

HIGHLIGHTS

- The needs of persons with disabilities outstrip rehabilitation services and mental healthcare.
- Brussels Conference pledges US \$6 billion for Syria response in 2017; US \$3.7 billion for 2018.
- UN Humanitarian Envoy visits the Bekaa and calls for urgent international support.
- NGO brings hope to at-risk youth in Wadi Khaled.

FIGURES

(As of 27 April 2017)

# of estimated refugees	1,500,000
# of registered refugees	1,011,366
52.1 % ♀ 47.9 % ♂ 53 % 👤	
# of returnees	35,000
# of Palestine Refugees from Syria (PRS)	32,000
# of Palestine Refugees from Lebanon (PRL)	277,985
# of vulnerable Lebanese	1,500,000
Total Lebanese population	4,400,000

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Syrian refugee children in the Bekaa. Source: OCHA

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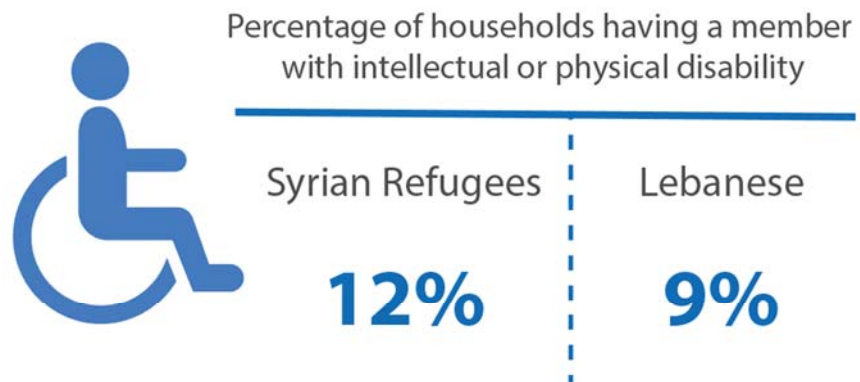
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In this issue, we put the spotlight on the stark challenges facing people with disabilities in Lebanon and the wide-ranging efforts underway to improve living conditions for these vulnerable communities. We also assess the outcome of the Brussels Conference on Syria, with an overview of the progress achieved since last year's London Conference. Finally, our issue tells a story of youth engagement in the deprived region of Wadi Khaled.

Supporting the disabled

Protracted crisis in Lebanon exacerbates risks for persons with disabilities

Persons with physical and mental disabilities, especially women and children, are at high risk of violence, exploitation, discrimination and exclusion. In Lebanon – where these risks are exacerbated by the protracted emergency setting and the insufficient number of targeted interventions – they are one of the most vulnerable population groups in the country.



9 out of **10** disabled children do not attend school in Lebanon 

Source: VaSYR 2016

Tailoring the response

In response to these challenges, the 2017-2020 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) prioritizes assistance for persons with disabilities, with an emphasis on tailoring services to their special needs in programming. For that purpose, a Disability and Older Age Working group has been established as part of the Protection Sector to coordinate advocacy and visibility for disability issues; the working group covers both communities because persons with disabilities and older persons face many similar challenges related to mobility,

accessibility and inclusion. The Protection Sector also tracks progress made at the level of people with disabilities, identifies and fills gaps, and ensures that proper case management is in place.

Despite a gap in the available data on disability in Lebanon, local and international partners have been able to set priorities and to provide a range of services to people with disabilities in the country, both refugees and vulnerable Lebanese. Services include prosthetic and orthotic devices; rehabilitation aids and supplies; physical/occupational therapy; hearing aids and basic speech therapy; medical eyeglasses; psycho-social support; awareness; vocational training; support in advocacy, engagement and empowerment; inclusive education support; and some technical support.

While overall countrywide figures are not available, particularly among Syrian refugees, 2016 highlights include the NGO Arcenciel assisting 16,254 persons with various types of disabilities (including 827 Syrians); the World Rehabilitation Fund assisting 769 people with physical disabilities and sensory impairments (including 590 Syrians); ICRC assisting 448 physically disabled and injured persons (including 378 Syrians); and UNRWA assisting 310 students with disabilities through an inclusive education approach and 136 students with scholarships to special education centers, in addition to the provision of rehabilitation therapy to 220 Palestinians with disabilities and the provision of assistive devices to 238 Palestinian refugees. Other disability interventions include projects by Handicap International, Movement for Peace, the Lebanese Physical Handicapped Union and others. A major assistance gap remains in targeting persons with intellectual disabilities, particularly among refugees.

In the coming year, the Protection Sector will continue to enhance inclusivity and nondiscrimination of programmes and ensure that all barriers – physical and those linked to capacities of service providers – are removed through capacity-building and necessary adjustments to programmes. UNICEF is also supporting plans for 2017-18 to implement a disability inclusion approach in education, vocational training and WASH projects, and to produce a study on children with disabilities as well as a survey on social norms and attitudes toward them.

The Government and organizations need to invest more in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities and facilitating their access to education, health, livelihoods, social protection and other services.

Challenges and Gaps

Persons with disabilities in Lebanon face various challenges that impede their easy access to services. In 2013, young persons with disabilities said they considered the lack of medical coverage and the limited disability-related medical specialties to be one of the most important obstacles to living a “normal life” [UNESCO Report on Social Inclusion of Young Persons with Disabilities, 2013]. The VASyR 2016 report shows lower school attendance rates for children with disabilities across all age groups. Parents have attributed this to non-inclusive education programmes and the lack of school facilities for people with special needs. According to a recent report by the Women’s Refugee Council, people with disabilities are also unable to access longer-term rehabilitation programmes that include them in community services.

At the level of the response, challenges and gaps include inadequate staff competencies in dealing with disability issues; the lack of a national disability plan targeting refugees and Lebanese host



Programmes include provision of rehabilitation devices to persons with disabilities. Source: World Rehabilitation Fund

communities; limited funds for long-term educational programs for children with intellectual disabilities or learning difficulties; the need to provide access to young persons with disabilities to livelihood opportunities; the need for outreach/frontline professionals capable of identifying, reaching and dealing with hard-to-reach cases of persons with disabilities; and the need to mobilize and secure long-term targeted relevant funding.

Needs continue to outstrip existing rehabilitation services and mental health care. Organizations like Handicap International, the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) and the World Rehabilitation Fund are the main service providers, but their coverage remains limited. In addition, even though 10% of Palestine refugees in Lebanon have an intellectual or physical disability, Palestine refugee children with disabilities are not entitled to government services and UNRWA only has a limited package of services targeting persons with disabilities.

The way forward

In order to improve living conditions for the disabled, the Government and organizations need to invest more in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities and in facilitating their access to education, health, livelihoods and social protection. A number of disabilities are preventable and can be treated; however, without the right interventions, the number of children with disabilities could increase and preventable impairments could worsen or become permanent. Early intervention is always less costly and more efficient, and should thus be prioritized. The Government and donor agencies need to invest more resources in the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream services and increase their participation in community life.

Supporting disabled persons through the Lebanon Humanitarian Fund

Over the last two years, the Lebanon Humanitarian Fund has supported persons with disabilities in Lebanon by funding three disability projects for a budget of \$790,000. These projects are among the 21 protection and health projects funded by the LHF in 2015-2016 to the tune of \$5.8 million, with disability-related activities ranging from case detection and referral to direct service provision (such as medicines and prostheses). The LHF has made support to disabled persons one of its key priorities for 2017.

Lebanon has not yet ratified the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In 2000, the parliament passed Law 220/2000 on the rights of people with disabilities including participation as well as access to proper education, public transport, rehabilitation and medical services.

Brussels Conference mobilizes support for Lebanon

Investing in the Future of Syria and the region

On 4-5 April, a wide array of UN bodies, donors, governments, and NGOs gathered for the “Supporting the Future of Syria and the region” conference in Brussels. At the end of the conference, 41 donors pledged \$6 billion for the regional response in 2017, as well as another \$3.7 billion for 2018.

The conference came one year and two months after the London “Supporting Syria and the Region” Conference in February of 2016, providing an opportunity to evaluate the progress made since then. In Lebanon, encouraging progress has been made in the areas of protection, education, infrastructure, and food security. In the area of protection, the government of Lebanon lifted the “pledge not to work” and waived residency fees for segments of the Syrian refugee population. Ensuring implementation of this policy in line with the intent of the London Conference will be critical, as will expanding it to include other refugees not currently covered. As ever, there is a need for international partners to continue advocating with the Government to strengthen protection for Syrian refugees.

One key recommendation put forward at the conference was to shift toward stabilization and longer-term development funding and projects in Lebanon.

Meanwhile, in the education sector, significant strides were made in enrolling 194,750 Syrians and an additional 204,000 Lebanese in formal education. In terms of infrastructure, 1.1 million people benefitted from improved municipal solid waste management, and 1.2 million people were provided access to a safe and adequate water supply. Lebanon also approved a World Bank-managed concessional loan for a substantial road improvement project. Finally, in addressing food insecurity, partners reached 880,746 individuals with food assistance – 95% of the target.

Despite this progress, there are still gaps in the response, as well as in fulfilling the commitments made at the London conference. A significant number of Syrians and Lebanese still do not have access to formal or alternative forms of education. Some progress has been made on livelihoods and job creation, yet the needs are substantial, and increased competition for jobs in this protracted situation risks exacerbating tensions within and between communities. There is also a continuing urgent need for infrastructure improvements to meet the strain of an increased population on basic services.

During the Brussels conference, UN Secretary General António Guterres emphasized the importance of supporting and building the resilience of host communities. In this vein, one of the key recommendations put forward at the conference was to make a shift toward stabilization and longer-term development funding and projects in Lebanon. This will require flexible, multi-year funding, including grants and concessional loans, in addition to continued and increased humanitarian support. In terms of priorities moving forward, Prime Minister Saad Hariri outlined a Lebanese strategy focusing on two pillars: first, large-scale infrastructure development and job creation, and second, education opportunities for Syrian refugees, including non-formal education and vocational training. In line with these priorities, at the conclusion of the conference, participants made a number of commitments, including a major new push on non-formal and vocational training, intensified efforts on job creation for deprived communities, and encouraging private sector investment through infrastructure development and structural reforms to the economy.

UN Humanitarian Envoy visits the Bekaa

UN Special Humanitarian Envoy Dr. Ahmed Al-Meraikhi visited Lebanon on 20-21 March as part of his first regional tour. The Envoy visited Syrian Refugees and host communities in the village of Ghazze in the Bekaa and called for urgent international support to Lebanon and the refugees.

The Humanitarian Envoy talked to refugee families in an informal settlement, examined a solid waste project by UNDP, and met second shift students at the Ghazze Intermediate Public School. The Union of Sahel Municipalities in the Bekaa relayed to

him their concerns and needs ahead of the Brussels Conference: they emphasized that their vulnerable host communities are stretched to their limits and are unable to meet the increasing demands on municipal services, particularly solid and water waste management, and warned against potential communal tensions.

On the second day of his visit, the Humanitarian Envoy met with humanitarian organizations and talked to senior Lebanese officials about the need to maintain funding for Lebanon. One of the Envoy's key priorities is to help the UN mobilize support from the Gulf countries. "Private firms, foundations, individuals and Governments across the Gulf want to exercise their generosity and invest in humanitarian action, but they need guidance on how to interact with the UN system", the Envoy said when he was appointed. "The U.N. system



UN Humanitarian Envoy visits an informal settlement in Ghazze, Bekaa. Source: OCHA

This was the first visit to the region by the UN Humanitarian Envoy since he was appointed in December 2016.

has been set up to work with traditional donors, but the roadmap is unclear when it comes to the GCC and others. That is where I come in.”

Hope for the youth of Wadi Khaled

In the border region of Wadi Khaled, one of the poorest areas of Lebanon, the NGO ‘Akkar Network for Development’ (AND) is empowering vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian youth to strengthen their community and find alternatives to extremism.

Wadi Khaled hosts 31,000 Syrian refugees for a local population of 41,000 Lebanese, according to local estimates. With high levels of unemployment among the youth, this has led to stark competition over jobs between different groups, as well as the risk of disengagement and radicalization for many young people in the area.

In response to these challenges, AND is working with the 15 members of the Wadi Khaled Sports Committee – made up of vulnerable Lebanese youth, Lebanese returnees and displaced Syrians – to help them become positive agents of change in their community. The NGO trained them on leadership and citizenship, as well as community mobilization, organizational management and conflict resolution. The trainings also focused on promoting social inclusion – a particularly acute need in Wadi Khaled given the high levels of poverty and youth unemployment which raise the risk of youth joining extremist parties.

In order to build on their new skills and spread them across Wadi Khaled, the committee members were trained on the right way to approach their community and disseminate their knowledge among other youth. The initiative has been a major success, giving the committee members a sense of ownership and encouraging them to be agents of change by reaching out to other at-risk youth.

The project’s most concrete achievement is the refurbishment of a large football pitch in the town of Amayer, in the heart of Wadi Khaled. The committee identified as a top priority the construction of a roof for the local pitch so that it could become a key gathering place for youth throughout the year, and not just during summer. AND provided training in welding and concrete pouring for the committee members and other local youth, then hired them to work on expanding and improving the football pitch.

The beautifully-refurbished field opened in January 2017 and welcomes about 3,000 local youth per month – both Lebanese and Syrian – who use the facilities for matches, tournaments, and as a safe space to play sports together, socialize and build positive networks. The youth committee manages the pitch, and says it is already making a major difference in the lives of the local communities. “Before, we could only play football in the summer months; now we play all the time, and we are building a real community, bringing together Syrians and Lebanese, and offering them an alternative to extremism,” says one committee member.



A few members of the Wadi Khaled Sports Committee. Source: OCHA

“Before, we could only play football in the summer months; now we play all the time, and we are building a real community, bringing together Syrians and Lebanese, and offering them an alternative to extremism.”