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Women in Conflict
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Marwa Shalaby, Director
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Contents

Foreword, 5

Kimberly Rightor

The Effect of the Presence, Duration, and Intensity of Armed Conflict on Women’s Formal and Informal Economic Participation: A Case Study of the 2003 Iraqi War and the Recent Rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, 11

Giacomo Frateschi

Housing Dilemmas for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, 27

Elbert Ahmad Giron Jr.
Foreword

by Kimberly Rightor

On December 17, 2010, a Tunisian street vendor named Tarek al-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire to protest the harassment he experienced at the hands of a municipal official. His death angered the public, who took up his cause in the Tunisian Revolution. Inspired by the events in Tunisia, a wave of revolution spread across the Arab World. These revolutions displaced rulers in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Tunisia itself, where President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali abdicated in January 2011 after 23 years in power. This “Arab Spring” led to major protests in Algeria, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Bahrain, Morocco, and Israel as well. The death toll in these protests has been enormous, and many international organizations, including the United Nations, have protested the human rights abuses that have occurred.

Many human rights crimes have been committed against women. The Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict found that “there are new forms of violence against women and girls intrinsically linked to the political uprisings of the Arab Spring—women’s ‘bodies are battlefields’ and are being instrumentalized in political rivalries.”1 It is clear that women are facing significant challenges in the region, especially in countries with ongoing violence, including the civil uprisings in Bahrain and Syria that began as a part of the Arab Spring. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria’s attempt to create a Muslim caliphate (Islamic State) and the ongoing Arab–Israeli conflict—including the most recent attacks on Gaza—also pose significant challenges to women’s rights in the MENA region.

Gender-based violence and discrimination are not new phenomena, but conflicts build on existing inequities to disadvantage women in unique ways. Women are more prone to economic and physical insecurities, which are exacerbated when sexual violence is used as a tool of war. Women are culturally designated “caregivers” and face a double burden when their husbands are off at war, especially since critical social services disappear during times of conflict or they have to leave their home country entirely.2

Mothers faced an additional burden in the Israeli attacks on Gaza this past summer. Palestinian women suffered from severe mental health issues after Israel’s military

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operation into Gaza began on July 8, 2014. They had to search for food under continued bombardment, which sometimes hit schools and resulted in the loss of their children. Over 1,031 Palestinians were killed in the conflict, and another 6,000 were injured. Many of them were children. Mothers were under severe stress, searching for refuge as they tried to keep their children close and safe by their side. To calm their children down, some women told their children that the loud noises were just fireworks—and that the war itself was a game.3

The conflict preyed on women’s fears as mothers as well as their physical health. The head of the Women and Children’s Health Department at the Ministry of Health in Gaza said that 250 women died during the war, and 16 of them were pregnant. Some of these deaths occurred because the bombing in Gaza resulted in a lack of vital health services. Six maternity units closed due to destruction from the bombing. Pregnancy and family planning services declined in general, and it was difficult to access the few remaining facilities amidst the bombing. Pregnant women had to walk long distances and carry things away from their homes, which led to increased chances of miscarriage, malnutrition, or birth complications.4

Female bodies are also a battleground where these wars are being waged. Rape is a weapon of war and a promotion of “ethnic cleansing.” In 2008, the United Nations’ Security Council officially labeled rape as a weapon of war in conflicts worldwide. It passed Resolution 1820 to engage in conflicts where “women and girls are particularly targeted by the use of sexual violence, including as a tactic of war to humiliate, dominate, instill fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate civilian members of a community or ethnic group.”5

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which was created when militant groups in Iraq and Syria joined forces in 2013,6 utilizes rape and other violent tactics. ISIS’s militants are fighting for a caliphate that would erase national borders and establish Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ISIS’s leader, as the self-declared authority over 1.5 million Muslims worldwide.7 ISIS’s atrocities against women have been severe. In October 2014, the United Nations released a report that condemned their violations of international law, including raping women, selling them as sex slaves, beating women who were not properly veiled,8

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7 Ibid.

and forcing women into marriage with ISIS militants.\textsuperscript{9} Many of their atrocities have been committed against Yazidi women, a Kurdish minority.\textsuperscript{10}

Unfortunately, Syrian women are still at risk from the government as well as ISIS. Human Rights Watch reported that “government forces and pro-government shabiha militia members have also sexually assaulted women and girls during home raids and residential sweeps.”\textsuperscript{11} The seeds of the current conflict in Syria were planted in March 2011, when citizens peacefully organized to protest the government’s torture of students who created anti-government graffiti. The government, led by President Bashar al-Assad, made a few concessions, but as the protests continued, they began cracking down and shooting protestors.\textsuperscript{12} Nearly 3 million people have fled Syria in the last three years, and nearly four in five of them are women or children.\textsuperscript{13}

Before the war, males ran the majority of households. Now, one in four Syrian women are the heads of the households.\textsuperscript{14} Many of them are widows. They have to earn money for the family, take care of the children, and grieve in a foreign country. Their vulnerability in these regards has placed them in the way of gender-based violence and financial destitution. Women forged ahead, however, as they found innovative ways to earn money in hard times. One Syrian mother, for example, started a kitchen in Lebanon where she employs other refugees to help her cook food to sell.\textsuperscript{15} Lina, another Syrian refugee in Lebanon, spoke to the United Nation’s High Commissioner for Refugees about the challenges Syrian refugees have experienced and fought against. She said, “When left alone, you have to push boundaries and make things happen. When you are weak, you are done. You have to be strong to defend yourself, your kids, and the household.”\textsuperscript{16} Many Syrian refugees have become newly responsible care providers. Syria is in a time of transition, as ISIS aims to erase Syria’s border and the government led by President Bashar al-Assad struggles to stay in power.


\textsuperscript{16} “Woman Alone,” The UN Refugee Agency.
Despite regime change, women in Egypt continue to face challenges, indicating that there needs to be a greater focus on women’s rights post-conflict. President Hosni Mubarak promised to step down after anti-government demonstrations, and in February 2011, he transferred his power to the army council. In June 2012, the candidate from the Muslim Brotherhood, Mohammad Morsi, narrowly won the presidential elections. Morsi’s presidency was short-lived, however, as the military removed Morsi in July 2013 after mass demonstrations calling for his resignation. Although former army chief Abdul Fattah al-Sisi won the presidential election in May 2014, the government is weakened as a result of the confusion and conflict.

The lack of stable government and the preoccupation of law enforcement officials have altered the environment that Egyptian women live in. A UN report found that 99.3 percent of women in Egypt have experienced sexual harassment. After the mass sexual assault in Tahrir Square during President al-Sisi’s inauguration, al-Sisi vowed to crack down on assault, and nine of the men involved in the Tahrir assaults were given prison sentences of 20 years to life. The Interior Ministry has created an anti-harassment unit dedicated to combating violence against women. Skeptics say that the culture still blames women for being harassed and that people need to recognize girls as full human beings with equal rights before the streets will really be safe. Egyptian women have been calling attention to this in various forms of activism over the past decade, but little progress was achieved on the institutional and legal realms.

In recognition of the ways that violence uniquely impacts women, the United Nations Security Council has adopted seven resolutions regarding women, peace, and security that promise that UN peacemaking forces will keep a gendered perspective in mind while carrying out their efforts. Security Council Resolution 1325, for example, recognizes that women are particularly vulnerable in times of conflict and reaffirms the necessity of creating laws to protect women during and after conflict. This resolution, adopted in 2000, deliberately includes a gendered perspective in times of conflict. This gendered perspective needs to recognize that women in conflict can be viewed through several different lenses.

While women are “victims” of conflict, they are also agents of change, active participants (combatants), supporting participants or shields, and newly responsible care providers. A group of 7,000 Kurdish women compose the Women’s Protection Unit, which has been

actively fighting ISIS militants for women’s rights.\textsuperscript{22} When ISIS ordered female physicians in Mosul to cover their faces, they organized a strike.\textsuperscript{23} While ISIS has murdered female activists, doctors, and politicians in their attempts to silence the voices of women, female activists continue to speak out.\textsuperscript{24}

Women cannot, and should not, be portrayed solely as victims. Many women in the MENA region helped start the Arab Spring and have been engaged in various forms of activism, including protests, awareness-raising efforts, and entrepreneurship, since its inception. They have stood up for their rights, but it is important to keep a locally driven gendered perspective in mind as we consider the questions that are central to Martha Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach: “What are people actually able to do and be? What real opportunities are available to them?”\textsuperscript{25}

Just as women cannot be portrayed as “victims” alone, it is clear that women face unique obstacles in each of the conflicts discussed above. There is no Band-Aid solution for empowering women in Middle East conflicts, but it is clear that women must be a part of the change, as they already have been. Women’s participation in decision-making and diplomacy is crucial, and the discourse surrounding female roles in conflict must shift to a context-specific approach.

To these ends, it is my pleasure to introduce the third issue of the \textit{Journal of Women and Human Rights in the Middle East}. The Women and Human Rights in the Middle East Program at Rice University’s Baker Institute for Public Policy created this issue, which seeks to contextualize women in conflict, especially since the onset of the Arab Awakening. The submissions in this journal position women in their local context while considering various methods of empowerment.

This publication includes case studies of women in conflict in the MENA region. The first, by Giacomo Frateschi, discusses the 2003 Iraq War and the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. He finds that women’s economic participation increases in times of conflict because men leave to fight and there are more female-headed households, men are less involved in enforcing cultural norms, and governments try to fill the gap in the workplace with women.

The second contributor, Elbert Ahmad Giron Jr., discusses how the inaccessibility and unaffordability of Lebanon’s housing market has posed significant challenges to Syrian

\begin{footnotes}
\item[23] Frida Ghitis, “Why women fight against ISIS,” CNN, last modified October 30, 2014, \url{http://www.cnn.com/2014/10/14/opinion/ghitis-isis-women-slavery/}.
\end{footnotes}
refugees. He suggests that Lebanon’s government should collaborate with NGOs to share information, ease financial strains on both sides, and increase Lebanon’s ability to accommodate refugees with homes. This involves documenting problematic structural or water sanitation needs to provide low-income, quality housing.

Readers will have the opportunity to learn more about these issues at the “Divided Societies, Volatile States: Conference on the Politics of Identity Post-Arab Spring” event being held at the Baker Institute on March 10, 2015. The conference’s panelists include experts on Iraq, Palestinian women in conflict, and secularism from both inside and outside the United States. Together, experts and participants will examine routes for scholarship on contested identities amid volatile times of social and political change in the MENA region. We invite you to come and join the discussion.

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Abstract

This study attempts to examine the impact of conflict on women’s formal and informal economic participation in the context of the 2003 Iraq War and the most recent conflict surrounding the rise of the Islamic State (IS or ISIS). It will first aggregate and review the existing literature regarding gender inequality, women’s formal and informal economic participation, social norms regarding female economic participation, and the impact of conflict on these matters. Subsequently, in the context of these conflicts, it seeks to assess the effects of the duration and intensity of a conflict on women’s economic participation. This report argues that the presence, longer duration, and greater intensity of conflict lead to increased female formal and informal economic participation. Specifically in the case of the MENA region, the greatest progress is made in the informal economic sector; institutional and societal barriers to women’s employment, although mitigated in times of conflict, still considerably restrict their formal economic involvement. The main explanations for this phenomenon lie in the reduction of the number of men in the labor force, a suspension of certain cultural beliefs in regard to women’s employment, an increase in governmental projects seeking to encourage women’s economic participation, and a surge in the number of households headed by women. Given that very little scholarly work has been conducted on the issue of conflict and women’s economic participation and none has been conducted on the effects of a conflict’s duration or intensity on women’s economic participation, this report will be an important addition to the literature.

Introduction

Gender issues pervade all sectors of society, regardless of the political, economic, or social framework; this is no different in the context of war and conflict. While men constitute the majority of physical casualties in conflicts, women also greatly suffer in ways that are often unnoticed or silenced. In times of war, women struggle to fulfill their duties as newly appointed primary familial leaders due to limited social services, diminished income, and an erosion of social networks. As such, while the issue of armed conflicts’ effects on women’s formal and informal economic participation has been scarcely examined, it is a matter that requires increased attention. This report offers a review of the literature on women and conflict before establishing and investigating a causal relationship between the presence, intensity, and duration of armed conflict and
women’s formal and informal economic participation in the case of the 2003 Iraq War and recent surge of the Islamic State. It will subsequently summarize findings and present concluding remarks before providing implications and suggestions for further research. Overall, the report finds that in times of conflict the predominance of male combatants depletes the labor force and thus creates a demand for employment that only women can fill. This necessity also leads to the suspension of certain cultural beliefs in regard to female employment and increased governmental projects to increase women’s economic participation. On a smaller level of analysis, women, which constitute a reserve army of labor, often become the primary heads of households and thus need to find additional income in the absence of their spouse.

**Literature Review**

A useful general framework for the study of the impact of armed conflict on women’s economic participation comes from World War II. In this regard, Claudia Goldin (2013, 1) remarks “women [in the United States] whose husbands were away during the war years had twice the employment rate in 1944 of those in the same age group whose husband were not away.” Explanations Goldin gives for this change revolve around the income effect (women’s husbands earned less in the armed forces than in their civilian occupations) and cultural reasons (husbands were often an impediment to a wife working for pay). As such, the authors claim that the 1940s was also a time during which various cultural norms were loosened, especially in regard to women’s role and status in society.

Building upon that claim, Donna Pankhurst (2007) argues that women have always played key roles during conflicts by carrying heavy socioeconomic burdens; since more women survive in the post-war phase, they also come to bear a greater relative burden in regard to the post-war reconstruction efforts. In times of conflict, household composition is likely to change as men leave and women often acquire greater responsibilities. Certain opportunities may also open for women as traditional attitudes are undermined by war and the conditions of personal and statal economic necessity that accompany it (Stewart 1997). In an updated version of her previous work, Frances Stewart (2010, 2) asserts that women frequently take on new roles during war “as men join the fighting, leaving jobs unfulfilled and losses in family incomes, for which women have to substitute.” The rates of female participation in the formal sector and the informal sector consequently drastically increase in times of conflict.

The three main explanations, from the existing literature, for increased female economic participation in times of conflict center on economic factors, cultural factors, and governmental factors. The explanations centering on economic factors claim that in times of conflict men are more likely to leave their households and occupation to go fight;
as such, there are fewer men in the labor force, more female–headed households, and greater opportunities for formal and informal female employment. Due to pure economic necessity, the women, who have often become the main provider and caretaker of their familial unit, need to join the labor force in order to supplant their husbands’ lost income. The justifications favoring cultural factors highlight the suspension of certain cultural beliefs in regard to women’s rights and position in society. While most men seem staunchly against female employment, when they are fighting—and thus less involved in the well-being of their family and their country’s economy—these cultural beliefs, some argue, are temporarily suspended, giving women the “right” to obtain employment. Finally, a third school of thought argues that governments, which recognize that an economic void needs to be filled, play an active role in increasing female labor force participation in times of armed conflict.

The topics of conflict and gender have always been important facets in the study of political science. Nonetheless, these terms take on a new meaning in the context of the Middle East and North Africa; the region—cited for its gender inequality, prevalent patriarchal societies, and frequent violent outbreaks—makes for a noteworthy and complex subject of analysis. The intersection of gender and the economy in the MENA region is among the most significant aspects of the subject area. The case of Iraq is even more unique due to the nature of the conflict in which the nation is involved, as well as the political, social, economic, and religious characteristics of the nation.

**Women’s Economic Participation**

With regard to employment in general terms, a World Bank report (2013) found that in the year 2012, the level of female participation in the labor force in the MENA region was at a worldwide low of 27 percent. The same report also found that labor–abundant, resource–rich countries such as Iraq tend to have even lower rates of formal economic participation. Unsurprisingly then, in 2012 Iraq had the third lowest female labor force participation rate in the region at 11 percent for married women and 18 percent for unmarried women (World Bank 2013). This phenomenon can be explained by the patriarchal nature of society, the centrality of the family as the main unit of society, the view of the male as the sole breadwinner, and an “unequal balance of power in the private sphere, which hinders female access to the public sphere” (World Bank 2004, 56). Also in 2012, the Iraqi public sector represented 58 percent of total employment for women and 32 percent of total employment for men. This comes as little surprise given

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1 According to Hamid (1995, 177), female–headed households are defined as ones in which “the female is the major provider and/or protector, carrier and bearer, and decision–maker in the household.” Furthermore, households may be classified into two broad categories: de jure and de facto. For Hamid (1995), de jure households can be defined as those with no male over 18 years of age present in the households; de facto households are those with male heads living or working outside the home and only occasionally visiting and with no other male relatives living permanently in the household. In all cases, if a male is present in some form or another, his contributions to household income need to be marginal. The women in female–headed households are widely believed to be more likely to participate in the economy due to their responsibility to provide for their family and thus have a necessity for income.
that it offers women 53 percent more earnings on an hourly basis than the private sector (World Bank 2013). For the women that remain in the private sector, 89 percent are self-employed. Given that these self-employed women are largely involved in small commerce and artisan activities and over 93 percent of them do not benefit from any form of social security, their businesses are often considered to be on the borderline between formal and informal economic activity.

Inadequate pathways for access to institutionalized economic activity for females coupled with antagonistic societal views leave many women who are in need of income constrained to working in the informal sector. Elsebeth Krogh (2009, 4) asserts, “women are still more likely than men to access low-paid, low-productivity, and vulnerable jobs with no basic rights, social protection, nor voice.” The fact that women’s jobs are concentrated in the informal economy is thus one of the major inhibiting factors in the attainment of female economic empowerment. There is little doubt that the average worker in the informal sector is largely disadvantaged compared to his or her counterpart in the formal sector. In terms of magnitude, Diego Angel-Urdinola (2012, 1) adds, “the size of the public sector and the size of the agriculture sector are perhaps the main determinants of informality in the MENA region.” For Robert Looney (2006), a safe estimate of the current size of the informal economy in Iraq is between 65 and 80 percent of the nation’s GDP.

Social and cultural norms play a central role in dictating everyday conduct; as such, these norms can impact the social, political, and economic participation of individuals. In Iraq (just like much of the MENA region), these norms generally place high value on women’s role within the home and family (World Bank 2013). Therefore, women’s primary sphere of influence is perceived to be within the home, whereas men are supposed to be the income-earners and decision-makers in the public sphere. On that matter, survey evidence from Iraq shows that, irrespective of marital status, women spend vastly more time on household chores and childcare than do men (World Bank 2013). Furthermore, analysis of focus group discussions reveals that gender norms surrounding women’s restricted mobility, household-care burdens, occupational segregation, and preferences for male kin all constrain female economic participation in Iraqi communities.

These societal attitudes are reflected by the fact that in 2008 “82 percent of people in the MENA region believed that if jobs are scarce, men should have preferential access to jobs” (World Bank 2004, 7). There seems to be a considerable fear that higher women’s employment will undoubtedly lead to higher unemployment rates—a fear that the World Bank report (2013) dismisses as a fallacy but nonetheless carries serious societal implications. The most recent World Value Survey (2004) conducted in Iraq confirmed the World Bank’s report and showed that, with no variation across employment status, 87.4 percent of males and 80.6 percent of females agree with the statement “men should have more right to a job than women.” Finally, marital status has been shown to affect the likelihood of labor force participation and the amount of time a woman spends
performing household tasks; marriage has been shown to lead to 25 percent lower employment levels among Iraqi women (World Bank 2013).

Many scholars, such as Mounira Charrad (2001), have linked this trend to widely accepted religious interpretations dictating that women should stay at home and be cared for by their husbands. Throughout modern political history, many observers have viewed Islam and the political systems of most MENA nations as inseparable entities. As such, it is not surprising that Islam becomes an inextricable component of many debates and perspectives concerning the nexus of politics, society, and gender in those countries. In her work, Charrad (2001) begins by asserting that in Islam, laws regulating social life represent an integral part of the religion itself; for her, being a Muslim inherently involves acquiescing to a system of laws. In other words, Charrad argues that Shari’a law is largely responsible for modeling the social and moral order of the Islamic world. She uses family law and its manifestations in the Quran as a window into gender and sex inequalities that are, according to her, although somewhat inherent in the text, truly legitimized and crystallized through the common acceptance of certain interpretations of this scripture. The interpretation of the Quran is thus often used as a tool to subordinate women to their husbands and male kin while privileging patrilineage over all other types of relationships. As such, men use these religious understandings to keep women at home and out of the public sphere and the labor force. These views are further buttressed by an objective reading of the Quran, which does state that men are the ones responsible for providing for and supporting their families. While this report does not expect the presence, duration, or intensity of conflict to influence religious interpretations, religious and cultural beliefs about female societal and economic roles have been temporarily suspended in times of necessity (brought about by conflict in the case of Iraq) (Stewart 2010). It is thus important to be aware of the nexus between religion and gender in Iraq and the MENA region in general.

At the largest level of analysis—the state of Iraq in this case—prevalent gender inequality undermines equity and impedes economic efficiency; as such, it hinders the development of the nation as a whole. When half of the population does not participate in the economy on a consistent basis, the nation’s entire economic apparatus is affected, and its full potential unfulfilled. The highest costs, however, are borne by the households that are headed and financially supported by women, for whom work outside the house often becomes necessary for survival.

When one factors the presence of conflict into these considerations, the climate concerning female economic participation is considerably altered. In times of war, given the shortage of males in the labor force, the Iraqi government has asked and encouraged women to fill public sector positions (World Bank 2013). In order to successfully do so, a number of recruitment campaigns have been developed in the country’s major cities. Flyers encouraging women to join the labor force have been distributed, and many government buildings have held “open houses” in order to show women how various public sector jobs are structured and invite them to apply for such positions (Krogh 2009).
In regard to the Iraqi conflicts themselves, the Heidelberg Institute (2013) coded the intensity of the 2003 Iraqi conflict, which began with the US invasion against the Ba’athist government of Saddam Hussein, as fluctuating between categories four and five, classifying it as a high-intensity violent confrontation or war. Most recently, the Islamic State (IS or ISIS), which grew out of Al-Qaeda in Iraq, has experienced a drastic surge in influence, attributed to the ongoing Syrian civil war and the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq. This new group seeking to create an Islamic State out of the Sunni areas in Iraq and Syria has added yet another dimension to conflict in the state; this most recent violent outbreak has been coded by the Heidelberg Institute as belonging to category three, classifying it as a crisis with sporadic use of violence (Lister 2014).

All of these conflicts engender a number of serious political, social, and economic consequences. This report seeks to specifically address “the immediate consequences of the conflict, and the reactions to these direct effects” in regard to the 2003 Iraq War as well as the current conflict surrounding the Islamic State (Stewart 1997, 17). According to Nadje Al-Ali (2005, 746) “the demographic cost of two wars, political repression, and the forced economic migration of men triggered by the imposition of international sanctions accounts for the high number of widows and female-headed households [in Iraq].” The women now heading these families experience a drastic increase in the amount of economic and social responsibilities they have. This change is best illustrated by the increase in female-headed households in Iraq due to the onset of conflict; in 1998, women headed 21 percent of households in the city of Basra compared to 60 percent in 2005 (Al-Ali 2005).

One of the few, if not the only, brief analyses of the gendering of the economy and its informal sector in the particular context of the Iraqi conflict comes from Nadje Al-Ali and Nicola Pratt’s 2009 book, Women and War in the Middle East. For these authors, conflict brings about the emergence of three new economies: coping economies seeking to ensure

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2 In regard to the intensity of armed conflict, this report will use the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research’s operationalization and measurement of conflict intensities. This measure codes conflict intensity as a discrete ordinal variable with five categories (“1” being lowest intensity and “5” being highest intensity). Category 1—latent conflict—is defined as such: “A positional difference over definable values of national meaning is considered to be a latent conflict if demands are articulated by one of the parties and perceived by the other as such” (Heidelberg 2008, i). Category 2—manifest conflict—is defined as one that “includes the use of measures that are located in the stage preliminary to violent force including, for example, verbal pressure, threatening explicitly with violence, or the imposition of economic sanctions” (Heidelberg 2008, i). Both categories 1 and 2 are considered as low intensity and nonviolent. Category 3—crisis—is defined as a “tense situation in which at least one of the parties uses violent force in sporadic incidents”; as such, it is considered as violent and of medium intensity (Heidelberg 2008, i). Category 4—severe crisis—is defined as the repeated use of violent force in an organized way and is thus qualified as violent and of high intensity. Finally, category 5—war—is defined as “a violent conflict in which violent force is used with a certain continuity in an organized and systematic way” (Heidelberg 2008, i). Additionally, wars are usually of longer duration, and the extent of destruction is typically massive. As such, category 5 conflicts are coded as violent and of high intensity. This report uses the Heidelberg measure, updated yearly since 1992, in order to determine the intensity of the conflict under analysis. It must be noted that in order to categorize conflicts the Heidelberg Institute analyzes weapons employment and type, number of personnel involved, casualties, refugees, destruction, and duration as factors. As opposed to applying the measure to conflicts of interest, this report will use the institute’s annually published categorization of all ongoing conflicts’ intensity.
survival and the reproduction of families and households (motivated by sheer survival), combat economies seeking to directly fund and supply fighters, and criminal economies which directly fund and supply conflict activities (Al–Ali and Pratt 2009). Overall, in times of conflict, to ensure the survival of the household, women seem to do the majority of informal work relating to the coping economies. The informal activities that constitute this sector range from “domestic or socially necessary and voluntary work (cash rarely exchanged and no regulatory institutions) to secondary ‘shadow and irregular’ activities where some form of enterprise and payment is expected, but regulation is either too difficult to enforce or avoided and evaded” (Al–Ali and Pratt 2009, 47). In her work for the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, Birgitte Refslund Sorensen (1998) adds that the informal sector proved to be of great importance to women’s livelihood in times of war. This type of work has also proved paramount in allowing these women to ensure the survival of the families that many of them have come to head due to the conflicts. Valentina Stoevska (2011, 5) of the Department of Statistics in the International Labour Office confirms that, for women, the main motive for participation in the informal economy is the “survival strategy.” She adds, however, that these women’s choices are restricted by the lack of other opportunities (access to education or waged employment for women has been significantly curtailed by war), barriers to formal employment, and the violence and insecurity brought about by the 2003 Iraqi war and the rise of ISIS currently.

As a result of these forces, Iraq’s informal economy has increased considerably since the American invasion in March 2003 (Looney 2006). The biggest increases “have been in the areas of small-scale urban services” with smaller increases “in agriculture and various small-scale industries” (Looney 2006). As reflected by the increase in small-scale urban services (artisanal production of goods, domestic services, etc.), women have undoubtedly made extensive use of the informal sector in order to support their families and mitigate the loss of a male kin or deteriorating living conditions during the wars that have ravaged Iraq.

From a broader angle, women seem to constitute a “reserve army of labor” in the MENA region; they serve primarily as temporary labor reserves that respond to occasional demand created by events such as natural disasters or conflict (Jennings 1994, 12). In turn, this volatility of labor and lack of stability drastically increases the vulnerability of individual women in society, especially those that need to support entire households. Additionally, it decreases the value of their work, further undermining their role in society.

3 A good definition of the informal sector comes from the work of Mirjana Markovic (2009, 2); she claims that the informal sector of the economy “consists of unregistered companies which continually employ other people who work without contract and without right to social and retirement protection.” In other words, the informal sector is a sector of the economy in which regulations are avoided and employees do not benefit from legal or economic protection. Markovic (2009) claims that the informal sector, just like the broader economy, especially in the MENA region, is heavily influenced by the gender division of labor and the difference in control over resources between men and women, as well as the broader social and economic structure of a certain society. Gender occupational segregation not only operates on a horizontal plane, but also on a vertical one.
In Iraq, this string of conflicts has also impacted the cultural and social fabric of the nation; even in the highly patriarchal MENA region, cultural beliefs about female societal roles and appropriate labor participation become temporarily suspended in times of necessity, brought about by conflict. In support of this argument, the Austrian Development Cooperation (2009) found in its report on the intersection of gender and armed conflict that during an armed conflict, women take the responsibility and strain of keeping the family together; many of the barriers to the empowerment of women are eroded by conflict, and cultural beliefs about females are temporarily suspended. As such, the views and beliefs of many males—whether they were community leaders, relatives, or other—became more tolerant of female economic participation. This is due to the absence of males or the recognition that the financial necessity of many families could not otherwise be satisfied. Nonetheless, in phases of post-war reconstruction, pre-war gender attitudes are once again adopted; women tend to be neglected as gender issues are ignored and employment schemes become largely redirected toward men (Stewart 2010).

The last facet of war’s impact on women’s economic participation in Iraq relates to the actions of the government. In times of war, especially when the nation as a whole is in conflict, the government, once again recognizing the void in economic productivity engendered by the loss of men to conflict, temporarily promotes female employment. Suad Joseph argues that “the official women’s organizations [in Iraq] pursue goals set by the state: increasing women’s participation in the work force when, as during the Iran–Iraq war, there were labor shortages” (Graham–Brown 2001, 26). This is a phenomenon that was repeated in the conflict that began in 2003; the governments that succeeded Saddam Hussein’s regime launched a number of campaigns that encouraged women’s employment and even reserved a number of positions within the civil service and the public sector for females (Al–Ali and Pratt 2009). In times of war, “the glorification of a militarized masculinity coincided with the glorification of the Iraqi mother” (Al–Ali and Pratt 2009, 45); this new Iraqi mother is portrayed as one who supports her family and brings income to the household. Nonetheless, as stated above, once the war is over, it would not be surprising to witness a return to pre-war attitudes toward gender and thus exclude women from economic participation once again.

This pattern of government intervention, present in the 2003 conflict (in which the enemy, Saddam Hussein, was well known to the people of Iraq and to the Western invading forces), seems to be less applicable to the current situation involving the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq. Unlike most local and transnational jihadist organizations that seek to confront the West or topple existing regimes, the IS’s primary goal is the establishment of “a state that bears its thoughts and beliefs” (RCSS 2014). The group recently traded its positive measures, which included cooperation with the country’s main tribal figures and providing social welfare programs to Sunni populations, in favor of the imposition of rigid Sharia law in the regions it controls. As such, in these areas, its policies have negatively impacted the already-suffering women, many of whom are frequently harassed, threatened, and even taken (Blumenfeld 2014). The Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq even claims that its focus has shifted from “legal work and
improving rights of women to working in a state of emergency and trying to [get women] to safety” (Lister 2014). Despite the presence of similar conditions as in the 2003 conflict (loss of male heads of households, disproportionate male death rates due to war, increase in female–headed households, etc.), the religious aspect of the Islamic State will certainly pose a great threat to women’s ability to receive any income from employment in the formal or informal sectors.

Conclusions

This report has analyzed the impact of the presence, length, and intensity of conflict on the formal and informal economic participation of women in the case of the most recent war in Iraq. Overall, the three hypotheses were confirmed; the presence of, increased duration of, and increased intensity of conflict in Iraq all contribute to higher levels of female economic involvement, especially in the informal sector. In times of war, when many males become full–time combatants, a shortage of labor arises. As such, women are the ones who are often called upon to fulfill this temporary shortage. Recognizing this need for female employment, certain cultural beliefs relating to the role of women in society appear to be suspended; during conflict, the Iraqi patriarchal elites digressed from their traditional views on women and their appropriate primary responsibilities in order to justify an increase in female employment and satisfy a demand of national importance.

Simultaneously, the government of Iraq, an entity that strongly ascribes to patriarchy, also created a number of programs and initiatives in order to encourage higher levels of female employment.

On a smaller level of analysis, many women whose close male kin are engaged in the conflict as combatants—and thus can no longer fulfill their duties as primary caretakers—find themselves economically and physically responsible of their family. Consequently, faced with a drastically reduced household income, these women need to find occupations in order to ensure the survival of their family. While a fraction of them is assisted by their extended kin and thus can continue to stay at home, this is not the case for the majority of Iraqi females. Additionally, many of the cultural and moral constraints placed on women by their husbands are eroded once the latter leave and the households become female–headed. Seemingly, the increased levels of violence do not deter women from entering the work force in times of need. In the aggregate, women constitute a reserve army of labor that is only called upon in times of need; when such need arises, the necessary social and cultural modifications are made by the elites in order to justify temporary changes to the nation’s economic fabric. Finally, it must be noted that conflict is the phenomenon that indubitably creates the greatest shortage in the labor force and thus the greatest need.

Implications and Recommendations

It is only since the passage of UN Resolution 1325 dealing with the notion of mainstreaming gender issues in conflict that “the international community has given attention to the impact of war on women and the role of women in peace–building and
conflict resolution” (Al-Ali 2009). While men constitute the majority of casualties in wars and conflicts, these processes can also have severely negative impacts on women’s lives, “as they struggle to maintain households in a context of limited basic services, restricted income-generation activities, and dismantling of social networks” (Al-Ali 2009, 2). It is thus extremely important to gain a better understanding of the effects of conflicts on women in order to subsequently better address their specific needs and more effectively mitigate these damaging consequences. In turn, better understanding of women in conflict as well as the shifts that occur in their economic roles is central to analyzing the nexus of gender and issues of nationalism, citizenship, nation-building, post-conflict reconstruction, transnationalism, and peace-building. The overarching goal should be to provide women with security and peace, defined by Al-Ali and Pratt as “the fair distribution of resources to enable people’s access to livelihoods and to ensure political and social justice regardless of gender, race, class, religion” (Al-Ali 2009, 19).

In times of peace, there is no doubt that Iraqi women face myriad barriers in attaining positions in the formal or informal sector. Many certainly lack the skills and training, religious groups impose a number of constraints, and credit limitations impact the running of small businesses in the informal sector. During conflict, these barriers evolve as some of the existing ones are eroded and new ones, such as safety concerns, arise. Given that conflict is a time when it is essential for many Iraqi women to find a source of income, it is necessary to understand these changes and adopt certain steps to facilitate the process. While informal economies have thus far been the easiest and most effective manner for Iraqi women to receive income in times of peace and—most importantly—in times of conflict, the informal sector presents a number of challenges and hazards. An elevated degree of economic informality signifies that the country’s population is at risk of economic instability; lower occupational security and stability; and increased safety, health, and environmental risks, as well as the emergence of criminal activity.

For Looney (2006, 15), “what [ultimately] happens to women in the coping/informal sector will largely be controlled by developments in the formal sector, as well as the growing power of religious groups.” Building on that point, Looney asserts that higher rates of economic growth, or even a lessening of the insurgency with increased reconstruction efforts, “will not result in a significant decline in the size of Iraq’s informal economy in the near term” (Looney 2006, 15). As such, there are a number of more policy-centered measures available to stop and reverse the expansion of the informal economy and provide the women of Iraq with better alternatives. These include “improved governance, especially improving the rule of law and anti-corruption measures, specific tax policies that would keep them low, [and improving] macroeconomic stability” (Looney 2006, 15). Finally, an expanded social net, constructed with the aid of local, national, regional, and international partners could provide short run security for the most vulnerable (Looney 2006).
As the growth of the IS illustrates, very serious dangers can also arise after a conflict has waned—in phases of post-war reconstruction. During such periods, nations are often fragile and present power vacuums that facilitate the rise of extremist groups and future conflicts. It is also in the post-conflict environment that pre-war gender attitudes are once again adopted and women lose all of the gains they made in times of war (Stewart 2010). Given the prevalence of conflict and the preexisting patriarchal structures in the Middle East and North Africa region along with the importance of improving the status of women, it is essential to understand the changes that can be made to reconstruction processes in order to avoid such nefarious consequences. A better understanding of women in conflict, as well as the shifts that occur in their status and roles, is central to analyzing the nexus of gender and issues of nationalism, citizenship, nation-building, post-conflict reconstruction, and peace-building (Pankhurst 2007).

In general, what also needs to be emphasized in terms of future recommendations is that involving women in the reconstruction of Iraq, after conflicts end, will not simply be a matter of what Nadje Al-Ali (2005, 476) has termed “just add women and stir.” The reconstruction of Iraq needs to include a “gender perspective in line with UN Resolution 1325, which acknowledges the importance of the inclusion of women and mainstreaming gender into all aspects of post-conflict resolution and peace operations” (Al-Ali 2005, 756). Unlike what has happened in Palestine, Iraqi women should not situate gender-specific issues within—and to a large extent secondary to—the nationalist struggle; doing so would erode their ability to articulate and engender social change (Al-Ali 2009). Contrastingly, the mainstreaming of gender would have to involve the appointment of women to post-conflict governments on a significant scale. Women would also have to be present and active “in the judiciary, policing, human rights monitoring, the allocation of funds, free media development, and all economic processes” (Al-Ali 2005, 477). Finally, both the new administration and foreign actors should support the creation of women’s groups, NGOs, and community-based organizations (Al-Ali 2005). Only through the effective implementation of such measures will women ensure that the economic, social, and political sacrifices and gains they have made in times of war will carry through to times of peace.
Appendix

Model
Presence, intensity, and duration of armed conflict → women’s formal and informal economic participation

Hypotheses
H₁: The presence of armed conflict will increase women’s formal and informal economic participation.

H₂: The greater the intensity of an armed conflict, the greater women’s formal and informal economic participation.

H₃: The longer the duration of an armed conflict, the greater women’s formal and informal economic participation.

Graphic Representation of the Model
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RCSS (The Regional Center for Strategic Studies). 2014. “Can ISIS Establish A State In Iraq And Syria?” The Regional Center for Strategic Studies.


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Housing Dilemmas for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon
by Elbert Ahmad Giron Jr.

Abstract

Since the civil war began in Syria in March 2011, many Syrian citizens have fled the violence by traveling to neighboring countries. Lebanon currently has 1.14 million Syrian refugees, more than any other Middle Eastern country. 1 Although the government of Lebanon and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have provided support in the forms of direct financial assistance, housing programs, and specialized field teams, the refugees’ needs still exceed the available aid. The majority of refugees are women and children, and they are primarily from families opposed to President Bashar al-Assad’s regime. Over half of Syrian refugees are children under the age of 18, and many live in female-headed households.2 These refugees face a myriad of obstacles, but one major issue that has received less attention— but is becoming more pronounced—is the accessibility and affordability of the housing market. The availability of housing was already an issue in Lebanon, but the problem has been exacerbated by the influx of Syrian refugees. Official documents from the Lebanese government as well as various NGO reports demonstrate the complications that arise when Syrian refugees seek housing. A stronger collaboration and better communication between NGOs and Lebanon’s government regarding legislation, serviced communities, and housing initiatives would better accommodate the needs of Syrian refugees and alleviate financial strain for the institutions that service them.

Introduction

Civil unrest gripped Syria following the Arab Spring and has continued for three years. Anti-government protests led the regime to crack down violently, which in turn fueled the beginnings of a civil war between government forces and various rebel groups. The ascension of President Bashar al-Assad’s regime and consequent human rights violations against Syrian citizens have spurred a mass exodus from the country. Many refugees fled to the surrounding countries of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon.3 Three million have fled the country since the violence started, and with the progression of the

conflict, it is feasible that these figures will continue to increase. This upsurge has begun to burden many countries in the Arab world that are accommodating refugees from Syria. Lebanon has been hit the hardest fiscally by these rising numbers.

Numerous NGOs have stepped in to assist with the refugee crisis under the guidance of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), including the Danish Refugee Council, the Norwegian Refugee Council, Oxfam, and Medair. However, UNHCR’s monetary recommendations have not been fully granted, and the Lebanese government remains only somewhat cooperative. This is reminiscent of the government’s attitude when it faced a massive Palestinian refugee influx.

In 1948, Lebanon opened its borders to thousands of Palestinians who sought refuge in the country during the Arab–Israeli War. Although the government allowed these refugees in, they were not allowed the same freedoms as the citizens of Lebanon. By law, only Lebanese citizens are allowed to vote and work in jobs that require specialized training, leaving Palestinians no choice but to work in unskilled labor. Furthermore, fearing that Palestinians could destroy the country’s delicate political atmosphere and sectarian balance, Lebanon implemented laws prohibiting permanent settlements for Palestinian refugees. Essentially, Lebanon accepted Palestinian refugees into the country but imposed many restrictions on them that limit their ability to live comfortably. A similar situation faces the Syrian population in relation to the housing crisis. Old legislation regarding Palestinian refugees is still in effect, bleeding into the rights of Syrian refugees today.

Affordability and Access

Prior to the Syrian refugee influx, Lebanon was already facing a housing crisis created by a lack of affordable housing coupled with rising rental and mortgage prices and high unemployment rates. The Lebanese government found it difficult to ensure quality and affordable housing for its citizens, let alone noncitizens. Housing and rent are huge obstacles for Syrian refugees. While the Norwegian Refugee Council’s (NRC) recommendation is to allocate 30 percent of expenses for rent, Syrian families spend

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6 Ibid., 31.
7 Ibid., 32.
90 percent of their monthly income on rent.\textsuperscript{11} Many families that are currently renting live in single housing units that face overcrowding—conditions that are not suitable for families. These conditions are detrimental in regard to sanitation, safety, and the mental health of refugees. In Lebanon, even after rent, food, medicine, and other costly expenses are covered, a majority of refugees still need greater shelter assistance. The assistance that is provided is usually for a limited time period due to limited funding and program cycles.\textsuperscript{12}

A majority of the refugees living in Lebanon are renting houses. In Tripoli, 72 percent are renting, while 28 percent are being hosted by Lebanese families. In Akkar, 56 percent are living in rented accommodation, and 44 percent are living with Lebanese host families.\textsuperscript{13} This is troubling because the figures indicate that many refugees are not procuring permanent residences and are having trouble establishing a stable foundation in Lebanon. In both Tripoli and Akkar, monthly rent is between $200 and $400 USD; in Beirut, it is upwards of $600 USD. Average monthly income is $250 in Lebanon; however, in Akkar the average is $86 and $547 in Beirut.\textsuperscript{14} Because of this drastic imbalance in rent and income, refugees cannot afford to save for unforeseen expenses or invest in better living arrangements. Spending in Beirut is on average $580 per month and in Akkar $359 per month. Although monthly salaries and cost of living are varied throughout Lebanon, these figures consistently represent a monthly gap of $274 a month for other expenditures per household across the board.\textsuperscript{15}

These figures do not take female-headed households into account. Women have a harder time finding and maintaining employment because of their gender. This is more pronounced if there is not a man within the family. Rahel, a migrant worker from Ethiopia, spoke out about the treatment of refugee women in the workplace: “If they speak up or complain, their employers can easily throw them in jail for ‘theft’ or ‘violent behavior.’ No one investigates and no one cares. I know one girl who has been in jail for nine years because her employer claims she stole a pair of earrings.”\textsuperscript{16} This is just one example of how refugees and migrant women are treated in the workplace in Lebanese society, which makes it harder for them to achieve upward mobility and secure a job that can financially provide for their household. Housing prospects are just as dismal for women who maintain employment. Female-headed households are more likely to stay in rental agreements and face unequal power dynamics when negotiating with landlords.

\textsuperscript{11} Norwegian Refugee Council, “NRC’s Syria Refugee Response,” accessed October 13, 2014, \url{http://www.nrc.no/syriaresponse+VF_A0vnF9d8}.
\textsuperscript{12} Norwegian Refugee Council, “NRC Lebanon Fact Sheet,” accessed October 14, 2014, \url{http://www.nrc.no/arch/_img/9186679.pdf}.
\textsuperscript{13} Danish Refugee Council, \textit{DRC Annual Report 2013}, April 24, 2014, \url{http://drc.dk/about_drc/facts_about_drc/annual-reports/?elID=dam_frontend_push&docID=14568}.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 17.
Rental agreements are cumbersome because refugees are usually unfamiliar with legislation regarding refugee rights and eviction procedures in Lebanon. This can lead to refugees being victims of rent gauging, unfair eviction procedures, and illegal housing procedures. Households headed by a male are more likely to stay with family or friends rather than renting. A slightly higher percentage of female refugees live in shops and warehouses than their male counterparts.\footnote{Ibid., 18.}

Access to housing is problematic for refugees because programs such as the Public Corporation for Housing (PCH), a partnership between the government and local private banks in order to guarantee low-interest loans for Lebanese nationals, are only offered to Lebanese citizens. Furthermore, refugees cannot offer guarantees for loan approval—they spend too much of their savings on rent and the cost of travel to Lebanon. Refugees searching for housing rely on established social networks, but some do not have a network readily available to help them.\footnote{UNHCR and UN-Habitat, \textit{Housing, Land, and Property Issues In Lebanon: Implications of the Syrian Refugee Crisis}, August 2014, \url{http://unhabitat.org/housing-land-and-property-issues-in-lebanon-implications-of-the-syrian-refugee-crisis-august-2014/}.} Refugees may choose to elect a camp representative (always a male) known as a \textit{shaweesh}, who arrives in Lebanon before the others to “negotiate access to land with the property owner, ensuring price stability, and managing payment of the rent.”\footnote{Ibid., 13.} While awaiting access to housing, families stay in informal settlements made of makeshift materials. NGOs have attempted to install transitional access points in these settlements, but these lack governmental approval due to previous policies that were enforced during the influx of Palestinian refugees in the 1940s.\footnote{Ibid.} The Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) has selectively sanctioned a small number of settlements as access points, but there is not enough space to accommodate refugees with average monthly rates of registrations exceeding 100,000.\footnote{Ibid.} It can take a substantial amount of time for services to be rendered according to individual household needs.

\section*{Shelter Conditions}

When private housing is unattainable, refugees reside in shelters that usually do not provide suitable living conditions. Security and sanitation issues can then lead to increased monthly expenses when families have to tend to sick children or dangerous situations resulting from the lack of proper building construction. Medair conducted 607 technical assessments, 444 of Syrian refugee dwellings. They encountered many problems with housing infrastructure and structural issues in their housing accommodations, such as missing windows and leaking roofs.\footnote{Medair, \textit{Medair 2013 Annual Report}, June 1, 2014, \url{http://relief.medair.org/assets/uploads/documents/MedairAnnualReport2013.pdf}.} Rural areas may face worse housing conditions due to the lack of resources nearby. This also means that it takes longer to receive aid in

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\end{itemize}}
the form of structural upgrades. In Akkar, the common household is a single room with a
bathroom and a kitchen with single rooms subdivided so that multiple families can reside
in the household. This layout is also seen throughout Lebanon, even in major cities such
as Beirut. Inside these dwellings, problems such as minimal lighting, lack of ventilation,
and cracks in the building foundations are common in Beirut, where the concentration of
refugees is higher due to limited space.

Since many refugees do not have access to housing, informal settlements have been created
to accommodate the surplus of refugees. These settlements generally consist of makeshift
structures and are situated far from health and housing services, rendering them harder
to access. A substantial number of the refugee population—29 percent—live in this type of
arrangement. An additional 25 percent live in unfinished or substandard buildings, and
57 percent live in unfinished apartments or houses. This translates to a lack of security
and protection from authorities, resulting in a higher occurrence of violence, which is a
particular threat to refugee women. Responsibility for these issues falls to NGOs, because
the Lebanese government has been slow to grant more housing sanctions.

International Law versus Lebanon’s Constitution

Lebanon became a member of the United Nations in 1945 and is therefore legally bound
to accept and carry out the obligations of the UN Charter. Lebanon’s constitution does
not require it to grant Syrians asylum or citizenship, but the UN charter does under
Article 14(1): “Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from
persecution.” The preamble of the UN’s Declaration of Rights (Section B) declares that
Lebanon is “also a founding active member of the United Nations Organization and abides
by its covenants and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Government
shall embody these principles in all fields and areas without exception.” As a member
of the UN, Lebanon must also abide by Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of
Human Rights, which states that every person has the right to enjoy a standard of living
that provides for basic necessities such as “food, clothing, housing, ... medical care, and
necessary social services.” The preamble of Lebanon’s constitution further establishes
that “There shall be no segregation of the people on the basis of any type of belonging, and

23 Ibid., 22.
24 UNHCR and UN-Habitat, Housing, Land, and Property Issues, 56–57.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 16.
This article was created to provide for refugees that entered Lebanon during the Israeli-Palestinian conflict prior to 1990. The article applies to the present-day Syrian refugees as well.

However, the Lebanese constitution states that the government of Lebanon will not recognize Syrian refugees as citizens. Therefore, Syrian refugees have not been granted the same housing rights and privileges as Lebanon’s citizens. For example, they are unable to access basic services (including some pertinent to housing), work legally, or obtain marriage and birth credentials. Although Lebanon is not obligated by the constitution to offer citizenship to Syrian refugees, the UN’s Human Rights Charter clearly states that they must provide refugees with basic necessities, including housing. Due to constitutional law, however, it is almost impossible for a non-Lebanese resident to procure housing without citizenship.

Avenues to resolve this discrepancy already exist. Although Lebanon is an active member of the UN, it has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention. This convention defines what a refugee is, their rights, and the obligations that countries must adhere to in their treatment of refugees. Article 21 of this text concerns the ability of refugees to acquire adequate housing. As a member of the UN, Lebanon is expected to recognize this document and adhere to its policies in order to maintain membership.

Lebanon and Syria signed the Lebanon-Syria Treaty of Cooperation in 1991, which stated that peoples of both countries could move about freely without any laws that would restrict them from moving in or out of either country. Lebanon adheres to this policy by allowing Syrians to enter without restriction, but in order to secure the rights granted under the agreement, Syrian identification must be presented to officials in Lebanon. This may be problematic for Syrians who have been subject to multiple displacements or have not yet registered with the UNHCR, as well as refugees whose documentation is lost or destroyed.

**Regulatory Housing Laws at the National Level**

The Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) coordinates with the UN and other international organizations on the Population and Development Program and oversees the Corporation for Public Housing (PCH). All central and municipal legislation must go through MoSA first. Although there are no government programs geared towards helping low-income households finance housing costs via incentives or grants, the

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31 The Lebanese Constitution, Preamble.
35 Ibid.
PCH works directly with MoSA and private banks to secure loans.\textsuperscript{36} These loans are only granted to Lebanese residents and are contingent on many factors, such as age, collateral, and income. They do not assist refugees in obtaining housing. Housing prices in Lebanon are steadily rising, which makes it harder to find temporary housing while also saving money with the goal of purchasing a permanent residence. The Displacement Fund, created in 1993, could help lighten this burden. The fund was established after the Civil War to rebuild rundown neighborhoods and encourage expatriates to return to Lebanon.\textsuperscript{37} If altered to include Syrian nationals, the Displacement Fund could be used as a basis for incentivizing low-income refugees to move into these neighborhoods and contribute to the overall maintenance of these areas, while at the same time improving the housing market in Lebanon.

\textbf{NGO Response}

The Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center (CLMC) is one of a few local NGOs working to alleviate the strain on the Lebanese government. CLMC works collectively with the Lebanese government via 13 embassy representatives throughout the country. It also has an outreach program to educate the general populace about the rights of refugees in order to destigmatize various migrant groups and change negative mindsets.\textsuperscript{38} Their target is migrant workers, refugees, and asylum seekers. They have four main goals: 1) improve living and working conditions; 2) reduce exploitation, marginalization, and exclusion; 3) defend migrants at all levels of government; and 4) raise awareness among the Lebanese and migrants about their rights and responsibilities.\textsuperscript{39} The CLMC employs accredited social workers, lawyers, and other professionals to offer professionalized services to migrants and refugees in Lebanon, which serve as useful resources in all aspects of assimilation into Lebanese society.\textsuperscript{40}

Since the CLMC is aware of the current housing situation, it maintains three shelters, with two available to women. The Safe House is dedicated to the protection and safety of women who have been trafficked across regions in the Middle East. It also provides support systems in the form of psychological and repatriation services. The Shelter Lakesetha exclusively caters to migrant women and their children.\textsuperscript{41} The Beth Aleph program gives refugee

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\item \textsuperscript{36} Bank Audi Sal, “Bank Audi Sal,” accessed October 18, 2014.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center, “About Us,” accessed October 16, 2014, \url{http://english.caritasmigrant.org.lb/about}.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center, “Objectives,” accessed October 16, 2014, \url{http://english.caritasmigrant.org.lb/about/objectives}.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center, “Our Action,” accessed October 19, 2014, \url{http://english.caritasmigrant.org.lb/our-action}.
\end{itemize}
children a chance to attend school from ages 3 to 12, since households often cannot afford to send their child to school or take their children out of school to work and contribute to family expenses.42

The CLMC is not the only NGO that works with refugees in cooperation with the Lebanese government. The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) specializes in direct assistance. They provide shelter and protection while encouraging community development through housing initiatives and outreach. The DRC created a shelter program in Lebanon that aims “to provide beneficiaries and host communities with a dignified and safe living environment. The shelter team identifies, assesses, and rehabilitates preexisting unfinished or uninhabited building in collaboration with local actors and authorities.”43 After their initial assessment of living conditions, the DRC sends a team known as the Collection Center Management (CCM) to ensure that refugees receive adequate social services and provide periodic updates about the serviced communities. In addition to providing shelters, the DRC has a division that helps maintain and upgrade substandard living conditions. In order to achieve this, it works alongside MoSa and the UNHCR so that it can properly allocate resources to communities.44 This aid is crucial for the well-being of many refugees. One refugee from Syria stated, “The assistance my family and I received from DRC has been more we could have asked for.”45 Funding for these projects is provided by a wide array of private and public entities, but the majority of DRC’s funding comes directly from the UNHCR.46 The DRC has a program to provide specific services for women and children. Abaad, an NGO in Lebanon that works with the DRC, created two halfway houses in the Bekka region and Tripoli for survivors of gender-based violence. Both halfway houses also provide women with a forum so that they can speak freely about their experience. Within this division are “awareness and counseling sessions, workshops, and livelihood trainings to empower women and help build coping mechanisms.”47 The DRC promotes the successful integration of families into Lebanese society by offering support from their protective team and child-friendly spaces in their community development division.48

Recommendations

Even though many NGOs are currently working with the Lebanese government to provide services to refugees, there is a great need for a streamlined communication system between organizations. The UNHCR and Lebanese authorities should broaden their outreach system in order for refugees to report unlivable or unsafe situations and to document and regulate

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
48 Ibid., 36.
situations that are conducive to a safe or secure environment. This would keep Lebanese authorities accountable and draw attention to the challenges that many refugees face in order for organizations to decide how to improve services for their communities. For example, in rural areas, refugees lack structural housing (such as concrete housing) and mainly live in informal settlements, while in Beirut, refugees have some structural needs met but still lack essential services like water sanitation.

Policymakers should develop a database for refugees in individual cities. The database could start with the information available in international organizations’ annual reports, which could serve as a quantitative basis for resource allocation. Once that has been established, the organizations that choose to participate would then document their studies of communities in the collective database, making it easier for organizations to specialize in specific areas and not expend resources on areas that other organizations are already addressing. This database would also help governments allocate money to certain areas of infrastructure (i.e., health, sanitization, and education).

Another strategy would use NGO accommodations solely as short-term transitional housing and begin to integrate formal low-income housing for refugees in areas that need improvement. National and central legislation need to work more cohesively with NGOs so that housing can accommodate the rising influx of refugees. The number of refugees coming from Syria is rising every year.49 Instead of addressing this issue in the short term, policymakers in Lebanon should develop and implement better legislation at the national level. According to the NRC, “limited development assistance for shelter has been rolled out due to absence of national housing strategies, needed to address chronic short-falls in adequate housing which have been severely compound by the refugee influx.”50 Securing these housing opportunities can help to regulate rent prices and even out competition in the real estate market.

Providing low-income housing in Lebanon could potentially boost the money coming into the Lebanese economy in the long term. This, in turn, would give government entities more monetary resources for enhancing the Lebanese housing market (improved infrastructure, market rates, reduced inflation, etc.). According to the NRC, Syrian refugees contribute an estimated minimum monthly amount of $73.7 million to the Lebanese economy. This figure only reflects an estimated number of refugees paying for rent in finished apartments—not those in informal settlements and refugee communities. If the government allows refugees to live in neighborhoods that need development and provides housing at a reduced cost, the refugees will revive these areas and eventually create money-making institutions such as businesses, resulting in higher property values in the long term. By regulating low-income housing accommodations, the government can simultaneously reduce the number of illegal refugee camps in Lebanon, which would also generate revenue via taxes and fees.

50 Ibid.
Government agencies should also accommodate special circumstances such as women-headed households. This would ensure that women do not get unfair treatment in rental prices and negotiations. By working with NGOs and implementing the proposed streamlined communication initiatives, all organizations would have access to information regarding specific families and their needs. Using the data, they could also document instances of gender-based violence based on statistics and monitor/regulate communities in order to prevent future crimes against women from occurring. Having authorities present and holding communities accountable can help prevent the violence against women.51

Conclusion

The Lebanese government and NGOs are working together to accommodate Syrian refugees, whose number continues to grow at an unprecedented rate since the outbreak of the civil war in 2011. However, their efforts fall short due to a combination of limited resources and lack of a communication system. Another major concern is that Lebanon’s constitution is not in line with the policies and the responsibilities it accepted when it joined the United Nations. There must be greater efforts to clearly define the role that both parties should undertake in future dealings with Syrian refugees.

Furthermore, governmental agencies such as MoSA and the DGU need more decision-making power so that changes can also be made at the local level without the red tape of going through various channels. NGOs that are based locally should also work closely with these institutions as the liaison between refugees and local authorities. This could funnel resources specifically to programs that communities need the most. For example, if a highly concentrated area in Beirut is facing large numbers of forced evictions, it would be wise for MoSA to send someone educated on tenants’ rights to a local NGO in order to inform refugees of steps that they can take to maintain their residence.

Though space is limited in Lebanon due to the size of the country, there are areas in underdeveloped neighborhoods that refugees can occupy. As the refugees begin to populate and develop these areas, it will raise the value of the neighborhoods. This can be accomplished by making these housing agencies state-run by the Lebanese government, so it can lower the cost of rent for Syrian refugees to live there. It would provide an alternative to informal settlements and bring in revenue to the Lebanese economy. These housing initiatives should also incorporate female-headed households as a factor. If the state were to provide housing, it would be less likely that women would face discrimination in unfair rental prices. NGOs or governmental employees could also periodically check in on families that reside in state housing units, which would serve as a means to track gender-based violence and other trends within the community.

The influx of refugees entering Lebanon does not have to be a strain on the economy—it can be used to revitalize old neighborhoods and give Lebanon a well-needed economic boost. In order to do so, these reforms must be implemented in national legislation and among NGOs.

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