature of the meetings, which they argued could have focused more on informing the governors of the ongoing projects rather than ensuring better collaboration.

Coordination proved to be particularly effective when it was organised regionally in a more formal and regular structure. As will be further outlined in the next chapter, in the UoM of Sahel El Zahrani, bi-weekly coordination meetings are conducted with the various international and local organisations operating in these municipal territories in order to avoid project duplication and improve project implementation. These meetings have had particularly positive effects that have made the region more successful in project implementation and coordination than others. Elsewhere, local committees have been established as *de facto* coordinating bodies and these have taken different forms and adopted different structures in each area, depending on the nature of the challenges and the profile of the stakeholders and issues at hand. This was the case, for instance, in the adjacent municipal districts of Bourj Hammoud and Sinn-el-Fil (in the eastern suburbs of Beirut), where a local committee, which had been established prior to the Syrian crisis and included both INGOs local organisations and the municipalities of Bourj Hammoud and Sin el Fil, held monthly coordination meetings in response to the crisis, and where ongoing activities and future programmes were presented. In the Beq'a, UN-Habitat has supported the development of local committees which act as the voice of the communities and refugees on the level of needs. This form of coordination has been important to ensure the participation of local communities in the response, a factor which according to some has been neglected in the response.

Coordination between international organisations and local and regional authorities has however typically proved to be challenging for both aid agencies and Lebanese authorities alike. While many international and UN agencies made serious efforts to collaborate with

local authorities prior to and during the implementation of programmes, this collaboration was limited to data collection or facilitating programme implementation, while critical decisions about project selection and design did not involve the participation of local authorities as much. As a result, a number of mayors expressed their dissatisfaction with the roles they had been ascribed by their international counterparts. Others expressed their frustration with international organisations that bypassed them in implementing projects in their localities. Conversely, many international agencies reported their frustration in attempting to coordinate their interventions with local authorities, which are often at the mercy of domestic politics and bound by bureaucratic and time consuming administrative procedures that require support from central levels, and may delay project implementation. Others further pointed to weak municipal human capacities and poor financial resources that prevented Lebanese agencies from being real partners in responding to the crisis. This was all the more the case since municipal budgets were not modified to reflect the presence of large refugee groups in their territories. Others further complained about the ability of mayors to halt projects if they decided that the presence of refugees was/is undesirable in their areas, and/or if they represented a political party whose views and interests they would prioritise over cooperation with relief agencies. In sum, taking into consideration the challenges faced by international organisations and local and national authorities, difficulties in coordination across levels of governance at sectoral and regional levels are undermining the responses to support both refugees and host communities. As a result, it is important to propose strengthened coordination mechanisms at the central, regional, and local levels in order to improve refugee crisis responses.

Inter-organisational coordination

Coordination between international, national and local NGOs is also itself complicated by relations among NGOs themselves, particularly because relations often suffer from hierarchical structures. In the case of Lebanon, with UNHCR taking the lead in the response, implementing partners report back to the lead agency. While this is efficient in regulating and organising the implementation of programmes, many implementing partners declared themselves to be disempowered by the UNHCR leadership and consequently less effective. Local organisations frequently argued that INGOs implement 'what they typically do', irrespective of the Lebanese reality and its specificities, a point that we will come back to in the next sections.

Funding mechanisms and relations further exacerbate this hierarchy since relations between donor, international, UN, and local agencies frequently reinforce certain hierarchies and biases in project and beneficiary selections and impinge on the decision making of smaller actors, such as local NGOs. This is how the head of a local NGO described the relationship: "the relationship with UN agencies is good, but you know... the big fish always eats the small fish. You have the European Union that gives an amount of money to the UN, and the UN gives us back a very small amount. It's a hierarchic system, from the biggest agent to the smallest".

Finally, the coordination mechanisms put in place have not focused on community-based organisations (CBOs), despite the fact that the latter have proved to be key actors on the ground. However, a number of international organisations that have partnered with CBOs in articulating their response have considered this to be a key factor behind the success of their projects. Workers within these organisations explained that a number of CBOs might not have the adequate capacities to respond, yet they ensure access to areas that INGOs could not otherwise reach. Moreover, CBOs have local knowledge and, in many cases, are closer to the communities on the ground. Thus, INGOs have opted to partner with CBOs through programmes that would build the CBOs' capacities and involve them in the implementation stage. CBOs' participation in crisis responses is important to ensure that such plans are well fitted to the local populations and that implementation is facilitated.

In sum, relations between the various agencies active in the response need to be rethought to allow a more bottom-up approach to the development of projects, based on the existing needs and priorities on the ground. Ultimately, INGOs, UN agencies, national and local authorities are embedded in a mutual process of blame, according to which the counterparts are the ones who make coordination fail most of the time. An international agency, for instance, highlighted the insufficient involvement of the Lebanese government in service provision: "The government is like a home, it should organise and control who gets in and out. But it wants to remain in the doorway and allow anyone in and out to do whatever they want... We should not leave the donors with the dream that they can finance local governance; by law, their support should fall under the ministry, and they shouldn't get anything unless with the agreement of the central government" (Actor in an international agency, 2016).

3.3 Challenges to cooperation: understanding the stakes

What can we learn from the case studies and how can they inform us about the hurdles that need to be overcome before real collaboration between municipalities, international and local organisations takes place? Difficulties in coordination between international and local agencies cannot be explained just by the absence of effective mechanisms. There are, in fact, structural differences that stem from the global experience on which INGOs build to outline their response in Lebanon in relation to the realities of the Lebanese context. In this section, we outline a few of these tensions, namely: (i) rural/urban; (ii) emergency/development; and (iii) local and host/refugee. There are also tensions that emerge from the different inherent needs of international organisations and local authorities. These include: ruling 'sectors' and 'territories'.

Urban vs. rural responses

Given that Lebanon is about 90 per cent urban, it comes as no surprise that refugees follow the same pattern of settlement observed among nationals and settle in urban areas. Table 1 shows that large numbers of Syrian refugees have settled in the main cities of Tripoli, Beirut, Saida and Sour. This is all the more important since their presence in Lebanon is not supported by sufficient relief support that would secure shelter and food and so they consequently have to look for employment opportunities that tend to be concentrated in urban centres.

Despite the 'urban' nature of this crisis, however, international organisations have largely maintained a rural bias in their interventions, which materialises both in the locations that they target and the frames they use in organising the response. They have thus implemented the same responses that have been implemented in emergencies elsewhere for decades (Betts and Collier, 2015).

Take for example the question of 'shelter relief', which exemplifies one of the worst tensions between international and local organisations. In a context where everything is debated and agreements are hard to make, the provision of shelter for refugees presented a complex scenario for international and local agencies, particularly because they had conflicting representations of where the refugees had settled. By the end of 2012, heated debates were surfacing about the processes through which refugees would be hosted, with INGOs and UNHCR insisting on 'camps', a form of shelter typically borrowed from other contexts where the 'concept' of a refugee settlement is typically associated with 'non-urban' tropes such as open areas, tents, and others. For many agents working in international organisations, camps presented the only realistic housing options for refugees, and they continued to negotiate the setting up of camps with the Lebanese state despite popular and governmental resistance to this form of settlement, which is widely perceived in Lebanon as problematic and potentially a threat to

Table 1: Concentration of Syria Refugees in Urban Areas in Lebanon. UN-Habitat (2016)

	Municipalities	Cadasters	Area Km²	Population		
				Lebanese	Syrians	Palestinians
TRIPOLI	3	17	27	306,629	69,979	33,842
BEIRUT	80	42	146	1,366,962	199,774	35,984
SAIDA	11	13	19	163,787	27,798	77,100
SOUR	4	4	17	94,427	14,414	69,780
TOTAL				1,931,805	311,965	216,706
SOURCE			Stereographic projection	SDATL 2007 data	UNHCR 31.12.2015	UNRWA, UNDP, UN- Habitat

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national security. Eventually, the Lebanese government maintained a 'no-camp' policy,[9] due to negative perceptions of the Lebanese experience with Palestinian refugee camps. Thus, refugees have found shelters through market channels. By 2014, 18 per cent settled in informal tented settlements (ITS), and 82 per cent in sub-standard shelters (garages, worksites, unfinished buildings etc) and apartments – the majority in urban or semi-urban areas (UN-Habitat, UNHCR, 2014). Meanwhile, refugees settled mostly in urban areas, renting out housing units in the most affordable sections of cities where they blended with other members of the working classes, such as migrant workers and low income Lebanese families. Conversely, only 11 per cent of refugees, particularly those who had worked in the agricultural sector before the war, have settled in tents, where they rent plots of land and form what is now recognised as ITSs. Despite their low numbers, these refugees have received the widest visibility among all refugees, and potentially also most of the attention of the global community. There are numerous reasons why aid would be focused on ITSs. First, ITSs match the criteria of aid agencies in hosting the most vulnerable populations. Second, these settlements are easier to locate, access, and target, ensuring that aid is provided to a large number of refugees at once. Conversely, refugees in urban areas are harder to find and access since they blend in rented housing units with other vulnerable population groups such as low-income Lebanese families, migrant workers, etc. Third, refugees living in ITSs tend to remain in their primary place of settlement, however, many of the refugees living in urban and peri-urban areas, tend to move more frequently due to high living expenses or in search of new job opportunities (UNHCR, 2016). The issue of mobility creates a challenge for NGOs and UN agencies in terms of outreach, accessibility, and registration with the municipalities where they reside. Indeed, providing urban refugees with aid is more complex, especially in terms of distributing basic services in demographically dense areas and enhancing livelihoods in economically competitive environments.

More generally, the crisis in Lebanon unveiled yet another example of the urgency of the need to raise awareness and develop tools on how to address a large urban refugee population, which has been arguably neglected. This could be due to the fact that the term 'urban refugee' has only gained significance in the literature and among aid agencies recently. Thus, while UNHCR has drafted several 'urban refugee policies' over the past decade, implementation has lagged behind, most likely because international organisations lack the expertise to implement area-based approaches and recurrently fall back to 'projects as usual' when they are faced with the direness of human needs. Interviews with international and local NGOs in Lebanon have confirmed that only rarely do they adapt programmes to the urban settings where they will unfold. Thus, in one of the most compelling example of the sort, latrines set up on sidewalks were offered as a toilet solution for refugees renting units in the multi-story apartment buildings in the urban neighbourhood of Bourj Hammoud, a solution perhaps adequate for refugees setting up tents in rural areas but understandably appalling municipal authorities in a dense urban neighbourhood.

In sum, urban areas are attractive to refugees in search of jobs and better livelihoods. This however comes at a higher price in terms of access to housing and basic services. Ultimately, urban refugees are often at a higher risk of vulnerability and require area-based responses to address their needs and mitigate such risks (UN-Habitat, UNHCR, 2014).

Emergency relief or development?

Another important factor that complicates the possibilities of coordination between local and international organisations is the 'timeframe' in which each of these groups perceives its interventions. This brings us to the larger concerns within the field of reconciling humanitarian relief with development aid, rendering short-term relief processes more sustainable (Hirst, 2015), a task made difficult because aid and development agencies do not typically operate within the same perspectives, but also because refugees normally perceive their presence as transient, host community members fear the threat of long-term refugee settlement, and because funding gaps and mechanisms of collaboration are not set in place. When it became however apparent that the Syrian crisis is becoming extended and protracted, and that as a result refugees would settle in Lebanon for several years, local authorities began to insist on the necessity to shift away from the narrow timeframes of emergency relief. This was all the more so the case because many of the problems that were being identified by international organisations were widely understood by local authorities and NGOs alike as endemic local issues that preceded the unfolding of the refugee crisis. However, relief agencies are usually restricted by funding and timing to complete a specific project within

[9] Despite relentless pressures, the Lebanese government maintained its opposition to the formation of any official 'refugee camp' in its national territory, claiming that the failure of this form of shelter with respect to the Palestinian refugees set a precedent it would be unwilling to support.

a short timeline and a limited scope. As a result, they approach local governments to intervene with limited, short-term projects. To local authorities, however, the sporadic, targeted interventions are disruptive and may even contradict the longer-term perspectives they have in mind. They hence look for longer-term relationships with humanitarian agencies in order to make the latter's projects more effective on the ground. Over time, this diversion in 'timeframe' and the lack of commitment to a sustainable developmental set of interventions from relief agencies has affected the credibility of aid agencies in the eyes of frustrated local authorities.

More recently, however, and particularly owing to rising tensions among local communities vis-à-vis refugee settlement and aid agencies interventions, a number of initiatives have successfully shifted the timeframe of aid agencies towards longer-term interventions. For example, an international NGO addressed water scarcity by installing water pipes instead of simply trucking water. It also helped the INGO respond to its current goal of including host communities in its refugee response in a bid to prevent social disorder and local resentment. Yet, for many agencies, especially the ones with fixed programmes, limited funding and timeframes, sustainability remains a challenge. Even when agencies with poor resources are financially supported from foreign funds, the structure of most donor agencies and the ways in which their funding is made available is unsuitable to the slow and difficult task of building or strengthening local capacity (Satterthwaite, 2001: 137), a necessary prerequisite to such developmental interventions.

Local and host communities

Difficulties in coordination also emerge because of the conflicting visions of international organisations and local authorities on who are the 'beneficiaries' of their interventions. Indeed, most international organisations involved in relief activities respond to the global refugee agenda and only target refugees in their projects. Conversely, many organisations who plan to operate in this context outside of this crisis moment perceive their beneficiaries to be more generally the vulnerable groups impacted by the crisis, irrespective of their nationality, while Lebanese national and municipal authorities are understandably mostly concerned about the impacts of their crisis on Lebanese nationals. For example, to get more votes in the municipal elections, mayors are likely to show little sympathy for aid destined to Syrian refugees in their districts, as it has become less popular nowadays - "now the soil is no longer fertile" (World Vision, 2016).

Therefore international organisations who came to the country with a mandate to respond to refugee needs, have seen this materialise in fuelling tensions between refugee and host communities. The latter began to feel they were at a disadvantage vis-à-vis refugees who were the only recipients of aid despite the fact that they were equally economically disadvantaged. This was all the more the case since, as the crisis extended and the number of refugees increased, local populations began to feel the effects of the crisis on the local crumbling infrastructure, as well as spikes in rent prices and competition in the labour market. These tensions also affected Palestinian refugees who have been in Lebanon since 1948, and who have suffered from the worse competition over low-pay jobs among members of the host communities. At times, the form of relief that was extended to refugees triggered further anger among low-income rural Lebanese groups who may have accepted until then poverty as a normal state of being. Thus, the coordinator of an international inter-governmental agency argued that while poverty had been conceived as a "normal thing" by disadvantaged local residents who hosted large numbers of Syrian refugees such as in Akkar, their perceptions changed now that they saw the type of relief that had been extended to the refugees: "When the Syrian refugees settled in Akkar, the local communities, suddenly obtained heaters and blankets for the winter… People will not think the same after this refugee crisis. If we had avoided the tension, there would have been a bit more sympathy for the Syrians". This comment was mirrored in focus groups among members of the host community, where it was common to hear statements such as: "UNHCR is covering the health needs of all these Syrians. The UNHCR is better to them than the Ministry of Health is to us" (participant in host community focus group discussion in Sahel El Zahrani, February 2016). Irrespective of the truth of this statement (which it is not), the feeling of relative deprivation has strengthened tension vis-à-vis the refugees, particularly when local authorities are unable to respond or provide equal services and/or protection. This is well conveyed by another respondent who explained: "We are losing our jobs because the Syrians are accepting considerably lower pay" (participant in host community focus group discussion in Sahel El Zahrani, February 2016). Ultimately, these tensions have generated a severe worsening of living conditions for Syrian refugees, particularly with the imposition of security curfews virtually everywhere in the country, with most participants in focus groups across the country agreeing to their necessity.[10]

[10] Several local municipalities have imposed curfews on Syrian refugees and street patrols, which, far from being an institutional measure, follow a flexible and unpredictable pattern. The law on municipal security – that is the extent to which municipalities are in charge of enforcing curfews – is presently debated in Lebanon. While segments of Lebanese society advocate for further securitisation, which supposedly reduces the local sense of fear and threat, others rather encourage enhancing refugee protection policies.

The rising tensions between local and host communities underpinned another challenge in coordinating local and international organisations: the fact that Lebanese authorities, particularly local ones, are accountable to a local electorate that needs them to envision interventions at the local and regional scale, relief agencies are accountable to donors who seek to target refugees through a global agenda. Rising tensions between local and host communities highlighted the need to rethink the response, and organisations eventually began to implement projects which target both communities. One example are the community support projects (CSPs), which were implemented across various localities with the aim of addressing the impacts of the crisis by benefiting refugees and host communities. Agencies approached individual municipalities and involved them in the choice of community support projects to be implemented in their locality, in the effort to ensure the approval of the host community. Moreover, many INGOs and UN agencies in Lebanon now provide services to populations based on categories of 'vulnerability' rather than on the basis of the beneficiaries' nationality. The changes in the crisis response, through ensuring that programmes also address host communities, show a serious effort to allow the context to inform the response. However, whether the type of implemented projects (mainly consisting of physical upgrading) has resulted in increased social tension is debatable, especially with no evidence of both being directly related.

Sectoral and area-based response approaches

Difficulties in organisation may also stem from the fact that coordination is occurring at less than optimal levels. As outlined above, UN agencies have organised their interventions in Lebanon essentially in specialised sectors, while regional coordination has come later. This sectoral approach has somewhat mirrored the government's organisation of service provision. As such, various international organisations and UN agencies coordinated and joined efforts and interventions to target separate sectors including: livelihoods, shelter, food security, education, social stability, WASH, protection, health, and basic assistance. This 'coordination' took the form of regular weekly and monthly meetings among workers of various active organisations and UN agencies who recorded and posted their discussions. These meetings, however, failed to include representatives from local authorities, such as members of UoMs or municipalities. This is despite the fact that most members of these unions of municipalities and local authorities are more knowledgeable of the realities and needs on the ground and have been at the forefront of the response, despite their weak financial and human resource capacities. However, interviewed members in international organisations explained that they found it cumbersome to invite the large number of local representatives, particularly given their numbers, but also due to language barriers when it came to involving local elected officials who did not speak English.

While this sectoral approach was considered an adequate solution to the most pressing refugee needs in an emergency context, the shift towards a long-term, protracted crisis generated the need to complement this sectoral approach with longer-term area-based approaches. Area-based approaches, which are currently advocated by a number of international organisations and scholars, adopt as the entry point for coordinating interventions in relief zones spatial coordination mechanisms, whereby responses to the refugee crisis are coordinated between humanitarian and local actors on the basis of assessments of the territorial offerings and characteristics, modes of governance, and the needs of communities including refugees and host populations. This bypasses the problematic division of these two groups. This approach proposes to analyse the challenges facing relief agencies at multiple scales, avoiding problematic problem definitions at the scale of administrative or national geographic boundaries which, as we saw above, often curtail the possibility of an adequate response.

One interesting precursor of such area-based coordination is the UoMs of Sahel el Zahrani. In the wake of the Syrian refugee crisis, and based on earlier successes in South Lebanon, UN-Habitat established a regional technical office (RTO)[11] at the UoM of Sahel el Zahrani, which has played an important role in strengthening coordination by ensuring that bi-weekly meetings take place at the UoM's premises, with all international and local agencies responding to the crisis within Sahel el Zahrani. These meetings paved the way for a discussion of current and planned programmes in the presence of the mayor and members of the union of municipalities. It allowed these actors to coordinate their interventions within the region, setting in place an

[11] The RTO is a unit performing under the mandate of the UoM, and comprises motivated local experts and technical persons. It aims to mobilise public and civil local actors to collectively address local needs based on available resources. RTOs were first established in 2006 to respond to the Israeli war on Lebanon in the areas of Tyre, Bint Jbeil, and Jabal Amel. As this model proved efficient for emergency responses and planning, RTOs were also established in the wake of the Syrian refugee crisis in other localities, one of which is the UoM of Sahel el Zahrani.

area-based coordination mechanism that allowed better efficiency and more ambitious interventions in the area. It furthermore empowered local authorities to channel projects in ways that could address the combined needs of both host and refugee communities, overcoming one of the biggest challenges of sector-based interventions.

In sum, there are promising precedents for developing responses based on an area-based analysis that could considerably improve the response to refugee problems.

Institutional challenges

Aside from the conflicts that stem from the context in which these projects unfold, there are additional gaps between the needs and aims of international organisations and those of local authorities that need to be taken into account. These are summarised as follows:

- **Political challenges:** There are numerous political challenges to coordinate between local Lebanese authorities and international organisations. To begin with, elected politicians consider themselves the only actors who have the mandate to determine and address local priorities and they have to negotiate this role with international agencies who claim jurisdiction over refugees in their territories. Thus, many local public authorities voiced their concerns about being isolated from decision-making processes while international agencies were not accountable to Lebanese governance agencies or to local citizens. However mayors themselves often find themselves constrained in responding to refugee needs, since the decreasing popularity of refugees in the country will negatively affect their ability to satisfy their own voters should they choose to partner with aid agencies and visibly support the presence of refugees (World Vision, 2016). In fact, a number of mayors argued that responding to refugee needs was altogether outside of their responsibilities, and that they had insufficient resources to respond to their own constituencies and were hence reluctant to extend their limited resources to refugees. Politics also interfere heavily because mayors are often themselves either members of political parties or navigate territories that are influenced by one party or another. Mayors are therefore constrained by political calculations and have to manage their territories in relation to the priorities and guidelines set by political parties, as these not only influence how a project will be implemented, but also, in many cases whether particular agencies will be able to implement projects in a jurisdiction at all. Ultimately, international organisations operate along the lines of domestic politics as they are controlled and managed by municipalities on behalf of shifting political agendas (Personal Interview with the Advisor of the Minister of Interiors and Municipalities , 2016),[12] sometimes getting permission to operate and, in other instances, retreating because guidelines from their own donor agencies prevent them from cooperating with particular political forces. Ultimately, politics greatly affects the responses of various local agencies and consequently those of international organisations.
- **Technical challenges:** In many cases, interventions require enhancement of the capacities of local governments. This could result in difficulties for external agencies which might lack the know-how or tools to build local capacities, as this generally requires a thorough understanding of the local context. As a result, international aid agencies appeal to staff located in Europe or North America, finding it easier to resort to foreign consultants, rather than drawing on the fine-grained territorial knowledge that local consultants have, and ultimately fail to build local know-how but also to produce a constructive collaboration that improves their knowledge of the local context. Hence, one of the main challenges faced is the marginalisation of locals as active staff agents, since donors believe it is easier and less time-consuming to assign expatriate staff members. Unfortunately, expatriate consultants require more time and effort to understand local complexities, leading in many cases to implementing standardised programmes that are not well adapted to the local context, which may ultimately contradict local processes and potentially generate adverse effects.
- **Funding:** Numerous funding constraints render coordination between international and local organisations harder. These should be classified in two terms, including both: (i) regulations and constraints about who can get funding; and (ii) the scarcity of funds themselves. Within the first category, one of the most common hurdles mentioned in Lebanon at least since 2006, is that a number of INGOs are unwilling to allocate their funds to municipalities run by specific political parties, due to restrictions imposed on them by donor agencies who discriminate among beneficiaries according

[12] In this regard, the municipality of Hadath in the southern suburbs of Beirut stepped out of the UNDP-funded ArtGold project, which had aimed to enhance health services in the southern municipalities of the capital's outskirts.

to political affiliations. Their position is mirrored by municipalities who also abide by policies set by the political parties that they represent and who prevent organisations from conducting projects in their territory if the latter are funded by organisations or countries that they consider to be against their political affiliations. Complications attached to funding should nonetheless also extend to cover the dwindling funds available to relief agencies that require them, for example, to monitor spending on staff cost because the ratio of staff costs to total funds spent is considered a paramount indicator of a development agency's 'efficiency'.

These divergences, generated by differences both in the understanding of the issues at stake and the operational mechanisms through which local organisations, international organisations, and Lebanese public agencies operate, naturally render coordination between them more difficult. These were perhaps best exemplified by this statement made by a Lebanese public official who argued: "They [INGOs] have developed their experience in Sudan, especially the Europeans. They think we don't understand. They want to apply a model they have and use elsewhere. The Lebanese staff is the ones in the face, but the planners were the problem. Even the implementation partners, I don't blame them – they have to get their funding from those sources."

4

Refugees in Sahel el Zahrani

4.1 Union of municipalities of Sahel el-Zahrani: brief background of the area

The UoM of Sahel El Zahrani was founded in 2010 and includes 18 municipalities,[13] all located within the governorate of Sidon and the governorate of the South. It is situated between the historic coastal cities of Sidon and Tyre. Prior to the Syrian refugee crisis, the population in each of these municipalities ranged from 1,000 local inhabitants in Adousieh to 10,000 local inhabitants in Al-Kharayeb and Saksakieh. Even before the crisis, these municipalities were deeply concerned about development issues. The municipalities oversee and provide basic services such as garbage collection, road network maintenance, educational facilities, and key projects for water provision and sewage networks upgrading, among others. Nonetheless, many municipalities have a weak administrative apparatus and lack adequate resources to respond to the basic needs of the dwellers within their region.

Figure 2: Sahel El-Zahrani union of municipalities map, 2016

Source © UN-HABITAT

[13] Three of the 18 municipalities in the UoM of Sahel el Zahrani are in the process of being registered.

Over the past few decades, the area has witnessed large waves of population departures as its residents either moved to Beirut or left the country altogether. As a result, most of the registered voters in the villages of Sahel El Zahrani are absent throughout the year and send remittances to their families that have grown an economy largely dependent on the support of Lebanese expatriates. Conversely, the local economy of coastal villages relies on sea-related activities such as fishing. Like other areas of South Lebanon, the area has received limited development interventions since the formation of modern Lebanon in 1922. It has also suffered the consequence of regional wars, including multiple Israeli invasions and incursions. However, since 1992, the area has been targeted by several development programmes with the support of some political parties (Public Representative, 2016).

4.2 The Syrian influx and its implications

After the outbreak of the Syrian conflict, the refugee influx to the area of Sahel el Zahrani increased rapidly. The area had already been home to a large number of Syrian migrant workers before the war; these mostly held menial jobs in the agricultural and construction sectors. In line with other areas in Lebanon, these migrant workers brought in their families, relatives, and neighbours, channelling through their social networks the flows of refugees who settled in the area. Most of these refugees rented out shelters, paying either from their own savings or with the support of aid organisations, but a number of families resorted to living in nylon tents in the peripheries of the towns. Eventually, a number of villages were hosting a very large number of refugees. For example, in the town of Bissariyi that has hosted the highest number of refugees in the Union of Municipalities (6,500 people), the size of refugee

Figure 3: Adloun Village in Sahel El-Zahrani

Source © UoM Sahel El-Zahrani

Figure 4: Saksakieh village in Sahel El-Zahrani

Source © UoM Sahel El-Zahrani

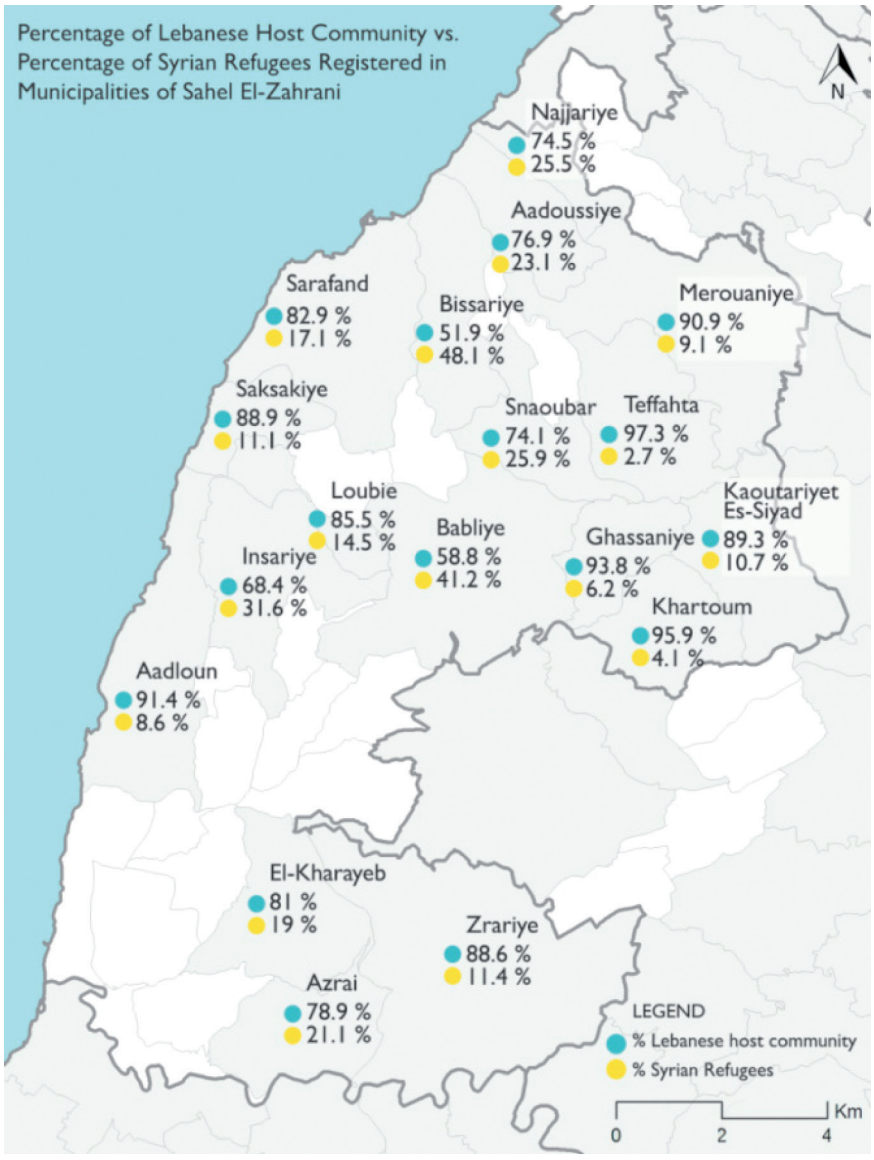
population was almost equal to the number of local inhabitants (7,000 people). This large number strained municipal resources and made it impossible for them to manage the increased service demand. Moreover, this population increase added to the liveability challenges in these villages: weak infrastructure crumbled, garbage collection lagged behind, water shortages increased and sewage systems overflowed. These difficulties were further exacerbated by the fact that the municipalities did not receive any additional funding to respond to the crisis, making it impossible for them to not only respond to the needs of the refugees, but also to those of the host community, even when they had the best intentions.

4.3 Coordination mechanisms in the response

i. The role of the UoM and the single municipalities

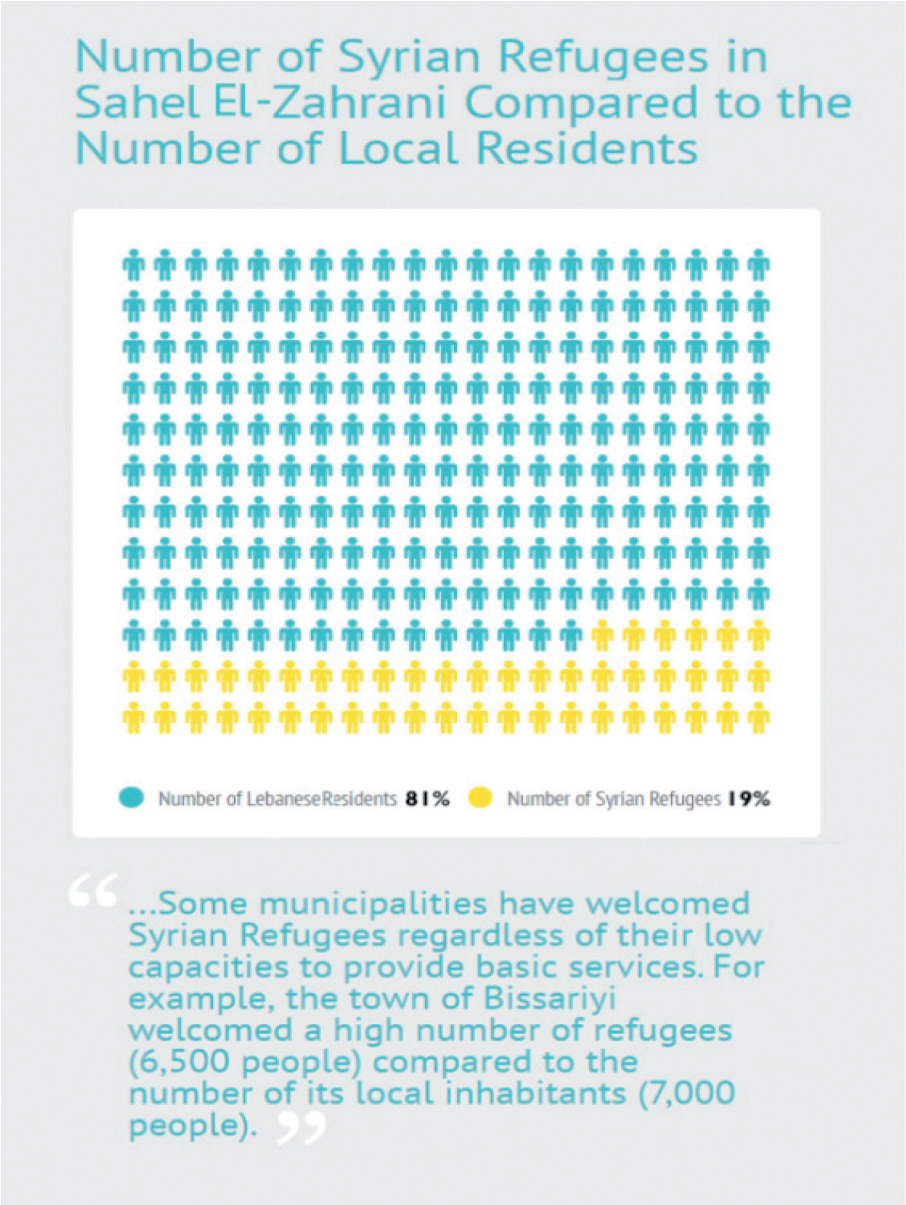
Fieldwork indicates that the UoM in Sahel El Zahrani emerged as a relatively successful case of strong coordination between local authorities and humanitarian agencies on the ground. This is particularly reflected in the comments of respondents in the focus groups, including Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees who mostly agreed about the positive role of

Figure 5: Percentage of Lebanese host community with respect to registered Syrian refugees in the municipalities of Sahel El-Zahrani, 2016



Source © UN-HABITAT

Figure 6: Percentage of Lebanese host community with respect to registered Syrian refugees in the Union of Municipalities of Sahel El-Zahrani, 2016



Source © UN-HABITAT

local authorities and their ability to coordinate the work of international organisations, albeit not seamlessly. This coordination, it should be further specified, can only be partially explained by the coordinating mechanisms set in place. Other factors include the nature and structure of the relations between different actors; this goes a long way in explaining this relative success, as we will see in the next paragraphs.

The success of the UoM in responding to the crisis is perhaps mostly due to the proactive role that the head of the union has played, reaching out to international organisations and refugees and imposing himself as a reliable partner to both. In his narrative of the management of the refugee crisis, a public representative denounced the blindness of international aid agencies to the needs of the region in the early days of the crisis: "International organisations overlooked the area because they were heading to 'big cities' in South Lebanon such as Tyre and Nabatiyeh. […] They were blind to these peri-urban zones" (public representative, 2016). In response to these challenges, the role the head of the union has played to encourage the strengthening of coordination with the international organizations active in the area enhanced the response to the large scale of refugees resettling in the area.

Moreover, with the support of the RTO at the UoM, the union was able to address development on a regional scale. Furthermore, the union used the little capacities they had to provide direct support to refugees, including police rounds to identify the locations of where these refugees had settled, and targeted support. They did so outside the framework of official regulations since no agreement and/or legal framework coordinates the role of municipalities or UoMs in the provision of services in Lebanon. Hence, their role in service provision occurs through informal agreements and mechanisms that respond to moral and/or religious imperatives that compel them to help those in dire need.

On the whole, despite several challenges, the UoM of Sahel El Zahrani provides a relatively positive example of coordination, having an easy geographical set-up, where the farthest village is 15 minutes away from the union's headquarters (public representative, 2016). The union works with the funds granted by the central government whenever there is a project for common benefits, and assists individual municipalities at the technical, financial, operational, and research levels.

ii. Existing coordination mechanisms

As noted in the section above, within the framework of the Lebanese law, mechanisms of coordination between international agencies and local authorities are essentially informal. They rest on the organisation of regular meetings in which information is exchanged and perhaps some roles distributed, but they do materialise into more formal arrangements. In the case of Union of Sahel el Zahrani, bi-weekly coordination meetings took place at the premises of the union with the support of the RTO who encouraged such meetings.[14]

The RTO is considered a key factor in the success of the UoM of Sahel el Zahrani in responding to the refugee crisis and coordinating its activities with international organisations in addition to supporting the management of the crisis at the regional scale. The RTO is a 'technical' office that unions can establish to take charge of the management of their territories in terms of emergency response and development planning, reducing hence the dependence of local authorities on national planning agencies. In the UoM of Sahel el Zahrani, the RTO consists of the head of RTO, a civil engineer, a surveying engineer, a foreman, and a social worker. All the RTO staff are locals which enhances accessibility and efficiency as the staff "know the area by heart" (head of the RTO of UoM of Sahel el Zahrani, 2015). The unit in Sahel el Zahrani is supervised and supported by an area coordinator from UN-Habitat who is an architect and urban planner. The area coordinator supports the RTO through capacity building on issues related to planning and project implementation, including strategy development and strengthening coordination with international and local agencies and municipalities.

As such, the presence of the local RTO staff and area coordinator strengthened the coordination capacities of the union, empowering it to host the bi-weekly coordination meetings of aid organisations active in the Syrian response within its jurisdiction. Such meetings facilitated the exchange of information, eventually decreasing the possibility of overlapping projects, improving efficiency, and providing better relief services to the refugee communities. This successful coordination at the local level is also reflected in the various implemented projects between partnering agencies in the area with the support of the RTO, these include: sewage network upgrading covering many municipalities; two collective shelters for Syrian refugees; establishment of water tanks; awareness-raising campaigns on water preservation and hygiene promotion; rehabilitation of a fish market in one of the villages; conducting village profiles for all the villages within the union, and the initiation of strategic planning for the union.

iii. Challenges of coordination

Despite its success, the case study of the UoM of Sahel el Zahrani also reflects the challenges in establishing a real coordination mechanism. These mirror the challenges at the national scale outlined in the previous chapter.

The first challenge to aligning coordination is when international organisations and local authorities perceive their interventions and role within different timeframes in which programmes are supposed to be developed and accomplished. International humanitarian agencies tend to intervene due to the presence of refugees or internally displaced people in the aftermath of natural disasters or man-made conflicts. This challenge is however likely to subside since the realisation of a protracted crisis among members of the international community has provided incentives for relief agencies to turn short-term projects into long-term development programmes, providing incentives for greater coordination between local and international actors. This is particularly the case of international agencies such as UNDP, whose presence in South Lebanon, since the withdrawal of the Israeli occupying troops in 2000, has provided a long experience in relief management which eventually led to a shift in its strategy to seek higher levels of cooperation with local municipalities (UNDP, 2016).

[14] The success of UN-Habitat in establishing RTOs in South Lebanon after the 2006 war in Lebanon had encouraged the agency to maintain its effort and, in 2013, UN-Habitat established a RTO at the UoM of Sahel El Zahrani.

Another challenge to coordination is a complex hierarchy between aid agencies and political actors. Hierarchy also exists between international and local staff operating within the same organisations, whereby international staff are on higher pay-scales and roles. Moreover, new informal local powers also emerge in times of vulnerability and are able to condition international humanitarian interventions. Assessing the coordination between such mechanisms, therefore, sheds light on the problematic common way of referring to local entities as 'authorities', and to international entities as simple 'actors'. What needs to be assessed is not only the presence or absence of such coordination, but rather its qualitative nature: hierarchies which appear in some cases are considered a troublesome impediment to cooperation.

Indeed, in an interview conducted with the head of the UoM of Sahel El Zahrani, the hierarchical relationship between international and local actors promptly emerged. He argued: "Municipalities are doing things that INGOs are actually not doing… You should tell the INGOs that when they are not here, the municipality is on the frontline. They think we don't understand, but they are the ones who apply the same model everywhere. The Lebanese staff [both in local and international NGOs] is put as a façade, but the planners are not local. Even the implementation partners – how can I blame them? I have to get their funding from those sources" (public representative, 2016).

The rising tensions between local and host communities represent a third challenge to the coordination of local and international actors. Although by 2016 most international and local programmes have been adapted to also address host communities' needs, Lebanese residents expressed resentment against unequal aid distribution; especially in the ways aid agencies channel resources towards new regional crises rather than support local chronic vulnerability or enhance sustainability mechanisms. This was translated with outbursts of negative comments vis-à-vis refugees who were often seen as escaping the intransigencies of the Lebanese law and/or benefiting from underserved largesse when the local population was starving. For example, a resident in the area argued: "If a Lebanese is stealing electricity, they fine him. If a Syrian does it, they don't say anything. I've seen it happen" (participant in host community focus group discussion in Sahel El Zahrani, February 2016). Another local resident expressed similar concerns: "I've seen Syrian households with a TV! And I can't even feed my children" (participant in host community focus group discussion in Sahel El Zahrani, February 2016).

Among Syrian refugees in Sahel El Zahrani, opinions on the efficiency of the municipalities are highly contradictory, but they nonetheless frequently betray a lack of trust (focus group with Syrian refugees in Sahel El Zahrani, February 2016). Thus, a number of participants argued that municipalities are far more accountable than INGOs or UNHCR while others insinuated that the funds that INGOs give to the municipalities for distribution to Syrian refugees 'often disappear'. They also discussed the tensions that emerged due to the treatment of their presence as 'temporary' even when the crisis has been prolonged, with serious long-term implications that also affect refugees. For example, refugees described the struggle they face in burying their dead in the absence of sufficient land allocated for this purpose. Refugees are furthermore often required to limit their claims and avoid being vocal as this might be interpreted as 'politically challenging' to the local community and/or political party, a situation that would threaten their safety and perhaps even their ability to stay in place.

Refugees appeared well aware of the limitations ensued by the lack of coordinating structures between Lebanese and international organisations. Thus, most interviewees among the refugee community blamed their lack of legal papers and the uncontrolled rise in tenancy rental fees on the unsuccessful coordination between INGOs, UN agencies, and local authorities. This lack of coordination was linked to the (un) registration policies that UNHCR introduced throughout the last five years, and the consequent poorly motivated removal of some Syrian refugees from the register in times of financial shortfalls.[15]

Despite these difficulties, the case of Sahel el Zahrani provides a relative success story in the Lebanese context, where better coordination mechanisms have improved the management of refugee issues and enabled some of the challenges faced by refugees to be addressed. The municipality of Sarafand, which is within the union, has recently responded to the demands for a more burial space, expanding the land destined for the construction of a new cemetery. In sum, the arrival of a large number of refugees has impelled local governors to sort out a long-standing problem that local residents were already facing prior to the Syrian crisis. However, many of the larger problems observed at the country scale are not being addressed, particularly those associated with the weakness of a national policy and the informal and changing interventions of UNHCR, which are negatively affecting the refugee and host communities.

[15] The registration and referencing of refugees by UNHCR was carried out based on the lowest geographic administrative level adopted in Lebanon – the cadastre. While relevant data exists on refugees residing in villages and small towns where administrative borders fall within one cadastre, data on refugees who have settled in cities and urban areas is scarce and inaccurate.

5

Refugees in Bourj Hammoud

5.1 Background to the neighbourhood

The neighbourhood of Bourj Hammoud is situated immediately outside the administrative boundaries of Beirut, in the Metn District and falls under the municipality of Bourj Hammoud, which is an administrative division of the Mount Lebanon governorate located at four kilometres north-east of central Beirut. The majority of the population of Bourj Hammoud are Lebanese nationals of Armenian descent. However, the neighbourhood also has a number of Lebanese and Palestinian nationals, and a large number of migrant workers coming from African, Asian, and Arab countries –including Syria. Since 2012, the neighbourhood has witnessed a large influx of Syrian refugees (Fawaz, 2016). According to UNHCR statistics, the municipality of Bourj Hammoud hosts one of the largest concentrations of refugees in the Lebanese capital, with more than 20,000 registered Syrians (UNHCR, 2016), many of whom have followed a family member who had resided in the area before the outbreak of the war in Syria.

Figure 7: Location map of Bourj Hamoud, 2016

Source © UN-HABITAT

Naba'a is a district of Bourj Hammoud which developed in the 1940s at the southern tip of the area. While its early developments were legal, particularly because they preceded the adoption of urban and building regulations in the country, much of the neighbourhood's war and post-war developments violated urban and building regulations. Dense, congested housing units are provided at even cheaper rates than other neighbourhoods under this municipality (UN-Habitat, UNHCR 2014, Fawaz 2016). Naba'a displays visibly poorer living conditions than the rest of Bourj Hammoud and the city, most likely owing to the fact that the municipality perceives this concentration of poor individual of non-Armenian descent as threatening to its cultural and national identity as Armenian, but also to the image of a middle class, respectable district. Community services other than those addressing Armenian vulnerable categories are less developed in the area. Armenian culture has been kept alive in Bourj Hammoud through cultural associations, religious centres, schools, sports clubs, and other institutions (Wilson, 2015), and it is not uncommon to hear Armenian spoken in grocery stores and restaurants as the casual language of the area.

Figure 8: Number of Syria refugees in Bourj Hammoud compared to number of Lebanese host community, 2016

Source © UN-HABITAT

5.2 Syrian influx and implications

Since the end of the civil war (1989-90), the neighbourhood has witnessed large waves of population swaps that first evacuated those families who had occupied the area during the years of civil war and then restituted illegally occupied properties to their original owners. While a handful of owners returned, the majority preferred to remain away from an area associated with the violence of their war experience, renting out their properties to those in need. Rapidly, Naba'a turned into a hub of affordable rental housing where migrant workers could afford a room and/or a shared apartment close to an unaffordable city. Among those were numerous Syrian migrant workers who eventually brought their families to the area when the war broke out (UN-Habitat, UNHCR 2014; Fawaz 2016). Given the level of destitution, local and international organisations frequently operated in Naba'a, including the well-known *Mouvement Social*, World Vision, and others. In addition, several political parties have a strong and visible presence in the area, including Hezbollah and the Lebanese Forces.

The arrival of Syrian families to the area after the outbreak of the war was faster and greater than in other sections of the Greater Beirut area, gradually making Naba'a one of the largest concentrations of refugees in the city – what was termed by the *Housing, Land and Property Issues in Lebanon* report as a *de facto* camp (UN-Habitat, UNHCR 2014). These families were accommodated in the neighbourhood through processes of apartment re-subdivision, the make-shift transformation of ground floor stores into apartments, and the illegal additions of rooms on building roofs, all of which allowed for a flexible readjustment of space, but at the expense of the quality of life of these refugees (Fawaz, 2016). Indeed, the excessive concentration of low-income families in this area added pressure on an already crumbling infrastructure, exacerbating power outages, water scarcity, and the accumulation of garbage on street corners. As a result, international programmes started intervening in the neighbourhood, particularly to respond to the needs of the large Syrian refugee population.

Figure 9: View of Naba'a neighbourhood in Bourj Hammoud, 2016

Source © UN-HABITAT

Syrian refugees are said to lead their everyday life quite safely and enjoy relative freedom of movement in Bourj Hammoud. In fact, a number of respondents indicated that they preferred the neighbourhood to other areas because of the concentration of Syrian refugees that enables them to rely on a dense network of social relations of solidarity (Fawaz, 2016). The municipality was among the last to enforce night curfews (Al-Akhbar, 2014): the area is often represented as a relatively peaceful settlement (Madoré, 2016). However violence against Syrian refugees actually point to a higher rate of local tensions.[16] This is however not to say that conditions here are comfortable. In focus groups, for instance, refugees raised numerous issues that rendered their living conditions particularly difficult. These include high birth rates, child marriage, poor financial support for health and other social services, poor housing conditions due to high tenancy rates and spiking rents, confessional hatred and persecution, feelings of isolation, fear of detention and deportation, lack of documents, and a general mistrust towards secular and religious institutions.

Figure 10: Bourj Hammoud, Lebanon 2015

Source © UN-HABITAT 5.3. Responses to (un)coordination

[16] Overall, the presence of single males in the neighbourhood is viewed as engendering social conflicts to a greater extent with respect to families.

5.3 Coordination mechanisms in the response

i. Role of the municipality and other actors

In Bourj Hammoud, more stark problems of coordination between local governors and humanitarian actors have been identified with multiple negative repercussions to both host and refugee communities. The role of the municipality is in fact weaker and less effective, resulting in a more decentralised local administration, poorly informed of the plans of the counterparts. This is particularly interesting because the municipality of Bourj Hammoud is well known as an effective and powerful local authority (Favier, 2001). This can be explained by the fact that the municipality sees the presence of these refugees as undesirable, looks negatively at interventions to extend their stay, and often adopts a language of criminalisation when referring to the violations of urban and building regulations in the area. Hence, a public representative in Bourj Hammoud (2016) was among the very few respondents to state that camps are the best solution for the refugee shelter crisis, arguing that living conditions in camps are much better than those in urban areas. He also expressed his dissatisfaction with the performance of international and local relief agencies, which he argued were "using the Syrians in many ways" (public representative, 2016), and decried the outcome of their interventions as often doing more harm than helping refugees. Ultimately, the contrast between this and the position of the mayor of Sahel el Zahrani outlined in the previous chapter may go a long way in explaining the divergent coordination outcomes in the two areas, likely more than an 'urban' or 'peri-urban' setting, since willingness to collaborate is a first requirement for coordination mechanisms to be set in place, when the latter are left to informal arrangements and decisions rather than legally mandated structures.

Cooperation, of course, rests on two pillars and the reluctance of a mayor to respond to the refugee crisis should not be read in isolation of the attitude of INGOs which, as described in previous chapters, are frequently dismissive of local authorities. In this regard, the deputy mayor of the Bourj Hammoud municipality (2016) blamed the lack of municipal coordination on the INGOs; these showed great interest in coordinating at the beginning of the crisis, but were ultimately only interested in data collection: "The INGO staff would not show up again, once they had exhausted the data they thought they could get from us" (public representative, 2016). The attitude of the municipality also feeds on the general perception of INGOs that operating in Bourj Hammoud is difficult and hence strategies to avoid coordination with the municipalities may help them eschew local bureaucracy. As the humanitarian worker of an INGO stated: "Just to donate a garbage truck or any service, we have to go through an intense process that is impossible to achieve. That's why we deal with service providers directly" (actor in INGO in Lebanon, 2016). This, of course, is not a generalised attitude; other statements are also noted where members of INGOs officially assert the importance of involving local NGOs to enhance their capacities with statements such as: "Lebanon is the readiest for local partnering" (actor in an INGO in Lebanon, 2016).

Weak coordination between local authorities and INGOs in Bourj Hammoud has made it less possible for international organisations to intervene and support the refugee community in a context where much of its access to employment and shelter rests on market channels that can only be regulated through the interventions of local authorities. For example, INGOs were disempowered to intervene and support refugees in their quest for shelter since the only instrument they had at their disposal was rent subsidies that had the effect of increasing rents exponentially in the neighbourhood. Ultimately, controlling an 'unregulated' or informal rental market characterised by increased rental prices for refugee accommodation and host communities alike can only be monitored with the support of local authorities, if the latter are willing to play a regulatory role in the area (UN-Habitat, UNHCR 2014).

ii. Existing coordination mechanisms

As noted above, coordination mechanisms are weak in this area. The most interesting coordination entity identified in this area is a local coordination committee established in the area nearly 20 years ago, and activated during times of crisis such as during the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon and, more recently, during the Syrian refugee crisis. Today, the coordination committee includes both the municipalities of Bourj Hammoud and Sin el-Fil, 16 local NGOs, and two international organisations. The committee is currently focused on addressing the response to the Syrian crisis by focusing on four sectors: social and educational, healthcare, environment, culture, and vocational training. Member organisations working on each sector coordinate through regular sector meetings, which are reported back to the general committee meetings which are held on a monthly basis.

In addition, and among the several local NGOs that roll out programmes within the district of the municipality of Bourj Hammoud, *Mouvement Social* was elected as the main national NGOs responsible for coordination

between the different local and international actors and the municipality (actor in local NGO in Lebanon, 2016).

iii. Challenges of coordination

One of the main challenges in coordinating activities in Bourj Hammoud is related to domestic politics which often interfere in further complicating the nature of coordination between local and international actors. Given its largely Armenian voter constituency that perceives the rising numbers of Syrian refugees as a threat to its territorial identity and integrity, it is expected that local authorities will view the presence of refugees suspiciously and look to reduce their numbers.

In the absence of any national agreement or mechanism that forces them to respond to the refugee crisis, and with little, if any, incentives from international organisations to actually respond to rising needs, local authorities ultimately find that a 'refugee containment' policy is politically the most feasible form of intervention. This is clear in Bourj Hammoud, where both influential social networks and municipal members agreed to limit the number of refugees in the Armenian quarters of the neighbourhood and, conversely, stigmatise and denounce the illegality of the quarters where refugees have settled.

The municipality's role is further exacerbated by rising tensions between refugee and host communities, which take particularly complex political and social forms in Naba'a that can only partially be blamed on the INGOs' targeted relief strategy that until recently excluded members of the host community as potential project beneficiaries. Indeed, the level of social marginalisation in Naba'a is due to the fact that a large number of members of the host community stigmatise Syrian refugees as sympathisers of the 'Islamic State of Iraq and Syria' (ISIS) or to the locally unpopular policies of Saudi Arabia among some communities in the neighbourhood. Indeed, the level of identification of refugees with terrorist groups depends on the hostile political environment – sometimes close to Hezbollah allied with the Syrian regime – which surrounds the refugees in Bourj Hammoud. Beyond verbal abuse, this hostility materialises in members of the host community expressing their reluctance to host those Syrian refugees coming from areas opposing the Syrian regime, which they perceive as threatening to local social harmony and their security. Members of the Lebanese host community also frequently express their resentment to the presence of Syrian refugees beyond the potential security threat. In focus groups in Naba'a, refugees were also blamed for the panoply of ills that include rent spikes, 'stolen' jobs, schools full of Syrian children whose tuition fee is paid by NGOs, and Lebanese men marrying Syrian women because supporting the latter is generally 'cheaper'.

This hostility was closely felt among Syrian refugees who expressed their wariness vis-à-vis the hosting community and recognised that they felt residents' lack of empathy towards them. In fact, the highly hybrid urban setting of Naba'a, unlike the more demographically homogenous area of Sahel El Zahrani, generates further challenges for refugees to navigate a politically complex area where they are likely to be exposed to greater discrimination and racism. This is clearly expressed in the following statement: "(Even) if God, Jesus, and Saint Mar Maroun were Syrians, the Lebanese would hate them all" (participant in Syrian refugee focus group discussion in Naba'a, March 2016). The following account also strongly exemplifies this generalised anguish: "I hope Syrians stop going to mosques. The sheikhs will take advantage of their kids and probably direct them to join terrorist groups. And they should stop going to the church, or the priests will also take advantage of them" (participant in Syrian refugee focus group discussion in Naba'a, March 2016).

Conversely, Syrian refugees are also far from a homogeneous group. Indeed, for at least two decades, Naba'a has been home and refuge to a large number of Syrian-Kurdish refugees who had fled the violence and oppression in their native Syria. The latter experience their own tensions with other Syrian nationals who do not share the same narrative about the ongoing war in Syria. Moreover, the refugee community itself is larger than just Syrian refugees, and while each benefits from a different system of support, refugees compare themselves to each other, often making the point that each of the group feels 'less supported' than the others. Ultimately, an imaginary hierarchy of needs and privileges is built on the basis of national belonging. For instance, Syrian refugee participants in focus groups compared themselves to Iraqi refugees and Egyptian migrants in Lebanon who they perceived to be equally destitute. whereas they incorrectly believed that Filipino and Sri Lankan nationals benefited from the legal support of their embassies whenever one of their citizens gets into trouble (Syrian refugee focus group discussion in Naba'a, March 2016). The common feeling of being segregated in 'zones of social abandonment' (Biehl, 2005) and excluded both from a national or a community-centred social contract is also expressed by those mentioning the delay in the arrival of the Red Cross to provide aid in the area of Naba'a in cases of emergency. As such, entitlement to obtain better benefits acquires an ethnic face, as fed by policies of aid provision established on the basis of nationality.

Ultimately, however, the largest tensions in Bourj Hammoud remain between those who live in the 'upper' section of the municipal territory, where their presence is perceived as legitimate, and those that live 'south' of the neighbourhood, within Naba'a, and remain 'undesirable'. In this regard, a resident contended: "The funds we get are much less than what they get at the other side of the bridge" (participant in Syrian refugee focus group discussion in Naba'a, March 2016). This is a bridge under which the demographic traits of the population are able, again, to define a higher or lower access to resources.[17]

Another difficulty in coordination which recalls the case of Sahel El Zahrani is the conflict in the timeframe of action which has proven to complicate the possibilities for successful coordination in Bourj Hammoud. Most organisations which had initially set up long-term programmes prior to the crisis, eventually reallocated their funds to short-term emergency relief to respond to rising needs. This went against the flow of the needs of the local host community and local authorities, which expected that disaster recovery would be framed within a vision of economic development, in a bid to tackle the long-term social and economic problems exacerbated by disasters (Waugh and Streib, 2006).

Syrian refugees in Naba'a highlighted that the coordination between humanitarian actors and local authorities is difficult to sustain. The refugees seem to feel closer to the municipal authorities but, at the same time, some of them pointed out how their own community now provides more aid to community outsiders, which is an uncommon perspective in a country with a long genealogy of community services and community-based organisations. As a Syrian refugee mentioned: "What is happening is terrible… Christians are becoming Muslims so that they can get US$100 from the church. And Muslims are becoming Christian to get US$100 from the mosque. The mosque and the church only give US$10 to their own community" (participant in Syrian refugee focus group discussion in Naba'a, March 2016).

This scenario of overall fear, distrust, and reluctance to socialise, highlights the challenges faced by local and international NGOs in upholding their role as community gatekeepers. This is also a reflection of numerous international-local partnerships which are highly hierarchical and bind local NGOs to global political agendas, rather than to their assessments or perceptions of local communities' needs. Indeed, international agencies may seek to draw on local voices, but they do not put in place the mechanisms by which local organisations and institutions have any power or influence within their decision-making processes (Satterthwaite, 2001).

[17] Armenians living on the Bourj Hammoud side of the bridge, which divides the municipality from Beirut, are said to be less wealthy than those who resettled in Beirut's districts.

6

Conclusion: challenges & lessons

Since the beginning of the refugee crisis in Lebanon, political, social and economic challenges that mostly existed in the country prior to the war in Syria have been exacerbated, leading to worsening living conditions for both refugees and host communities.

This study suggests that coordination efforts and mutual aid agreements between international and national actors at the central and local levels, both state and non-governmental, are vital if a proper response system is to be set in place. The study has focused particularly on the difficulties of establishing these mechanisms of cooperation, and the structural and institutional challenges to successfully establishing such mechanisms. This concluding chapter outlines the main challenges which emerged, followed by a set of recommendations for actors keen on improving collaboration mechanisms, particularly between aid agencies and local authorities in response to refugee crises.

6.1 Gaps and challenges

1. The **lack of response from the Lebanese government** during the first years of the crisis, the outsourcing of service provision to international organisations, and leaving local authorities to coordinate their interventions on the ground, have proved to be problematic. This allowed local politics to take over the management of services, missed an opportunity to channel resources, and ultimately

Figure 11: Bourj Hammoud, Lebanon 2015

Source © UN-HABITAT

contributed to the dramatic deterioration of both urban and rural livelihoods. This was detrimental, since local authorities lacked the institutional rights as well as the human and financial resources to respond to the crisis appropriately. To the contrary, the reinforcement of local governance building (Hubbard *et al.*, 2002) is the ideal outcome of local participation in governance structures, and successful mechanisms of domestic coordination could have provided much better results.[18]

For a government which has been deemed as weak or absent (Mouawad, 2015), decentralisation without a clear allocation of roles may not be the most adequate scenario. Reinforcing the municipalities rather than the central government may be practical and efficient for short-term emergency responses and local planning; however, over time, it presents the political limits of not having reached broader consensus on the management of domestic issues.[19] In the present proliferation of actors, establishing a more clear-cut role for each of them would lead to better public management overall.

2. The **informal mandate of UNHCR and other relief agencies in Lebanon** has unintentionally affected coordination, particularly in the distribution of roles and tasks among INGOs and local NGOs as well as between INGOs and local authorities. In the absence of a common definition of 'vulnerability' criteria, humanitarian actors and local municipalities in Lebanon were unable to coordinate the registration of refugees, eventually leading to several cases of multi-registration that emerged over the last four years (UCLG, 2009). In fact, the agencies' vaguely defined mandate may well have produced a counter effect of having organisations reluctant to engage in cumbersome collaborative initiatives. Hence, INGOs and UN agencies recognised that, in some cases, they do not negotiate their programmes with local authorities but directly approach project beneficiaries, as this strategy allows them to skip a highly bureaucratised stage.
3. The **heavy bureaucracy** of the Lebanese central government creates severe hurdles for local authorities to play an active role in relief. As a result, while local NGOs tend to partner with international NGOs in order to survive, the latter seek to avoid coordinating with the government to eschew bureaucracy and be able to implement their projects in the short run.
4. Conversely, **decentralisation may not be the best scheme** to adopt. While several humanitarian and development agencies aim to strengthen municipalities and UoMs across Lebanon, decentralisation, seen as necessary within a wavering state, does not necessarily lead to optimal logistic and financial results. The strength of some mayors to steer funding and activities in their localities based on their own vision is a plus if

Figure 12: Informal tented settlement in Sahel El-Zahrani, Lebanon 2016

Source © UN-HABITAT

[18] Local governance is defined as 'a shift from centralised and bureaucratic forms of decision making [generally referred to as 'government'] to a plurality of coexisting networks and partnerships that interact as overlapping webs of relationships at diverse spatial scales, from the neighbourhood to the globe'.
[19] The case provided of an international agency paying the service provider recommended by the municipality rather than the cheapest is evidence of political favouritism at a municipal level.

they can prioritise local needs. However, in cases where mayors lack the knowledge or will to optimally develop their localities in response to the needs of host communities and refugees, their power risks steering funding and programmes in the wrong direction.

5. (Mis)coordination between local authorities and humanitarian agencies is largely explained by the intersection of global politics of intervention and domestic politics. For instance, in the context of Lebanon, personal disputes or the individual preferences of appointed governors have an important impact on humanitarian and development responses, such as dependency on the approval or survival of projects during municipal elections, or even on the decision of individual council members, for example during the current garbage crisis.
6. Donorship influences short-term and long-term approaches to development and assistance, in accordance with the cornerstone of humanitarian action of most international donors and NGOs (to prioritise emergency relief and turn it into development efforts in the longer term). As a consequence, coordinating actors are also faced with the challenge of shifting timeframes, finding themselves in need of readapting their programmes according to long-term or short-term plans. In this framework, the concessions that were made to allocate resources to everyday welfare were only granted to respond to the need to compensate for local resentment. Nonetheless, an emergency-driven logic still dominates humanitarian interventions, widening the gap between the perspectives and the needs of Lebanese municipalities and those of the humanitarian agencies.
7. Service allocation according to national and stigmatised criteria such as 'refugees' and 'host communities' exacerbates personal identifications along the lines of 'criteria of access' to humanitarian assistance regimes. Such rigid criteria of eligibility and classification of vulnerability, in turn, amplify societal frictions and conflicts that stand in the way of building cooperation.
8. The lack of a shared vision between local/international organisations and local authorities creates a barrier to coordinating a sustainable response and development programme. For example, in many cases, local authorities have a long-term vision for development in their localities while donor agendas opt for short-term relief measures.
9. In some cases, even when INGOs confirm that their intervention is implemented in collaboration with municipalities, at a later stage they resort to implementing their own programmes independently of local advice and in compliance with their donors' agenda. In other circumstances, humanitarian/development agencies pursue their agendas regardless of local advice because the area of intervention is easier to approach and address. Thereby, the need for international aid providers – both INGOs and UN agencies – to operate in particular territories becomes poorly responsive to local necessities and aprioristic.

6.2 Lessons learned

The willingness to coordinate and the benefits of coordination have been expressed by most local and international agencies and local authorities. Collaboration and coordination mechanisms, however, cannot be successful if they are primarily based on a still lacking understanding of the main challenges to be faced among local authorities, international agencies, and local communities.

A first, obvious, conclusion is that collaboration between humanitarian agencies and local authorities should start at the **early stages of any response,** so as to build on each other's knowledge and experience.

I. Developing a locally-based understanding of the specificity of issues in the local context. In Lebanon, for instance, international organisations failed to understand the urban nature of the crisis and continued to look for frameworks to implement the schemes with which they were familiar, while refugees had clearly selected different options.

II. Recognising that short-term relief programmes need to be turned into longer-term development projects and accepting considerable changes in their mandate due to the necessity of tailoring their action to protracted refugee crisis scenarios. For example, public officials who were interviewed invariably provided examples of projects targeting specific social or infrastructural issues raised by the presence of Syrian refugees in these districts. They highlighted how such issues were deep-rooted problems they had faced for decades and outlined why they required larger public investment projects beyond the scattered support they gathered from the latest emergency responses.

III. While the sectoral approach in Lebanon has presented a solution to addressing pressing needs in times of emergency, adopting this model alone is not sufficient to address local needs in the long run. Based on the case studies presented in this paper, it becomes clear that, in addition to sectoral coordination, area-based coordination is recommended for more cost-effective and efficient responses which promote complementarity, enhance outreach, and avoid overlapping. More importantly, area-based approaches would

ensure that needs are addressed in an integral manner without excluding any community group (host communities, or refugees who were in Lebanon prior to the crisis or who are of a different nationality).

IV. The strong coordination between various agencies at the central level was not always reflected in the regional and local meetings at the level of unions and municipalities.

V. A more bottom-up approach to the development of projects based on the existing needs and priorities on the ground has often been mentioned as a successful move towards the coordination of international and local actors, as well as towards inclusiveness.

6.3 Policy recommendations

1. **Effective role of the central government:** The central government should enhance coordination with and support local municipalities in times of crisis as well as in the aftermath of the crisis. This would revert the current abdication of responsibility of the state institutions, which lack the adequate capacities and tend to rely on aid agencies. as well as municipalities, in emergency responses. Moreover, greater financial transparency should be demanded, in a bid to monitor the annual governmental redistribution of revenues to the single municipalities and unions of municipalities.
2. **Shift from emergency relief to long-term and medium-term programmes:** the need to shift from the implementation of quick short-term relief interventions to the planning of medium- and long-term programmes and activities has become crucial, taking into account the protracted nature of the Syrian crisis and the unforeseen return period of refugees to their homeland. Those medium and long-term programmes have to be planned and coordinated at both national (sector ministries) and local (municipalities) levels.
3. **Enhanced coordination at the local level:** Coordination frameworks and high level meetings between humanitarian agencies should encourage the involvement of local authorities. While it is difficult to involve a large number of municipalities in such meetings, specific criteria can be put in place to ensure the presence of certain local authority representatives, such as mayors of those municipalities most affected by the crisis. In addition, humanitarian agencies and national authorities should aim to bridge the gap between decisions taken on a higher level and implementation on the ground through strengthened local coordination.
4. **Listening to the most affected:** Innovative coordination mechanisms that include the voice of refugees and host communities should be put in place to ensure that programmes primarily address their needs efficiently. As such, humanitarian agencies should build on existing informal coordination mechanisms at the local levels by integrating them in the response.
5. **Combination of sectoral and spatial approaches:** Sectoral responses to address refugee crises should be complemented with area-based approaches. In terms of implementation, area-based approaches could tap into existing informal coordination mechanisms which are taking place on the local level, such as through UoMs and municipalities, and formalise or regularise such coordination towards the development of the area as a whole. Also the role of local committees is key to ensuring that this approach is well in line with the needs of the local community and that it responds to the different social groups and sectors optimally and sustainably.
6. **Strengthening of regional coordination:** Since the majority of municipalities in Lebanon are small in size, INGOs and UN agencies should strengthen coordination with UoMs. Moreover, international aid and coordination with local actors should be perceived as opportunities for mutual learning and enhancing responses. Supporting the unions can also be a valid strategy to avoid the power of particular municipalities and the marginalisation of others. However, multi-scalar support to local governance is seen as the best option, in the effort to tailor international and local practices to the specific features of the targeted districts.
7. **Respond to urban challenges**: The case of Lebanon reflects a high presence of refugees in urban settings. Yet programmes are not focused on urban areas, and are not adequately adapted to respond to the challenges of the urban context. As such, it is important to raise awareness and develop the necessary tools and coordination mechanisms to optimally address refugees in urban contexts, especially as more refugees are settling in urban areas worldwide.
8. **Horizontal knowledge sharing:** The exchange of knowledge should be horizontal rather than through a hierarchical relationship in which solely international agencies have administrative authority and technical know-how. This highlights the primary concern of this working paper: not merely assessing mis/coordination, but rather analysing the qualitative relationship between different aid actors and local authorities and finding ways to tap into the knowledge of both parties towards a better response.

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Lebanon's refugee crisis has highlighted the need for much closer coordination among the various organisations and local authorities involved in the response. This paper analyses existing collaboration mechanisms in relation to the Syrian crisis in Lebanon and provides a series of recommendations, on how national, local and international humanitarian actors can work together more effectively to enhance urban refugee responses in Lebanon and perhaps in other countries. In the context of a protracted urban crisis, this paper argues that humanitarians will only be able to ensure their responses are sustainable and meet needs on the ground if they work closely with local authorities.

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Funded by:

This research was funded by UK aid from the UK Government, however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the UK Government.