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# The Social Stability Context in the Nabatieh & Bint Jbeil Qazas

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*Conflict Analysis Report - March 2016*



Supported by:



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## Summary

This report presents a brief analysis of the social stability context in the Qazas of Nabatieh and Bint Jbeil in the Nabatieh governorate, a sparsely populated religiously and politically homogenous area which hosts a small number of Syrian refugees. The highly securitized border area is economically dependent on migrants' remittances and agriculture, with a few small industries. The area is largely dominated by the strong presence and popularity of a limited number of actors, namely Hezbollah and the Amal movement and the security apparatuses, with a few secular and nationalistic parties. Although relatively stable, the report elaborates on sources of tension with the Syrian refugee population in the area particularly given Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict. At the security and political levels, harassment and attacks on Syrian refugees and disrespect of their freedom, either because of their perception as a threat of terrorist attacks or in retaliation to events in Syria is the major concern locally, while opportunities for reporting of these assaults and their fair management are limited. An ambiguous and bureaucratic national level policy on the residency of Syrian refugees is feeding discriminatory attitudes and further weakening the refugee population. These issues and dynamics are experienced against a backdrop of solidification of support for Hezbollah locally because of the rise of fundamentalist militant groups and desire of marginal groups to appease the party. The report recommends the prioritization of rights based support and protection of the refugee locally, by local actors and national government alike, and the investment in improved relationships by supporting longer term development projects for Syrians and Lebanese alike.

## I. Introduction

This report provides a quick description and analysis of the conflict and social stability context in the Qazas of Nabatieh and Bint Jbeil in the Nabatieh governorate. The analysis is based on fieldwork conducted in both Qazas between 14 October and 18 November 2015, and included interviews with 25 key informants including members of civil society organizations, journalists, local government representatives, and local business people, in addition to members of the Lebanese and Syrian refugee community.<sup>3</sup>

The report provides an entry point into the context and a quick conflict analysis based on the limited field work conducted, news reports and relevant current research and should be treated as a snapshot of the current context and not as comprehensive profile of the area. The analysis is concerned primarily with conflicts at the social and socio-political dimensions at the local level, with particular focus on issues of concern to humanitarian and peacebuilding organizations.

## II. Context

The Nabatieh and Bint Jbeil Qazas are both part of the Nabatieh governorate which includes also Hasbaya and Marjeyoun, not covered in this report. The administrative boundaries of the districts in the Nabatieh and South Lebanon governorates were historically drawn to suit electoral interests of Lebanese politicians in the past, and in practice, the villages of these two districts bare a lot of resemblance to villages of the Tyre Qaza, in terms of economic activity, religious composition, and political affiliation.

Distinction in this largely homogenous area can still be made between the urban areas (Nabatieh and the villages surrounding it) or larger towns (like the town of Bint Jbeil) on the one hand, and the rural areas and smaller villages on the other. The former have a variety of economic activities and do not rely primarily on agriculture and have historically higher levels of education. Those cities and towns have a longer civil and cultural tradition with both Nabatieh and Bint Jbeil being home towns of prominent writers and academics. Another distinction can be made between border towns which were under Israeli occupation from 1978 and 2000 and other villages in the area, particularly as for twenty two years these two areas followed diverging economic and political trajectories. Some individuals in border villages have cooperated with the Israeli military administration in that period, some of whom left the country or received court sentences for that role. Today, some of those or members of their families are stench supporters of Hezbollah in an effort to improve their blemished image in their villages.

### A. Demography

The Qazas of Nabatieh and Bint Jbeil are relatively sparsely populated with an estimated 200,000 inhabitants, which is less than 5% of the total Lebanese population. The number of Syrian refugees these communities host is approximately 39,000, making the proportion of Syrian to Lebanese residents at 1:5, less than the national ratio of 1:4. There are no Informal Tented Settlements in the area, and refugees live in rented rooms and apartments.

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<sup>3</sup> Interviews were conducted in Arabic by two researchers, one Syrian one Lebanese, and if interviewees accepted were recorded. The report though does not provide a mere summary of the key issues reported by interviewees, but provides an analysis which does not always take statements by interviewees at face value and rather compares and contrasts various perspectives and opinions to provide this analytical summary.

**Table 1: Key Demographic Data**

	Nabatieh Qaza	Bint Jbeil Qaza
Number of localities	38 registered municipalities. Nabatieh city the centre of the Qaza	38 registered municipalities. Town of Bint Jbeil the centre of the Qaza
Total number of Lebanese population <sup>2</sup>	125,321	66,120
Number of Syrian refugees <sup>3</sup>	30,276	8,733

## B. Political and religious composition

The vast majority of the residents in both Qazas are Muslim Shiites, with a small number of villages with a Christian (mostly Maronite) or Sunni Muslim community. Politically, Hezbollah and Amal Movement coalition won 88-94% of the votes in the 2009 parliamentary elections, and is likened to a steamroller due to what appears like the impossibility of opposing it since the resumption of Parliamentary elections in the post-war period.

Historically the South of Lebanon was represented by a feudal political dynasty the last of which was Kamel Al-Asaad, defeated in favour of nationalist, leftist and Shiite religious political parties, and the militarization of some of those areas during the Lebanese civil war and the resistance to Israel. Today, the majority of remaining members of the nationalist and leftist parties seem to agree with Hezbollah's political agenda at the regional level as to the opposition to Israel and support to the Syrian regime, despite the difference in ideologies and even if some had differing opinion on the national level politics. Very few politically dissident voices exist, possibly the most prominent of which is Ahmad Al-Asaad, son of aforementioned Kamel Al-Assad, but he enjoys little, if any, popularity locally.

Residents of the area are generally religious, a trend that has increased with the political dominance of religious parties, but is also based on the historic significance of the area of Jabal Amel in the history of the Shiite sect and as a hub of religious scholarship.

**Table 2: Political Distribution of Parliamentary members**

	Members of the Parliament and political affiliation (all members of the March 8 coalition)
<b>Nabatieh</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mohammad Raad – Hezbollah</li> <li>- Abdel Latif El Zein</li> <li>- Yassine Jaber - Amal Movement (not an affiliated member)</li> </ul>
<b>Bint Jbeil</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ali Bazzi – Amal Movement</li> <li>- Ayoub Hmeid - Amal Movement</li> <li>- Hassan Fadlallah - Hezbollah</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> According to UNHCR's summary data of Lebanese and Syrian refugee population ranked vulnerability, dated January 2014 available on <https://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=4596> (accessed 21/12/2015). Number of registered voters in both areas is relatively high, and is not indicative of the actual resident population due to high percentage of migration.

<sup>3</sup> Based on August 2015 data according to: UNHCR, UNICEF, and WFP. 2015, 'Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) in Lebanon: Executive Summary' <http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/download.php?id=9645> (accessed 21/12/2015).

## C. Security

Apart from Israeli threats and minor border clashes with Israel, the Qazas of both Nabatieh and Bint Jbeil are relatively stable in terms of relations between the inhabitants. Still, the area is highly securitized, partially because of the proximity to Israel, as well as the perceived risk of possible targeting of points of interest because of the area's political and sectarian composition, not least since the Burj Al-Barajneh bombing<sup>4</sup>. In the border areas, UNIFIL forces, the Lebanese Army, and the security apparatus of political parties maintain tight control, and all foreigners, including Syrian refugees need special permission to live in the area. In other areas, including the busy city of Nabatieh, the municipalities upon the Ministry of Interior's directions keep up to date records of Syrian inhabitants. Security zones are demarked around governmental institutions, and visitors to busy areas – including for example the weekly market in Nabatieh - are checked. Further security measures are taken at times of political and religious events, not least during Ashoura and the yearly commemoration of the disappearance of Imam Musa Sadr<sup>5</sup>.

## D. Economy

The Nabatieh governorate is generally one of the better off governorates economically, with an estimated low prevalence of extreme poverty at 2% in 2008, and a below-average prevalence of overall poverty (close to 20 per cent)<sup>6</sup>, despite years of occupation in the South, and repeated wars with Israel resulting in significant destruction. According to analysts in the above quoted UNDP report, the low rate of poverty observed for the Nabatieh governorate (Nabatieh Caza in particular) could be explained by the 'relatively low level of inequality and the high incidence of external migration and remittances'<sup>7</sup>.

Indeed, remittance from external migration remains one of the key sources of income for residents in both Qazas, in rural and urban areas alike. This is closely followed in rural areas by income from agriculture, primarily the government subsidized tobacco agriculture. Other agricultural crops, including olives, apples (in the Iqlim el-Tuffah area of Nabatieh Qaza) and vegetables are less significant economically due to national level weaknesses of the agriculture sector and like elsewhere in Lebanon have been negatively affected by the limitation on export by land with the Syrian crisis. Other sources of income include small industries (carpets, sweets, construction material), as well as small commercial institutions, restaurants, and cafes in urban areas.

Syrian refugees work locally in seasonal agriculture, as daily workers in factories and in construction, and within the city of Nabatieh, females work in commercial shops, offices and doctor's clinics. A negligible percentage started their own business, mainly bakeries or services.

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<sup>4</sup> This includes for example the bombings on 12 November 2015 in Borj El-Barajneh <http://cskc.daleel-madani.org/sir/twin-explosions-targeted-borj-el-barajneh> and 20 June 2014 in Dahr el-Baydar <http://cskc.daleel-madani.org/sir/1-dead-34-wounded-dahr-al-baydar-blast> (both accessed 19/12/2015).

<sup>5</sup> Usually takes place end of August.

<sup>6</sup> See El-Laithy, Heba, Kamal Hamdan, and Khalid Abu-Ismael. 2008. 'Poverty, Growth and Income Distribution in Lebanon'. UNDP (page 18).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid; page 21.

### III. Actors

The political scene in the Bint Jbeil and Nabatieh area is largely dominated by a limited number of actors who are significantly more powerful than any other opposing group or counterpart. Sectarian and political homogeneity coupled with the strength of Hezbollah and the Amal movement overshadow all other actors. Nevertheless, it is important to assess the local nuances in both parties' power and other existing parties.

#### A. Hezbollah<sup>8</sup>

The main actor at the local level, and a key influential actor at the national and regional levels. While there is no room to delve into the party's history and transformation in its politics and popularity locally, it is important to note recent critical junctures in its trajectory. The 2005 nation-wide political schism dividing political groups into the March 8 (led by Hezbollah) and the March 14 (led by Future Movement) brought to the surface the national level conflict brewing since the year 2000 – the year of the Israeli Army's withdrawal from the South of Lebanon - on Hezbollah's arms. The party's lead role in the 2008 take-over of the city of Beirut posited it away from the post-war established – and largely respected particularly since 1996 - image of a resistance group to that of a sectarian party in local Lebanese political conflicts.

Hezbollah's continued support to the Syrian regime after the start of demonstrations, and its ensuing involvement in the war in Syria have represented another key juncture in the party's positioning within Lebanese politics. At the start of the Syrian crisis, the party's image further moved away from that of resistance to that of a regional player acting primarily in support of its partners, namely the Syrian and Iranian regimes. While speculation about the possible waning of the party's popularity because of its role in Syria abound<sup>9</sup>, our assessment is that the rise of Islamic militant fundamentalist groups and bombing targeting civilians across Lebanon has recently further consolidated its base of support locally.

Beyond the official political rhetoric and the televised speeches of its Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, the party is encountered locally through its representatives and members in the villages and the funeral processions of its martyrs in Syria. Despite clearly limited authority, local representatives and elected officials affiliated with the party influence perceptions of the party. They are forced to deal with day-to-day realities and challenges. As such, daily performance of local officials does not always match the national level principled discourse.

In terms of membership, while historically the party achieved its local popularity and legitimacy through its successful role in the resistance against Israel and provision of social services locally, some interviewees attribute its present ability to recruit young fighters primarily to the financial compensations it pays its members at fight in Syria<sup>10</sup>. The regional political considerations, a claimed moral duty to support the Syrian regime because of its support to the resistance against Israel, and/or the proclaimed 'religious duty' to defend Sayyeda Zeinab's shrine – presented in 2013 by Nasrallah as the motivation for involvement in Syria<sup>11</sup> - appear to be rhetorically used by some supporters but

<sup>8</sup> For an exhaustive – though at times partisan – introduction to Hezbollah see: 'Hezbollah | Mapping Militant Organizations'. 2015. October 4. <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/81?highlight=hezbollah> (accessed 19/12/2015).

<sup>9</sup> See for example Lob, Eric. 2014. 'Is Hezbollah Confronting a Crisis of Popular Legitimacy?' 78. Middle East Briefs. Crown Centre for Middle East Studies - Brandeis University.

<sup>10</sup> Reportedly the starting salary of a Hezbollah fighter is USD800.

<sup>11</sup> See: Aziz, Jean. 2013. 'Hezbollah Leader Defends Involvement in Syria - Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East'. February 5. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/05/hezbollah-nasrallah-speech-involvement-syria.html#>.

not instrumentally the motive for the young fighters. We have not observed that the high number of casualties in Syria has affected the party's popularity, though often the associated blame and anger after the death of a fighter is displaced onto the Syrian population. In its relations with Syrian refugees as the de facto force on the ground, Hezbollah representatives intervene in local disputes, often via or in coordination with local state security apparatuses. From cases of conflict we encountered, they adhere to a 'pacification' approach, one where overt expressions of conflict, are promptly contained in coordination with local notables and families.

Despite the many dissident voices against Hezbollah's role in Syria – and at times because of the lack of legitimacy of these voices - the party continues to be very powerful with a strong loyal constituency.

## **B. Amal Movement**

Hezbollah's political ally at the moment and longtime ally of the Syrian regime in Lebanon has not taken an active role in the war in Syria. The party's established privileged position within the state has sustained its political power<sup>12</sup>. Locally, limited rivalry exists between the Movement and Hezbollah – which feeds on a historic rivalry between the two - as manifested in local elections and disputes between young supporters of each of the groups, though national level coordination and a tacit power sharing agreement keeps the relationships in check.

Locally the movement is present both through its parliamentary representation and leadership, as well as its local membership. The latter implements security operations at times, particularly around events of concern for the movement. In dealing with its constituency, the most prominent role for existing active members of parliament who continue to visit the South<sup>13</sup> and maintain a base of clients around them, as well as the direct interaction with the Movement's leader Nabih Berri himself and the government institutions under his control. With Berri entering his late seventies, speculation exists as to his successor – as the speaker of the house as well as in leading the movement - which remains unclear particularly as he appears not to be particularly preparing a successor<sup>14</sup> as habitually practiced by Lebanese politicians.

## **C. Security apparatuses working locally**

The areas of Nabatieh and Bint Jbeil, like many areas in Lebanon are highly securitized for reasons mentioned earlier and because of the ongoing securitizations of the Syrian refugee crisis, particularly since the Arenal clashes. This securitization, among other reasons, has contributed to increased power of the different security apparatuses locally. In Nabatieh, a security cell or committee is established at the district level and is made up of officers representing five security apparatuses as well as three representatives of civil administrations, and one civil society representative<sup>15</sup>. The security cell meets weekly and coordinates local policy on dealing with Syrian refugees and their concerns. It is coordinated by the governor's office and reports directly to the Ministry of Interior (Mol). While adjoining such a

<sup>12</sup> For a long time this included the "Council of the South" which was responsible for infrastructure projects in the South, and still includes "The Lebanese Tobacco and Tunbac Monopoly Department" (Regie), and the cultivation of tobacco that it subsidizes is a major source of income in the area.

<sup>13</sup> Yassin Jaber is one example of local elected Member of Parliament who has strong presence locally, and continues to have a client's base independent of the movement.

<sup>14</sup> There was some speculation around the Movement's congress in March 2015 about the possibility of a greater role for Berri's son, Abdallah which did not happen. In parallel though, one of the movement's old guard, Hani Kobeissi, resigned from his position as head of the Nabatieh branch around the same period – see Luca, Ana Maria. 2015. "The Legacy of the Amal Movement." April 15. <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reportsfeatures/565120-the-legacy-of-the-amal-movement>.

<sup>15</sup> Members include representatives of the General Security, Army intelligence, State Security, the Intelligence unit of the Internal Security Forces, and Local Police, as well as a representative of the ministry of Social affairs, the Ministry of Education, and the appointed doctor in the governorate, plus a representative from the local coalition of clubs and association in Nabatieh.

committee in every governorate is a recommendation of the MoI, in the qaza of Nabatieh it appears particularly efficient and the point of reference for key policy related to Syrian refugees locally. The committee includes representation from and coordination with civil society and administrations in an effort to shift its focus from a predominantly security one, towards further inclusion of social, humanitarian or rights based aspects<sup>16</sup>.

#### **D. Nationalist and leftist political parties<sup>17</sup>**

Marginal in their power and the number of members, these parties have enjoyed more power historically and still have many sympathizers. Politically, their members and sympathizers stand in support of Hezbollah's resistance to Israel, but vary in their position towards its involvement in Syria. Collision does happen as a result of Hezbollah's conservative ethos and reported attempts to enforce Islamic practices in the area and the secular and socially liberal values cherished by individuals affiliated with these parties but this has minimal effect on the political level. With regards to the relationship with the Syrian refugees, some of these members or sympathizers are active in civil society organizations and champion a rights based discourse in dealing with the refugee crisis, and are an important moral voice in that regard leveraging the security rhetoric<sup>18</sup>.

#### **E. Employers of Syrian workers**

For many Syrians, the primary contact with the Lebanese community is the one with their employer. This includes the business owners in the city of Nabatieh as well as the contractor who employs several agriculture or construction workers. Also important to note are large employers, particularly industrial ones and the Nabatieh Traders Association who could have a decisive say in Syrian refugees livelihood activities. A patronage relationship between the Lebanese employer and the Syrian daily worker, that predates the Syrian crisis, is less prominent in the South than the Beqaa for example. Yet, the employer continues to be the first point of reference for Syrians who face bureaucratic or security problems. Exploitation and harassment by employers was reported by several Syrian employees, as employers benefit from the power differentials and the lack of support for refugees.<sup>19</sup> We have also observed two incidents where an employer provided support to female workers against harassment or several where one employer supported his workers' demands for wages that were not duly paid by other employers. The new regulations on residency and work of Syrians in Lebanon (in force since the beginning of 2015 - see Section IV.4) have increased the dependence of Syrian workers on their employers as their support is needed for residency, and further strengthened the latter's clientelistic power<sup>20</sup>.

#### **F. Municipalities**

Under the direction of the MoI and the Governor's office municipalities maintain up to date records of Syrian refugees residing within their area. This is acting as a quasi-registration process, which covers all Syrians residing locally including those not registered with UNHCR or without legal residency documents. Despite possible limitations of this system<sup>21</sup>, municipalities continue to be a key source of

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<sup>16</sup> The committee has recently started receiving support from UNDP and UNHCR to be able to better integrate social and humanitarian aspects into its work. UN partners also noted that the Governor's office aims more broadly at positively maintaining stability, by actively prohibiting municipalities to levy payments from refugees.

<sup>17</sup> Including the Communist, The Syrian Social Nationalist, and Baath parties, among others.

<sup>18</sup> We were also informed of the existence of the "Committee for Syrian Workers", allegedly established to protect the rights of Syrian workers. Yet, we have limited knowledge of that, beyond unconfirmed information that it predates the refugee crisis, is affiliated with the Syrian Baath party, and provides support to workers conditional on their political loyalty.

<sup>19</sup> HRW, How Lebanon's Residency Rules Facilitate Abuse of Syrian Refugees

<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that we have no accurate data as to the number of Syrians who have applied for residency in the cazas of Nabatieh and Bint Jbeil and what percentage continue to live and/or work there without legal documents.

<sup>21</sup> In December 2015, and after data collection for this report was completed, three regional trainings on the use of newly

information and some have served as a first point of contact for the aid community, the role of most is limited to a security and conflict management one. Based on the perception of the limited number of refugees we met, the municipality remains a first point of contact and one of the most trusted of Lebanese authorities, particularly in the villages.

## G. NGOs and the aid community

The relatively limited number of refugees in both areas and the ongoing decrease in amounts of aid have reduced the importance of the aid community as a key actor. Syrian refugees' day-to-day contact with the NGOs and aid community is decreasing. The new regulation from the MoI on residency of Syrians, both refugees and non-refugees, have shifted the weight of bureaucratic management of Syrian refugee's life in Lebanon towards heavier involvement of the MoI. Nevertheless, other ministries like MOSA or MoPH and MEHE continue providing essential daily social, educational and health services to refugees. The Lebanese community sees employment with NGOs as an important source of livelihood in the South. This does have its negative ramifications on young people's career choices since employment in the charitable and development sector has relatively good benefits on the short term but is unstable on the longer term. In addition, the aid provided by NGOs does also have a direct impact on the host communities, in the form of rents to landlords, food expenses in supermarket, etc...<sup>22</sup> There seems to be limited information on aid policy at local level, as we observed a prevalent negative perception of both local and international NGOs, often described as ineffective, and at times accused of unfair allocation of assistance or even of fraud. Still, as mentioned earlier, NGOs have an important role in advocating for a humanitarian rights based perspective in dealing with the refugee issue.

## IV. Conflict Issues

The South of Lebanon is commonly described by aid workers as one where overt conflict between the Syrian refugees and the host community is limited. This holds a good measure of truth, particularly because of the relatively low ratio of refugees to Lebanese host communities. It is thus difficult to coin specific issues over which there is conflict, and the issues described below are better described as sources of tension (see also Figure 1: Force field analysis of social stability).

Of note is that unlike voiced complaints in other areas that Syrian refugees are forming competition for Lebanese labour, refugees in the area appear to be an economic asset to the community, providing cheap labour in the agricultural sector and have contributed to the local economy through their expenditure<sup>23</sup>. The varying sectarian belonging of members of the predominantly Shiite Lebanese host community and the mostly Sunni Syrian refugees also appears to have no apparent negative consequences on the

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developed tension assessment tool and software were provided by UNHCR and UNDP, to district Security Cells members in Saida, Nabatieh and Marjayoun. According to UNHCR, participants in these trainings claimed that municipalities are not maintaining updated records about the refugee population living in their areas because of a lack of resources and the frequent movement of the refugee population.

<sup>22</sup> UNDP and UNHCR (2015), *Impact of the Humanitarian Aid on the Lebanese Economy*.

<sup>23</sup> It is not possible to quantitatively assess the percentage increase in the Syrian labour in Nabatieh governorate as gauging the number of Syrian workers in Lebanon has long been very difficult and estimates vary widely. Estimates according to UNDP's Human Development reports are between 200,000 at 450,000 in the end of 1995. Whereas IRIN gives an estimate of 300,000 Syrian workers in Lebanon in 2009. Yet observations in the field (and UNHCR data on number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon) clearly indicate the significant increase in available in Syrian labour, now available year round and at relatively lower cost. In addition, the southern area of Lebanon, particularly border villages have witnessed significant political and economic changes since the year 2000 which we believe has increased cash flow locally and increased the demand on foreign labour. See IRIN. 2009. "LEBANON-SYRIA: Wretched Conditions for Syrian Workers." April 13. <http://www.irinnews.org/report/83900/lebanon-syria-wretched-conditions-for-syrian-workers> and UNDP. 2009. "Toward a Citizen's State: 2008-2009 The Lebanon National Human Development Report."

relationship. Indeed, although some Syrians voiced concern that they might be negatively perceived because of their religious belonging, none of the Lebanese interviewees raised this as an issue of concern, with variables like political leanings, nationality, class and differentiation between urban, rural and Bedouin ways of living having a greater impact on Syrian-Lebanese relationships locally.

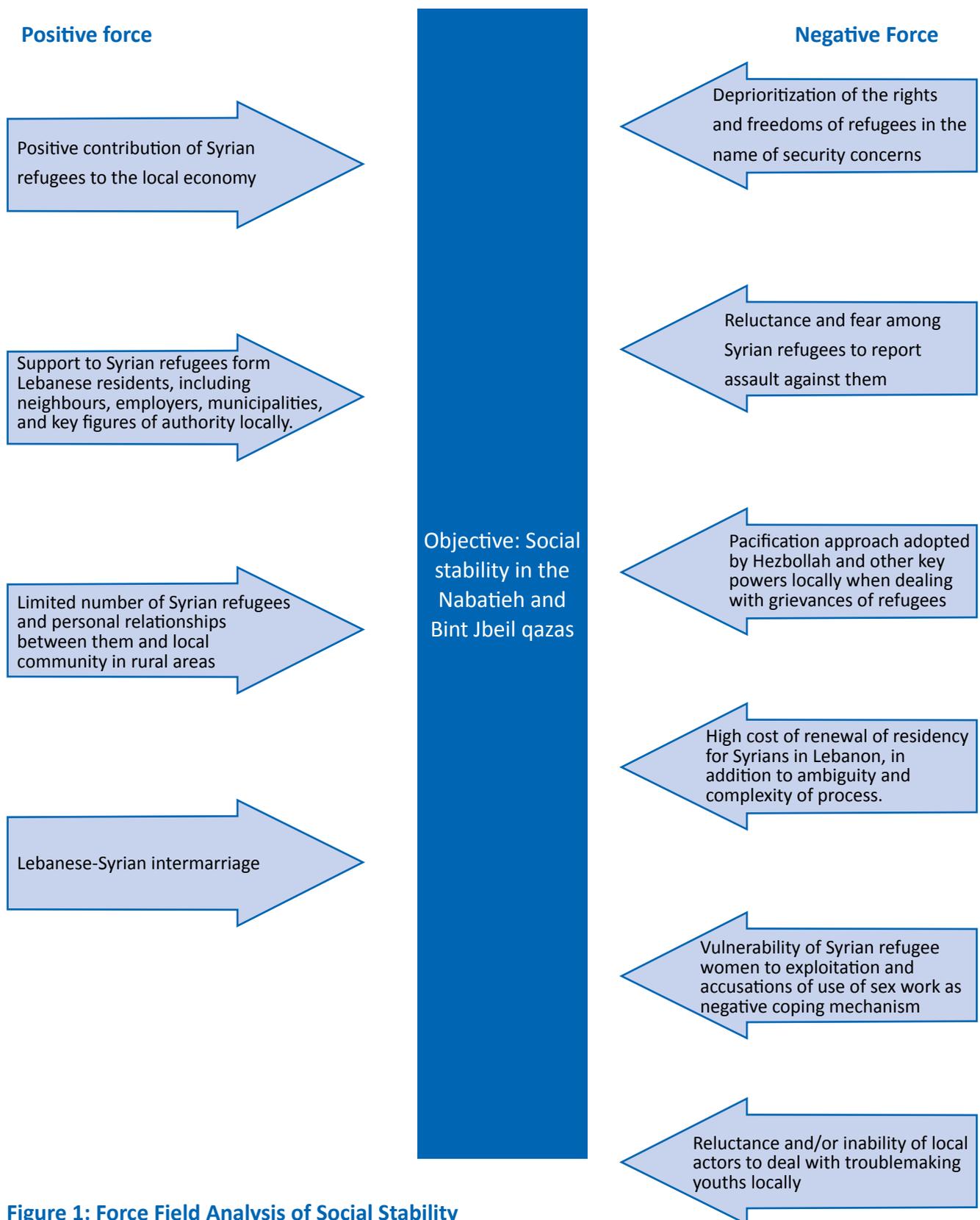


Figure 1: Force Field Analysis of Social Stability

## 1. Balancing security concerns with respect for human rights and freedom of movement

Hezbollah's role in the ongoing Syrian conflict has increased the threat against areas in which it has large popular support as well as the Party's and various security apparatuses securitization<sup>24</sup> these areas in fear of possible retaliatory attacks. For the Syrian refugees in the South of Lebanon this securitization has translated into monitoring of the number and residence of all Syrians, restriction on movement, and being subjected to routine security checks. Most communities<sup>25</sup> of both qazas have restrictions on the movement of Syrians at night, and Syrians abide by these restrictions, and also often follow self-imposed curfews for fear of being assaulted and not because of the municipalities' enforcement. These restrictions are heightened around periods of religious or political significance, often at the cost of the refugees' freedoms. During fieldwork, we encountered cases of families forced to stay at home all day during such events, or urged to temporarily leave their homes for security considerations. To an extent, the security concerns are valid; from a peacebuilding perspective the possible long term negative impact of a serious security incident on the relation between the refugees and host communities requires security vigilance. Yet at the same time these security measures are having a negative impact on two levels. First, they are implemented with little regard to their impact on the rights and freedoms of Syrian refugees, often imposing measures unnecessarily strict. Second, they propagate the image of the Syrian as a security threat, framing every Syrian as a possible suspect and feeding into stereotyping of Syrian refugees.

## 2. Political tension and attacks on Syrian refugees in 'retaliation'

Some media have reported<sup>26</sup> on the targeting of Syrian refugees in towns and villages in both qazas that have lost Army or Hezbollah fighters in confrontations with Syrian opposition or Islamic militant groups; possibly the main overt manifestation of the political tension between the Syrian refugees and the host community. As described to us, perpetrators of these attacks are young men who act on the spur of the moment, and although supporters of Hezbollah or the Amal movement, are not by necessity following directions from parties they support. Following the incident, in the two cases where we managed to meet the Syrian victims, political and social figures usually reached out to the victims and in one case urged the perpetrators to apologize. Yet this kind of mediation remains inadequate as an intervention. The assaulted Syrians continue to feel vulnerable and think the apology and mediation was only performative and that locally powerful political parties are not doing enough to prevent such attacks. They are also not reimbursed for their medical costs nor for the losses incurred from having to take time off. From the point of view of the local parties and representatives of the security forces, there is little that can be done to control the young mischievous men, be it in attacks on Syrians or any others. They even gave examples of incidents where young Amal movement youths engage in violent fights with young Hezbollah members and security forces could barely intervene and no one was arrested. In terms of the popular response from the Lebanese community, in all cases we heard about, a few Lebanese bystanders or acquaintances interfered in support of the Syrian person under attack and tried to provide protection.

<sup>24</sup> Securitization is understood here as per the Copenhagen school of security studies ; ie the social construction of the Syrian refugee as a threat or "the process through which non-politicized (issues are not talked about) or politicized (issues are publicly debated) issues are elevated to security issues that need to be dealt with urgency, and that legitimate the bypassing of public debate and democratic procedures" - <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199743292/obo-9780199743292-0091.xml>

<sup>25</sup> While we have not surveyed all communities in both cazas, a curfew in all the communities we visited was in place, and a curfew was recommended by in all of the towns of the Nabatieh caza by the Nabatieh security cell.

<sup>26</sup> See for example "Lebanon Villagers Attack Syrians after Hezbollah Death." 2015. NOW. August 14. <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/NewsReports/565735-lebanon-villagers-attack-syrians-after-hezbollah-death>.

### 3. Lebanese-Syrian social and marriage relations and gender exploitation

Many of the Syrian refugees live today surrounded by only their nuclear family, having often left behind their extended family and closely knit conservative community. The change in the location of residence, the interface with the Lebanese community, and the transformation in the set of relationships in which the refugees are embedded have set off social changes within the refugee community itself. In urban areas and large towns, this has loosened social restrictions and possibly allowed for a greater freedom for women. In smaller areas, particularly where refugees came from the same town or family, it has meant more social restrictions, where members of the Syrian community monitored each other to ensure that a single individual's behaviour does not jeopardise their relationship with the Lebanese host community.

Equally, the influx of the Syrian refugees has its social impact on the Lebanese community. This is best observed in marriage and romantic relationships. Several marriages have taken place between older Lebanese men or men who do not have otherwise the financial capacity to get married, and Syrian women who, in addition to an overall position of vulnerability, are perceived as having fewer restrictions and financial demands compared to their Lebanese counterparts. Interviewees also mentioned accusations towards some members of the refugee population of use of sex work as a negative coping mechanism. In interviews such accusations came with claims – which we cannot substantiate – that the security forces raided a particular café or house where these services were offered. The importance of such claims though is also symbolic, as they are made within a broader moral discourse, portraying those engaging in such services as dishonourable and positing the Lebanese 'culture' on higher moral ground.

In parallel, we have heard several accusations towards members of the Lebanese host community of harassment or exploitation of Syrian women, particularly by male Lebanese employers in urban areas and against divorced or widowed females. While we have been able to document at least one such case of harassment<sup>27</sup>, we have observed that a wide spectrum of male female relationships exists, embedded within the context of power differentials and socio-economic needs of the refugee population which might facilitate exploitation, but not always devoid of actual relationships.

### 4. National level policy feeding discriminatory attitudes locally

At the national level, Lebanon in 2015 has witnessed a solidification of a national policy<sup>28</sup> in dealing with Syrians in Lebanon to limit the number of Syrian refugees<sup>29</sup>. This included restrictions on entry into Lebanon<sup>30</sup>, increased controls over residency, and a tighter definition of who is a refugee. Observed in practice, this policy is very ambiguous. In the Nabatieh caza for example, based on our brief conversation with an officer at the General Security – and as displayed on the information board – two types of residencies are officially given. The first is for those registered with UNHCR, and requires among others,

<sup>27</sup> In this case, the details of which are beyond the scope of this report, a female widow in her early thirties described several examples of requests for sexual services and persistent marriage proposals from a married Lebanese man. The marriage offer was accompanied with harassment from the suitor's wife accusing her of actively seducing him, and came at great cost for the Syrian lady who felt her image in the village as well as her daily life was negatively affected significantly.

<sup>28</sup> As per the 'Syrian Refugee Policy Paper' approved by the Lebanese Cabinet in October 2014. See "Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting Convened on October 23, 2014". Accessed January 19 2016. <http://www.pcm.gov.lb/arabic/subpg.aspx?pageid=6118>.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of the policy see: Saghieh, Nizar, and Ghida Frangieh. 2014. "The Most Important Features of Lebanese Policy towards the Issue of Syrian Refugees: From Hiding Its Head in the Sand to 'Soft Power.'" Heinrich Böll Stiftung Middle East. Accessed January 19 2016. <https://lb.boell.org/en/2014/12/30/most-important-features-lebanese-policy-towards-issue-syrian-refugees-hiding-its-head>.

<sup>30</sup> See circular by the Lebanese General Security on 23/2/2015 - [http://www.general-security.gov.lb/news\\_det.aspx?d=194](http://www.general-security.gov.lb/news_det.aspx?d=194) (Accessed 18/1/2016)

UN registration documents, proof of residence, and a signed commitment not to work in Lebanon. The second for those not registered with UNHCR requires a Lebanese sponsor and proof of residence<sup>31</sup>. In practice though, most men – particularly of a working age - are channelled through the track that does not treat them as refugees regardless of their registration status. The argument provided by the officer is that there are no Syrian men who are not working in Lebanon now. This has implications on their families, particularly for children under 15, whose legal status is tied to the head of household<sup>32</sup>. The requirement to renew one’s residency has its social and financial ramifications. The cost of the residency is \$200 a year per adult family member, and newborn babies for mothers without residencies cannot be registered. A myriad of obstacles face the legal renewal of residency, and refugees expressed the difficulty of dealing with what appears to be an erratic maze of bureaucratic procedure.

On the social level, these bureaucratic constraints are paralleled by a popular rhetoric delegitimizing the refugees. This rhetoric, equally propagated by Lebanese politicians and the media, feeds into the process of othering of the Syrians and feeds discrimination against them. Many interviewees considered the primary solution to the difficulties faced by Syrian refugees to be their return to safe areas in Syria, and most did not consider the Lebanese state is under any obligation towards the refugees. The procedures equally contribute to the disempowerment of the refugees, severely impacting the freedom of movement for adult men, especially in relation to livelihoods opportunities, as their dependency on local patrons and brokers (as sponsors and landlords) increases.

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<sup>31</sup> See Annex I . List of requirements for legal residence for Syrians in the Nabatieh Caza

<sup>32</sup> HRW (2016) I just want to be treated like a person, How Lebanon’s Residency Rules Facilitate Abuse of Syrian Refugees, p.9

## V. Dynamics

In a context characterized by conflict suppression, conflict dynamics are of particular importance if a source of tension is to trigger conflict. The developments in the area recently as well as projections of what can happen in Lebanon and in relation to the Syrian crisis more generally, show little cause for concern in terms of risks of conflict escalation. Nevertheless, ways of framing and managing existing conflicts, particularly by rights based and humanitarian actors, can have a significant impact on long term relations locally and thus awareness to existing dynamics can improve relationships.

### 1. Structural discrimination vs accusations of popular ‘racism’

Many humanitarian and human rights groups have condemned both institutional state level as well popular discrimination against the Syrians, some labeling this discrimination as racist. At the popular level, some Lebanese freely used discriminatory rhetoric, particularly in attempts to position the Lebanese culture in a ‘superior’ position and describing rural Syria as ‘at least 20 years behind Lebanon’. Examples of these include claims that the Syrians ‘have too many children’ on which they expend little effort to educate, and that Syrian ‘men show little respect to their wives’ and ‘all marry several women’. Yet beyond apparent racism and prejudices, there is a more complex set of relationships between members of these communities. The same lady for example who spoke about Syrians in her village as ‘completely different to the Lebanese’, and threw accusations of drug dealing, sexual ‘deviance’ and theft at Syrians, accepted to marry her son to a Syrian lady. In another instance, a man who attacked a Syrian daily worker after ISIS’s assassination of one of the captive Lebanese army officers also married a Syrian woman.

The main drivers of discrimination against Syrian refugees are not the social attitudes, but rather national level policy as well as political and media discourse which condones popular practices, and situates Syrian refugees in a position where they are vulnerable to exploitation. The further blurring of the boundaries between Syrian refugees and Syrian migrant workers, particularly with the long existing Syrian labour in Lebanon, the Lebanese government’s reluctance to recognize Syrian fleeing the war in Syria as refugees, and the ambiguity in the laws governing residence of Syrians in Lebanon further reinforces this exploitation.

### 2. Limited reporting on assaults by Syrian refugees

Many Syrian refugees described their reluctance to report attacks and assaults they face<sup>33</sup>. According to our interviewees, the reasons for this hesitation include a fear of the reaction by the perpetrators or members of the local community resulting from this reporting and the bureaucratic and legal costs they could possibly incur, including the cost of legal medical reports and transportation to and from police stations and courts. In addition, some described a sense of shame in reporting such incidents – or even sharing those with fellow Syrians- in that they might appear weak and incapable of defending themselves.

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<sup>33</sup> According to a recent survey on the perceptions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, of the total Syrian population who said they were subject to personal assaults, 69% did nothing while another 14% changed their patterns of behaviour or place of residence to avoid further risks. Only 17% reported the incident of confronted the perpetrator. See Jihad Nammour, and Carole Alsharabti. 2014. “Survey on Perceptions of Syrian Refugees.” Political Science Institute - USJ.

### 3. Changes in socio-economic systems

The attitude of the Lebanese host community in the two qazas is largely dependent on the community's need for Syrian labour. This is particularly true in rural areas, in villages that rely on agriculture and can benefit from cheap labour. Villages for example around Nabatieh and in areas in Bint Jbeil where there is high percentage of migration and limited agriculture appear to be less welcoming to Syrians.

Closely linked to the above is that the availability of cheap Syrian labour is creating changes in the class structures of the Lebanese community. Many Lebanese families who have traditionally labored their own land, particularly in olive and tobacco seasons, are now making use of Syrian workers instead. As land owners or holders of permits to cultivate government subsidized tobacco, they own the 'means of production' that are not accessible to Syrian workers.

### 4. Solidification of circles of support for Hezbollah with rise in militant fundamentalist groups

The rise in Islamic militant groups has allowed Hezbollah to regain to its side some of the voices that disagreed with its military intervention in Syria. The discourse of 'security' in the face of 'terrorist' threats appears generally – with the exception of a few dissident voices - accepted at the popular level and with it the clamp down on freedoms of Lebanese and Syrians alike.

### 5. Antagonism towards Syrian opposition and refugees used as sign of loyalty to Hezbollah

Some of the individuals and families of individuals who have once been members of militias in support of the twenty-two year occupation of the South of Lebanon and opposed to Hezbollah, today openly display support for Hezbollah, or their public opposition to Syrian refugees.

## VI. Recommendations

The situation in the South raises little alarms in terms of risk of conflict escalation. Still, the extremely limited power of the refugees locally given the security concerns and political homogeneity in the area requires particular sensitivity to ensure rights of refugees are upheld, and the recommendations below are proposed to contribute to this. While these recommendations can be seen to apply nationally, they are the priority interventions in the two cazas subject of this study.

1. The international aid community and Lebanese civil society need to lobby the Lebanese government at the highest level to ease and clarify the administrative policies and procedures governing the daily lives of refugees, particularly where these policies infringe on basic human and children's rights, particularly the right to education and birth registration.
2. The international aid community and Lebanese civil society should continue providing accessible and safe opportunities for legal support as well as compensation for costs incurred by plaintiffs in cases of attack against Syrian refugees, and make information about these opportunities widely available.
3. Political parties and security apparatus in the South of Lebanon need to take stricter measures against perpetrators of assaults and attacks against Syrian refugees and ensure that security measures taken maintain respect to Syrian refugees' freedom of movement.

4. The international aid community, in collaboration with municipalities and local government, need to increase their investment in sustainable development projects for Syrian refugees and members of the Lebanese host community alike. In particular, national level agricultural policies supporting food industries and export of agricultural crops, can increase work opportunities and allow for ample use of the combined Lebanese Syrian efforts.

## VII. Case Study<sup>34</sup>

Away from inquiring eyes, we sit on the couch of a local friend in a remote village in the caza of Bint Jbeil. Hatem details the story of his brother, Maher who has been assaulted by local youths.

Around 5:00 pm in early Oct 2015, young men armed with wooden sticks arrived in a small vehicle and assaulted then beat Maher as he was on his way to the grocery store. Those who assaulted him were at least four young men, aged between 17-20 years, and are relatives of a recently martyred Hezbollah fighter. The young men, according to Hatem, were acting after four days of receiving the news of the death of their cousin who was killed in the ongoing battles in Syria.

Older bystanders rushed to stop the young men and carried Maher home. Maher and Hatem's boss took Hatem to see a doctor, a visit which cost him around 330 USD, a large sum for a daily worker who was also obliged to take a week off work to recover. Hatem had a medical report and was advised to file a complaint, or at least seek compensation for the expenses he incurred, yet he chose not to. His reluctance to complain has many reasons. On the one hand, he had little faith that the results of a complaint would be favourable for a Syrian, and believes that Lebanese and Syrians are not treated equally by the police. In fact, he was concerned that it would actually have negative ramifications on him. On the other hand, he finds that having to recount that he was a victim of an assault brings with it a sense of disgrace and he prefers not to publicize what he has been through. In a similar vein, Hatem shared how he felt too 'ashamed' to ask another friend about the details of a similar incident which that friend has been through. He explains that he did not want to 'embarrass' his friend, particularly since when he was assaulted his wife was also with him.

Hatem described that he had previously worked for the man who assaulted his brother, and that some days after the incident, he bumped into him in the street and was offered an apology but nothing else. He describes how in some cases locally respected figures and Hezbollah representatives interfere to reconcile assaulted Syrians with young men who assaulted them, he believes that Hezbollah engages in this process half-heartedly and little is done to truly prevent such recurring incidents. He added how after the news spread of similar incidents, several many Syrians in the area wanted to leave the area in fear of things getting worse, but they were reassured by Hezbollah official locally and advised to stay.

Hatem and Maher are from Deir Ezzor. Maher has been in Lebanon for less than a year and has entered through legal border crossings, Hatem arrived to Lebanon over two years ago and has no legal documents beside the Syrian ID. Besides physical attacks, Hatem described many incidents of verbal abuse against Syrians locally, either through demeaning words or accusations of involvement with ISIL, to which Syrians do not respond, but rather have resorted to minimizing their movement and avoided areas and times where they could be subjected to harassment. Of note, the village where the two

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<sup>34</sup> The incidents described in this case study are based on accounts of Syrians, cross checked with those of local Lebanese residents, and are generally representative of other similar cases we documented. The name of the village is deliberately concealed and all names are fictitious to ensure protection of individuals involved.

brothers live, like most in the caza observes a curfew on the movement of Syrians after seven at night which is carefully observed by the Syrians because of fear of attacks.

In addition, and because he has no residency permit in Lebanon having entered Lebanon illegally, Hatem limits his movement and has occasionally been stopped on checkpoints. Once stopped at the checkpoint, he has called the head of the municipality of the village where he lives to identify him and help free him. This kind of support, Hatem mentioned, is possible because he has been in the village for several years now and has a network of acquaintances from among its residents.

He explained how similar incidents are taking place in the area, where Syrians without their legal papers are being stopped at checkpoints, arrested for a day or two (depends on each case), then are released through the support of a local person with authority, be it the mayor, mukhtar or an employer.

In the month prior to the interview, Hatem says he worked for 20 days in the past month at a rate of \$20/day (which is a total of \$400). This, a relatively good month, allowed him to pay his \$100/month rent, cover his expenses and save a little bit for other times when he has less work. He has lived elsewhere in Lebanon, and despite the recent attack prefers the Bint Jbeil Caza and the village he is in over other areas in Lebanon, due to its Islamic character and the availability of work. He sees limited long term prospects though and because of the lack of legal document has no way of leaving Lebanon, if at least to join his wife and four kids, who he has not seen for over three years, and are now refugees in Turkey living off daily agriculture work there.

## Annex I . List of requirements for legal residence for Syrians in the Nabatieh Caza

Figure 2: Required documents for issuing of residency permits for Syrians registered with UNHCR. On display in the Nabatieh Serail at the entrance of the General security office. In practice, this applies only to members of female headed households. (photo taken by author on 30/10/2015)

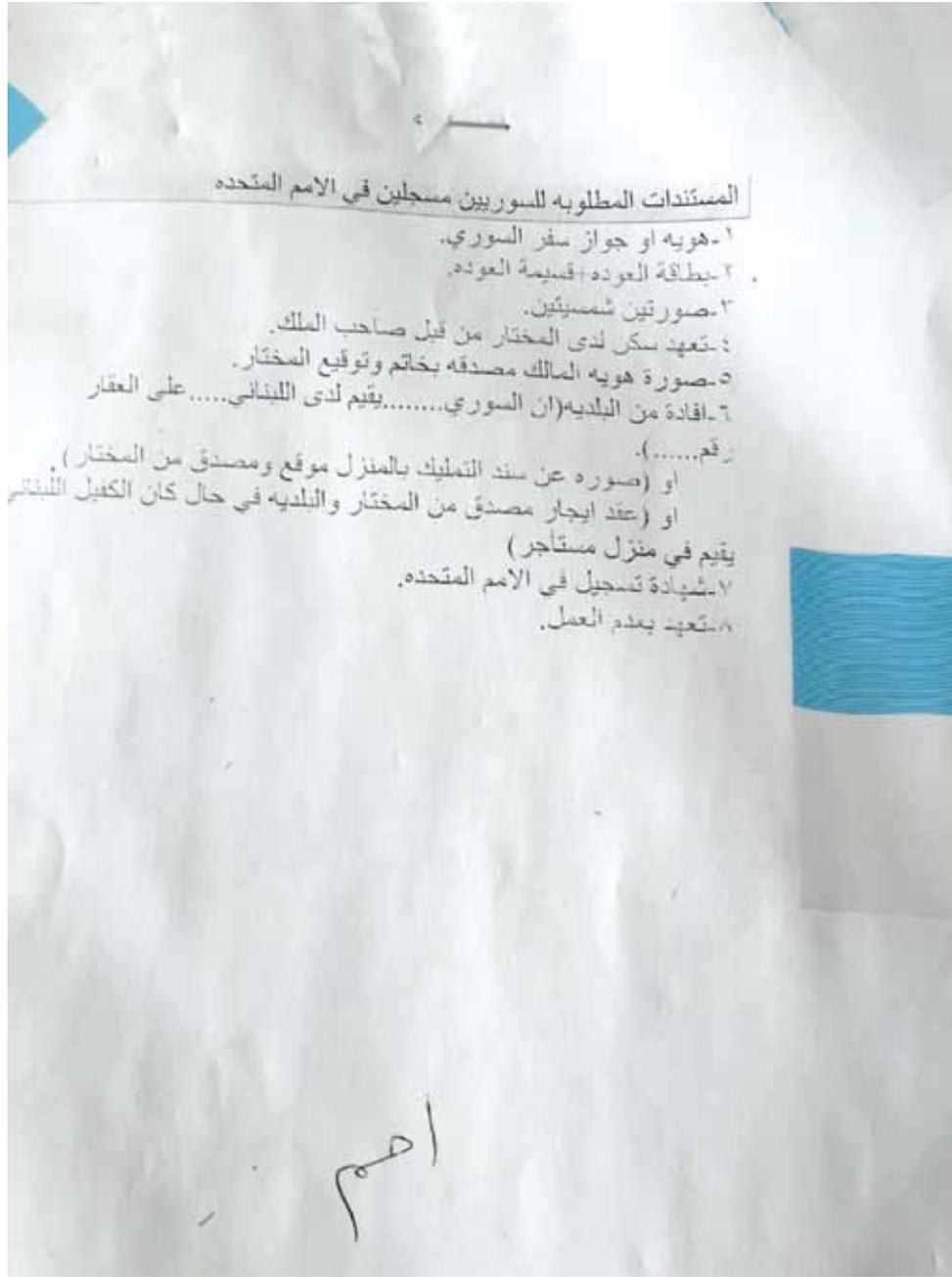
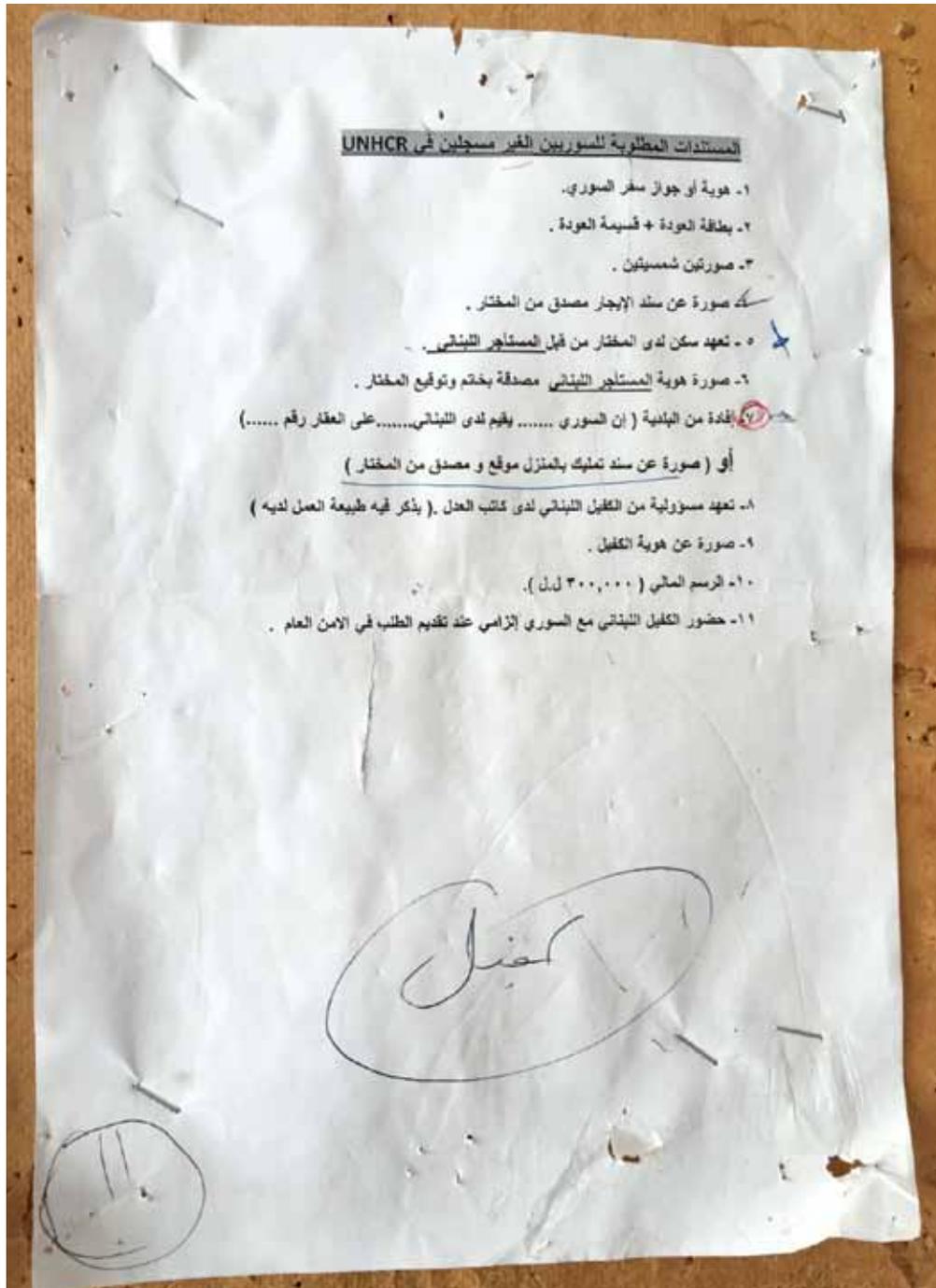


Figure 3: Required documents for issuing of residency permits for Syrians not registered with UNHCR On display in the Nabatieh Serail at the entrance of the General security office. In practice, this set of documents is required of all adult males. (photo taken by author on 30/10/2015)







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