

Precarious living

Access to housing in transit for refugees and other migrants

Introduction

As refugees and other migrants leave their countries of origin, they pass through villages, towns and cities, often stopping along the way as they move towards their final destination. Some leave with the intention of returning to their country of origin, while others seek to start a new life elsewhere. Based on individual circumstances like personal finance, or uncontrollable circumstances like border closure, such stops can vary in length, from days and weeks, to months and even years.

Although refugees and other migrants seek protection and shelter along their journey, large influxes of people can put immense pressure on even the best equipped cities in terms of infrastructure and services like housing. Cities are not always capacitated to respond and support newcomers as quickly and easily as humanitarian situations demand, especially when they face their own social and economic struggles. Additionally, a city's response will often depend on the specific country's national response. If the latter does not prioritise and defend refugee rights, it is less likely that a city's will.

In crowded cities, it is harder for humanitarian and development organisations to identify and assist refugees and other migrants. Urban refugees are less likely to know about assistance programmes that could help them access food, housing and livelihoods. For those that travel irregularly, a lack of regular documentation and recognised

status leaves them open to exploitation in terms of labour and housing, among other things. Fewer income generation opportunities can result in an inability to pay rent, pricing a refugee or migrant out of potential housing options, while those who are particularly vulnerable may be at risk of exploitation by landlords, who can raise rents, force evictions or fail to maintain dwellings.

UN-Habitat recognises access to adequate housing as a human right; migrants and refugees should not be excluded from this right because they are on the move. It is therefore critical to understand how a lack of adequate housing in transit cities and countries can add to the vulnerability of people on the move.

This paper investigates access to adequate housing primarily for Syrian, Iraqi, Sudanese and Somali refugees and other migrants in urban areas of Jordan, Lebanon and Greece. In each country, it examines the general situation of housing with regards to transit migration. It further takes a closer look at how refugees and other migrants access housing; how they access certain humanitarian services through housing; the challenges they face in accessing housing; and finally, how levels of access to adequate housing impact migration decision-making. Ultimately, the paper suggests approaches towards improved housing and related policy in this context. Produced by the Mixed Migration Platform (MMP), this briefing paper is the seventh in a series of studies examining specific issues pertinent to migration to, from and within the Middle East.

Key Messages

- Restricted and poor access to adequate housing in locations of transit can push refugees and other migrants to return home or move to alternative destinations.
- The ability to access adequate housing impacts refugees and other migrants' access to other rights and resources including residency.
- For those refugees and other migrants who move irregularly, a lack of regular documentation and recognised status leaves them open to exploitation in terms of housing, among other things.
- As the majority of refugees and other migrants live in cities, response actors and governments need to develop approaches that recognise this urban reality, and focus on how cities can respond to higher population densities.

Methodology

Data on how access to housing affects refugees and other migrants' access to other rights, including protection, livelihood opportunities, services and assistance, is limited. Much of the literature on refugee housing tends to focus on shelter in refugee camps rather than the challenges faced by urban refugees in transit cities.

This paper reviews the available secondary data on housing for refugees and migrants in three transit cities and seeks to address the above-mentioned gap. It relies primarily on academic literature, media reports and humanitarian data. Further, it supplements desk research with informal interviews with refugees and migrants currently residing in two of the focus cities.¹ The informal interviews provide additional nuance on availability, quality and affordability of housing to refugees and other migrants, as well as the role housing plays in decision-making and its effects on rights.

Terminology

Definitions of transit migration and transit migrants range from very narrow to very broad. The concept of **transit migration** entered popular discourse in the 1990s.² Although popular, terms like “transit country” or “transit migration” lack consensus. In 1993, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) defined transit migration as “migration in one country with the intention of seeking the possibility there to emigrate to another country as the country of final destination”.³ In 2005, the Assembly of Inter-Parliamentary Union defined **transit migrants** as “aliens who stay in the country for some period of time while seeking to migrate permanently to another country”.⁴ In parallel, IOM defined transit as a “stopover of passage, of varying length, while travelling between two or more countries, either incidental to continuous transportation, or for the purpose of changing planes or joining an ongoing flight or other mode of transport”.⁵ This paper defines **transit cities** as cities that refugees and other migrants use as stopover locations, regardless of the amount of time spent in them, with the intent and purpose of travelling onwards to reach a tertiary or final destination.

Not all refugees and other migrants intend to move on to a country of final destination, and instead seek to return to their country of origin. As situations worsen in certain countries of origin, however, refugees and other migrants willing to do so are forced to reconsider whether eventual return is feasible and safe. When unable to return to the country of origin, and conditions in the current city of residence don't allow for long-term stay, a city initially

viewed as a temporary refuge only (i.e. from where an individual intends to return to their country of origin), can become a transit city.

On the other hand, a city viewed as a transit city only can become a long-term place of settlement when transit itself is blocked. Refugees and other migrants' migration intentions can also change over time, more generally, leading to modified perspectives on movement between cities and stopover periods.

Variation in the amount of time refugees and other migrants may spend in transit has implications for how adequate housing is defined. At the most basic level **housing** can be defined as dwellings provided for people, or shelter that covers or protects.⁶ This may serve as an appropriate measure in emergency settings, but is not sustainable for longer periods of time. As mentioned above, UN-Habitat views **adequate housing** as a right, containing both freedoms and entitlements, which enables all people to live in security, peace and dignity. This is in line with the right to an adequate standard of living enshrined in the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.⁷

UN-Habitat, therefore, seeks to move beyond the idea that housing merely entails “four walls and a roof”.⁸ Adequate housing must provide its occupants with a sense of security, as well as tenure security; be affordable, accessible and habitable; include basic services such as running water and electricity; and include basic infrastructure like sanitation facilities. Therefore, although it is difficult to estimate how long a refugee or migrant might spend in a transit city or country, refugees and other migrants should have access to adequate housing regardless of where they are and what their status is.

Jordan

Amman has hosted large numbers of refugees and other migrants since the early 20th century. Circassians and Chechens formed the first waves of refugees in Amman and Zarqa, fleeing discrimination and persecution from the Russian Empire.⁹ In 1919, many persecuted Armenians chose to re-establish lives in Amman.¹⁰ More recently Jordan has welcomed and integrated large numbers of Palestine refugees.

While Jordan and the international community prepared for thousands of Iraqis to seek sanctuary following the start of the armed conflict in Iraq 2003, the continuous arrival and build-up of this displaced population was not expected.¹¹ A number of Iraqis have now lived in Amman for 10 to 15 years.¹² Most recently, Jordan has experienced the arrival of

¹ In total, three respondents were interviewed: Personal communication (1) and (3) correspond to two male Syrian respondents based in Beirut, and interviewed over the phone on 3 June and 4 June 2017 respectively; Personal communication (2) corresponds to a female Iraqi respondent based in Amman, and interviewed in person on 3 June 2017.

² Du vell, Franck (2006) *Crossing the Fringes of Europe: Transit Migration in the EU's Neighbourhood*, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society at the University of Oxford (COMPAS), Working Paper No. 33.

³ UNECE (1997) *International Migration Bulletin*, No. 3, cited in Du vell (2006) *Crossing the fringes of Europe: Transit migration in the EU's Neighbourhood*, COMPAS, Working Paper No. 33.

⁴ Inter-Parliamentary Union (2005) *Migration and Development*, CII/113/R-rev.

⁵ IOM (2004) *International Migration Law: Glossary on Migration*.

⁶ Merriam-Webster, *Definition of Housing*.

⁷ OHCHR/UN-Habitat, *The Right to Adequate Housing*, Fact Sheet No. 21 (Rev 1).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Nichols, Johanna (2000) “The Chechen Refugees,” *Berkley Journal of International Law*, Volume 18(2).

¹⁰ Kifner, John, *Armenian Genocide of 1915: An Overview*, *The New York Times*; Gustafsson, Jenny (2016) *To Beirut with hope: how the city shaped by refugees makes room for new arrivals*, *The Guardian*, 4 February 2016.

¹¹ Seeley, Nicholas (2012) *Jordan's “open door” policy for Syrian refugees*, *Foreign Policy*, 1 March 2012.

¹² Personal communication (2), 3 June 2017.

hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees. While some refugees and other migrants fled to Amman with the intention of ultimately migrating to a third country destination, others believed that the conflict in their countries of origin would be short-lived and that they would be able to return after a few months; still others came to settle in Jordan indefinitely.

For these reasons, Amman can be viewed as a transit city to third country destinations by some, and viewed as a short, or long-term 'sanctuary' city by others. Some arrivals make asylum claims and thereby potentially gain access to humanitarian support, but generally speaking, the situation for most refugees and migrants is economically very challenging.¹³ As a result, rising numbers are returning from Jordan to Syria.¹⁴ As conditions continue to deteriorate for refugees and other migrants in Jordan, and as rights are denied, Amman is likely to increasingly become viewed and approached exclusively as a transit city.¹⁵

The type of housing available to refugees and other migrants depends on legal status, availability and cost. Since 2012, Jordan has supported the creation of several refugee camps that are exclusively for Syrian refugees. While the benefits of living inside the official camps include not having to pay rent or utilities, some people choose to leave, complaining of poor hygiene and sanitary conditions, as well as a lack of privacy and intense weather conditions.¹⁶ As a result, many Syrians prefer to try to access housing in cities and towns.¹⁷ Of the 670,000 UNHCR registered Syrian refugees living in Jordan, nearly 85% live outside of the refugee camps, primarily in cities.¹⁸

Refugees who have been displaced for years are likely to have limited financial resources.¹⁹ Many did not expect to stay in Jordan indefinitely and their financial situation worsens as the length of their stay increases.²⁰ For the 90% of Syrian refugees who live under the Jordanian poverty line, being able to afford adequate housing is a significant challenge.²¹ Most rely on humanitarian assistance and when unable to afford housing or pay rent, face the threat of eviction.²²

A 2016 UNICEF report described shelter as often presenting the toughest challenge for refugees.²³ The report stated that in Jordan, 46% of Syrians living in host communities have no heating and that 25% have poor access to electricity. As a

copying mechanism to deal with higher rents, many refugees resort to living in informal settlements. In 2015, the Migration Policy Institute reported that almost 20% of Syrians in Jordan lived in substandard accommodation including garages, chicken houses and tents.²⁴ A 2015 article from the Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration linked unaffordable rents and living costs to the situation of over 16,000 Syrian refugees living in informal tented settlements across Jordan. These tented settlements often lack basic infrastructure services such as sanitation.²⁵

Even before the recent conflict broke out in Syria, housing availability and affordability was an issue in Jordan, due in part to large Iraqi and Palestinian refugee populations.²⁶ High demand has resulted in a general housing shortage in Amman for both Jordanian nationals and nationals of other countries.²⁷ Thousands of Syrian refugees seeking to live in Jordan's urban centres joined the ranks of foreigners and Jordanian citizens trying to access housing. This situation led to increasing rental prices, especially in northern cities like Mafraq, located close to the Syrian border.²⁸ In these areas especially, Syrian refugees end up competing for the limited housing that exists with lower income Jordanian families.²⁹

In some cases, the increased demand for housing has led to inflated rent prices of an estimated 200% or higher according to an opinion piece by Jordan's minister of planning and international cooperation published in 2014.³⁰ Reports also indicate that some landlords have taken advantage of their tenants' precarious situations and lack of documentation by evicting Jordanian tenants and offering the same property to two or three refugee families at once.³¹ Fear of eviction is widespread amongst refugees, and negative coping mechanisms are often employed to pay rent, including child labour, informal work and marriage for financial gain.³² There are also reports of landlords asking women for sexual favours in return for exemptions from paying rent.³³

Unlike Syrian refugees, an encampment policy never took effect for Iraqi refugees in Jordan. Instead, the majority of Iraqis moved to the working class and lower income neighbourhoods of East Amman and Zarqa. The wealthiest Iraqis bought and rented expensive houses and apartments in West Amman, which many Jordanians complained resulted in a spike in real estate prices.³⁴ As many wealthy Iraqis

²⁴ Achilli, Luigi (2015) Syrian Refugees in Jordan: a Reality Check, Migration Policy Centre, EUI.

²⁵ Odum, Alex (2015) Syrian informal tented settlements in Jordan: Humanitarian gaps and challenges, Oxford Monitor of Forced Migration Vol. 5, No. 2.

²⁶ Kelberer, Vicky (2015) Seeking Shelter in Jordan's Cities: Housing Security and Urban Humanitarianism in the Syria Crisis, Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), 5 November 2015.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ UNDP (2014) Analysis of Impact of Influx of Syrian Refugees on Host Communities, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Simmons (2016) As resources run dry, Syrians refugees cling to survival in Jordan's urban hubs.

³¹ Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD) – Legal Aid (2015) Putting Needs over Nationality: Meeting the Needs of Somali and Sudanese Refugees During the Syrian Crisis, 2 July 2015.

³² Abuqudairi (2014) Syrian refugees struggle in urban Jordan.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Fagan, Patricia Weiss (2009) Iraqi Refugees: Seeking Stability in Syria and Jordan, Institute for the Study of International Migration (ISIM) at Georgetown University and Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS) at Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar.

¹³ Carrion, Doris (2015) Syrian Refugees in Jordan Confronting Difficult Times, Chatham House, September 2015.

¹⁴ Reed, John (2015) Syrian refugees leave Jordan in greater numbers for Europe, Financial Times, 8 November 2015.

¹⁵ Dunmore, Charlie (2015) Hope gone in Jordan, Syrian refugees eye risky onward journey, UNHCR, 14 December 2015.

¹⁶ Shearlaw, Maeve (2013) Are refugee camps the best solution for people fleeing a crisis? The Guardian, 25 July 2013.

¹⁷ Simmons, Ann M. (2016) As resources run dry, Syrians refugees cling to survival in Jordan's urban hubs, Los Angeles Times, 6 September 2016.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Abuqudairi, Areej (2014) Syrian refugees struggle in urban Jordan, Al Jazeera, 17 April 2014.

²⁰ Whiting, Alex (2016) Running out of resources, Syrian refugees fall further into poverty, debt: report, Reuters, 5 July 2016.

²¹ NRC, NRC in Jordan.

²² Ibid.

²³ UNICEF (2016) Running on Empty: The situation of Syrian children in host communities in Jordan, May 2016.

agreed to pay higher rents, property prices increased for both Iraqis and Jordanians, resulting in Jordanians criticising the government for doing little to control the housing market.³⁵

Similarly, Sudanese, Somali, Yemeni and other non-Syrian or Iraqi refugees have tended to cluster in tight-knit communities in urban centres. Sudanese and Somalis in particular chose to settle in Amman, where, due to high rental prices, they often share housing or use communal living arrangements.³⁶ Sudanese will often live in houses of seven to eight men.³⁷ In some extreme cases Sudanese men will live in groups of up to 16 individuals to be able to afford rent, creating intense overcrowding.³⁸ While shared living arrangements offer the chance to reduce the cost of each individual's rent, the risk of eviction is high.³⁹ Somalis and Sudanese routinely face challenges with their landlords who will ask for far more than the agreed monthly rent when it is time to pay.⁴⁰ Because of the high rent, many Sudanese and Somali refugees are forced to live in substandard and inadequate housing.⁴¹

An Al Jazeera article established that while many of the Somali, Sudanese, and Yemeni families who live in Amman hold official UNHCR status, they do not receive the same UNHCR services that Syrians do, such as food aid, blankets and heaters in the wintertime.⁴² They are also considered “non-Syrian refugees”, which determines how they are perceived by donors, INGOs and in terms of humanitarian programming more generally. The same article showed that funding for refugee programmes is growing scarce, but most money is earmarked for Syrian refugees rather than non-Syrian refugees, which puts Somali, Sudanese, Yemeni and Iraqi refugees into an even more vulnerable position. Many of the Sudanese and Somali refugees living in Amman report feeling trapped in inadequate housing.⁴³ Receiving little from aid organisations, unable to work without a permit, and faced with racial discrimination, Somalis and Sudanese find themselves in an extremely vulnerable position.⁴⁴ The desire to seek asylum in a third country is strong; as such, most have filed claims with UNHCR but are stuck in desperate conditions while they wait in transit cities that have become semi-permanent homes.⁴⁵

Most of the Somali and Sudanese refugees in Jordan came to Amman after hearing about UNHCR's heightened presence after 2003.⁴⁶ Many Sudanese came from the Darfur region and until now, feel unable to return.⁴⁷ Somalis and

Sudanese have tended to approach Amman as a transit city, but their stays have become prolonged, in many cases by over a decade,⁴⁸ during which time there has been a scarcity of NGO support and a lack of adequate housing. In the case of Iraqis and Syrians, many of whom hoped to return to their countries of origin but have been forced to stay in Jordan due to violent conflict, funds have already run thin. What was also imagined to be a short-term stay is becoming prolonged.

A report from the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) has shown that despite the Jordanian government's need to create housing outside of refugee camps, and the chance it had to approach the refugee crisis as an opportunity to develop its housing stock, it halted all housing projects in early 2015.⁴⁹ Jordan is receiving foreign aid to help it support refugees and other migrants – UN-Habitat, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) all engage in shelter programmes and there are housing schemes and platforms that the government could explore in coordination with these groups. However, MERIP suggest that Jordan is not prioritising housing for urban refugees, which could in part be seen as influencing refugees to leave the country for alternative destinations. At the same time, the Jordanian government has to be interested and dedicated to providing such services, which means it also needs to be open to the possibility of these refugee groups staying in the country for the long-term.

Lebanon

Similar to Jordan, Lebanon has a history of hosting refugees that dates back to the beginning of the 21st century.⁵⁰ Lebanon welcomed Armenians fleeing persecution from newly established Turkey, and even provided citizenship to this early wave of refugees.⁵¹

When Palestinian refugees began to arrive in Lebanon in 1948, they were initially greeted sympathetically.⁵² Lebanon allowed Palestinians to stay, and camps were built on rented Lebanese land. Lebanon accepted the incoming populations under the assumption they would soon be returning to their own homes. By the 1990s, a general consensus existed among Lebanese that the permanent settlement of Palestinians refugees in Lebanon should be rejected.⁵³ The Lebanese government's experience with Palestinian refugees can be seen as very much informing its position on recognising, settling, servicing and integrating other refugee groups like Syrians.⁵⁴ At the end of the Lebanese Civil War, anti-Palestinian sentiment was so strong, that in September 1990, the government successfully introduced a modification of the Lebanese constitution to state in a preamble “there

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Mixed Migration Platform (MMP) (2017) *Displaced Minorities (Part II): Experiences and needs of Somali, Sudanese and Yemeni refugees and other migrants in Jordan*, April 2017.

³⁷ Davis, Rochelle et al (2016) *Sudanese and Somali Refugees in Jordan*, MERIP, Middle East Report, Vol 279.

³⁸ MMP (2017) *Displaced Minorities (Part II)*.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ ARDD-Legal Aid (2015) *Putting Needs over Nationality*.

⁴¹ Abuqudairi, Areej (2014) *Jordan's invisible refugees suffer in silence*, Al Jazeera, 20 June 2014.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ IRIN (2014) *Jordan's other refugees feel forgotten*, 5 February 2014.

⁴⁴ Ibid; MMP (2017) *Displaced Minorities (Part II)*.

⁴⁵ Quran, Layla K. (2016) *Jordan's Sudanese Refugees: 'We are tired'*, Al Jazeera, 19 September 2016.

⁴⁶ Davis, Rochelle (2012) *Urban Refugees in Amman, Jordan*, ISIM and Center for Contemporary Arab Studies (CCAS) at Georgetown University.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ MMP (2017) *Displaced Minorities (Part II)*.

⁴⁹ Kelberer (2015) *Seeking Shelter in Jordan's Cities*.

⁵⁰ Gustafsson (2016) *To Beirut with hope*.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Chassay, Clancy and Duncan Campbell (2007) *'We have no rights and no future.'* The Guardian, 29 May 2007.

⁵³ Gustafsson (2016) *To Beirut with hope*.

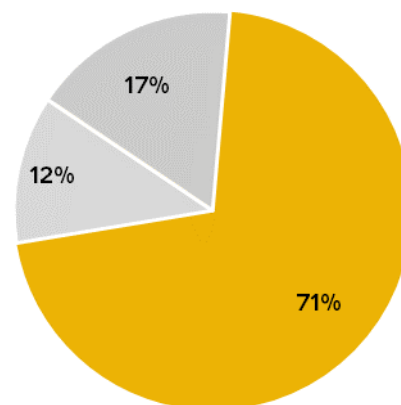
⁵⁴ Janmyr, Maja (2016) *'Precarity in Exile: The Legal Status of Refugees in Lebanon'*, Refugee Survey Quarterly, Volume 35(4).

shall be...no settlement of non-Lebanese in Lebanon".⁵⁵ Though the constitution has since changed, the official position at the time was clear.

Despite Lebanon's relatively open-door policy towards refugees and other migrants, exclusionary policies geared against long-term refugee settlement impact the access to rights and resources of those arriving in the country. At present, Syrians and other refugees have no other status than their own nationalities – and the Lebanese government authorities do not refer to them as refugees.⁵⁶ An article by Refugee Survey Quarterly suggests that by avoiding this terminology, the Lebanese government may be seen as circumventing its responsibility for providing Syrian refugees with support, such as access to livelihoods and adequate housing that would be afforded to them if they were recognised as refugees.

The ability of Syrian refugees to access adequate housing and livelihoods is negatively impacted by their lack of access to rights and resources, as well as high costs of living and a growing number of evictions. Conversely, the ability to access housing impacts refugees' access to other rights and resources including residency. In 2016, for example, Lebanese authorities required all Syrian refugees wanting to renew residency permits to pay a \$200 fee, and to provide a housing commitment (including certified lease agreements) and a certified attestation that the landlord owned the property.⁵⁷ Lebanon, and Beirut specifically, is therefore likely to be seen by an increasing number of refugees and other migrants as a transit location.⁵⁸

In Lebanon, there are no official refugee camps aside from those for Palestinians run by UNRWA,⁵⁹ as the Lebanese government has opposed the building of official camps for other nationalities.⁶⁰ A 2016 vulnerability assessment indicated that 71% of Syrian refugee households lived in residential buildings, 12% lived in non-residential structures, such as worksites, shops and garages, and 17% lived in informal tented settlements.⁶¹



■ Residential ■ Non-residential ■ Informal settlements

Figure 1: Share of households by type of shelter⁶²

Moreover, the assessment showed that some 42% of Syrian refugee households live in dwellings of sub-standard quality that suffer from overcrowding, dangerous structural conditions, and/or a lack of basic infrastructure such as a toilet. In a 2016 analysis of Syrian refugee access to housing in Lebanon, Caritas classified three main types:

1. **Houses of sub-standard quality**, or houses with poor or absent infrastructure, usually located in dense and overcrowded areas.
2. **Informal tented settlements**, in which refugees will rent a small plot of land from a Lebanese landowner and set up basic tents that can be exposed to the elements, and lack infrastructure, like kitchens and bathrooms. These are usually in rural areas.
3. **Unfinished construction or precarious housing**, such as garages, shops, commercial spaces, and containers that refugees and migrants are using for the most basic form of shelter; these also completely lack any infrastructure.⁶³

A lack of affordable housing options has led many Syrian refugees to seek out housing in the cheaper Palestinian refugee camps.⁶⁴ Some families incur debt by asking for extensions in their payment of rent and by borrowing money directly.⁶⁵ Others seek shelter wherever they can, often in sites of unfinished construction or precarious housing, such as on rented farmland, or in empty or abandoned houses and unused garages.⁶⁶ A joint investigation between UN-Habitat and UNHCR showed that urgent needs for basic shelter have resulted in many Syrian families living in very poor conditions.⁶⁷

⁵⁵ El Khazen, Farid (1997) "Permanent Settlement of Palestinians in Lebanon: A Recipe for Conflict," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, Volume 10(3).

⁵⁶ Janmyr (2016) *Precarity in Exile*.

⁵⁷ Janmyr (2016) *Precarity in Exile*.

⁵⁸ Sleiman, Dana (2015) Syrian refugee in Lebanon decides to head to Turkey to risk flight to Europe, UNHCR, 21 July 2015.

⁵⁹ Shaheen, Kareem (2016) 'Nobody wants to stay in Lebanon. It's a miserable life,' *The Guardian*, 6 April 2016.

⁶⁰ Rainey, Venetia (2015) Lebanon: No formal refugee camps for Syrians, *Al Jazeera*, 11 March 2015.

⁶¹ WFP/UNICEF/UNHCR (2016) *Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2016*.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Caritas Lebanon Migrants Center (2016) *A Place to Call Home: An Analysis of Syrian Refugees' Housing in Lebanon*.

⁶⁴ ILO (2013) *Assessment of the Impact of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and Their Employment Profile*.

⁶⁵ Caritas Lebanon Migrants Center (2016) *A Place to Call Home*.

⁶⁶ Gustafsson (2016) *To Beirut with hope*.

⁶⁷ UN-Habitat/UNHCR (2014) *Housing, Land and Property Issues in Lebanon: Implication of the Syrian Refugee Crisis*.

While the majority of Syrians in Lebanon are based in the rural Bekaa Valley, an increasing number are moving to Beirut to access better job and housing opportunities.⁶⁸ In 2016, OCHA reported that Beirut hosted 305,000 Syrian refugees, nearly 30% of the total 1,001,051 UNHCR registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon as of June, 2017.⁶⁹ In Beirut, Syrians face a number of obstacles in accessing housing, especially in terms of cost, availability and quality.

Beirut is routinely viewed as the most expensive city in Lebanon.⁷⁰ The real estate sector is restrained by few market regulations, leading to low property taxes and high real estate speculation.⁷¹ Furthermore, the real estate market concentrates on high-end needs that offer greater profitability rather than middle and low-income needs.⁷² In 2014, the UN found that there were no affordable or public housing projects by which lower income groups might access reduced rental prices in the city.⁷³

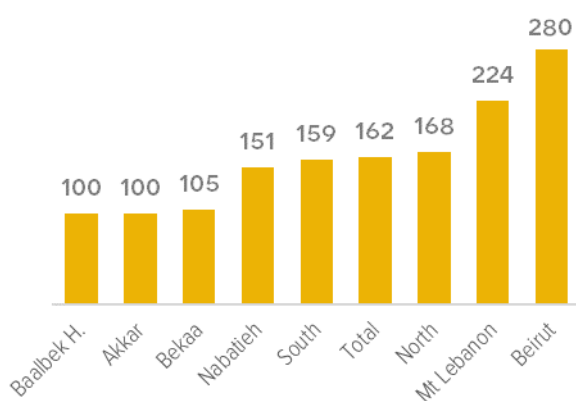


Figure 2: Average rental cost per month by governorate (in Euros)⁷⁴

Adequate housing in Lebanon was in short supply even before more than a million Syrians arrived in the country.⁷⁵ Initially Syrian refugees settled with families or communities, but as the crisis continued, households resorted to renting.⁷⁶ As Lebanon has disallowed the building of refugee camps, Syrian and other refugees compete directly with Lebanese for housing.⁷⁷ However, this lack of affordable or public

housing projects has meant refugees compete with, and in some cases crowd out, poorer Lebanese populations.⁷⁸

Syrian refugees face a number of challenges in Beirut. A 2016 report from Caritas took an in-depth look at housing options and challenges for this group in Lebanon.⁷⁹ Among other things, the report showed that as it can be difficult for a single family to pay rent for an apartment, refugee families have regularly resorted to house sharing, whereby two or more families will live together and split rent regardless of whether they knew each other beforehand. The report also demonstrated that between renters and landlords, agreements tend to be oral rather than written, and often do not specify the rights of tenants. Negotiations tend to rely on prior knowledge of the housing market, which most Syrian refugees lack. The scarcity of written legal contracts, in addition to the absence of a housing policy for refugees at a national level, means that refugees are more vulnerable to exploitation and eviction at the hands of Lebanese landlords.⁸⁰

The Lebanese government's policies have made integration of refugees with host communities more challenging as it has opposed the building of long-term shelter and housing for refugees, believing that this might encourage Syrians to stay longer than they anticipated, as has been the case for many Palestinians.⁸¹ The lack of rights afforded to refugees in Lebanon, in addition to the country's political instability, are prompting more and more Syrians to return to Syria or continue on through Turkey to final destinations in Europe.⁸²

Greece

In the past two years, 1.3 million refugees and other migrants have arrived in and travelled through Greece.⁸³ While many travelled onwards, 62,000 refugees and other migrants remain in Greece (according to government figures in 2016; UNHCR figures are closer to 49,000), and it is likely that many of these people will be forced to stay longer than they planned.⁸⁴

Many refugees and other migrants have viewed Greece as a transit country, and Athens and Thessaloniki as transit cities, on their way to destination cities in Northern and Western Europe.⁸⁵ Athens and Thessaloniki are now becoming centres for reception, where refugees and other migrants wait as European governments discuss border control and migration quotas.

When the number of refugees and other migrants arriving and passing through Greece began to rise in 2015, informal transit camps were established to address short-term shelter needs. The number of makeshift camps grew, and they are

⁶⁸ Caritas Lebanon Migrants Center (2016) A Place to Call Home.

⁶⁹ OCHA (2017) Beirut and Mount Lebanon Governorates; UNHCR (2017) Syria Regional Refugee Response.

⁷⁰ Personal communication (1), 3 June 2017; Personal communication (3), 4 June 2017.

⁷¹ UN-Habitat/UNHCR (2014) Housing, Land and Property Issues in Lebanon: Implication of the Syrian Refugee Crisis.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Amnesty International (2016) 'I want a safe place': Refugee Women from Syria Uprooted and Unprotected in Lebanon.

⁷⁴ WFP/UNICEF/UNHCR (2016) Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon 2016.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ ILO (2013) Assessment of the Impact of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon and Their Employment Profile.

⁷⁷ Shellito, Kevin (2016) The Economic Effect of Refugee Crises on Host Countries and Implication for the Lebanese Case, University of Pennsylvania Scholarly Commons.

⁷⁸ Amnesty International (2016) 'I want a safe place' Refugee Women from Syria Uprooted and Unprotected in Lebanon.

⁷⁹ Caritas Lebanon Migrants Center (2016) A Place to Call Home.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Janmyr (2016) Precarity in Exile; Onishi, Norimitsu (2013) Lebanon Worries That Housing Will Make Refugees Stay, The New York Times, 11 December 2013.

⁸² Fleming, Melissa (2015) Six reasons why Syrians are fleeing to Europe in increasing numbers, The Guardian, 25 October 2015; Shaheen (2016) 'Nobody wants to stay in Lebanon. It's a miserable life'.

⁸³ IRC Greece.

⁸⁴ IRC Greece; Petrakis, Maria (2016) Greeks share what little they have with refugees and migrants, Los Angeles Times, 21 March 2016.

⁸⁵ Oswald, Fahrinisa (2017) "There Is No Life Here," Slate, 23 February 2017.

located near country borders such as Idomeni and Moria, as well as next to major cities like Athens and Thessaloniki. Many humanitarian organisations have criticised the camps for having extremely poor infrastructure, namely shelter and sanitary provisions, which fail to meet basic humanitarian standards.⁸⁶ Groups like Amnesty International have been critical of the provision of services including food, basic shelter and sanitation facilities, as well as medical care, adding that they tend to be provided primarily by NGOs and volunteers.⁸⁷

In January and February 2017, thousands of refugees and other migrants were still living in tents in sub-zero temperatures, with limited access to water and electricity.⁸⁸ This inadequate standard of living endangers their health, security and well-being. The poor shelter situation is compounded by reports of discrepancies in aid provision among Syrian and non-Syrian refugees with the New York Times and IRIN reporting better housing and living conditions in camps for Syrians than in the ones other nationalities live in.⁸⁹

Overcrowding is a major issue at camps like Moria and Samos.⁹⁰ Moria was built to house 1,500 people but hosts 4,000, while Samos was meant to accommodate 700-800 and hosted 1,400 at the start of the year.⁹¹ A Border Criminologies blog post reported that as of October 2016 Greek camps required refugees and other migrants to pass through a rigid pre-registration procedure conducted on the mainland.⁹² At that time, UNHCR estimated waiting time to be almost a year, with those who refused to complete the pre-registration procedure being denied entry into the refugee camps nor access to health services.⁹³ As a result, many refugees are forced to sleep in fields, or public spaces outside, without access to toilets or any type of structural covering as they waited for a place inside the camps.⁹⁴ More generally, refugees and other migrants across the country are resorting to living in abandoned buildings, passenger terminals, and parks in the absence of sustainable housing solutions.⁹⁵

Human Rights Watch, among other rights groups, sees the government as failing to respond to the needs of refugees

⁸⁶ Al Jazeera (2017) Concern over spate of deaths in Greek refugee camps, 30 January 2017; Banning-Lover, Rachel (2017) Greek refugee camps remain dangerous and inadequate, say aid workers, *The Guardian*, 10 February 2017.

⁸⁷ Filippou, Fotis (2016) Greece: Thousands of refugees and asylum-seekers stranded at the mercy of European leaders, *Amnesty International*, 11 March 2016.

⁸⁸ Al Jazeera (2017) Concern over spate of deaths in Greek refugee camps; Banning-Lover, Rachel (2017) Greek refugee camps remain dangerous and inadequate, say aid workers.

⁸⁹ Alderman, Liz (2017) Greece's Refugee Camps, Trying to Recreate the Everyday, *The New York Times*, 2 March 2017; Trilling, Daniel (2017) Afghan refugees in Greek camp: "If you kept animals in this situation, they would die," *IRIN*, June 2017.

⁹⁰ Banning-Lover (2017) Greek refugee camps remain dangerous and inadequate, say aid workers.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Tazzioli, Martina (2016) Greece's Camps, Europe's Hotspots, *University of Oxford Faculty of Law*, 12 October 2016.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ O'Sullivan, Kate, *Refugee Crisis: "Mothers Wrapped Their Babies in Rubbish Bags Trying to Keep Them Dry," Save the Children.*

⁹⁵ Oswald, Fahrinisa (2017) "There Is No Life Here"; Yardly, Jim (2016) A "High Degree of Miserable" in a Refugee-Swollen Greece, *The New York Times*, 17 March 2016.

and migrants.⁹⁶ Across the country different groups of activists and citizen volunteers have taken action to address the housing needs they believe their government is ignoring.⁹⁷ Online platforms such as 'Refugees Welcome' provide Greek residents with a portal through which to connect with refugee assistance organisations and share free flats and rooms. In Athens, activists have responded by repurposing abandoned buildings such as hotels to create more dignified forms of shelter for asylum seekers. Groups have formed a network of activist-administered refugee solidarity centres where they help by providing temporary accommodation, basic medical treatment, clothing and information for refugees and other migrants.⁹⁸ These efforts offer a model for the Greek government to investigate when considering housing solutions for these groups.

Provision of housing is ultimately the responsibility of the national and municipal governments. In the winter of 2016, the European Commission pledged €80 million to Greece for housing assistance.⁹⁹ The amount was meant to include the costs of apartments, hotels and financial support for Greek host families. The funding offers a tremendous opportunity for the government as it now has the financial resources to reach out to humanitarian organisations and construction and housing groups in the public and private sector for ideas and operational support if it so chooses.

Investing in long-term, alternative housing options for refugees and other migrants, rather than short term camp-based ones, is extremely important if Greece seeks to ensure the well-being of such vulnerable groups. Greece is at a point where it can greatly affect and adapt housing policies and plans to accommodate the refugees and other migrants it currently hosts in safe and dignified ways for the years ahead. If they are to learn lessons from countries such as Lebanon and Jordan, which are hosts to longstanding refugee populations, reception countries cannot rely on camps as durable or safe solutions to house refugee and other migrant populations in the long-term.

Conclusions

All three case studies demonstrate two key issues: first, none of the countries seemed prepared for such a large incoming population who chose to live in urban, non-camp spaces, and second, refugees in all three transit countries tend to struggle to access adequate housing. Though it might be taken for granted that refugees and other migrants struggle with access to adequate housing in Jordan and Lebanon – countries that are overwhelmed in accommodating enormous per capita percentages of refugees – it is perhaps more surprising that there would be such obstacles and challenges in Greece, a country that has received a significantly smaller caseload.

While INGO- and community-based efforts exist to help cities provide refugees with safe, adequate and appropriate

⁹⁶ Human Rights Watch (2017) *Greece: A Year of Suffering for Asylum Seekers.*

⁹⁷ Strickland, Patrick (2016) Greek anarchists organize for refugees as 'state fails,' *Al Jazeera*, 19 January 2016.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Brooks, Julia (2016) *From Transit to Reception: A New Reality for Refugees in Greece*, Harvard University Advanced Training Program on Humanitarian Action (ATHA), 11 July 2016.

housing that enable refugees to live with dignity, the government response in all three countries can be seen as lacking. Recent actions, however, appear more positive. Through its resiliency plan, Amman is considering more inclusive and concrete actions to ensure urban refugee populations are represented and given rights. Greece also has the chance to reconsider housing rights and availability to refugees using the European Commission grant. All three governments must recognise the rights of refugee and other migrants, particularly regarding adequate housing.

The notion of urban refugees and how the international community defines, perceives and responds to this group also needs to be revisited. While most people think of refugees as living in camps, the majority now live in cities,¹⁰⁰ and government and humanitarian responses need to reflect this. It is much easier for vulnerable people to fall under the radar in cities, as they move and act freely.

Response actors and governments need to develop approaches that recognise the reality of transit and migration, including better provision of housing assistance that meets international standards. Recovery, development and resilience conversations concerning refugee crises need to focus more on how cities can be prepared to react to higher population densities and respond to greater housing and infrastructure needs, and how central government funding – bolstered by long-term financial commitments from the international community – might be allocated to cities for more targeted responses.

Policy and programme recommendations for the international development and humanitarian communities

- Encourage national and municipal governments to consider new registration and recognition policies that would respect the basic rights of non-UNHCR registered refugees and other migrants, through which they can access basic resources like housing
- Coordinate with national and municipal governments to monitor, document and evaluate housing provision and refugees and other migrants' ability to access housing. As humanitarian actors have unique access to such populations through their relief efforts, this can help governments improve the housing stock in a more targeted way
- Assist national and municipal governments in developing legal frameworks that address the provision of adequate housing as a basic right for all, to be used by the host community as well as refugees and other migrants
- Encourage national and municipal governments to develop an affordable housing scheme that would benefit not only refugees and other migrants, but lower income groups from the host population
- Help build the capacity of municipal governments and authorities to understand, prepare for and respond to housing crises amongst vulnerable groups

- Support the efforts of national and municipal governments to provide adequate housing for refugees and other migrants and host communities through long-term, predictable funding

Policy and programme recommendations for national and international governments

- Create space for consideration of new registration and recognition policies that would respect the rights of non-UNHCR registered refugees and other migrants, through which to access basic resources like housing
- Adapt policies that actively discriminate against refugees and migrants attempting to access housing, education, livelihoods and other basic services
- Encourage law enforcement and judiciary officials to enforce and regulate housing zoning, construction, affordability (renting and pricing) and eviction, and uphold tenant rights, particularly those of refugees and other migrants
- Develop safeguards in housing legislation that are applicable to refugees and other migrants to detect, prevent and prosecute against instances of tenant abuse and exploitation, particularly with regards to renting out substandard housing
- In conjunction with the international development community, create an affordable housing scheme that would benefit not only refugees and other migrants, but also lower income groups from the host population. Invest in, develop and implement adequate and affordable and alternative housing programmes that benefit the same groups
- Focus on long-term alternative accommodation options, such as upgrading schemes, including the upgrading of abandoned but functional buildings
- Greece, in particular, should consider forms of affordable urban housing such as clusters of apartments or independent apartments, as identified and recommended in a joint review of possible public alternatives to camps for refugees by NRC¹⁰¹

Recommendations

Areas for future research

- Future research could look at access to adequate housing for refugees and migrants in other transit cities in Italy, Turkey and Balkans countries. These transit countries have also seen hundreds of thousands (if not millions in the case of Turkey) of refugees and other migrants move through them. While Italy has been recognised as the desired final destination for some,

¹⁰⁰ UNHCR (2017) Urban Refugees.

¹⁰¹ NRC (2016) Study on Adequate Urban Housing for Refugees in Thessaloniki, Greece.

cities in Turkey and Balkans states tend to be viewed by refugees and other migrants as exclusively transit spaces

- Further research into how resilience strategies for cities with large urban refugee populations can be made more inclusive to promote refugees and other migrants' rights to adequate housing and infrastructure, as well as access to resources. Amman recently released the Amman City Strategy in conjunction with 100 Resilient Cities, which recognises refugees and other migrants as part of the urban population.¹⁰² In the strategy, IRC recommends an inclusive resilience plan that would include the needs of refugees and other migrants. One of IRC's ideas was to issue an 'Amman Citizen Card' to facilitate access to various services.¹⁰³ This idea should be explored more practically to see how it might work, and whether it could be introduced to other cities with large refugee and migrant populations
- Investigation into how affordable urban housing schemes that have been proven to provide accessible and adequate shelter to lower income groups work, and how they might be altered to ensure they account for refugees and other migrants as well as vulnerable host communities living in cities and countries of transit

The Mixed Migration Platform (MMP) is a joint-NGO initiative providing quality mixed migration-related information for policy, programming and advocacy work, as well as critical information for people on the move. The platform was established by seven partners—ACAPS, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Ground Truth Solutions, Internews, INTERSOS, REACH & Translators without Borders—and acts as a hub for the Middle East Region. For more information visit: mixedmigrationplatform.org

¹⁰² Amman Municipality Committee (2017) Amman Resilience Strategy.

¹⁰³ Amman Municipality Committee (2017) Amman Resilience Strategy.