



Youth At Risk in Lebanon

May 2014

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Syrian conflict, now in its fourth year, has taken a heavy toll on Lebanon's society. Among those most affected are young men and women in refugee camps and marginalized communities. Young people are increasingly confronting violence and discrimination. They are missing out on education and work opportunities. The rising number of unemployed and disenfranchised youth in Lebanon could become a security risk for both Lebanese and refugee communities.

A society's well-being relies on its youth, who can help revitalize the economy when education, health care and job opportunities are available to them.

In March 2014, ANERA undertook an in-depth, qualitative youth assessment to better understand the impact of the Syrian conflict and subsequent displacement on both Syrian refugees and host communities in Lebanon. The study focused on youth, aged 15 to 25, in areas most affected by the spillover of Syria's conflict.

The study aimed at identifying the critical issues and needs of youth, their ambitions and desires and the gaps in services that are critical to their survival and well-being. There were 18 focus group discussions with Lebanese and Syrian youth and 21 interviews with local government representatives and youth organization leaders.

Key Findings

ANERA's study identified three key areas of concern:

- Security is a priority for both Syrian and Lebanese youth. The highly unstable political situation and increased tensions between Syrian and Lebanese youth have fueled violence between these communities.
- The deteriorating economic situation translates into job anxiety that often overshadows youth development needs and prematurely forces youth to take on the burdens and responsibilities of adulthood.
- Both Syrian and Lebanese youth look at the future with anxiety as limited education opportunities jeopardize their development.

The report offers some recommendations for development and humanitarian practitioners and donor agencies to design and implement programs that will contribute to improving the development and livelihood¹ of youth in the most affected areas of Lebanon. ANERA's community development interventions rely on a long-term program that supports refugees and host communities through capacity building and empowerment of communities to develop their initiatives rather than implementing externally-designed relief projects.

¹ Livelihood is defined as the capabilities, assets and strategies that people use to make a living.

Recommendations

- Design and implement community-based assistance programs with involvement and cooperation of local authorities and youth-led or youth-serving organizations. This is essential to investing youth in programs and activities suited to their particular needs.
- Develop vocational training programs to prepare host and refugee youth for the job market. Burdened by the sense of responsibility youth have toward easing their family's financial burdens, young men and women in the focus groups stressed the need to obtain learn job skills.
- Invest in programs to strengthen social interaction among youth of different communities through sports and community services. ANERA's experience in this area has shown that sports and joint community activities help to integrate refugee and host communities and ease tensions stemming from lack of interaction
- Address the needs of women in all programs. Special attention must be paid to integrating women in training and other activities in safe and culturally appropriate environments.

The recommendations are defined in more detail on page I6.

YOUTH AT RISK

Background

The spillover of Syria's war into Lebanon is straining the country's resources. Rivalries between different Lebanese groups have intensified, underscoring the divide between pro- and anti-Assad groups. Cross-border shelling, armed in-country confrontations, increased political and religious tensions and the challenges stemming from postponed parliamentary elections are just some of the factors affecting stability across the country and particularly in border areas.

The Syrian crisis has cost Lebanon billions of dollars in lost economic activity since 2012. Nearly one million Lebanese live in poverty. The World Bank predicts an additional 170,000 Lebanese may be pushed into poverty and as many as 320,000 will become unemployed in 2014.²

According to a 2013 World Bank assessment, US\$1.4 to 1.6 billion is needed this year to stabilize and restore health, education and social services to pre-conflict levels. Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities alike are severely affected by the added pressure on public services, overcrowding, increased competition for jobs and a rising cost of living.

Lebanon today is the largest per capita recipient of refugees in the world.³ Over one million Syrian refugees are now in Lebanon and account for one-fourth of the population. The country's ability to provide basic services is stretched to the limit. The refugee population now is projected to grow to 1.5 million by the end of 2014, which would represent one-third of Lebanon's population.

With no foreseeable end to the war in Syria, the social and economic impact on Lebanon will only intensify.

The poorest Lebanese families hosting refugees in their villages and Lebanese youth are among the populations most affected by the crisis. So far 225 towns and villages have received 86 percent of the refugees, mainly in the villages of the Akkar, Tripoli and Bekaa areas and to a lesser extent the south. Those same communities are home to 68 percent of the poorest Lebanese whose situation prior to the arrival of the Syrian refugees was already precarious with mounting unemployment, limited opportunities, and little government support.

The current political and socioeconomic conditions present unique challenges for young Lebanese and Syrian refugee youth who seek social, education and work opportunities. Their diverse needs often are neglected. Only 57% of refugees rely on employment as a source of livelihood. The unemployment among youth is estimated to be much higher as refugee youth often have a harder time integrating into the labor market for social and psychosocial reasons. The relationship between the marginalization of disadvantaged youth from relevant education, training and livelihood opportunities, and the potential for cycles of instability and conflict has long been acknowledged.⁴

2 World Bank/UN, Lebanon: Economic and Social Impact assessment of the Syrian Conflict, September 2013

3 Quote by Mr. Mountain, the U.N. resident humanitarian coordinator in Lebanon, Lebanon cannot bear brunt of Syrian refugee crisis alone, UN relief official warns, March 18, 2014, UN News Centre: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=47379&Cr=lebanon&Cr1=#.U20oLmBv3yd>

4 Barbara Zeus and Josh Chaffin, Education for Crisis-Affected Youth: A Literature Review, December 2011. Available at: http://www.ineesite.org/uploads/files/resources/AYTT_LitReview_2012-02-14.pdf

Most aid efforts so far have been directed toward the refugees. Inadequate attention has focused on the host community's needs and priorities and even less to the youth of these communities.⁵ This has exacerbated tensions between the refugees and hosts. There are an increasing number of cases of physical aggression. In some areas, youth groups block main roads to villages and occasionally humanitarian organizations have become targets of their anger, frustration and dissatisfaction.

Methodology

ANERA's study relied on two qualitative research methods: focus group discussions with youth and in-depth interviews with local government representatives and leaders of youth-led or youth-serving organizations.

An independent consulting team organized discussions with 18 focus groups of Lebanese and Syrian youth aged 15-25, with 6 to 7 participants in each group. There were two age groups, 15-18 and 18-25 and a 50/50 gender breakdown. Youth groups were invited to participate in focus group sessions to express opinions in a supportive setting, facilitated by professional staff. Some groups in more conservative villages were segregated by gender to ensure participation.

The team also conducted 21 in-depth interviews with local government representatives and youth organizations' leaders. The organizations were identified as active by the municipality or by youth themselves. One-on-one interviews were held with mayors and other municipal officials to capture their fears, concerns, and perceptions of threat to their communities. They also talked about how to resolve some of the pertinent problems, based on their knowledge of what is suitable for their communities, as well as their experience in coping with very limited resources and support.

The assessment was carried out in three governorates of Lebanon North Lebanon, Bekaa, and Nabatiyeh. These have been identified by UNHCR as most in need of urgent immediate interventions due to imminent threat to life, denial of access to services, shelter/evictions and restriction of movement.⁶ In the north, focus groups and in-depth interviews were convened in Aamayer, Kouachra, Machha, Kneisset, Akkar, Fnaydeq, Minieh, and Beddawi. In Bekaa, they were convened in Qaa Baalbek, Aarsal, Ain Baalbek, Labweh, Baalbek, Bar Elias, and Majdel Aanjar. In Nabatiyeh, they were held in Nabatiyeh El-Tahta, Douair En-Nabatiyeh, Meiss El-Jabal, Safed Battikh, and Bint Jbeil.

Another factor that was considered was the socio-economic status of the participants. Almost 47.2% of Syrian refugees came from homes where the total household income does not exceed \$150 per month. The Lebanese participants' socio-economic status was deemed low to lower middle income.

5 Planning for community support targeting the most affected areas coincided with the launch of the RRP5 in recognition of the urgent need to support government institutions and Lebanese communities.

6 UNHCR source

KEY FINDINGS

Key Finding #1: Deterioration of security fuels negative perceptions, alienation and fear, leading to a cycle of violence among host and refugee youth

The deteriorating security situation was ranked the number one concern for all participants in the study. Representatives of local authorities and local non-profits voiced concern over public insecurity, explosions and criminal behavior.

Syrian and Lebanese youths offered different perspectives but all expressed feelings of alienation based on fear and mistrust. All participants said they felt powerless to deal with this issue. All expressed a deep sense of despair.

Negative perceptions among youth translate into physical and verbal violence. Daily incidents of violence are on the rise and quarrels, often involving young males, are fueled by negative perceptions and feelings spreading among both host communities and refugee youth. This is apparent within the context of political violence, including clashes between rival groups.

Host communities perceive refugee youth as a threat to security

Most young Lebanese participating in the study expressed negative opinions about the impact of the growing number of refugees on their security. Female participants said they were fearful of Syrian refugees. Male participants expressed feelings of resentment and anger toward the refugees. There were no specific variations in responses in the different age groups.

Several Lebanese youth raised concerns over Syrian refugees carrying weapons. Some youths claimed that refugees are members of Syrian militias participating in cross-border fighting and others added that the lack of work prospects in Lebanon pushed some refugees to become mercenaries. Participants also expressed fears that armed Syrians are carrying out criminal activities, such as robberies and assaults. One participant explained: "Syrians are destroying the country and igniting conflicts between communities." Some even blamed Syrian refugees for the recent terrorist bombings in Hermel.

Respondents said they feared armed groups among the refugees and believed control over refugees is impossible. They said they have less interaction with the refugees for their own safety.

It is important to note that these remarks were mostly based on perceptions and were not always substantiated real incidents. Few participants had actually witnessed acts of violence committed by Syrian refugees. Most cited incidents they heard secondhand in their communities or through the media.

The perceptions, real or imagined, translate into feelings of resentment and anxiety among Lebanese youth. Anger and fear translate into avoidance or hostility, which further limits integration and acceptance. This ultimately gives rise to outbreaks of violence and open confrontations.

The level of security concerns varied slightly between regions. In Bekaa and Akkar, where local political divisions reflect rivalries back in Syria, participants said security concerns negatively impact social cohesion and daily life.

In Nabatiyeh, an area more politically homogeneous, youth from among refugees and host communities agreed that feelings of insecurity were less prominent. Lebanese youth in Nabatiyeh also expressed feelings of sympathy and gratitude toward Syrians who hosted displaced Lebanese families during the July 2006 war. In addition, youth in Nabatiyeh attributed their feeling of calm to the presence of powerful political parties that enforce security measures.

Discrimination against refugees fuels alienation and victimization

Syrian youth paint a rather dark picture of their relations with host communities, in spite of frequent individual initiatives to foster solidarity. Day-to-day interactions are described as increasingly fraught with tension. Syrian youth said they suffered discrimination and perceived host communities as generally hostile. “The moment they hear my accent, they become hostile, distant, unfriendly,” a female participant explained.

Many Syrian youths reported having witnessed or having been involved in fights, incidents of harassment or exchanges of verbal insults and intimidation. Attacks included thefts, hold-ups and house break-ins. Some youth complained they were randomly assaulted and beaten by members of host communities. A few even reported unconfirmed instances of Syrian girls being kidnapped.

Self-esteem was very low among refugee youth who said they were regarded as less educated, less skilled and generally inferior. Syrian youth coupled Lebanese disregard for them with violent behavior and rejection. One of the young respondents in the Bekaa said she and her family had been evicted twice from the land where they had pitched a tent. “We have no social network and we live isolated because we live in tents. Lebanese see that we live in conditions inferior to them and they think that we are looking for trouble. This is why they keep evicting us.”

In all areas of the study, these difficult interactions with the host community were shown to produce feelings of victimization and alienation among refugee youth. This attitude was perpetuated by a lack of opportunities for joint activities that might lessen some of the tension.

Even where Syrian refugee youths have managed to forge relations with Lebanese residents, such as attending the same school or living near each other, they are still banned from sharing some activities, like playing in football stadiums. Some municipal officials expressed their reluctance to hold joint activities out of fear that bringing youths together could backfire and create confrontations without a safe and comprehensive framework to address the root causes of the tensions. This situation leaves Syrian youth very few outlets to release stress and tensions, and exacerbates their feelings of rejection and victimization.

Security measures and self-imposed limitations on movements affect local and refugee youth

Lebanese youth

All Lebanese participants complained that social life in their villages has significantly worsened as a consequence of perceived and real security threats. Youth participating in the focus group discussions explained that people traveled less frequently outside their villages and have begun to lock their doors, a rare practice in rural areas. They added that they avoid going out and socializing after dark.

One of the young female participants in Akkar explained that uncertainties about security made it difficult to plan events so women did not get together as much. Lebanese youth added that rising sectarian tensions added to their feeling of insecurity and increased security measures impeded their freedom of movement. For example, passing through a checkpoint takes a significant amount of time in a journey.

These self-imposed limitations on movement take a toll on social interaction. During this important development phase, youth need space to socialize, have fun, build their social network and practice skills, but opportunities are far fewer under the current circumstances.

“The moment they hear my accent, they become hostile, distant, unfriendly.”

Lebanese youth described the negative impact on their social life and their well-being. One female participant from Akkar reported that she is less aware of what is going on in her community because she has been spending more time at home and less time socializing. Others reported feeling constantly exhausted, depressed and anxious.

Syrian youth

Many refugee youth explained that security incidents directed at the refugee community forced them to stay at home in the evening, especially in the Bekaa and north regions. Young refugee women face special security concerns. Many complained their families have imposed restrictions on their movements amid rumors of kidnapping and prostitution. Female youth said they feel more isolated in Lebanon because of their inability to maintain social interactions, which used to constitute a great part of their daily life.

Some of the limitations were self-imposed by participants who indicated that they were spending more time at home, declining to go out after dark to avoid altercations with community youth.

Some local authorities have also imposed curfews on refugee communities. In one case, a municipal council member acknowledged that the municipality imposed a 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. curfew on all Syrian nationals, with exceptions for workers carrying municipal permits.



Syrian refugee tents in Bednine in the Bekaa valley.

Syrian participants in the study noted that recent car bomb attacks in different regions of Lebanon gave rise to new security measures that further limited their movement between cities.

The limits on movement are provoking a potentially explosive situation among refugee youth who feel trapped with no ability to move freely. Many youth described varying degrees of depression and anxiety. “Back home in Syria we were free to move as we wished... We were happy. Here we can’t move freely, we are trapped... It is very frustrating. We lost everything: our homes, our livelihood and even our pride,” said a 16-year-old Syrian refugee, who longs for his past life. “If it were up to me, I would go back to my village even in war rather than live here in humiliation,” another youth added.

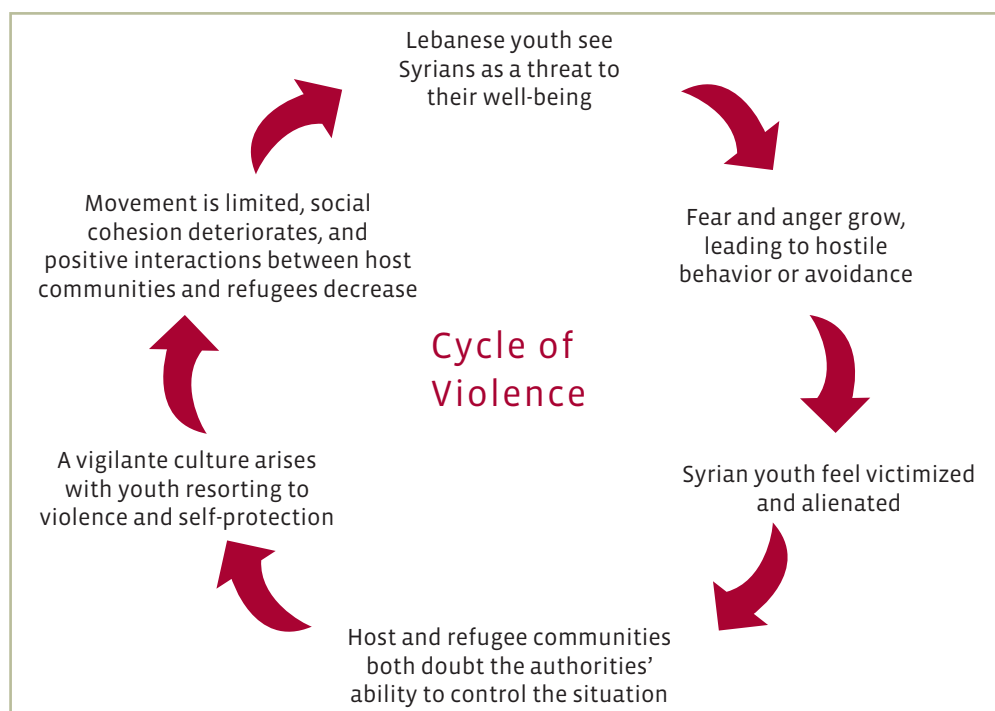
“If it were up to me, I would go back to my village even in war rather than live here in humiliation.”

Insecurity, dire living conditions and anxiety about the future, combined with a violent past, are producing some paralyzing psychological consequences. Several cases were reported of trauma and severe depression that required professional help.

Under the current circumstances, Syrian and Lebanese youth face challenges in developing their life skills. Tensions and deteriorating security impede their ability to integrate into social networks, to build relationships based on trust and reciprocity and to have a sense of belonging. These are considered essential elements for youth to become successful adults.

Vigilante culture fueled by skepticism about authorities’ ability to control the situation

The refugee population is scattered across the country but concerns about their precarious situation are apparent wherever they are. There was a consensus among refugee and host community youth in the study that the situation is chaotic and the ability of Lebanese authorities to deal with all the security threats was viewed with universal scepticism.



Several Lebanese youth faulted the government for refusing to create camps, while municipal authorities deplored the lack of resources to follow up on registered refugee populations and enforce significant security measures. Syrian youth, on the other hand, expressed distrust toward Lebanese security forces, often perceived as biased against them.

Both groups acknowledged an increased sense of helplessness and despair that is giving rise to uncontrolled outbreaks of violence. There has been a steady rise of hostilities between refugees and host communities. Although youth participating in the focus groups have denied resorting to violence, they acknowledged their readiness to use violence to resolve certain problems.

Several survey participants reported an increase in self-protection measures because of increased doubts about the effectiveness of institutional security measures. A vigilante culture appears to be on the rise in host communities. Many young Lebanese males in the focus groups affirmed they have joined neighborhood night-time patrols to monitor the streets. Such a culture could pose serious problems even after the end of the Syrian crisis.

Outbreaks of violence fuel youths' negative perceptions of the other communities as well as increased tensions and decreased interactions. Participants in the study believe this also drives the need for self-protection and fuels a culture of violence among youth.

Key Finding #2: Concern for jobs overshadows youth development needs

A majority of Lebanese and Syrian youth cited the degradation of their economic conditions as one of their most pressing concerns. Youth are prematurely forced to take on the burdens of adulthood: child labor is rampant, early marriages are increasing and youth express concerns usually associated with their elders.

Syrian youth are sharing their families' worries about job opportunities. Lebanese youth blame the refugees for the deterioration of their living conditions. Most survey participants said their economic situation, which was difficult before the crisis, has worsened with the arrival of refugees and they resented the refugees, who they blame for increased prices and job competition.

Youth participants from both refugee and host communities expressed great concern over the rising costs of food and shelter. They reported the average rent in some regions has doubled since the beginning of the crisis. Additionally, the cost of living is much higher in Lebanon than in Syria, which makes basic living expenses prohibitively high for refugees.

Aid for rent remains insufficient, so many refugees live in substandard conditions – unsanitary dwellings lacking proper space, ventilation, sunlight or water facilities. These conditions endanger the physical health and safety of the whole family. There is enormous pressure on Syrian refugees to pay rent despite their circumstances. Cases of evictions have been reported when landlords could find someone else who would pay more. This situation prompts youth to state their priority as finding ways to help pay the rent.

Food was also a great concern for Syrian youth, who reported that they rely on aid and neighbors' generosity but also resort to skipping meals and compromising on food quality. Although they struggle to come up with sufficient quantities of food, some Syrian youths admitted selling food vouchers issued by relief aid organizations to secure extra cash for rent at the end of the month. They also reported selling essential non-food items.

This coping mechanism for both food and housing expenses was presented as common practice

when money could not be secured by other means like working, borrowing from friends or selling any assets they managed to bring with them from Syria.

Syrian youth welcomed humanitarian assistance provided by international and local organizations but stressed that it is not enough to cover basic needs. They acknowledged they must rely on it and admitted an increased feeling of powerlessness.

The situation has reached such a level that several Syrian and Lebanese youth in the focus groups advocated refugee camps. Camps, usually stigmatized and associated with misery, are starting to be seen as a more organized, cheaper and safer option.

Syrian refugee youth in survival mode

When resources of the traditional breadwinner (father or parents) are not sufficient to cover basic needs, youth are asked to take part in their family's survival efforts. The concern over jobs has shifted their role in the household. They are taking on adult responsibilities without being properly prepared. This is giving rise to harmful options, such as child labor and early marriages. The survival mode mentality also prompts teenage refugees to seek any income-generating activities at the expense of age-appropriate activities.

Older respondents in their 20s who are trying to start a career and family said they are very concerned by the lack of employment opportunities and high cost of living. Although competition for work is high, young refugees do manage to find sporadic work. Employers frequently favor younger workers for minor tasks because they demand lower wages and are more easily managed than adults. Refugee youth reported frequent abuse and exploitation at work, including unsafe work conditions, inconsistent and unreliable employment, very low wages and delayed payments.

Some Syrian female youth are forced into early marriages. Even though the phenomenon is common in many conservative communities in the Arab world, early marriages appear to be on the rise among young Syrian refugees in Lebanon as a result of their feeling of increased insecurity and economic hardship. In the north, Syrian women described marriage as "a way out of [their] current misery." A 17-year-old Syrian living in Bekaa reported that she accepted becoming the second wife of an older man as a lesser evil to living in misery and desolation.

In some cases however, new responsibilities assigned to female youth in the refugee communities have had a positive impact. Syrian girls in Akkar, coming from conservative male-dominated families, said that one of the by-products of their displacement was less control by male family members. Some said that they are now expected to work and leave the house. They found this new freedom liberating and did not want to give it up, even if it meant never going back to their homes in Syria.

This new role for women was limited to a few cases. Although seen as an opportunity for empowerment, it also increases their vulnerability and the need for support to reduce the risks of exploitation and abuse. It was not generally accepted by males in the study who expressed their resistance when asked about women's increased livelihood responsibilities.

Syrian youth said they tended to respond to the need to contribute to the family income by forsaking their ambitions and submitting to humiliating living conditions and exploitative job assignments. Syrian youth feel powerless and burdened by constant worries about survival at a time of their lives when they should be filled with aspirations, have time to learn new skills and

develop their social networks to find a meaningful path for the future.

Lebanese youth blame refugees for the deterioration of their living conditions

Lebanese youth in the group discussions also cited the economic impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on host communities. In some villages where the refugee community has increased the village population by 100% to 200% (the town of Aarsal is now inhabited by 40,000 Lebanese and 80,000 Syrians), it affects host communities on both an individual and a community level.

Most community stakeholders participating in the one-on-one interviews reported a growing resentment toward the Syrian refugees. One municipal mayor described the gradual shift: “At the beginning of the conflict, people showed great sympathy for the Syrian revolution and empathy for the refugees but now there is lack of enthusiasm and a growing frustration.”

On a personal level, Lebanese youth confirmed the trend of deteriorating living conditions. They said their difficult economic situation has worsened with the arrival of refugees. They expressed resentment toward the refugees, whom they blame for increased prices and job competition.

Lebanese youth complained that the limited supply of housing and rising rents take a toll on local families. They also reported that Lebanese families were being evicted when landlords knew they could get a higher price from Syrian refugees. Lebanese youth feel disadvantaged and resent the fact that Syrians receive aid for rent while they do not. The housing concern is particularly affecting youth who are about to start a family and are seeking a home but fear they will not be able to afford an adequate dwelling because of rising prices.

Lebanese youth expressed concern over the rising food prices. Some estimated the cost of basic food items has gone up 30% in the past two years.

Lebanese youth also listed increased work competition as a priority concern. Both male and female Lebanese youth complained they were driven out of the job market by Syrian refugees willing to work for half or one-third of their wages. Lebanese youth usually felt it was highly unfair that refugees would receive both humanitarian aid and work opportunities. They complained that it was impossible for Lebanese to compete with Syrian refugees who were willing to settle for very low wages, in contradiction of Lebanese labor laws.

The stress over work opportunities was highest in Akkar and Bekaa, where Lebanese seasonal workers and even Syrian workers employed before the crisis could not find any more work. In the Bekaa town of Labweh, a young man described this phenomenon: “Most of the laborers used to be Lebanese, but now they all have been replaced by Syrian workers. The Lebanese workers now are out of a job, sitting around all day outside.”

“Most of the laborers used to be Lebanese, but now they all have been replaced by Syrian workers.”

Young men over 18 suffered most when seeking manual jobs such as construction, carpentry or agricultural work because they faced intense competition from Syrian refugee workers, who would underbid them.

The youth in the study were adamant about the need to address the issue of illegal labor. They often blamed employers who take advantage of the situation by lowering daily wages. However, some youth pointed out that, contrary to regular Syrian migrant workers, Syrian refugees actually spend their money in Lebanon and participate in the local economy.

The youth in the group discussions acknowledged that their main problem was not the right of Syrians to work but rather their ability to undercut Lebanese workers in terms of wages. They suggested a number of “solutions,” ranging from segregating Syrians into refugee camps to regulating the labor markets and preventing anyone access to employment without the proper permit from the Ministry of Labor or restricting Syrian labor to specific domains of manual labor (currently the case for Palestinian refugees who have settled in Lebanon since 1948).

Community infrastructure is insufficient to cope with added needs

The magnitude and the protraction of the Syrian refugee crisis create a massive burden for Lebanese host communities, leading to a growing resentment toward the Syrian refugees. The influx of refugees has strained community infrastructure in several ways – especially in the Bekaa and north regions.

Municipal officials interviewed in the survey complained of irregular and insufficient funding from the Lebanese government, which already had affected their ability to deliver services before the arrival of refugees. Now, they say it has worsened and forced them into a state of crisis.

Municipal officials in the study reported increased pressure on basic services like waste disposal, electricity and water supplies, already problematic before the crisis, as well as new expenses related to security measures in some instances. Lebanese youth confirmed that electricity and water was unavailable more frequently than before the arrival of the refugees. Additionally, the real-estate pressure drove many landowners to build illegal dwellings that are not linked to public utilities. In these cases, tenants often resort to illegal connections to electricity, resulting in lower voltage and unreliable power for others.

Most Lebanese youth complained of overcrowded hospitals because of Syrian refugees, leaving insufficient space for Lebanese patients. They claimed that hospitals give preferential treatment to Syrians, who benefit from a guaranteed payment by aid organizations, at the expense of Lebanese patients covered by Lebanese social security, which often delayed payment. This claim was denied by medical providers.

In addition, youth clubs – which usually rely on municipal and community support – said their resources are compromised because efforts are increasingly focused on more pressing needs. Lebanese youth complained about the decline of cultural activities and sport events.

Municipal officials acknowledged they have been forced to shift their attention due to increased needs. Youth-led organizations expressed disappointment that most assistance is directed only toward refugees. They advocated initiatives that address the needs of both refugee and host communities. Youth organization leaders cited a number of actions that were regarded as good practices, ranging from rehabilitation of sports facilities or community centers to cash-for-work projects that could provide employment for both Syrian and Lebanese youth.

Key Finding #3: Fear of a future jeopardized by limited education opportunities

In all three regions where this study was conducted, both Lebanese and Syrian youth revealed a generalized sense of despair and fear for the future. This was particularly reflected in their attitude toward education.

There are more Syrian refugees in Lebanon who need schooling (302,000 registered refugees from 5 to 17 years old) than Lebanese pupils currently enrolled in public schools (300,000).

That puts enormous pressure on Lebanon's public education system. In spite of great efforts by Lebanon's Ministry of Education to accommodate 90,000 refugee children in public schools, over 70% of children and youth remain outside the formal school system.⁷

Syrian youth in the focus groups voiced deep fears of facing the future without appropriate education, which they say severely impedes their earning potential and inhibits any ambitions to improve their living conditions and to build a career.

Syrian refugee youth find limited access to schooling and training programs

The paucity of educational opportunities for refugees jeopardizes their development of life skills and their present and future earning potential. Facing these challenges, young refugees need education and training that assist them in making a smooth transition to adulthood and gainful employment.

Syrian youth worry that limited access to education could produce a generation of illiterates. Most refugees have lost up to three years of education and job-related training because of the Syrian war.

None of the youth over 18 years old who participated in the study was enrolled in any form of schooling in Lebanon. Few of those aged 15-18 were enrolled in public schools. The participants attributed their lack of access to education to several factors, including:

- Overwhelming economic difficulties forcing them to work rather than study in order to help support their family;
- Cost of school-related expenses posing a burden for refugees who are unable to meet basic needs;
- Limited available space in Lebanese public schools limiting their access;
- Differences in curriculum between Lebanon and Syria making it difficult for Syrian youth to continue studies from school back home;
- Confrontations and violent clashes between Lebanese and Syrian students inside schools, coupled with insecurity on the way to school (especially for second-shift pupils who come back home late in the afternoon), deterring them from going to class; and
- the Lebanese co-education system being unacceptable to many conservative Syrian parents, who refuse to send their daughters to co-ed classes.

Female youth in particular expressed frustrations over the limited access to education. "My dreams are shattered," stated a young Syrian woman. "I used to be very good in school and I wanted to be a teacher. But now, I haven't been in school for two years, and I can barely find work as a replacement sales clerk."

In addition to difficulties in accessing a formal education, Syrian participants in the study said the availability of appropriate vocational training and skills development programs depended on where they lived. In remote areas there are no programs. In urban areas, those in vocational training said the programs did not meet their expectations and would not provide useful skills.

"My dreams are shattered...I wanted to be a teacher. But now, I haven't been in school for two years, and I can barely find work as a replacement sales clerk."

Still, Syrian youth expressed enthusiasm for attending appropriate training programs. Both

⁷ UNHCR Lebanon, Education update, February 2014

male and female Syrian youth were interested in programs that would help them find immediate employment but also acquire skills they could use in the long term – particularly language and computer skills.

Both male and female youth listed a number of conditions that would enhance their participation in training programs. Male youth suggested they needed some form of monetary compensation in order to justify to their families the time spent on training rather than on earning a living. Female youth favored training programs located close to their homes in order to facilitate parental permission.

School overcrowding fuels negative perceptions and discrimination by Lebanese youth

In contrast to the Syrian participants who were not in school, 85% of the Lebanese youth participating in the focus groups were students. They expressed deep concern over the negative impact of the Syrian crisis on their education. Lebanese youth deemed this issue to be very serious, considering that education in Lebanon has long been held in very high regard as one of the few pillars of upward mobility.

Lebanese public schools now have to deal with a sudden increase of Syrian pupils. In one of the public middle schools in Nabatiyeh, the number of Syrian pupils jumped from 120 in 2012 to 200 in 2013. Lebanese youth were worried that public schools cannot accommodate the growing number of Syrians and complained that the extra burden falls on host communities. For example, some reported that Lebanese students were now asked to pay tuition to attend school, which was free in the past. Lebanese youth said they resented refugees receiving financial aid for education while they were expected to pay full tuition.

Lebanese youth spoke at length about their discomfort over the presence of so many Syrian children in public schools, as well as their different accent and behavior. Even though there is not much of a gap between Lebanese and Syrian cultures, the Lebanese youth in the study perceived deeper differences in an atmosphere that is breeding hostility and alienation and making interactions tense and difficult. One Nabatiyeh middle school supervisor asserted that many Lebanese parents would move their children to other schools rather than keep them enrolled in schools that had many refugee children. That attitude was reflected in the decreasing number of Lebanese children at the school, down from 210 in 2012 to 100 in 2013. This phenomenon is symptomatic of a wider trend toward separation and intolerance between communities.

CONCLUSIONS

The UN World Program of Action for Youth states that “Armed conflict destroys the safe environment provided by a house, a family, adequate nutrition, education and employment... During conflict, young men and women who are forced to take on “adult” roles miss out on opportunities for personal or professional development... Without services to help them to deal with their situation, youth and young adults may fail to integrate into society.”⁸

ANERA’s study found that youth are among the main victims of the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis. The Syrian conflict and subsequent displacement of refugees to Lebanon have destroyed the safe supportive environment of Syrian youth. Instead, Syrian youth in Lebanon are subjected to violence and exploitation and are forced to take on “adult” roles. This causes them to miss out on crucial opportunities for development.

With the massive influx of this new population, host communities find their resources are stretched to the limit. Lebanese youth face increased competition for basic resources in their own neighborhoods and resent refugees for the deterioration of living conditions. Intolerance and fear are growing among Lebanese youth, increasingly pushing them to resort to violent solutions.

For Lebanese and Syrian youth, the sense of belonging and the opportunity to gain an education have been diminished and are impeding their personal and professional development, as well as the development of their respective communities. Hostility between communities increasingly leads youth to resort to violence. With no foreseeable end to the crisis, Lebanese and Syrian youth only see worsening economic, social and security situations for the future.

Recommendations

Despite a general sense of despair, ANERA’s study indicates that Lebanese and Syrian youth are willing to overcome the challenges. They demonstrate resilience and a strong desire for peace and justice, which could help build social cohesion and improve their living situations. Youth assert that they just need the appropriate tools to become meaningful actors of change and transform the existing dynamics of violence and alienation.

Interventions based on the emergency response model to alleviate basic needs are proving to be increasingly inadequate given the scope of the problem and the protraction of the crisis. The emergency response also has failed to adequately address the mounting burdens imposed on host communities and the tensions that arise.

ANERA proposes a new paradigm for intervention based on an inclusive “community development” model that relies on local structures and youth as agents of change. This approach should direct aid resources toward implementing high-impact projects that seek to benefit both the refugees as well as their host communities. Supporting the host communities is essential.

ANERA’s recommendations for action include:

- I. Designing and implementing community-based assistance programs involving local governance and youth.** We need to provide support for host communities to help mitigate tensions between refugees and local populations and enable hosts to share resources more

⁸ United Nations, Economic & Social Affairs, World Program of Action for Youth, June 2010 p. 55 sqq

readily with refugees. It is essential to co-ordinate support with local government structures (municipalities) to increase a community's capacity to sustain services for refugees and resident populations and help mitigate tensions and hostilities.

Activities should immediately focus on rehabilitation of the affected physical infrastructure, particularly schools, clinics, drinking water systems and water canals. Jobs would be created through public work projects subcontracted to local public and private firms, that provide short-term employment for both Syrian and host community youth.

- 2. Including youth-led or youth-serving organizations** and cooperating with them when planning community-based development. It is imperative to mainstream and empower youth from both refugee and host communities. Youth need the opportunity to participate as responsible members of the society and gain experience in decision-making.

Older youth (18-25) and leaders from youth committees and organizations who participated in the study prioritized projects to improve communal infrastructure, such as public sport fields. Youth organizations say the problems are very visible and need to be addressed because they affect a community's daily life.

In addition to improving living conditions, youth considered these projects would also create much-needed job opportunities. Ensuring their participation in decisions and implementation of projects could transform disenfranchised, angry youth into a positive force to respond to the needs of the community, as well as to their specific youth needs.

- 3. Developing vocational training programs to prepare host and refugee youth for the job market**

Research has shown that refugees who access education, develop useful skills and acquire resources have more chances of decreasing their dependence on humanitarian aid as well as making a positive contribution to the economy and country of asylum and of their home country upon return.⁹ Providing such opportunities would help enable Syrian youth to improve their living conditions, meaningfully contribute to the society and face the future with confidence.

Vocational training must lead to improved income and be based on an assessment of local market demand for goods and services. Training should focus on transferrable skills which will be in demand regardless of where refugees ultimately settle.

To be most effective, vocational training must lead to improved income in the short term. Programs should measure results by the ability to help trainees secure and maintain employment or self-employment rather than the number of persons trained. In the case of business development, quality programs for fewer beneficiaries with a higher capacity to succeed may be preferable to lower-quality programming for more beneficiaries with less capacity to succeed.

Areas of training should be based on an assessment of local market demand for goods and services. Programs should be designed with the input of young women and men, whenever possible, as youth involvement in the creation of the project is a key to creating ownership and engagement.

9 Crisp, J. (2003). No Solution in Sight: The Problem of Protracted Refugee Situations in Africa. New Issues in Refugee Research: Working Paper No. 75 (UNHCR).

ANERA's Vocational and Education Training model combines both formal and informal practical work skills in order to improve an individual's chances of finding work. It provides vocational training, job placement assistance and other support to economically disadvantaged young people ages 14 to 24. To meet their diverse needs, the model provides alternative curriculum, depending on participants' educational background. The model includes orientation and placement tests to assess students' skills and interests after which participants receive a mix of vocational and academic instruction designed to meet their needs. Sports is also an essential part of this model and is used as a cross-cutting program strategy to teach life skills, foster the participation and inclusion of girls and other marginalized youth.



Joumana, an ANERA-sponsored nursing student in Tripoli

The most successful approaches to skills training are those that include post-training follow-up services. To help young people transition to employment, service providers must be able to provide the necessary networks and linkages, especially to experiential learning opportunities like business mentorships, internships and apprenticeships. ANERA's model includes a community service component that allows participants to practice their skills while giving back to their community.

Beyond the vocational component, skills training should focus on providing transferrable skills, such as customer service, computer literacy and education in languages, which will be in demand regardless of where refugees ultimately settle.

4. Investing in programs, like sports and community service, to strengthen interaction

Research has shown that adding a social development component, such as group deliberation peer-to-peer networks or group activities, to a livelihood program substantially improves a program's success and impact.¹⁰

Both Lebanese and Syrian youth participating in ANERA's study emphasized the need to rebuild social ties between refugee and host communities. Programs should help host communities and refugee youth access safe places to interact with their peers and adult role models and allow them to exchange information, build their networks, and learn new skills.

To maximize inclusion, venues must be safe: physically (hazard-free, secure), politically (neutral, unbiased), and socially (accountable management, free from discrimination, culturally appropriate). Female youth will require special attention to ensure they can safely access these spaces. Such spaces do not always need to



Sports field ANERA renovated in northern Lebanon

11 Child Protection in Crisis/Women's Refugee Commission, *The Impacts of Economic Strengthening Programs on Children* (2011)

be created but are often well established through local structures, schools and youth-led and youth-serving organizations.

The study highlighted the need to strengthen youth-led and youth-serving organizations that provide a framework to help young people exchange information, identify common needs and opportunities, and build on interaction between refugee and host community youth.

The potential for interaction through sports remains largely untapped by non-profits in the survey areas, though it appears to be the main leisure activity, especially for young males. Recreational activities are essential for youth to cultivate teamwork and a sense of inclusion.

Teenagers participating in the study strongly emphasized their need for leisure and sport activities, which is considered essential to their psychological, cognitive and physical development. ANERA's sports programs have proven an effective tool in recruiting and engaging youth, and strengthening skills like teamwork and discipline.

Youth in the discussion groups also suggested community service as a way to break down barriers. Small-scale projects, such as greening campaigns carried out by both host and refugee youth, can improve the community and engage youth in productive activities based on common ground. Participants in the study agree this would help Lebanese youth reverse their negative perceptions of refugee youth and also give Syria refugees the opportunity to show their commitment to the community and lessen their feelings of alienation.

5. Address the needs of women in all programs

Training programs must take into consideration gender-specific needs and provide safe and culturally appropriate environments for young women, while encouraging them to pursue trades that will empower them (financially, socially and in decision-making).

For both sports and community service programs, specific considerations must be given to involving young women by providing safe venues and designing with them activities that would get their commitment.

Youth Organizations

Youth-led and youth-serving organizations exist in a number of Lebanese villages covered by the study. They may take different forms, such as popular sports clubs, youth committees or local non-profits. However, they all share common features:

- They are embedded in the community and have the outreach capacity to youth of both communities.
- They generally have good working relationships with municipalities and coordinate their work with them.
- Their intervention is usually ad hoc and activity-based rather than program-based, which limits their power to take action and their overall role in society.
- They rely on volunteers and are generally weak in resources, networking, and management structures. Their role has been further diminished in the past three years due to deteriorating security and a lack of funding.

With the ongoing refugee crisis, staff at youth organizations are overwhelmed by the basic needs of hosts and refugees, which overshadow youth-specific needs, such as creative, leisure and recreational activities. At the same time, they feel that addressing immediate community needs allows them to fulfill their aspirations in decision-making and more broadly practice their civic role.

ANERA

Improving Lives in the Middle East
Since 1968

MISSION STATEMENT: American Near East Refugee Aid (ANERA) advances the well-being of people in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon and Jordan. Through partnerships and close consultation with local groups and communities, ANERA responds to economic, health and educational needs with sustainable solutions and also delivers humanitarian aid during emergencies.

Incorporated in 1968 to help ease the suffering of Palestinian refugees after the Arab-Israeli War of 1967, ANERA is non-political and non-religious and is one of the largest American non-profits working solely in the Middle East for over 45 years.

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