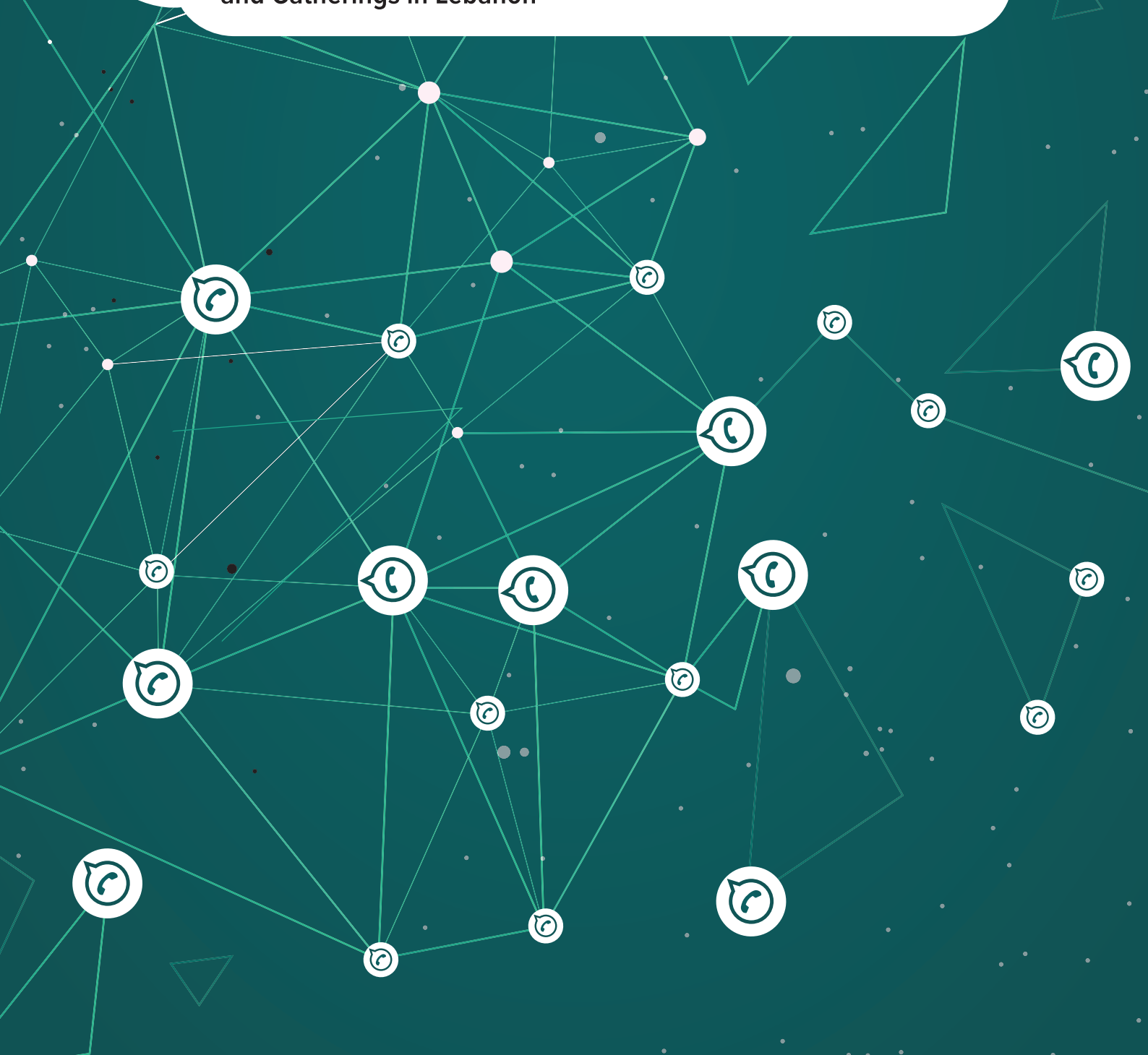




Nothing and Everything to Lose:

Results from a Qualitative WhatsApp survey of Palestinian Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon



Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

In October 2019, as part of the Tensions Monitoring System, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in cooperation with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), administered a qualitative WhatsApp survey to gain insight into the lives of Palestinians in Lebanon. Based on responses from the survey, this report aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of community needs, social relationships, inter-community tensions, and security environments in Palestine refugee camps and gatherings¹ in Lebanon. It combines data from the qualitative WhatsApp survey, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIs) with Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian community members and UNRWA and non-governmental organisation (NGO) frontline staff to build an in-depth qualitative analysis of two sites: (i) Wadi Zeineh gathering, a Palestinian Gathering in the Chouf area that is affiliated with Sibleine municipality; and (ii) Mieh Mieh camp, a Palestine refugee camp located south of the city of Saïda.

While quantitative surveys provide a broad overview of social stability trends, they often fail to capture the more subtle dynamics in people's perceptions of social relationships. Furthermore, there is a risk of generalisation in employing a quantitative approach since both questions and answers may be oversimplified. For instance, by asking 'What is the relationship between the Lebanese and the Palestinians?', we would effectively eliminate the heterogeneity of these groups and infer that only one type of relationship exists between them. A qualitative survey, on the other hand, allows us to hear from

community members directly in order to unpack these social stability trends.

The WhatsApp survey is an innovation which has simply repurposed a technology that is already widely in use. In Lebanon, for instance, 78 per cent of Syrian refugee households use WhatsApp for daily communication; with the number likely to be similar for Palestine refugees. In order to collect data from a range of participants, including those who struggle with literacy or dyslexia, participants were invited to send voice notes detailing their stories, insights and experiences. Collating these accounts in this way also facilitates new ways to connect with refugees and host communities at the human-level, valuing their knowledge and input beyond fundamental statistics. The survey covered a range of topics including conflict dynamics, individual safety and needs, gender relationships, and people's vision of the future.

Key Findings

- Palestinian respondents described **unemployment as 'the core of all their problems'** with devastating economic and social consequences, particularly for youth.
- The situation in Mieh Mieh camp is particularly difficult as **Lebanese army checkpoints create heavily securitised living conditions**, making access to goods, services and employment even more limited. In Wadi Zeineh gathering, people were **particularly frustrated about the inadequate service provision** such as garbage collection by the municipality of Sibleine.
- In discussing the sources of tension where they lived, respond-

¹ Unlike official Palestine refugee camps, Palestinian gatherings are informal Palestinian villages that are part of Lebanese municipalities.

ents focused more on the difficult economic situation and how it is exploited by employers, and local political and religious groups, rather than on the relationship between host communities and refugees: ***Tensions between different communities (Lebanese-Palestinian, Palestinian-Syrian, Palestinian-Palestinian) exist but do not seem to be a major concern.***

- ***In places where people live close to each other without restrictions on movement, such as Wadi Zeineh gathering and Siblina, there is more mutual understanding, cooperation and support between Palestinians and Lebanese.*** This is in stark contrast to places where Palestinian and Lebanese communities are strictly segregated, such as Mieh Mieh camp and village, in which stereotypes of the 'Other' and memories of a violent past overshadow daily interactions.
- More vulnerable social groups such as women, Syrian refugees, and Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS) face various forms of discrimination, especially based on class, gender and race. Palestinian refugees living in camps also feel shunned and securitised by the State and their surroundings.
- Respondents did not clearly distinguish between a lack of physical safety and vulnerability. Rather, they described ***unsafety as a pervasive psychological experience:*** everyday fears of survival and harassment can be as stressful as fears of armed clashes or crime for Palestinian refugees.

- Women often described how they negotiated their safety ***between the unsafety of the street and the unsafety of the home,*** with single or widowed women feeling particularly vulnerable.
- Palestinian refugees are pessimistic about the future and many see resettlement to another country as the only solution.

Introduction

For more than 70 years, Palestinian refugees have been living in Lebanon. However, since 2011, the dire conditions in Palestinian camps and gatherings have been eclipsed by the Syrian refugee situation. Moreover, Palestine refugee camps and gatherings have hosted a number of these Syrian refugees and PRS, placing greater pressure on already limited services and infrastructure. UNRWA has faced severe funding cuts since 2018 whilst Palestinian refugees have struggled to find work amidst an economic downturn. Meanwhile, the prospect of a return to Palestine seems more remote than ever amidst geopolitical developments in the Middle East. How have these pressures influenced the social fabric on the ground in Lebanon? Have they stoked tensions between host communities and refugees? How do Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians make sense of their social relationships and how do they see the future?

To answer these questions, UNDP in cooperation with UNRWA, administered a qualitative WhatsApp survey and conducted FGDs and KIs in Wadi Zeineh gathering and Mieh Mieh camp between June and October 2019. The approach builds on two successful UNDP pilot studies which tested the viability of WhatsApp surveys as an in-

depth conflict analysis tool in Lebanon. The pilot studies focused on social relationships between Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees, and were implemented in 2017 and 2018 in Bar Elias and Qaraoun. 78 per cent of refugee households in Lebanon use WhatsApp (VASyR, 2018, 34), and 1,036 people participated in our WhatsApp surveys sharing their experiences and insights through a blend of voice and text messages, covering a variety of topics including humanitarian assistance and development, as well as people's needs, fears, and social relationships. The results of these surveys were published in two UNDP research reports alongside a practical guide for conducting qualitative WhatsApp surveys (Ullrich, 2019a; Ullrich, 2019b; Ullrich 2018).

This WhatsApp method makes four important contributions to research in refugee and crisis contexts. First, it is a cost-effective tool for scaling up qualitative research in real time (it would take weeks, if not months, to conduct qualitative interviews with more than 1,000 people). Second, it taps into a technology - WhatsApp - that people already use, that they are comfortable with, and that they trust more than other forms of communication (i.e., due to end-to-end encryption). As such, it has the potential to establish more personal insights into individual lives across vast spatial and temporal differences. Third, qualitative WhatsApp surveying generates more bottom-up, people-centred knowledge that is separate from the jargon of humanitarian and development institutions. Put simply, using WhatsApp enables people to talk about the issues that matter to them in their own words. Fourth, the method fosters inclusivity since it (1) can extend to hard-to-reach communities (e.g., in conflict situations), (2) is more accessible to people who struggle

with literacy and dyslexia, and (3) is less dependent on local gatekeepers to select research participants.²

Research Location Overview

The rationale behind the comparison between Wadi Zeineh gathering and Mieh Mieh camp was to disentangle (i) to what extent safety and tension dynamics depend on (ii) the material and social conditions of (iii) where and how people live. Previous surveys of Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees have shown that social relationships tend to be better where host communities and refugees live together and interact (ARK, 2017). Is this the same for Palestinian communities? Looking at places that are very different can sharpen our analytic lens for what they have in common despite all differences. Wadi Zeineh gathering and Mieh Mieh camp are very different. The first difference relies on the fact that Wadi Zeineh is an informal gathering whilst Mieh Mieh is an official Palestine refugee camp. Second, in Wadi Zeineh gathering and Siblino, there are no restrictions on movements and people of different nationalities live in close proximity to one another. In Mieh Mieh camp, however, there is strict segregation amongst groups. Third, residents in Wadi Zeineh gathering are generally more prosperous than those in Mieh Mieh camp; and fourth, Wadi Zeineh experiences less security incidents and is less securitised than Mieh Mieh camp – particularly since violent clashes there in October 2018. Finally, the Lebanese host villages differ in terms of political and religious affiliation. Mieh Mieh village is a predominantly Christian village affiliated with the three Christian parties while Siblino is a predominantly Sunni Muslim village affiliated with the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) and Future Movement.

2- For a more thorough discussion of the contributions and limitations of qualitative WhatsApp surveying, please see Ullrich (2019a, 7-9), Ullrich (2019b, 2-4) and Ullrich (2018, 16-20).

Mieh Mieh Camp

Mieh Mieh is a Palestine refugee camp located south of the city of Saida, with the current population estimated to be around 5,000 according to Palestine Popular Committee members. The camp was established in 1954 and extends over an area of 54,000 square metres. In 1982, the Israeli invasion destroyed many shelters in the camp, with alternative shelters established in the Wadi sector of the camp (i.e., along the southern border not recognised as part of the official camp). The ongoing Syrian crisis had also led to an additional influx of Syrian and PRS refugees in the camp (UNRWA, 2019).

The camp witnessed an eruption of violent clashes between different Palestinian factions in October 2018, leading to several deaths and the temporary displacement of most residents. Following the clashes, an agreement to disarm the camp was implemented in 2019 and accompanied with further securitisation measures, including more entry and exit checkpoints. In addition, and unlike in other camps, the Lebanese Armed Forces now provide security patrols alongside Palestinian forces.

Wadi Zeineh Gathering

Wadi Zeineh is located in the Chouf area of the Mount Lebanon governorate and is administratively affiliated with the Sibline municipality. The municipality does not consider Wadi Zeineh to be 'a gathering', and insists it is part of Sibline village and calls it 'Kamal Jumblatt Street' or 'the Lower Sibline'. Since UNRWA shelter, infrastructure and camp improvement programmes are only implemented in official camps, Wadi Zeineh gathering does not benefit from these services. Infrastructure projects in Palestinian gatherings fall under UNDP's mandate while basic services such as water, electricity and garbage collection fall under the responsibility of the Lebanese municipality of Sibline.

The first wave of Palestinian refugees arrived in Wadi Zeineh in the mid-1970s, predominantly after the Israeli destruction of Nabatieh camp in 1974, the massacre at Tal El Zaatar camp in 1976, and the massacre at Sabra and Shatila in 1982. More recently, Wadi Zeineh became home to many PRS fleeing the war in Syria, although some of them have already resettled to other countries.

Wadi Zeineh belongs to the second and third category of most vulnerable Palestinian gatherings in Lebanon, with greater vulnerability in education, health and income (UNDP, 2018, 51). The majority (70%) of residents rent homes, while the remaining 30 per cent live in houses they inherited, purchased or built. Healthcare is a major concern, with 64 per cent of households hosting a family member who needs treatment; 15 per cent of those who needed treatment did not receive it. The unemployment rate stands at 15 per cent, with underemployment at 27 per cent and 72 per cent of residents earning less than minimum wage. Having said that, most of Wadi Zeineh's economic indicators (e.g., for wages and employment) are slightly above average for Palestinian gatherings, making it one of the more prosperous settlements. Furthermore, safety perceptions are greater in Wadi Zeineh (92%) than in gatherings adjacent to Palestine refugee camps (all data here has been taken from UNDP's 2018 Assessing Vulnerabilities in Palestinian Gatherings in Lebanon Report).

Analysis

The report undertakes three types of analysis:

(1) Thematic: the WhatsApp survey data was analysed through key themes including (i) needs, rights and employment; (ii) social relationships and tensions; (iii) unsafety, vulnerability and fear; and (iv) expectations of the future.

(2) Intersectional: we also applied an intersectional lens to the data by elaborating on how different social categories (e.g., gender, class, nationality, age, race, and sect) compound vulnerability and shape social relationships (Crenshaw, 1989).

(3) Comparative: the report compares Wadi Zeineh gathering and Mieh Mieh camp in order to identify the similarities and differences between informal Palestinian gatherings and official Palestine refugee camps, and how they interact with their respective Lebanese surroundings.

The stories and insights of participants were subsequently analysed using ‘narrative inquiry’: a method which seeks to represent people’s stories through their own concepts (Clandinin, 2007). Our questions were intentionally broad in order to provide participants with the freedom to discuss issues meaningful to them and in their own words. In addition, we avoided imposing particular assumptions or interpretations upon respondents (e.g., that tensions existed predominantly between different nationalities, or between the host community and refugees). Indeed, comparable to previous findings with Lebanese and Syrian groups (Ullrich, 2019a, 3), our analysis demonstrated that these categories (‘Lebanese’, ‘Palestinian’) are not nearly as important as we assume in shaping social relationships on the ground.

General information



Established: 1954



UNRWA registered persons: 5,747 as of June 2018



Size: 0.054 sq Km



Total population: 2,359 according to the official Population and Housing Census of Palestinian Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon of July 2017

UNRWA employees serving the camp:



Health: 11



Education: 23



Sanitation Services: 6

Main UNRWA installations serving the camp:



Camp service office: 1



School: 1



Health centre: 1

Key Findings

While FGDs and KIs provided more systematic insights into the different social and material conditions of Wadi Zeineh and Mieh Mieh, the WhatsApp survey added a much more personal portrayal of what it feels like to be Palestinian in Lebanon on an everyday basis. A psychological and emotional reality of stress, and a pessimistic outlook on the future was largely shared between Wadi Zeineh and Mieh Mieh residents despite their different socio-political and economic conditions.

Needs, rights and employment

In both the Wadi Zeineh gathering and Mieh Mieh camp, the need for medical and education facilities was overwhelming, as was the need for employment, infrastructure, and recreational space. In Mieh Mieh camp specifically, security checkpoints have restricted access to goods, services, and employment. In Wadi Zeineh gathering, residents were particularly frustrated by inadequate service provision (e.g., garbage collection by the municipality of Sibline).

Palestinian respondents described unemployment as 'the core of all their problems' with devastating economic and social consequences (e.g., poverty, stress, depression, and drug abuse), particularly for youth. Rather than fierce competition for jobs amongst different nationalities, a lack of employment opportunities compounded by legal exclusion from the labour market was identified as the root cause of these problems. Palestinian respondents demand an integrated approach to their situation that addresses both their needs, and their civil and economic rights in Lebanon.

Social relationships and tensions

Hostility between different communities

(Lebanese-Palestinian, Palestinian-Syrian, Palestinian-Palestinian) does exist but does not seem to be a major concern. Rather, Palestinian participants were more concerned with everyday survival, restrictive measures from the Lebanese state, geopolitical reshaping of the Middle East, and fears about the future. In discussing the sources of tension where they lived, respondents focused more on the difficult economic situation and how it is exploited by employers, and local political and religious groups than on the relationship between host communities and refugees.

When we prompted our Palestinian respondents to talk about relationships with Lebanese host communities, many described them as typical relationships between 'neighbours': some relationships are close and cordial, others more formal and distant. Some respondents observed that the challenges of everyday life mean that 'everyone minds their own business', which undermines closer relationships.

Some Palestinian respondents were careful to distinguish between relationships with the Lebanese state and the Lebanese people. While Palestinians resent their marginalised political, economic and legal situation in Lebanon, this does not necessarily affect personal relationships with Lebanese residents ('when it comes to the people, some are good, and some are bad'), particularly for Palestinians who were born and raised in Lebanon.

In places where people live close to one another without restricted movement, such as Wadi Zeineh and Sibline, there is greater mutual understanding, cooperation and support between Palestinians and Lebanese. This is in stark contrast to places where Palestinian and Lebanese communities are segregated, such as Mieh Mieh camp and village, where stereotypes of the 'Other' and memories of a violent past overshadow

everyday interactions. WhatsApp respondents often emphasised the difference between how newcomers and people who were born in Lebanon are socially integrated – with the latter usually enjoying much better relationships with the host community than the former.

Observing social relationships through an intersectional lens, our respondents were divided over the importance of nationality, class, gender, race and sect when defining relationships on the ground. Some respondents argued that behaviour, ethics and personal interactions are more important in shaping relationships than an intersectional positionality. More marginalised social groups, such as women, Syrians and PRS, disagreed and recounted the types of class, gender and race discrimination they face. Palestinian refugees living in camps also disagreed, feeling shunned and securitised by the state and their surroundings.

Relationships amongst PRS and Palestinian refugees from Lebanon (PRL) remain ambiguous. While many respondents insisted relationships have improved with time, particularly since the number of PRS in Lebanon has dwindled by almost one third, discrimination has not necessarily subsided for those PRS who remain in Lebanon. PRS surveyed via WhatsApp often expressed their dismay about being associated with Syrian refugees by fellow PRL, labelling the abuse and discrimination that they suffer at the hands of PRL as ‘racist’.

Unsafety, vulnerability and fear

Our respondents did not clearly distinguish between physical unsafety and vulnerability. For them, unsafety was not only a question of space and time (i.e., feeling unsafe in particular locations at particular times), but was rather identified as a psychological experience

(i.e., that everyday fears of survival and harassment can be as stressful as fears of armed clashes or crime). Furthermore, fear of interpersonal violence is more pronounced amongst marginalised segments of society; particularly women, Syrians and PRS.

Women commonly described how they navigated safety between the streets and their home, with single or widowed women feeling particularly vulnerable. In addition, many reported that they felt constrained by what they could wear or how they could behave in public as a result of the harassment they experienced out. Consequently, women often feel forced to retreat home; though home can be an equally, if not more, dangerous space for women at risk of domestic violence or other family conflicts.

Gendered safety is a sensitive issue for Palestinian communities. Many of our respondents insisted that fears of everyday survival and armed violence in the camps persisted across genders. From this perspective, participants felt that gender sensitive programming seeks to divide communities, to encroach personal boundaries, and to discredit individuals or groups as patriarchal and traditional. The challenge for researchers and practitioners, then, is to discuss these issues (e.g., sexual harassment and domestic violence) without condemning already marginalised and vulnerable communities.

Indeed, many respondents were keen to establish ‘Palestinian normality’ against the backdrop of a sensationalist media narrative of violence and extremism in the camps. They emphasized that ‘ordinary people’ help each other, interact, become friends and marry – whether Palestinian, Lebanese or Syrian; while it is the ‘political people’ – the Palestinian factions, the army, the government and employers – who try to divide and incite tensions.

Uncertain future

Palestinians were pessimistic about the future, particularly since their political, legal and economic status is precarious. Most respondents saw immigration to Europe or North America as their only hope for a better life. Palestinian respondents predominantly fear for their children's future and invest in their education despite knowing that they will not be able to work in Lebanon.³ University education becomes a mark of distinction ('the Palestinian kids are known to be smart') rather than training for a liberal profession. Investment in education also reflects the hope that one day Palestinians can be doctors, lawyers or engineers in Palestine or in another country that they immigrate to.

The political and legal context

Palestinian refugees have been living in Lebanon for more than 70 years. The LPDC census in 2017 found that 165,549 PRL and 17,706 PRS reside in Lebanon's camps and gatherings alongside 12,030 Lebanese and 28,317 Syrians (LPDC, 2017, 21). Many Palestinian refugees are deprived of basic civil and socio-economic rights, such as the right to work or practice liberal professions, run businesses and own property outside gatherings and camps. As a result, more than half (53%) of PRS and 23 per cent of PRL are unemployed (AUB and UNRWA 2016, 2). Perhaps reflective of this, most Palestinian refugees are partially dependent on humanitarian assistance,

with the vast majority (90%) of PRS and 65 per cent of PRL living below the poverty line in Lebanon (AUB and UNRWA 2016, 2).

Characterised by fragile security, poverty, limited space, and numerous other socio-economic vulnerabilities, Palestinian camps and gatherings in Lebanon have also hosted PRS for the last eight years. In contrast to other Syrian refugees who fall under the UN Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) mandate, PRS receive support from UNWRA. Aside from the rights to nationality and political representation, Palestinians in Syria have been granted similar rights to those of Syrian nationals; specifically with regard to education, work, property, and freedom of movement.

Our research was conducted during turbulent times in Lebanon. While we conducted the FGDs and KIs between June and September 2019, Palestinian camps and gatherings were awash with weekly protests after the Ministry of Labour implemented its 'Action against Illegal Foreign Employment on the Lebanese Territory' plan between July and October 2019. The plan focused on the implementation of existing laws and obligations, launching a nation-wide crackdown on non-compliant employers and irregular employees.⁴ Palestinian refugees in our FGDs argued that the plan is 'racist and discriminatory', emphasising that they are refugees who were forced to flee their homeland and not foreigners who could return to their country. Over the course of our research, protests against the Ministry of Labour's plan

3- Palestinians are prohibited from working in 39 professions. See UNRWA, 'Employment of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon: An Overview', 2016, available at https://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/content/resources/2017_employment_of_palestine_refugees_in_lebanon_arabic_and_english_ve.pdf.

4- The actions of the Ministry of Labour inspectors were strongly condemned by the Palestinian leadership and wider community in Lebanon, leading to nationwide protests. On 5 August 2019, the Ministry of Labour adopted Decree 93/1 to simplify the administrative procedure for Palestine refugees to obtain work permits but not detaching it from the work contract. On 22 August 2019, the Lebanese Government formed a Ministerial Committee headed by Prime Minister Hariri in order to discuss the issue of Palestinian refugees' employment in Lebanon. However, the Ministerial Committee never convened after its formation as Prime Minister Hariri announced his resignation on 29 October 2019.

continued on Fridays in most camps, with additional protests organised by PRL and PRS outside the Australian and Canadian embassies. Here, protestors demanded resettlement to Australia, Canada and other countries, and some asked for their refugee files to be transferred from UNRWA to UNHCR in order to become eligible for resettlement.

We subsequently sent the WhatsApp survey questions through both voice and text messages between 18 September and 23 October 2019. On 17 October 2019, protests erupted throughout Lebanon demanding the fall of the regime and radical changes to the Lebanese political and economic system. The protests persisted at the time of writing in January 2020.

Methodology

This research report will triangulate three sources: First, the qualitative WhatsApp survey responses from Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese participants who live in Wadi Zeineh gathering or Mieh Mieh camp, as well as UNRWA and NGO frontline staff who work or reside in these two areas. Second, 27 KIIs with UN and NGO experts who focus on or work in Palestinian gatherings and camps in Lebanon. Third, eight FGDs⁵ with Palestinian and Lebanese residents in Wadi Zeineh gathering, Sibline, Mieh Mieh camp and the nearby village Mieh Mieh. The KIIs and FGDs helped to ensure conflict sensitivity of the WhatsApp survey design and to build the local credibility of the survey by involving key community stakeholders from all sides.

This mixed methods analysis also helps to compare the strengths and weaknesses

of traditional qualitative methods (i.e., FGDs and KIIs) with novel social media-based methods (e.g., WhatsApp surveying). For instance, while KIIs focus on the specific expertise and insights of key stakeholders, and FGDs generate more group-based understandings, their implementation may limit certain kinds of knowledge. This is particularly true of personal experiences which may prompt negative emotions or disruptive opinions that better reflect lived experience and social tensions.

Overall, we engaged with 89 participants (see breakdown in Figure 1 below), the small-n of which enabled the desired in-depth study with Palestinian community stakeholders to explore whether WhatsApp surveys were suitable in the specific security environments of gatherings and camps. Of interest, approximately half (52%) of respondents were female – an increase compared to previous WhatsApp surveys conducted in Bar Elias (33%) and Qaraoun (18%). This increase may be attributed to additional efforts to engage in women's groups in both Wadi Zeineh and Mieh Mieh ahead of the implementation phase. Positively, the increase indicates that there are no inherent barriers to female participation using these methods.

5- The FGDs included three in Wadi Zeineh, one in Sibline, and four in Mieh Mieh (three in the camp, one in the village); comprising two women's groups, two men's groups, two youth groups, one mixed Lebanese group, and one Lebanese youth group. The majority of the participants in the FGDs were PRL, some PRS and a couple of Lebanese participants. We arranged the FGDs in collaboration with the municipalities, Popular Committees, NGOs, and other local contacts.

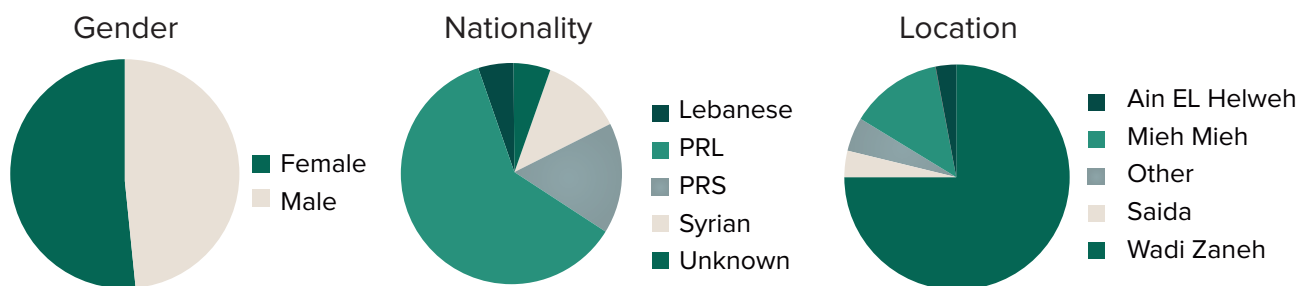


Figure 1. Breakdown of participants by gender, nationality and location.

The majority of survey respondents (61%) were PRL, followed by PRS (16%), Syrians (12%) and Lebanese (5%).⁶ Three quarters (75%) of those participants who indicated their location were in Wadi Zeineh, 14 per cent in Mieh Mieh, 3 per cent in Ain El Helweh Palestinian refugee camp, 3 per cent in Saida and a further 5 per cent from other locations (Sibline and Douris).⁷ This means that our results are more relevant for Wadi Zeineh than for Mieh Mieh.

In line with previous surveys conducted using WhatsApp, our survey reached more Palestinian and Syrian refugees than Lebanese host communities (Ullrich, 2019a, 8-9). Only 5 per cent of survey participants were Lebanese meaning that the report cannot speak to Lebanese perceptions beyond the findings from KIIs and FGDs. The low uptake of Lebanese participants may indicate that UN agencies and local partners hold less contact information for these residents, or reflect less interest amongst Lebanese residents to discuss their perception of refugees with the UN agencies that assist them. In addition to gender, nationality and location data, we found that 28 per cent of respondents were unemployed, 14 per cent identified as housewives, and 11 per cent were frontline staff in Wadi Zeineh or Mieh Mieh.⁸



Photo 2 Women's FGD in Wadi Zeineh

6- 7% of survey participants did not indicate their nationality.

7- 59 out of 89 respondents indicated their location.

8- UNRWA provided us with phone numbers of frontline staff who had agreed to participate in the WhatsApp survey. Local organisations and FGD participants supplied us with additional phone numbers of PRS, PRL and Syrian residents in both locations. The municipality and FGD participants in Wadi Zeineh, Sibline and Mieh Mieh village helped us to find Lebanese contacts.

Data Safety

Data safety is an important concern when using messaging apps for research purposes. While end-to-end encryption arguably makes WhatsApp messaging safer than other forms of communication (e.g., email, texting), there are still data breach risks insofar as the researcher and/or government has the ability to access metadata (i.e., names, numbers and geolocations) that could put participants at risk. While there has recently been much focus on security breaches in messaging apps, human error arguably remains the biggest risk to data safety.

To maximise data safety, it has been important for us to limit the number of people who have access to the survey phone and to the computer on which the data is stored. Thus, people with access were asked to sign non-disclosure agreements as required. Both devices for data collection and storage were also safely locked in an undisclosed location to provide further security. Apart from safe data storage, it is also important to remind survey participants to protect their phones and WhatsApp accounts through separate passwords. In addition, however, since no device or technology is immune to hacking, we were careful not to rely solely on technical solutions. We therefore endeavoured to collect as little personal and sensitive data as possible to safeguard our respondents as far as reasonably possible. For instance, whilst phone numbers were entered into the system, identifiable data (e.g., names) were not. We also advised people not to give out any personal information (e.g. names, ID numbers) in their messages to enable full anonymity. While we did ask our respondents for basic demographic information (i.e., nationality, gender, age, employment, place of residence), this was optional and some participants declined to provide us with that data.

Gatherings vs. camps

Part of the rationale for comparing Mieh Mieh camp and Wadi Zeineh gathering was to compare the security and conflict dynamics between camps and gatherings in Lebanon. There are 12 official Palestine refugee camps in Lebanon and 42 informal Palestinian gatherings. To accommodate the growth and evolution of these settlements over time, the LPDC lowered the minimum number of households per gathering to 15. Their 2017 census therefore identified 156 gatherings (LPDC, 2017, 2), home to 55 per cent of all Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon (LPDC, 2017, 18).

Palestine refugee camps are governed by Palestinian factions – the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), Hamas and other splinter groups – through ‘popular committees’ and ‘security committees’ (Home Office, 2018, 10). The popular committees resolve disputes between factions and individuals, and coordinate with the Lebanese government. The security committees organise security, with different factions patrolling areas under their control and coordinating with Lebanese authorities. In addition, while the Lebanese army generally refrains from exercising control in the camps, it does regulate movement into and out of some of them.

Palestine refugee camps are commonly associated with violence in the public eye. As one key informant said, ‘Palestinians in the camps are isolated due to myths of the camps being militarised territory. People think that everyone is walking with a gun there, which makes them overlook the camps’ desperate living conditions. Everyone fears going inside even though you can easily walk into most camps.’ This perception of camps as dangerous is based on the situation of some camps in Lebanon - particularly Ain El Helweh camp which has witnessed frequent clashes between armed groups.

This perception is often generalised to all camps, compounding socio-economic marginalisation and stigmatisation.

Palestinian gatherings constitute relatively homogeneous refugee communities; some are adjacent to official camps while others exist separately. Gatherings are better integrated into the social fabric of Lebanese villages and towns, often blending into their surroundings which renders them less contentious for Lebanese residents but also less visible to donors. This means they fall through the cracks of support and assistance systems more frequently. UNRWA's shelter rehabilitation, infrastructure and camp improvement programmes are restricted to the 12 recognised Palestine refugee camps, while the agency provides basic services (e.g., education, healthcare, relief, social and protection services) to all eligible Palestine refugees in Lebanon. While the gatherings fall under the jurisdiction of Lebanese municipalities, the latter often do not provide adequate services to them.

In these gatherings, there are fewer security incidents and the Lebanese security apparatus is in control. Safety perceptions in gatherings adjacent to camps are generally lower than those in non-adjacent gatherings (UNDP, 2018, 135). Conflicts between gatherings and surrounding areas are generally less pronounced, and focus more on land tenure and services – particularly since home ownership is informal and insecure. In 2001, Law 296/2001 was adopted which prevents Palestine refugees from legally acquiring and transferring immovable property in Lebanon. This has led to insecurity of tenure as many refugees have been forced into informal rental arrangements and deprived of property ownership benefits (UNDP, 2018, 17). This entrenched marginalisation experienced

in the gatherings – one that fosters what one key informant termed 'sleeping anger' – extends to the labour market in which only 42 per cent of residents participate. Moreover, while only 14 per cent of men were out of work, 70 per cent of women were found to have no access to the labour market (UNDP, 2018, 31).⁹

Everything is political

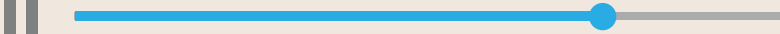
From the outset, one humanitarian worker in Lebanon warned us that 'Palestinian refugees are very suspicious; everything you do or say gives rise to rumours'. It was not long before we encountered this distrust in both the WhatsApp survey and FGDs. Despite our insistence that the purpose of our study was to analyse the needs and social tensions in Palestinian gatherings and camps in Lebanon, Palestinians and Lebanese in both areas suspected some political agenda behind the research: 'Why are you really conducting this study? Are you testing the waters to see if we are OK with settling Palestinians in Lebanon?', one Sibling resident asked. Indeed, it seems that Palestinian communities are dubious of benevolent or neutral 'outsider' interventions. The underlying message of the Palestinian reception of our research was thus that 'everything is political and no question is innocent'.

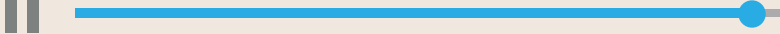
We found that participants' reactions were often as insightful as their answers, with many conveying a sense of outrage or indignation about the questions: 'Don't mess around and fool people! What safety are you talking about?'; 'You're asking about safety, but where is it? [What] is safety? How do you want me to be safe and sound while I'm unable to undergo medical treatment or even see a doctor?'; 'How can I feel safe when I'm afraid and worried that my kids and


9- The LPDC 2017 census estimates the total population of all Palestinian gatherings to be around 110,000 inhabitants, of which 91,000 are PRL, 9,000 PRS, 8,000 Lebanese, and 2,000 Syrians (UNDP, 2018, 57).

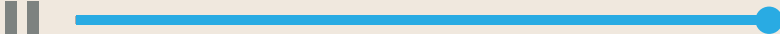
I are going to be forced to leave the house, or the country?’. These were common exclamations in response to the question ‘Do you feel safe?’. Our participants felt as though they were being asked the wrong questions - that there could not possibly be such a thing as ‘safety’ for people living in such difficult conditions.

Emotional Reactions

‘The speaker is devastated, and her tone is rough.’


‘The speaker keeps crying. She speaks out of pain and grief. She seems devastated and shattered.’


‘The speaker is talking in a serious tone. He seems enraged.’


‘The speaker is yelling, and repeating the word ‘horrible’ many times.’


Our analyst’s descriptions of some of the WhatsApp voice messages we had received from Palestinian refugees give a glimpse of the emotional soundscape of the WhatsApp survey. The ambition of this report is not primarily to create a detached, positivist analysis of different social stability variables in Palestinian gatherings and camps in Lebanon, but to put a human face on data, and to understand as much as possible how respondents themselves make sense of their situation and their social relationships.

Setting the scene: **Wadi Zeineh gathering vs. Mieh Mieh camp**

Based on our FGDs and KIs outlined above, this section provides a detailed analysis of the social and material conditions of Wadi Zeineh gathering and Mieh Mieh camp, and their respective relationships with nearby Lebanese villages.



Wadi Zeineh and Sibline village

Wadi Zeineh is an open, mobile and changing society which embraces Lebanese nationals, PRL, PRS, Syrians, and other nationalities. According to residents, there are no major security problems, and peaceful co-existence of different groups prevails. The gathering itself consists of three main streets, but poverty is evident in poor infrastructure and garbage piling up on the roadside. Several participants in our study spoke of the difficult financial situation residents face, with many selling or renting out their apartments in order to make ends meet or leave the country. Indeed, it is striking how many property advertisements we saw while driving through the area.

Sibline village sits in stark contrast to the adjacent gathering of Wadi Zeineh. It is tidy and quiet, and far less densely populated. Unlike Wadi Zeineh, Sibline is a closed society consisting of few families whom are related to one another and rarely interact with outsiders. According to Sibline's Mayor, Mohammed Younis, few Palestinians live in the village and those who do are more financially comfortable than those in Wadi Zeineh gathering.

Unequal services and environmental conflicts

Aside from the poor infrastructure, one of the first things that strikes any visitor in Wadi Zeineh is the pollution resultant from the garbage crisis and the unsafe waste treatment (e.g., burning) in the area. A Popular Committee representative in the gathering explained that 'despite the fact that Wadi Zeineh is a Lebanese area and its responsibility falls on the government, it suffers from the same problems that exist in refugee camps, because it is

being ignored by the government.' Indeed, residents are somewhat open in accusing the Lebanese authorities of discrimination (e.g., in withholding garbage collection), especially when compared to services received by those in Sibline village. Residents of Sibline agree, suggesting that the authorities should take into account the higher population density in Wadi Zeineh when providing services to the area. Having said that, the municipality is unable to provide any support beyond this, with one villager upholding that 'the municipality of Sibline has nothing against Wadi Zeineh area; the thing is the Lebanese government is not fair towards Palestinians. The money we receive from the government is barely enough for Sibline'.¹⁰

One Popular Committee member observed that this discrimination may be attributed to the fact that people living in Wadi Zeineh do not vote: 'we think that one of the reasons why the municipality, especially under the former mayor, neglects Wadi Zeineh is because people who live here do not vote'. Consequently, Palestinian officials in the area seek to hold the new mayor accountable to his intention to improve conditions in the area.

However, some Sibline residents and representatives believe that it is not only a problem at the top - many also complained about a lack of environmental awareness in Wadi Zeineh. They believe that some residents there feel as though they do not belong and are thus negligent of its environment. One Sibline resident told us: 'we think people in Sibline are attached to their village and thus respond more positively to eco-friendly projects, while it's not the case for people in Wadi Zeineh'. Many residents in the gatherings somewhat agree, particularly given that many consider it as nothing more than a transit stop on their way home or onward

10- President Aoun only recently in April 2019 signed a decree releasing municipal funds for 2017.

to another country. As one man from Wadi Zeineh explained: a 'lack of work opportunities and [a] lack of sense of belonging are the two reasons for most of our social problems'.

Concerns about this poor infrastructure and deteriorating environment in Wadi Zeineh are compounded by a lack of any green spaces or recreational facilities. In particular, many respondents spoke of the need for an appropriate and safe space for children to play since they are currently limited to the dangerous streets of the gathering. This highlights another concern – the lack of sufficient lighting resulting in many accidents according to residents. In addition, many young women believe that there is a real lack of gendered facilities; both in health and in recreation: 'there is actually a problem of sexism in this area, where places like coffee shops are only frequented by young men, and it is unacceptable for us to go, and the society encourages this by accepting that these places are only for men, and not for everyone'. Members of the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) highlighted the lack of basic health facilities for people with disabilities. Palestinian residents also lamented UNRWA's definition of Wadi Zeineh as a gathering which excludes them from services to support infrastructure, environmental, health, and other improvements it provides to Palestinian camps.

Unemployment in Wadi Zeineh

Palestinian refugees in Wadi Zeineh gathering spoke abundantly about unemployment. Our FGD participants claimed that the Ministry of Labour's move to regulate foreign labour made things worse for refugees in the area and across Lebanon. This decision also led to widespread political and popular opposition. One FGD participant exclaimed that 'we, as Palestinians, don't

want to be a burden on Lebanon, all we want is our human and civil rights to be productive like everybody else, but sadly now once they learn I am Palestinian they don't hire me'. Unlike Mieh Mieh camp, Wadi Zeineh has many small local businesses owned by people in the area, and a few big companies (e.g., the chocolatier Patchi) have been known to employ people locally. Many residents, however, claim that this is no longer the case since companies like these now opt to hire cheaper Syrian workers.

Unemployment has indubitably taken its toll on Wadi Zeineh. Women were particularly keen to speak about its devastating consequences on their children; emphasising school dropouts, drug and alcohol abuse, theft, violence, sexual harassment, and mental illness in young people. During our youth FGD, several participants confirmed that the lack of job opportunities and the dire financial forecast led them to drug use to run away from their problems, or to resort to theft or dealing drugs to make ends meet. Members of the General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) in Wadi Zeineh observed that the high unemployment rate has also negatively affected the dynamics of familial relations between spouses, parents and children.

Unlike Mieh Mieh village, Lebanese residents in Sibling are supportive of their Palestinian neighbours' rights in Wadi Zeineh. Indeed, in summer 2019, they expressed support of the protests demanding exemption for Palestinians from the regulation of foreign labour. They believe that Palestinian refugees have been in Lebanon for more than 70 years and should be treated as Lebanese nationals; not as Syrian workers who have a country to go back to if they choose to do so. Many Lebanese residents in Wadi Zeineh joined Palestinian refugees in the protests that took place in the gathering.



Figure 3: Wadi Zeineh Gathering

Social relations in Wadi Zeineh and Sibline

The appearance of positive social relationships between Wadi Zeineh and Sibline can be deceiving, and is particularly true for the relationship between Lebanese host communities and Palestinian refugees. Indeed, our attempts to host joint FGDs with Lebanese and Palestinians upon the recommendation of officials from both sides were not very successful. In each of the three FGDs held in the area, Sibline residents seemed very withdrawn. This led us to conduct a separate FGD for Lebanese nationals in the village. The hesitation of Sibline residents toward the joint FGDs could be attributed to the fact that (i) it is a closed society where people do not readily interact with others; and (ii) they did not feel comfortable to speak openly of ‘the Palestinian Other’ in their presence. We have arrived at this conclusion based on our experience of one Sibline resident who proved to be more diplomatic in the joint (male) FGD and more outspoken in the Sibline-exclusive FGD. This was also the case with Palestinian refugees in the joint (male) FGD who expressed different views in the absence and presence of the mayor (who attended for a short period) and another Sibline resident.

Our research suggests that there is not one distinct relationship between ‘the Lebanese’ and ‘the Palestinians’ but rather that these relationships differ significantly even in close geographical proximity. Relationships between Lebanese residents and Palestinian refugees seem much closer in Wadi Zeineh gathering since people there interact daily and share similar living conditions. Lebanese residents in Sibline and Palestinian refugees in Wadi Zeineh gathering, on the other hand, are far more distant and formal.

Both Palestinians and Lebanese were more eager to discuss their needs and

challenges rather than the relationship between host communities and refugees possibly because the latter does not constitute a major issue for either. Curiously, Lebanese host community members were more interested in discussing the problems in Wadi Zeineh gathering rather than in Sibline village, despite numerous attempts to encourage them to address the latter.

Safety in the village and the gathering

Perceptions of safety varied between Wadi Zeineh gathering and Sibline village. Although the area generally enjoys relative stability, conflict is less common in Sibline village than in Wadi Zeineh. Sibline is a small, well-controlled village with quasi non-existent security problems where its residents feel safe in their family-oriented environment. One young person from Sibline told us: ‘we do not have any problems in Sibline, everyone knows one another in the village and they are often related’. The long highway that separates Wadi Zeineh and Sibline also distances the villagers from security incidents which take place in the gathering, and the wider lack of safety many residents in the gatherings complain about.

In addition to numerous social problems, the presence of different Lebanese political parties makes the gathering a fertile ground for conflict. Many claim that the political parties are often a source of insecurity since they can recruit marginalised and unemployed youth who will go to great lengths to make small sums of money. According to the Wadi Zeineh residents, this fuels occasional violence between people of different political backgrounds. One woman said that ‘some political parties play a role in the violent incidents that take place since they attract lost youth who stir trouble’. Another noted that ‘no one feels safe at Wadi Zeineh, safety arrangements are decreasing, and violent incidents are increasing.’

Unsafety amongst people of Wadi Zeineh is not limited to these security incidents. Young women in particular talked at length about sexual harassment and catcalling, with many revealing that they avoid reporting these incidents to their family or the authorities for fear of causing trouble. When asked if they think this might encourage perpetrators to continue their aggression, most young women at our FGD said that this has less grave consequences than reporting would. All young women expressed a genuine concern for their safety at night in Wadi Zeineh, saying that they do not dare walk the streets in the dark. They also expressed strong frustration at being forced to stay home at night for fear of sexual harassment: 'the community solves the problem by locking up girls in their homes at night,' one young woman said. Some young women also referred to the growing problem of online sexual harassment in their area. Sibline youth at our FGD said that the problem is not so distinct in their community, attributing this to the family-oriented community structure.



Figure 4 Wadi Zeineh Mural



Figure 5 Destroyed House in Mieh Mieh Camp

Mieh Mieh Palestine refugee camp vs. Mieh Mieh village

Mieh Mieh camp is a typical Palestinian camp; it is overcrowded with very narrow roads which makes it impossible for two cars to pass one another simultaneously. Evidence of clashes still scars some buildings in the camp, especially where heavy fighting took place in October 2018. Here, Ansar Allah, an Islamist group, and Fatah clashed following a personal dispute between two armed men. An agreement was subsequently brokered that provided for the disarmament of all three main factions (i.e., Ansar Allah, Fatah and Hamas) and that the camp fall under the control of the Lebanese army.

Mieh Mieh village has a population of 2,000 inhabitants, around 500 of whom reside there permanently and the remainder visiting on weekends or during the summer. The village has three churches, one public school, two hospitals, an American school and some recreational facilities (e.g., a public garden, an elderly club and a scout club amongst others). Mieh Mieh village is typically Lebanese with beautiful houses and streets, and plenty of space to enjoy the breath-taking nature in the area. It is a quiet, tidy and organised village. Despite few commonalities, both societies in the camp and in the gatherings are governed by familial and tribal relationships, and are relatively closed-off and isolated from their surroundings in Saida.

Poor infrastructure and isolation

Overwhelming suffering and countless needs overshadowed all other topics in the FGDs. Men, women, and young people were all eager to highlight the hardships they face in the camp and suggest solutions to existing problems, despite their conviction that nothing will change for the better.

The camp, as with all other Palestinian camps in Lebanon, suffers from poor infrastructure with potentially dangerous consequences. Several refugees spoke of attempts by some international organisations to fix the roads, but these attempts ultimately failed due to political considerations. One man claimed that 'one NGO tried to fix some of the roads in Mieh Mieh camp, but the mayor of Mieh Mieh village did not allow any material to enter the camp unless the organisation fixe[d] the road of Ein El Deleb first'. Unsafe electricity installations also cause problems in the camp, including the tragic death of three children who were recently electrocuted.

The camp is in dire shortage of any public recreational facilities such as playgrounds, gardens or libraries, sports club and so on. Indeed, upon entering the camp, a typical scene includes children playing in the narrow streets amongst passing cars while young people sit idly nearby smoking cigarettes or Nargilehs and gazing into space. 'They say open a sports club, close a prison,' one man said. 'There are no places that welcome children and young people to spend their energy and time productively, and places outside the camp are expensive which we can't afford,' said one young person. The few modest recreational facilities that do exist are affiliated with Palestinian political factions, which discourages many to go because of their political affiliation. Some women also admitted that they are hesitant to send their children to activities that are organised by political factions.

Mieh Mieh camp lacks medical facilities as a result of reduced health coverage from UNRWA since 2016. The only working clinic in the camp belongs to UNRWA and only opens three days each week (Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays) until approximately 2pm. One Popular Committee member told us

'basically if you get sick after UNRWA's closing hours, you are on your own, and if you get sick on Thursdays, Saturdays or Sundays, you are also on your own'. Another man lamented that 'people are dying at the gates of hospitals; UNRWA is barely helping with anything recently'. The camp also lacks an ambulance for emergencies and sometimes uses the only one available courtesy of Hamas. As with other concerns in these settlements, people with disabilities are most adversely affected by this lack of facilities.

Mental health is a serious issue in the camp and can be attributed to the tremendous stress residents endure on a daily basis. Although women and young people in the FGDs were more outspoken about mental health issues, it is likely that this affects residents in Mieh Mieh camp more broadly. Our findings highlight that children suffer from serious psychological problems including learning, language, and communication difficulties; anger, violence, and isolation; and poor performance in school (often leading to drop-outs). Several women in our FGD experienced tremendous stress and were unsure how to cope, with one telling us that 'women suffer from depression, stress and insomnia, and they don't feel safe telling family or friends. They would feel safer if they had professional psychiatrists, instead of doctors who simply give them drugs'.

Securitisation of the camp

While the disarmament agreement improved security conditions in the camp, it also imposed greater restrictions on Palestinian movement by the Lebanese army. The number of entry and exit checkpoints increased from one to three, and a barbed wired fence now encloses the camp much to the dismay of Palestinian residents: 'with all the restrictions

they are imposing on us we really don't know what is coming next! You never know they might cover the camp and allow us only a certain time during the day to see the sun,' one refugee ridiculed. Another young person added: 'since the village is next to the camp, they demanded to build a wall that would surround the camp. They installed instead a fence. It is depressing for us; it feels like a big prison, or a war territory, and this messes up people's mental health, and makes them angry'. As one key informant also observed, 'the eruption of violence between the three political factions [in October 2018] was an exception which also elicited an exceptional response. All Lebanese parties interfered and the camp was swiftly demilitarised. Why? Because of its proximity to the village'. She contrasted Mieh Mieh camp to Ain El Helweh camp:

Ain El Helweh is like domestic violence – it is not seen as constituting a threat to Lebanese society at large, to those that matter politically and that's why it does not warrant a systematic intervention but this [eruption of violence in Mieh Mieh camp] is different. It constitutes a threat to a Lebanese Christian village.

Palestinian refugees in Mieh Mieh camp thus believe that the security apparatus functions to protect Mieh Mieh village from the camp, and not the camp's own residents from factional violence and conflict. Indeed, a Popular Committee member said: 'We were hoping after the weapons-free deal that Mieh Mieh would become an example to follow for other camps, on how things can get better after the factions turn in their arms. But honestly this has not been the case, they are suffocating people more and more'. In one meeting with different factions in the camp, one woman asked us: 'the weapons-free deal is a relief for all of us, but is our reward for giving up our weapons to imprison us in a big prison and practice on us more segregation,

racism and exert pressure on us at checkpoints?’ As another civil society activist put it: ‘the security measures give people the impression that Palestinians are monsters who need to be locked away.’

Entry and exit restrictions for people and goods in the camp is a persistent inconvenience. Indeed, one young person exclaimed that ‘the number of checkpoints add a lot of stress on people who live in the camp, sometimes you have to get out an hour earlier to make sure you are not late because of the checkpoints’. Many FGD participants also claimed that what can or cannot be brought into the camp depends on the mood of the soldiers monitoring these checkpoints: one man told us they ‘spend hours at checkpoints, to explain the entry of necessities. [The guards] require permits to enter food and basic equipment, such as heaters in the winter, gas tanks, water, a TV. I don’t understand why all this, especially after the withdrawal of weapons!’ Another said that ‘they stop sick people at checkpoints, and even when we give them proof that they are sick or dying, they insist on IDs, even dead people need permits to pass’. Regarding this last point, we found that these delays often meant that some people did not make it to the hospital alive. A young woman in our FGD became emotional as she spoke of the tragic death of her father: ‘my father had a heart attack in the middle of the night and due to the lack of any medical facilities in the camp, we tried to take him to a hospital outside, but they made it hard on us at the checkpoints and he died on the way’.

Figure 6 Barbed Wire Fence surrounding Mieh Mieh camp



Relationship dynamics between Palestinian camp and Lebanese village

The relationship between Palestinians in Mieh Mieh camp and their Lebanese neighbours in the adjacent village was described by refugees as 'quasi non-existent'. While Palestinian officials are comfortable with the idea of sending their children to the village to participate in joint activities, their Lebanese counterparts are not. Despite the weapons-free camp agreement and the control of the camp by the Lebanese army, the Lebanese authorities we spoke to in the village do not trust that the camp is safe.

At an official level, although each side is generally diplomatic when they speak of the other, some Palestinian voices were louder during our meeting with Popular Committee members and factions, claiming that the Lebanese side obstructs 'any project that can improve the life of refugees in the camp'. There is a concern that any organisation that attempts to implement a project in the camp is discouraged by the mayor's demands to implement a parallel project in the village.

At the community level, the Palestinian youth in our FGDs said they would like to see relationships improve but do not believe that the other side is interested. A number of young people said they attempted to build bridges with their Lebanese counterparts through joint projects but failed. 'As young people we would like to break the stereotypes about the camp as a dangerous place with no educated youth, and we are open to breaking the barrier between us and the youth of the village,' one of the young people said.

Some young people attribute the tense relationship to the violent history between

the camp and the village. Indeed, one young person told us: 'we think the problem lies with the elders, they haven't forgotten the past yet, but the youth are different because they haven't lived these events; I don't think they would mind making friendships and building relationships with us Palestinians'. Different religious affiliations between the two settlements were also mentioned as a possible reason behind these tensions. One young person affirmed that he had 'met some people from Mieh Mieh village at work and they treated me the way I treated them, all was good, but I could sense tension from them not only towards us but also towards Lebanese people from Saida'. Another said, 'we think the distance between us could go back to religious reasons, they might not have many things in common with people from Saida, they might not be on really good terms with their fellow Lebanese neighbours, let alone with Palestinians.' On the other hand, several young people, especially young men who either study or work in Saida described the relationship with the people of the city as excellent: 'we do not feel different at all from our fellow Lebanese from Saida, the only difference between us is the paper that states our nationality, we really feel we are one people'.

During the men's and women's FGDs, the relationship between the two sides was generally categorised as 'mediocre' or 'non-existent'. Many Palestinians in the camp feel that they have done their share of trying to improve the relationship but were always met with rejection from the other side. Others expressed strong sentiments that they believe their Lebanese neighbours do not care what happens to them. One woman remarked: 'we prefer they keep the roads closed between us. We don't trust them much, because of our history, and they lack any interest to open doors between us. We even feel they would not mind wip[ing]

out the camp altogether, so let's keep the army in the middle between us'. Another man observed that 'as a Palestinian from Syria, I feel safer in the camp, due to the amount of discrimination I and my family are subjected to outside of the camp'.

Some people acknowledge the difficult history that governs the relationship between the two sides but believe that it is time to start thinking prospectively about an improved relationship in the future. 'There ha[ve] been attempts to break the barriers with the village, but it is obvious that they are not interested, we are trying to [turn a new leaf], and forget about our bloody history, but they refuse to do so,' said one man. Another added: 'we understand their fear during the recent events that took place in the camp, and we shared their fear, we lived it even more intensely, but their reaction was dramatic when they started demanding their properties in the camp'. One key informant also claimed that:

Prior to the civil war, they had excellent relationships; many Palestinians lived in the village. When the war erupted, the two sides initially agreed not to fight, but then Palestinian fighters from Ain El Helweh entered the camp and murdered a Lebanese family. In retaliation, the people from the village burned down the camp. Young people know nothing about the good times before the war.

Despite this negative interpretation of the relationship between them, Lebanese-Palestinian relationships did not seem to be a priority for the majority of community members we spoke to. Rather, discussions in the FGDs focused on numerous other problems and how to make ends meet. Officials in the camp, on the other hand, emphasised that better relations between the camp and the village may result in better living conditions for camp dwellers.

'The mere existence of Palestinians by our side'

Although we only conducted one FGD in Mieh Mieh village, it stood out from all the others. The feelings expressed about the Palestinian 'Other' during the Lebanese youth FGD were extremely strong and at times very hostile. Participants spent most of their time with us relaying their sentiments toward their Palestinian neighbours in the adjacent camp, rather than the problems they face specifically as youth in the area. Indeed, according to all of these participants, their biggest problem is 'the mere existence of Palestinians by their side'.

The Lebanese youth that we spoke to unanimously agreed that they would rather not have 'anything to do with their unsolicited neighbors'. In fact, they openly stated that the presence of Palestinians in Lebanon bothers them, with one arguing: 'we don't only have a problem with our Palestinian neighbours, we have a problem with them anywhere in the country'. They were decidedly matter-of-fact about their indifference to maintain any form of relationship with Palestinians in Mieh Mieh camp, pointing out that they have absolutely nothing in common. One young participant said: 'we don't share the same culture or mentality, their upbringing is different from ours, and we surely don't want any kind of social interaction with them'. Another pointed out: 'we cannot differentiate between the good and the bad in the camp; we can't take the risk of getting to know them'.

When we told them that the youth in the camp are willing to start over, one participant was surprised – asking if they had forgotten 'about the people they killed and the homes they occupied?' Another said: 'it's because they need us, but we do not need them.' The young people showed significant distrust

towards Palestinians in the camp and did not believe that the new weapons-free camp agreement would hold: 'we don't trust that there has actually been a weapons withdrawal'. Although none of our participants experienced this violent history first hand, they all seemed to hold bitter feelings toward Palestinian refugees. The most recent clashes in the camp further unsettled them: 'we are always in a state of fear; we don't know when fighting will happen'. They claimed that they still hear gunfire from time to time, expressing fear for the lives of Lebanese soldiers, and accused some Lebanese political parties of downplaying the violence that takes place in the camp.

The Lebanese youth with whom we sat held many misconceptions and contradictory beliefs about Palestinian refugees in Mieh Mieh camp. On the one hand, they believe that Palestinian refugees in the neighbouring camp enjoy better living conditions than they do because of an abundant aid supply. On the other, they deplore the way they live. For example, one participant said: 'we think that the camp has an incubating environment for corruption and terrorism'. Another told us that 'there are a lot of drug addicts and fugitives, this is what the media reports all the time, personally, I would never allow my son near the camp, or the people in it, I don't trust he will be safe.' When asked if their ideas are shaped by the portrayal of Palestinian refugees in the mainstream media, they agreed that: 'We are not that interested in verifying if what is said in the media about them is true or not, because we simply have nothing to do with them'.

These young people cannot see tangible solutions to their genuine security concerns unless drastic measures are taken. 'We believe the solution for us to feel safe, is for them to leave, and for the camp to be removed,' said one young person. Another articulated a similar sentiment: 'our primary preoccupation is

when will they leave so we can take back our properties?' This suggests that, aside from historical animosity and security concerns, the issue of Palestinian refugees might also be linked to other factors, such as property disputes, and possibly a broader sense of stagnation in the village.

Unemployment is a significant problem for Lebanese residents of Mieh Mieh since the village lacks many real job opportunities. The village has a few small businesses and shops but many residents either work in the private sector in Beirut or in state jobs (teachers or in ministries), returning home every night; or they work with the Internal Security Forces or the Army. Others also work in the struggling agricultural sector. The lack of job opportunities in the village thus forces young people to leave.

The dilemma of land ownership in Mieh Mieh camp

Strong feelings run on both Palestinian and Lebanese sides regarding land ownership. The issue resurfaced in Mieh Mieh camp after the weapons-free deal was enforced. Despite wide agreement that Mieh Mieh village owns some of the land in their camp, Palestinian residents do not believe it is a problem that should concern them – rather, it is between the land owners and UNRWA. Yet, fears and uncertainty persist, with one man sharing: 'if they demand their lands in the camp, this could turn into a big problem that could result in another civil war'. The issue is generating much frustration for people in the village, and one community stakeholder asked us: 'is it natural for an elderly woman to be living with her son in the village because her house is occupied by others?' He continued: 'We do understand their problem, it's not easy to have your land occupied, but [in] the end we can't alone pay the price while we are trying to help

them’

Many houses in the camp are in a state of disrepair, especially in the lower areas which UNRWA does not recognise as within the official boundaries of the camp. Palestinian refugees who fled from other camps during the 1980s settled there on this private property now known as the lower camp or Hay El Wadi. According to Popular Committee members, UNRWA has now agreed to provide some services like water, electricity and garbage collection to the lower camp, but does not support renovation work in the area. Checkpoints have established an additional barrier to importing construction materials necessary for residents to make essential repairs themselves. With limited financial resources to allow them to rent or buy outside the camp, refugees are left with no other option but to stay in unsafe conditions (e.g., leaking houses or in houses on the verge of falling apart).

Figure 7 Mieh Mieh Village



Gap Analysis through the Focus Group Discussions

Area	Suggested Solutions	Problem it would solve
Mieh Mieh Palestine refugee camp	Operational projects such as a sewing factory	Unemployment
	Income-generating projects such as catering for women (to gather, chat, and generate some income)	Unemployment Depression Low income
	Facilities to train youth on crafts production and other skills (especially for school dropouts)	Illiteracy Lack of skills Unemployment Straying from the right path
	Psychologist/Psychiatrist and a clinic for mental health issues	Mental illness Depression Stress
	An equipped health center	Health issues Emergency cases
	House Renovation	Unsafe living conditions
	Road improvement and maintenance Spaces for parking lots	Heavy Traffic Fatalities of children playing on the streets Stress Fights among residence The problem of cars parked on the streets
	Maintenance of electricity installations	Fatalities through accidental electrocution Unsafe living conditions
	A bakery so the camp can be self-sufficient in terms of bread production, considering the hardships caused by delays of food delivery through the checkpoints	Poverty Hunger Hard living conditions Unemployment
	Projects/activities to create part-time and full-time jobs for youth to help pay tuition fees and ensure a better future	Unemployment Straying from the right path Depression Unproductive use of time
Gender friendly cultural clubs and recreational facilities (sports clubs, libraries, playground, etc.)	Lack of means of expression & energy Unhealthy lifestyle	

Area	Suggested Solutions	Problem it would solve
Wadi Zeineh gathering	Gender-sensitive cultural clubs and recreational facilities (sports clubs, libraries, playground, etc.)	Unemployment Straying from the right path Depression Unproductive use of time
	Gender sensitive youth- oriented facilities (coffee shops, gyms, cultural clubs, etc.)	Lack of means of expression & energy Unhealthy lifestyle Sexual harassment
	Organizations offering volunteer work in the area	Sexism
	Projects/activities providing small jobs for young people in the area	Health issues Emergencies Accommodating health needs for all sectors of the society
	Health facility, facility for people with special needs & physical therapy facility	
	Parking lots	Heavy Traffic Stress
	Roads maintenance and improvement	Fights among residence The problem of cars parked on the streets
	Awareness campaigns regarding violence against women & sexual harassment	Sexism Sexual harassment Violence against women
	Space for a public garden	Unhealthy environment Lack of green areas
	Creation of a green space Better garbage collection schedule	Pollution Waste crisis Depression Stress
Common activities between the two areas bringing people together (festivals, sessions, campaigns, etc.) [they suggested cleaning campaigns as part of the area's schools activities]	Lack of communication between the areas because of distance Integration of two communities Building a sense of belonging	
Pickup truck for Popular Committee to help distribute food	Help families in need	

Area	Suggested Solutions	Problem it would solve
Sibline	Establishment of civic communities (in streets, neighborhoods or buildings) in Wadi Zeineh	Poor understanding of problems & demands of people in the area by the municipality Poor results in services extended Poor maintenance of services extended
	Environmental awareness campaigns/ activities for both communities but especially in Wadi Zeineh Awareness campaigns/ activities to build sense of responsibility and belonging in Wadi Zeineh	Improved use of services extended

Area	Suggested Solutions	Problem it would solve
Mieh Mieh village	Revive the agricultural sector and raise awareness of the importance of agriculture	Self-sufficiency in terms of food
	A roof over the playground	Make it functional in winter and safer in case of trouble in the camp
	A gym	Lack of sports facilities
	Place electricity poles on solar systems	Renewable energy that is ecofriendly
	Fix the sewage pipes	Better infrastructure & services
	Logistical & financial support of clubs & NGOs in the village	Youth empowerment Extend needed services Unemployment
	Equip a health center and improve its conditions	Health issues Emergencies



The WhatsApp Survey: **What it feels like to be Palestinian in Lebanon**

Rather than a site-focused analysis, accounts shared via our WhatsApp survey were either more personal (talking about their own experiences and those of family and friends) or more general (talking about the situation of Palestinians in Lebanon and the world more broadly) than those relayed in the KIs or FGDs. As such, the added value of the WhatsApp messages was found in a more personal portrayal of what daily life is like for Palestinians in Lebanon.

The first section of the WhatsApp analysis explores the key employment problems our respondents identified in the camps and gatherings. The second section examines social relationships between different groups and communities, particularly through the lens of nationality, class, gender, race, and sect. The final section analyses how respondents articulated their everyday experiences of safety and fear, focusing on gendered perceptions of safety, and discusses how distinct sections of Palestinian communities in Lebanon might experience safety differently.

The core of all problems: lack of jobs

Everyone we spoke with referred to unemployment ‘as the core of all their problems’ with devastating economic and social consequences such as poverty, stress, depression, mental illnesses, child labour, and drug abuse. Youth unemployment, in particular, is a significant challenge.

Many men told us about the stress they experience because they are unable to provide for their families, including an education for their children. One man said: ‘men are dying from heart attacks because they don’t have money to pay for their families’. Another reiterated that his brother had prayed that his son would not pass his baccalaureate because he did not have the money to pay for university tuition. Sadly, the brother passed away from a heart attack shortly after his son scored very well on the exam. ‘I am convinced that he died because of all the stress he underwent thinking of how he will pay for his son’s university,’ he added. Men also addressed the issue of disciplining their children. They asserted that it has become increasingly difficult to discipline their children because they are unable to provide for them. These children no longer see the parents as an authoritative figure. One man told us: ‘our words as parents count for nothing to our children, because we are not fulfilling our duties towards them, because we are incapable of doing so, because of the life that has been forced on us’.

Both Palestinian and Lebanese men in the FGDs were concerned about job competition with Syrian workers who accept lower wages. PRL men said that their standard of living and lifestyle is similar to the Lebanese, and that they therefore cannot live on the salaries that Syrians accept. In the WhatsApp survey, we asked people ‘have you or people you work with been affected by

unemployment or job competition? What are the reasons behind unemployment or job competition?’ In replying to that question, most people told us that they or their friends and relatives have been affected by unemployment or job competition. Some Palestinian respondents also mentioned the competition brought about by the Syrian crisis and faced by Syrian workers and PRS. One Palestinian housewife from Wadi Zeineh told us:



Yes, I used to work at home, selling my hand-made products, and the price was good. However, Syrians started to do the same job for less money, which made me stop working. With all respect to the Syrian people - I don't hold any grudge or discriminate against them.

Yet, many other respondents were careful to clarify that ‘the reason for unemployment is the lack of job vacancies.’ On first sight, this answer seems redundant, yet there was something about the question that encouraged respondents to point out the obvious to us. In doing so, they also shifted the blame narrative implicit in the semantics of unemployment – from ‘unemployment’ (people who are not working) to ‘lack of jobs for Palestinians’. The problem is not on their side (people being too lazy, not skilled enough, foreign workers undercutting local salaries) but on the ‘political’ side: the economy is bad; political elites are corrupt; employers are exploitative; and nepotistic practices and political decisions restrict Palestinians’ access to jobs. Indeed, as with other questions, the question in and of itself was seen as an insult or a provocation by some who felt the answer was too obvious to be genuinely sought: ‘What unemployment are you talking about? Are there any job vacancies to begin with?’ One Palestinian woman lamented: ‘You’re asking about unemployment and jobs. Everything is horrible. There’s no

work, or peace of mind. What can I say? We're physically exhausted now. We're in so much pain. We're really feeling down. We're mentally and physically ill.'

Many respondents emphasised that their inability to find work was politically engineered. For them, work is a basic right that is unjustly denied to Palestinians due to their nationality:



You're asking about the reasons for unemployment, while we as Palestinians are deprived of our basic rights. We're not allowed to work, and when we work, we can't take any days off or receive service indemnity, and we can't have any property. We're deprived of all of our rights. You're asking me while I'm a Palestinian? There is unemployment because of the lack of job vacancies. As a Palestinian, I'm only allowed to work as a freelancer.

(Palestinian Plumber, male, 52 years old, Mieh Mieh camp)

This situation was compounded by the Ministry of Labour initiative in July 2019 to enforce laws which required Palestinian workers to obtain permits and which penalised businesses that did not comply with the regulation. Companies fear legal repercussions for hiring Palestinian workers through inspections by the field teams of the Ministry of Labour:



As we mentioned before, the Ministry of Labour obliged the Palestinians to obtain a work permit, without which they aren't allowed to work... Many companies don't like to hire Palestinian refugees, unless they have a work permit, which has increased the rate of unemployment in Palestinian gatherings.

(Palestinian Vocational Trainer, male, 53 years old, Ain el Helweh camp)

The myth of job competition and the potential for solidarity

As in previous surveys, many respondents emphasized that the issue is not 'job competition' but a lack of jobs, and a nepotistic and sectarian recruitment process (Ullrich, 2018, 32). As one respondent said, 'especially in this country, there's no room for competition, due to sectarianism.' Another WhatsApp respondent claimed:



One might be the least competent applicant, but due to sectarian bias, he would be hired, even though he's not qualified, but in order to reach balance in the number of employees between all sects, they have to hire him. As Palestinians, the only job competition that we face is for the jobs at UNRWA. Even the jobs at UNRWA, the applicant has to pay kickback in order to be hired. Many positions might be vacant, but the employers don't announce them, and they hire people they know.

(Palestinian, male, Wadi Zeineh camp)

The lack of faith in a meritocratic job market also creates the potential for solidarity across groups:



Job opportunities are scarce in Lebanon, not only for Palestinians, but also for the Lebanese as well. You know what's happening in Lebanon. Only those who have means of nepotism, or have important acquaintances - like politicians - who can support them, will be hired, while regular people who are qualified aren't being hired. Many engineers, doctors, and well-educated people work in unbelievable types of jobs.

(Palestinian nurse, unemployed, male, 40 years old, Mieh Mieh camp)

Here the distinction is less between nationalities (Lebanese/Syrian/Palestinian) or refugees and citizens, but rather between 'ordinary people' and those who have the means of nepotism. It becomes a class and political distinction between employers and workers - between people who have powerful networks and people who do not.

Some Palestinian respondents see job competition as a myth on all fronts: there is no job competition because there are no jobs, but also because there is no competition – jobs are given to people who have the right nationality and, much more importantly, access to nepotistic networks. Job competition between Lebanese and Palestinians is also a myth given the small size of the Palestinian workforce in Lebanon. The LPDC census in 2017 estimated that between 193,000 to 241,000 Palestinian refugees live in Lebanon which means that Palestinians make up significantly less than 5 per cent of the labour force in Lebanon (LPDC, 2017, 9; ILO, 2012, 62). A survey by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2012 already concluded that claims of job competition between Lebanese and Palestinians are exaggerated and that discriminatory laws against Palestinian workers are therefore unjustified (ILO, 2012, 62).

The survival economy and its contradictions

Both Palestinian and Syrian respondents countered a media discourse that portrays them as 'stealing jobs from the Lebanese'. They emphasised that they need to work to survive, that they work in different areas than Lebanese citizens, and that they struggle to find jobs as the Lebanese State limits them from working in a number of professions:



There's so much unemployment, and the youth can't find any jobs. This is killing us. If a guy doesn't find a job, how would he survive? How would we compete for jobs, while there are no jobs in the first place?

(Palestinian Housewife, 48 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering)

A Syrian respondent emphasised that refugees have been losing their jobs because of the State's regulations:



Yes, there's so much unemployment in Lebanon. The Lebanese people are affected by it, so how would the case be with Syrian and RPS refugees?... As for job competition, most refugees in Lebanon, whether male or female, were fired from their jobs, because the Lebanese state prohibited them from working in markets, factories, restaurants and any other such job... As refugees, we don't ask for anything other than being able to pay the house rent, and to buy bread to feed our children.

(Syrian widow and mother of four children, unemployed, 36 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering)

Many employers exploit that work is the only means to survival for refugees - no matter what work, how precarious, and how irrelevant it may be to their qualifications and experience. They often pay less than agreed or even refuse to pay altogether. The 'work as survival' logic thus becomes void - you need to work to survive, but you cannot survive if you are not paid, making work pointless:



There is no money. We're working and working without taking our rights. Hence, we prefer to stay at home because we're being deprived

of our salaries when we work. We see that it's better not to work in the first place, than to work and be deprived of our rights.

(PRS, single mother, 46 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering)

Social Relationships and Tensions

Nationality, Class, Gender, Race and Sect

This section provides an intersectional analysis of social relationships in and around Palestinian camps and gatherings. 'Intersectionality is a metaphor to understand how multiple forms of inequality and disadvantage [such as gender, race and class] sometimes compound themselves' (Crenshaw 1989, 2018). This report provides an intersectional analysis on two levels: first, intersectionality is the lens through which we interpret responses. Second, we also put these categories to our respondents to see how they relate to them, and whether or not they consider them relevant to make sense of their experiences. Specifically, we asked, 'do categories such as nationality, class, gender, age, race and sect influence social relationships in and around the gathering/camp and if so, how?' Some respondents felt that all had an effect; others considered some categories more pertinent than others. Nationality, sect, class, and race were particularly prominent concerns in people's stories.

'We are family'

Some respondents, particularly in Wadi Zeineh, insisted that none of these categories matter and that different nationalities and sects live together 'like a family'. Where people have lived together for decades and where identities have not been politicised, social relationships are habitual and often positive. Individual

behaviour, ethics and social interactions are then more important in shaping relationships than one's intersectional positionality:



Of course, these issues don't have any effect. Race, colour, nationality, language, gender and sect don't have any effects. Instead, a person is judged by his manners and the way he deals with people.

(Lebanese Doctor, male, 60 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering)

Despite being mentioned more frequently by residents in Wadi Zeineh, these sentiments were also expressed in Mieh Mieh:



There's no discrimination in Wadi Zeineh. In my building, the people are mixed. There are many sects and nationalities in our building; Syrians, Palestinians, and Lebanese, with the different sects. Thank God, we're living peacefully together, and there's no differentiation. We're just like a family here.

(Palestinian bus driver, male, 39 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering)



I live in Mieh Mieh camp, and I'm close to the area of Christians. Some people are biased to their sects, and they discriminate based on the race. However, the most important thing is the way you treat people, and how your relations are.

(Palestinian paver, male, 55 years old, Mieh Mieh camp)

The family metaphor was often used to describe relationships - particularly within Palestinian communities, but also with the host community:



My neighbours and friends are Lebanese. My relation[ship] with them is very good, and we're good friends. We always visit each other, and we're just like one family. My family is far in the north, so I consider them as my family. We're very close. I love Lebanon.

(Palestinian vocational trainer, male 53 years old, Ain El Helweh)

The projected ideal is to live like a family as though those relationships are fundamentally good: 'No, nothing affects us. Thank God, we all live like siblings here.' The notion of 'siblings' does indeed convey an idea of closeness, harmony and peace but, of course, siblings also quarrel frequently so it is unclear whether the metaphor has multiple meanings.

State vs. people

The family metaphor seems to fulfil three related functions in participants' discourses: first, and similar to previous surveys we conducted, it served the purpose of distinguishing social relationships (e.g., neighbours, friends) from economic and legal relationships. As one Palestinian respondent observed:



After the decision of the Minister of Labour, which states that Palestinians can't work, those who have the Palestinian identity are facing so much trouble in life and work. Hence, there's more unemployment of Palestinians now... However, this doesn't have any effect on the level of neighbours. As a Palestinian refugee living in a Lebanese society, there's no effect in terms of difference of nationality. We're living like one family, and there's no difference between us. However, whenever

we apply for jobs, or whenever we look for jobs in newspapers or social media, we find that only Lebanese people are wanted, and no other nationalities would be hired. No one is hiring Palestinians nowadays.

(Palestinian, Public Relations worker, unemployed, female, 30 years old, Saida).

Another respondent added:



Relations are very strong. There is no difference between us. We always visit each other. They never make us feel that we're Palestinians and they're Lebanese. Instead, we're one family. Of course, we're talking about the people, not the state.

(PRS, unemployed, female, 22 years old)

Relationships with the Lebanese state are particularly poor thanks to securitisation of the camps and legal discrimination against Palestinians. Yet this does not necessarily affect personal relationships ('when it comes to the people, some are good, and some are bad'). The disputes and grievances that do exist (e.g., civil rights, jobs, official papers) are rather of a political and legal nature:



In regard to the social relations here, nationalities don't have any effect, because we were born and raised in this country. Hence, we became one with the neighbours. However, nationality has an effect in terms of civil rights, jobs, and issuing official papers. However, between people in the society, it doesn't have any effect at all. There are no tensions or conflicts in Wadi Zeineh. However, about three years ago, some disputes took place between political parties, and not between the people [our emphasis]. Since then, nothing has happened. Even

the Lebanese political parties are on good terms with the Palestinian parties and factions now. Now they have a committee, and they always meet to discuss things related to the area, which might benefit it.

(PRS, unemployed, female, 22 years old)

Being born here vs. newcomers

The family metaphor also serves to emphasise how long host communities and refugees have cohabited. Unlike Syrian refugees and PRS, many PRL have lived in Lebanon for their entire lives and have known no other home. Many PRL highlighted that they were born and raised in their area and thus locally have good (normal) relationships with their (Lebanese) neighbours. Yet, some people admitted that experiences are often different for newcomers: 'The relation between us is normal. However, regarding the newcomers in this area, there's so much sensitivity and fragility in the relations.'¹¹

In addition, beyond signalling positive relationships the family metaphor also effectively shielded these relationships from further enquiries (e.g., our 'family' relationships are none of your business. We need you to address our political, economic and legal marginalisation). However, not everyone agreed and the experience of more marginalised groups in society (e.g., PRS, Syrians, women, people living in poverty) often undermined this image of a 'happy family'.

Wrong nationality, wrong class

Syrian refugees and PRS who arrived in Lebanon more recently have fewer interactions with host communities. As one Syrian woman from Wadi Zeineh told us:



My relation[ship] with the Lebanese neighbours is very superficial, because I don't have any Lebanese neighbours, and I don't know anything about them. I've been in Lebanon for five years. I've never entered the house of a Lebanese neighbour and talked to her, or had a cup of coffee together. Also, I've never shared information, traditions, customs, or food recipes with another Lebanese neighbour. The intimate bond that was between me and my neighbours in Syria is no longer here. We used to talk about food recipes and clothes. Hence, they were like family. Back in Syria, whenever I had any problem and needed the help of my neighbour, like going to the doctor, or during crisis, she'd immediately help. However, this isn't the case here. Here in Lebanon the situation is different... until now, I've never talked to a Lebanese person unless he's the salesperson in the clothing store, or a Lebanese seller inside the market...I know nothing about the Lebanese people...They mind their own business, and so do I.

A PRS housewife observed:



How do I describe my relation[ship] with the Lebanese neighbours? I can't evaluate it because, of course, not all people are the same. Thank God, some people are good and genuine, we can't deny that. Not all people are the same. However, they always create obstacles and barriers. Not all of them, of course. I mean some of our Lebanese neighbours. They talk to us in a formal way. They don't like to interact with us. Also, they don't feel safe with us. They always blame us 'the Syrians' for anything.

(PRS, housewife, 46 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering)

11- Palestinian Trader, male, 36 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering

The WhatsApp messages we received suggest that the combination of the 'wrong' nationality ('Syrian') and the 'wrong' social ('refugee') and class ('poor') status facilitates particularly severe racism and discrimination. In order to illustrate how deeply rooted and pervasive the racist abuse is, Syrian respondents gave examples of how their children are bullied:



These issues affect the social relations and the social life. Discrimination against Syrians has always been there, so people call Syrians bad names. This affects us and our children in a bad way. For example, in events or in parks, the Lebanese kids play, while our children just sit aside and watch. Our children don't have the right to play like the Lebanese kids in the neighbourhood. If our kids try to play, the Lebanese kids start bullying them, and calling them bad names.

(Palestinian housewife, 60 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering)

One Syrian woman recounted the following experience:



Our neighbour's daughter came to me, and I gave her a candy. Her older sister said, 'don't eat from the Syrians!' Then, I found out that she threw the candy in the garbage when she left my house. This made me feel really bad and I cried. Why did that happen? I gave her the candy out of love and care. The kid is two years old and she came to my house by herself.

(Syrian, unemployed, female, Mieh Mieh camp)

Creating borders against Palestinians

Yet, in addition to Syrian refugees and PRS experiencing racism and feeling marginalised, many PRL respondents also observed the close link between nationality, racism and classism in their relationship with Lebanese host communities - particularly in Mieh Mieh camp. They complained about segregationist policies implemented against them at a physical level (e.g., building fences and checkpoints), an economic level (e.g., denying their rights to work and own property) and a social level (e.g., discouraging marriage and social interactions):



There are many answers to this question. There's sectarian and racist discrimination, as well as many other kinds of discrimination. First, I live in Mieh Mieh camp, and if you visit this area, you can find that we, as Palestinian refugees, are separated from the area of Lebanese people, which is in Mieh Mieh as well. Borders made of sand and barbed wire separate our area from that of the Lebanese people. This is enough to show how racist people here are. Also, if we talk to anyone, they'd look down at us, just because we're Palestinians. Once I proposed to a Lebanese woman, and when her parents found out that I'm Palestinian, they rejected me. Hence, this question is useless, because it's obvious that discrimination and racism are very common in this country.

(Palestinian nurse, unemployed, male, 40 years old, Mieh Mieh camp)

Another respondent observed:



Yes, we face discrimination due to the fact that we're Palestinian refugees. Hence, we face discrimination and racism in all our movements. There are Lebanese people in my area who have constructed borders made of soil, to separate themselves from the refugees. This is the peak of discrimination. Do you want more than that? We're living inside a camp, but we feel that we're in a prison.

(Palestinian driver, male, 39 years old, Mieh Mieh camp)

While Mieh Mieh village is both a Lebanese and Christian village, this was not an important talking point in the WhatsApp messages. People did, however, talk about the role of sectarianism in shaping everyday social life.

The sectarianisation of Lebanon

One respondent observed that: 'yes, these issues really affect us. Based on a general glimpse at an area, and seeing the services given to it, you know to which sect or religion it belongs'. While many respondents felt that sect was an important factor in understanding social relationships and the distribution of resources, they also treated sects as contingent (rather than fixed) categories. Some people invoked a better past in which 'all people, from all sects used to coexist and treat one another with respect and love'. They identified the civil war as a turning point that politicised sects and transformed them into socially divisive categories:



After the wars took place, sects were all over the place. Now, everyone is living in isolation, and there's differentiation. People don't like each other anymore, and fear has prevailed. Also, some neighbours fight due to sectarian bias (Sunni, Shia, Christian). Some people are rational, so they don't like to fight.

(Palestinian housewife, female, 48 years old, Wadi Zeineh)

Some respondents emphasised that the 'sectarianisation' of social relationships is a choice rather than fate: 'once the people start to put religion and politics aside, you'd see that all of them would become like siblings, and their differences would vanish, only by putting these two problems aside.'¹²

Of course, we should not idealise this nostalgia for a better past in which everyone lived together peacefully. Yet, we should be equally sceptical of the 'deeply divided societies' narrative that governs much scholarship and policymaking in the Middle East. As Rima Majed argues, the 'deeply-divided societies paradigm views society as a mosaic of sects or ethnic groups that are internally homogenous and cohesive. Moreover, it considers that these divisions are enduring and deep enough to be the catalyst of violence and wars' (Majed, 2019, 3).

Not only does this approach conceal other tensions (e.g., class, gender, intra-sectarian), but it may also justify top-down, military and sectarian action to manage, rather than solve, purportedly ancient conflicts. The so-called Trump 'deal of the century' is the most recent example of such a top-down policy

¹²- Palestinian Electrician, male, 41 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering

imposition. Karmi commented on the so-called ‘Trump peace plan’ as follows: ‘the Palestinian right of return – declared an inalienable right by the UN General Assembly in 1974 – would be officially cancelled: Palestinian refugees would receive compensation from an international fund and be allowed more rights in the countries where they are now living’ (Ghada Karmi, 2019).

Understanding sectarianism as contingent, whether an historical development or a personal choice, clears the way for solidarity and bottom-up solutions. Some respondents were hopeful that the upheaval in Lebanon which began in October 2019 marked the beginning of a new era in which these identities would matter less both socially and politically.

The relationship between PRS and PRL

On the surface, narratives about the relationship between PRS and PRL mirror the stereotypical media narrative of relationships between ‘the Lebanese’ and ‘the Syrians’. As one Lebanese WhatsApp respondent observed:

Of course, there’s [a] difference between PRL and PRS. PRL don’t accept PRS, just like the Lebanese people don’t accept the presence of Syrians. This is due to the bigger use of resources. It’s also due to the fact that they agree to take less salaries, so they’re seizing the job opportunities. Similarly, PRL are marrying PRS women, which is enraging the PRL women, which is similar to the situation of Lebanese people vs Syrians. What’s remarkable is that PRL and PRS are both Palestinians, yet the PRL tell the PRS that they’re Syrians, which really enrages them.

(Lebanese, humanitarian worker, female, 29 years old, Mieh Mieh camp).

While tensions between PRL and PRS were much discussed in the first years of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP), they are now arguably less of a concern as the number of PRS in Lebanon plummeted from a planning figure of 42,189 PRS in 2016 to 28,800 PRS in 2019 (LCRP, 2016; LCRP 2019). While their number has decreased by almost one third, PRS in Lebanon remain one of the most vulnerable groups in the region, with 89 per cent reportedly living below the poverty line (AUB and UNRWA 2016, 152). Our WhatsApp survey suggests that for those PRS who remain in Lebanon, discrimination has not necessarily receded. PRS respondents consistently expressed dismay about how fellow Palestinians in Lebanon often associate them with Syrian refugees:

We’re all Palestinians. However, they include us with the Syrians, and they tell us to go back to Syria, because we’ve negatively affected their work. We’ve been here for a long time. However, there are no huge conflicts between us. It seems that we got used to each other. We hope we will be able to travel and live peacefully.

(PRS, male)

Another PRS respondent expressed:

Yes, we were really surprised by the PRL. We were surprised by their lifestyle, traditions and customs. Also, we were surprised by their hatred towards us, even though we are Palestinians as well. They surprised us with their discrimination and racism. For example, they call us Syrians and not Palestinians although we are PRS. Whatever we do, they say that ‘the Syrians have done so and so’.

(PRS housewife, 46 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering)

It is interesting how confidently PRS perceive the abuse and discrimination that they suffer at the hands of other Palestinians as 'racist'. It speaks to a tendency that we also observed in previous surveys to call out racist ideas (e.g., the 'othering' of PRS as Syrians) or methods (e.g., segregating people perceived to be 'other') independently of who uses them.

One Syrian widow in Wadi Zeineh gathering, whose husband was PRS, lamented:

Regarding the relations between the Palestinians: the Palestinians who have been living in Lebanon for a long time are almost Lebanese. Most of them treat us as though they're Lebanese and we're Syrian refugees or PRS, so we're nothing. However, they're still kinder than the Lebanese people.

She contrasts this to how she experienced relationships between Syrians and Palestinians in Syria:

My husband was PRS, but when I married him, I thought that he was Syrian, and not PRS. We didn't discriminate against anyone in Syria, and all of us were like family.

(Syrian widow, unemployed, female, 36 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering)

One key informant observed that resentment was fueled by the fact that Palestinians enjoyed a more privileged legal status in Syria, with better access to the job market than PRL do in Lebanon. Another important concern amongst respondents was the competition over scarce resources at a time when UNRWA services and support are threatened by lack of funding. One FGD participant summarized: 'A dead man can't carry another dead man'. One WhatsApp respondent claimed:

The reason is discrimination between PRL and PRS, because PRS are prioritised over PRL, [in terms] of education, shelter, or living expenses. PRL have always been suffering, and they've always been under the poverty threshold...However, PRS are taking full assistance, and the assistance that one PRS family member takes is the same as the assistance that a whole PRL family takes.

(Palestinian Mechanics Teacher, male, 48 years old)

Yet there seems to be more at stake here than competition over jobs and resources. In fact, the labelling of PRS as 'Syrians' does not only serve the function of protecting whatever limited rights and privileges PRL have (i.e., by rendering PRS foreign), it also appears to relate to the Palestinian return objective. For example, one PRL respondent said:

Yes, of course there are many social conflicts between us; in terms of clothes, traditions, food, sleeping, and work. We've been here for 71 years, but we still pronounce words just like we used to do in Palestine. Although our traditions and customs are close to those of the Lebanese people, we preserved our language and accent, because we think that language is a basic part of heritage. However, PRS speak just like the Syrians, so you can't differentiate between PRS and Syrians in terms of accent...We're transparent, and our social relations are clear, while their social relations aren't. Both of us have been refugees in Syria and Lebanon for 71 years. We still maintain our cause more than they do. Also, we still preserve our traditions and customs while they don't. When they

came here, sorry for saying that, the mask was dropped, and they suddenly started to dress up like the Lebanese people, and imitating them, in terms of clothes and make up. They're acting as though they were imprisoned, and they were set free in Lebanon.

(PRL, male, Wadi Zeineh gathering)

PRS are said to adapt to the countries in which they reside in a way that compromises their commitment to the Palestinian homeland. Thus, what is at stake here is also a claim to Palestinian authenticity (who preserves the heritage?) and a commitment to a future in Palestine.

Other PRL respondents were equally insistent on the unity of all Palestinians for the sake of preserving the Palestinian cause; what matters is the common cause of returning to Palestine and the shared condition of displacement and suffering:



Thank God, the relation between us and the PRS is good. We've opened up our houses for them, helped and supported them. At the same time, we share the same bond, the same cause, and the same suffering. We both had to emigrate and leave our country. We will go back to Palestine if God wills. At the end, we're all siblings in Islam.

(Palestinian housewife, 48 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering)

Other WhatsApp messages highlighted the shared material conditions that create solidarity between PRS and PRL, with one

respondent insisting that 'there aren't any differences, because we're all from the same country, and we suffer from the same conditions in camps.'¹³ Another respondent claimed that 'the relations between PRL and PRS are good, and there are no conflicts, but the employers are the ones who are causing conflicts'¹⁴. Conflicts are thus not between PRS and PRL, but rather with employers who play off one marginalised group against another in an effort to repress workers and their wages.

There is therefore a sharp divide amongst respondents that focuses not on whether there are differences between PRS and PRL, but rather whether these differences matter. Both positions – those that dismiss these differences and those that emphasise them - are steeped in a political commitment to the Palestinian homeland. Both 'unity' and 'othering' techniques serve this political commitment from different angles: the unity narrative insists that Palestinians are one community connected through a common cause and shared conditions of oppression and marginalisation ('we've become like one body'). Meanwhile, the 'difference' or 'betrayal' narrative argues that PRS have instead assimilated in Syria; that they have not preserved the Palestinian accent and customs in the same way that PRL have. They have done so to reap the benefits of assimilation (e.g., better rights and access to jobs in Syria) at the cost of the political project to return to Palestine. The question of the PRS-PRL relationship was seen by respondents as deeply political and not only about social conflicts in a particular context, but also about the future of the Palestinian community. Something similar happened when we asked our respondents about gendered safety.

13- Palestinian driver, male, 39 years old, Mieh Mieh camp

14- Palestinian Public Relations worker, female, 30 years old, Saida.

Unsafety, Fear and Vulnerability

On safety, the WhatsApp survey presented more subtleties - particularly on sensitive issues such as gendered safety. Perception surveys often link the concept of safety to a physical location – for example, the ARK survey of Lebanese and Syrian respondents in Lebanon asks: ‘generally speaking, how would you rate the safety of your neighbourhood during the day?’ This question has yielded very positive results, with at least 90 per cent of respondents feeling safe in their neighbourhood (ARK, 2018, 25). The UNDP survey of Palestinian gatherings in 2018 also found high levels of safety, with 80 per cent of respondents feeling safe (UNDP, 2018, 135). Yet, while people might feel physically safe in their neighbourhood insofar as they do not fear interpersonal violence or crime, they still feel structurally unsafe or vulnerable. Indeed, respondents did not clearly distinguish between physical unsafety and vulnerability. People are structurally unsafe (or vulnerable) if their living conditions do not ensure safe and dignified living. This safe and dignified living is not ensured if they cannot see a doctor when they are sick; if their accommodation is unsafe and precarious; if they do not know how to pay for food next month; if they are unable to send their children to school; or if they have to worry how to get home safely.

In the WhatsApp messages, the conceptual differences between unsafety, fear and vulnerability disintegrated. Indeed, some respondents felt that the question of whether they feel safe per se was presumptuous and insensitive: ‘Don’t mess around and fool the people! What safety are you talking about?’, one unemployed Palestinian worker raised his voice. Another Palestinian woman replied: ‘you’re asking about safety, but where is it? [What] is safety? How do you [expect] me to be safe and sound

while I’m unable to undergo medical treatment or even see a doctor?’ One Syrian mother added: ‘how can I feel safe when I’m afraid and worried that my kids and I are going to be forced to leave the house, or the country?’ Safety, fear and vulnerability were therefore inextricably interlinked.

Indeed, simply listing individual fears fails to capture the emotional and psychological quality of this fear. For many respondents, fear controls the senses and governs their mind; it creates a pervasive physical stress. One Palestinian man from Mieh Mieh camp explained:



There is no safety nor stability in this country due to the security and living situations, which are causing constant stress and tension. Daily life stress, due to the lack of educational and health care aids, and the difficult conditions of life, makes humans feel nervous and unstable.

High costs of living, unemployment, expensive medical bills, drug addiction, sectarian conflicts, checkpoints, violence, crime, sexual harassment, bullying, legal residency, fear of house eviction, and fear of repatriation compound people’s fears and sense of vulnerability. The WhatsApp survey brings these sentiments to life, especially since some respondents shivered and stuttered as they listed their innumerable worries.

In fact, the WhatsApp survey suggests that a site-specific understanding of safety might be overly simplistic since safety is a psychological and physiological state of being. Fear eats itself into the body and the mind. While some respondent’s safety concerns were dependent on specific times or places (‘I don’t feel safe during the night’; ‘I don’t feel safe on the street’), many respondents’ fear was

chronic beyond any temporal or spatial conditions ('we don't feel safe neither during the day, nor during the night'). As one PRS housewife from Wadi Zeineh gathering told us:



Of course I don't feel safe. I've lost the feeling of safety. I'm afraid of everything, due to everything that has happened to us. How will I feel safe, after my country went through all of this destruction, catastrophes, leaving us with fear? There is no safety at all...I'm always worried about my children and myself, due to the lack of safety. Also, we didn't find safety in the area where we came to, seeking refuge in it, honestly. My little son is afraid of everything as well. That's because he saw what's happening to his mom, with his own eyes. He also doesn't have a father, and no one of his relatives is around him. He saw how people treat us in an aggressive and bad manner. Hence, my son is afraid of everything now, and so [am] I. Of course there's no safety.

A Lebanese respondent also described life in terms of a multifaceted concept of safety:



Safety is a huge word that we don't identify with. Within all the poverty, starvation, and corruption, criminal acts increase, just like thefts. Hence, we don't feel safe at all. We take all the precautionary measures at home, but it's not enough. Also, when we walk on the streets, we're always cautious of everything around us because we're always afraid of criminal acts.

No differences between men and women?

We asked people whether men and women experience safety differently. Some people thought it was obvious that fears are the same across genders. As one Palestinian man argued: 'of course there is no difference between men and women, because they have the same fears. When conflicts and fights happen inside the camp, they don't distinguish between a man, a woman, or a child.' Other respondents equally and confidently claimed the opposite ('of course the fears between men and women are different').¹⁵ Many women, in particular, recounted their everyday experiences of feeling unsafe whilst very few men described gendered insecurities. Having said that, it was clear from the stories that men do face many abuses at work, at checkpoints, and in the streets.

The insistence that there is no difference between how men and women experience safety was sometimes quite strong, as if the question about gendered safety, in and of itself, is seen as distracting from the wider context that affects all Palestinians: 'there is no difference at all. The chaotic conflicts, the lack of security, the lack of governing authorities are the sources for problems and insecurities.'¹⁶ As one male PRS worker said: 'safety is non-existent for us, women as well as men, due to the stress we're going through at all levels. Hence, we're asking you to help us immigrate to a country that respects us.'

The 'no difference' perspective insisted that conflict and daily fear of survival do not discriminate based on gender: 'There is no difference between men and women. The fear is one, it's the fear of not

15- Palestinian vocational trainer, male, 53 years old, Ain El Helweh

16- Palestinian UNRWA staff member, male, 58 years old, Mieh Mieh camp

being able to find work and provide our daily sustenance. Hence, we're always worried and afraid'.¹⁷

Unsafe because I'm a woman

Yet, many women talked about the specific verbal and physical harassment they face in public:



Of course, I don't feel safe due to the fact that I'm a woman. That's because the time to go out and come back is restricted, so we have curfews. The streets are always full of men, who are mostly drunk or high. Hence, it's not safe to go out. This is the most important thing. Also, there are certain dress codes, so we have to wear long and loose outfits, or else we'll face verbal and physical harassments.

(Palestinian office clerk, female, 32 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering)

These conditions impose movement restrictions on women, meaning they do not go out after a certain time in the evening for fear of harassment or assault. Single women were particularly outspoken about the harassment they faced:



Of course, I don't feel safe at all. As a single woman, I face a lot of sexual harassment by men as well as exploitation. People are taking advantage of me since I'm alone. How would I feel safe while people are exploiting me? Now I've become unable to deal with people. For example, when I go to the butcher to buy meat, he starts saying things to attract me to him, so that he can come to my place. Wherever I go,

people treat me like that. Hence, you don't feel that there's a person who treats me fairly, honestly, friendly, and religiously. I'm unable to find anyone like that.

(PRS housewife, 46 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering)

The vulnerability of women can be compounded by their refugee status. Some people see them, and treat them, as 'fair game':



When we came here, we became [the subordinate Syrian refugees] and PRS women in Lebanon. We as Syrian women were exploited and physically harassed, through bad looks and touches. Hence, when a man came out of his car and told my daughters to get into the car, what did he want from them?... My daughters immediately started running to take refuge at home... When they arrived at home, they were in severe terror and panic... At first, I started accompanying them to school, but I wanted my daughters to be independent. I told them that since we're refugees, we are most likely going to face such cases a lot. We might face extortion, humiliation and exploitation. I explained the situation in my own way, so that they won't be afraid, and face everything, because life requires confrontation.

(Syrian widow, unemployed, 36 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering)

In the WhatsApp responses, there was significant focus on sexual harassment on the streets and the perception that women are safer at home. Movement restrictions and dress codes supposedly

17- Palestinian, male, 45 years old, sells coffee to people in the neighbourhood, Wadi Zeineh gathering

keep women safe (but also discipline them and limit them to the house). Yet, some women also made clear that the home is not necessarily a safe place either. One woman told us: ‘there is no loyalty. Cheating is common. My husband is a cheater, and I don’t feel safe with him.’¹⁸ Another Palestinian woman explained:



When the man doesn’t work, he becomes enraged and very nervous. Thus, he has some tantrums at home. Hence, his tension leads to many problems. The lack of work and money cause many problems of course. When a man’s pocket is full, he’ll eventually feel at ease. He’ll even make his surrounding[s] feel happy. Hence, money is the reason for any problem in the world, between a man and a woman, or among the societies, or families. Money is the basis for everything in life.

(PRS housewife, unemployed, 50 years old)

This quote in particular illustrates the relationship between peace, patriarchy and money. Peace under conditions of capitalism and patriarchy can only be achieved by filling the pockets of men. The private and the public, safety at home and outside, feeling safe and having money are all intimately connected (see also Shalhoub-Kevorkian, 2009).

Narrow streets, hectic traffic, crowded housing, and unrelenting noise chip away at people’s nerves. A humanitarian worker explained the situation in Palestinian camps:



There is more dignity in Mieh Mieh camp than in Ain El Helwe camp which is basically an open air prison suffering from extreme population density. You always hear the neighbour’s TV, you cannot have sexual intercourse without the neighbours listening...any small spat with neighbours over parking space can escalate into a fight.

The camps are often sites of extreme stress and daily humiliation. The latter experienced at the hands of checkpoint guards or other armed men may then transgress to those spaces where ordinary men still hold some power: the home and against single women on the street.

Women are therefore caught between a rock and a hard place. Sexual harassment in public spaces drives them back into the home, yet the patriarchal home can create further insecurities (e.g., domestic violence). There almost seems to be an unholy alliance between men in the streets and men at home, particularly in creating female dependency on patriarchal security arrangements (e.g., staying at home, marriage, wearing decent clothes, relying on armed men) that often fail them. Patriarchy can also erode solidarity amongst women themselves. One Syrian woman told us that she regularly receives threats from other local women who fear that she may steal their husbands. She sent us a message she had received from a local woman:



Look! You’re a pathetic woman. I know two powerful men, and I can send them to kill you and your kids, and send you back to Syria naked

18- PRL woman, unemployed, Wadi Zeineh gathering

with no clothes. Stay away, you filthy woman. Damn Syria, which brought such garbage to our country. I can kick you and send you away. You're pathetic. You're all roguish and dishonest. Damn you. You're such a bastard, whose parents and origins are unknown. You get yourself to sleep and then you sleep with men. Damn you Syrians. You're cheap people. Such dirty and musty women!

This threat to mobilise 'powerful men' to threaten a Syrian woman portrays the workings of patriarchy: keeping men ('their breadwinners') is an ultimate strategy for survival for many women that justifies a threat to send 'powerful men' ('their patrons') to kill more vulnerable, single refugee women when there is a threat to this survival. The patriarchal home thus emerges as both a source of security ('material survival') and a source of insecurity ('threats of domestic violence and disciplining') and many women prioritise the former over the latter.

Yet, the patriarchal home and women's position within it are changing as women negotiate their role in private through increased opportunities in public (e.g., in education). One woman told us:



First, I will talk about the difference between males and females. There's so much difference between males and females in the Arab culture, in terms of attention. In general, there's more attention directed towards males, and they have the superiority in anything. However, females have a smallest share in anything. Lebanon is just like any other Arab country. However, thank God, there's current development. If a girl is educated and has a degree, she would be able to communicate

better with her parents and society, because she has the experiences, so she can communicate well with her surroundings, and her Arab community, through her certificate. However, in general, she's exploited, due to the way she's treated by her parents, relatives and at coffee shops. Hence, wherever she goes, she's being exploited. However, what encourages her is the fact that if she studied and got a certificate, she'll have an influential word in her family, because she's worked hard to succeed, so she has a better place among her parents and society. The more educated she is, the more powerful and open minded she gets.

(Syrian widow, unemployed, 36 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering)

Women are exploited and feel insecure both in public and in private ('she's exploited due to the way she's treated by her parents, relatives and at coffee shops. Wherever she goes she's being exploited'). Indeed, such spaces are interconnected, meaning that women can use their changing public role to strengthen their position in private ('thank God, there's current development. If a girl is educated and has a degree, she would be able to communicate better with her parents and society...through her certificate'.)

'Ordinary people' under extreme circumstances

In interviews with Palestinian community stakeholders, there was some reluctance to talk about domestic violence. 'It is a sensitive issue', one local NGO representative in Saida explained. Domestic violence is, of course, a sensitive topic everywhere but even more so for people and communities who are already marginalised. They fear that any such information might be used against them, and to feed into the existing

portrayal of Palestinians as violent and traditional. This was also expressed in some WhatsApp messages. One man told us, in no uncertain terms, his voice shaking in anger:



Don't mess around and fool the people! What safety are you talking about? No one knows what's between men and women other than God. What are you talking about? This is trivial talk, and lying. Your only duty is to help people, not to ask them trivial questions. Stop sending anything to this phone number at all.

(Palestinian painter, unemployed, male, 43 years old).

Rather than helping people, we were seen as nosey and intrusive, asking questions that are none of our business. One Palestinian humanitarian worker remarked that 'a people under extreme pressure will behave in an extreme way – that's normal'. He had been describing a recent incident at a medical facility he works in at Ain El Helweh camp: a desperate father held a gun to a doctor's head because he thought that his daughter's wound was not treated properly in the understaffed and poorly resourced facility. Domestic violence is seen in a similar light. A qualitative analysis of Palestinian communities in Southern Lebanon found that:



in all camps and gatherings violence within the home was largely seen as a means of releasing stress and frustration caused by the tough living conditions and not as a mean [sic] of discipline (mother or father against children, man against woman, child against child and so on)...Most said they lose control and behave in such a manner due to the tremendous pressure they are living under and

the violence they feel in their daily lives.

(Abu Sharar, 2009, 15)

The question, then, should turn to how we can ensure that desperate conditions do not destroy social relationships between people. Many WhatsApp respondents were keenly aware of this challenge and insisted on the difference between 'ordinary people' and 'political people'. 'Ordinary people' help each other, interact, become friends and marry – whether Palestinian, Lebanese or Syrian. 'Political people', on the other hand, are the factions, the army, the government, and employers that try to divide 'ordinary people' and incite hatred and distrust.

Many respondents also believed that violence in the camps was the doing of the 'political people'. They emphasised that external forces exploit the isolation and vulnerabilities of the camps:



Of course we feel safe in this camp, because, sorry for saying that, we all share the same nationality (Palestinian), and we share the same cause. We have many things in common, such as poverty, the social, financial, and political state, and our mental state. All of these issues help us be safe. The murders, assassinations, and the state of alertness that we hear about inside the camps aren't caused by Palestinians. Instead, they take place because of external forces that take advantage of our internal state. Thus, there isn't any conflict or dispute among us. We used to stay up until the morning together, talking and having a good time. However, outside security forces interfered and messed with all our social and economic relationships. Thus, even

though assassinations and murders take place from time to time, we as Palestinians have trust in each other, so we feel safe.

(Palestinian, male)

While most respondents expressed their wish to be non-partisan in these conflicts, the political and economic pressures on people to pick sides are huge. One woman told us:



Each faction is waiting for the other faction to make a tiny mistake. This is making us live in constant fear. If one of them looks at the other in a mean way, they'd fight. This is our society. That's why we're always tense and anxious. We hear rumours about wars and fights every single day... Thus, it's normal to feel afraid and worried...when my kids are grown up in two years, I will have to choose one of the two factions. I won't say the names, but I'll have to choose one of them in order to survive in the camp...I don't want this to happen. I like to be neutral. I just want my son to go to school or go to work and come back home peacefully. This is our situation, our tensions and our fears.

(Syrian woman, unemployed, 46 years old, Mieh Mieh camp)

While our respondents were eager to communicate the multiple hardships they face and demand more support from the international community, any such narrative cannot come at the expense of demonising whole communities. This puts a particular responsibility on NGOs and International Organizations to carefully alert the international community to the

difficult conditions in the Palestinian camps and gatherings, including sensitive topics such as domestic violence, without reinforcing orientalist tropes of violent and patriarchal Arabs or Palestinians.

Uncertain Future

Palestinian respondents are torn between protecting whatever precarious existence they have built in Lebanon over the last 70 years ('all of our affairs are here') and seeking resettlement to a third country. While they are deeply dissatisfied with the status quo, they also fear an uncertain future that may be even worse than the present. One respondent pondered, 'we're not sure whether we're refugees or foreigners or anything else. We're not given the rights of refugees, nor of foreigners in this country. Hence, we don't have a future.'¹⁹ Facing an insecure political and legal situation in Lebanon, and in the world, Palestinian respondents insist on their rights: 'we're concerned about the living situations, the right to work, and the right to go back to Palestine. We want our full rights: the right to live and to ownership, and to go back to Palestine.'²⁰ Indeed, a notable difference between this survey and the previous UNDP WhatsApp surveys of Syrian refugees was that Palestinian refugees are much more versed in 'rights' discourse, rather than a 'needs' one.

Some people mentioned the uprising in Lebanon that began just as we were administering the final phase of the survey. The uprising reinforced the sense that the future is uncertain: 'You know what's happening in Lebanon; demonstrations and revolutions. This might lead to worse, or better, we don't

19- PRS, unemployed, female, 22 years old.

20- Palestinian, male, 45 years old, sells coffee to people in the neighbourhood, Wadi Zeineh gathering

know.²¹ Others felt that while change might be on the horizon, ‘nothing gives a hint that something good will happen with Palestinians in this area, in this country’.²² For some PRS, the experience of the Lebanese uprising was too close to what happened in Syria; they fear the prospect of civil war in Lebanon could lead to further displacement. One woman told us ‘you know what’s happening in Lebanon. I think that a civil war might take place. If it really happened, what can I do? Where can I go with my kids? Whenever I think about this issue I start crying’, her voice cracking under tears. PRS, like Syrian refugees, fear living ‘through the same crisis in another country’.²³ While the status quo is extremely difficult, people worry that things may get even worse, diminishing the precarious existence they have built.

The next generation

These fears are compounded by Palestinians’ concern for the next generation. One respondent insisted ‘we’re not worried about ourselves. We’re worried about our children. We’re afraid they won’t find jobs when they grow up and finish their education.’²⁴ Another respondent lamented, ‘you see your son’s life and future being ruined in front of you, but you can’t do anything to help him.’ Whatever social advancement these Palestinians make in their lives, they cannot pass them on to their children because Palestinians do not have the right to own and inherit property. Ownership is important because it is associated with security:

21- Palestinian driver, male, 39 years old.

22- Palestinian school teacher, male, 43 years old.

23- Syrian woman, unemployed, 46 years old.

24- Palestinian driver, male, 39 years old.

25- Palestinian respondents used the concept of immigration to describe their aspirations to leave Lebanon preferably for Europe or North America. Given that they are refugees under international law, UNHCR would refer to this as ‘resettlement’ rather than ‘immigration’.



We’re afraid we will be thrown out of the camps because we don’t own them. Regarding concerns, we want to live peacefully inside camps until we go back to our country, or until we travel to a better country, and seek refuge in a better country in which we have rights... as for the future for us as refugees, unfortunately it’s unknown.

(Palestinian construction worker, unemployed, male, 31 years old, Mieh Mieh camp)

Most Palestinians, especially the younger generation, set immigration²⁵ as their ultimate aspiration:



I want a better future for my kids, in a country that would protect them in terms of intellectuality and gender. How can I describe that? I want my kids to live just like other kids, free from any fear, bullying, suffering, misery. I want a house for them, so that they can say, “this is our pillow, this is our bookcase, this is our house, this is our bed.” Imagine that my kids dream about sleeping in a bed. They dream about having a room for girls, and a room for boys. I want my kids to relax when they come back home. We want a good life in any country that treats us in a human way.

(Syrian widow, unemployed, female, 36 years old, Wadi Zeineh gathering)

Conclusion

The difficult situation in Palestine refugee camps and gatherings in Lebanon has been somewhat overshadowed since 2011 by the impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon. Tensions between host communities and refugees have primarily been analysed through the lens of Lebanese and Syrian relationships. The combined qualitative analysis of this report suggests that this is problematic. Indeed, needs in Palestinian camps and gatherings have grown since 2011 as they have hosted Syrian refugees and PRS while UNRWA services and support are under threat due to funding shortages. Tensions among Palestinians and between Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians have also increased as people struggle to find work and access basic services, while facing an uncertain future.

That said, the WhatsApp survey showed that our respondents distinguish different types of relationships – those with neighbours, relatives and friends (whether Lebanese, Syrian or Palestinian) - are perceived very differently to relationships with political factions, the army, government, and employers. Many Palestinians keenly illustrated ‘Palestinian normalcy’ – what ordinary people think or do – while also insisting that Palestinians live under extreme circumstance. These attitudes foster solidarity and connections between people beyond stereotypes and prejudices, and despite the considerable pressures of day-to-day survival.

In the case of Wadi Zeineh gathering and Sibling village, there is scope to work with both communities on joint activities and projects to improve the quality of services, and foster trust and mutual understanding. Residents of Wadi Zeineh feel discriminated against in terms of the services they have access

to, while those of Sibling - who do not deny such discrimination exists - believe that residents in the gatherings lack two key qualities: (1) a unified leadership that could speak on behalf of the people of the gathering; and (2) a sense of belonging to the area to maintain services which are extended. Future initiatives should not be limited to contacts with officials on both sides, but rather should involve people from both areas - particularly children and young people who are generally more open and flexible.

The situation in the case of Mieh Mieh camp and Mieh Mieh village is more complex. The relationship between the camp and the village requires further peace- and trust-building initiatives before any joint projects can successfully take place. Palestinian refugees in the FGDs described the relationship between them and their Lebanese neighbours in the adjacent village as ‘quasi non-existent’. The two sides exchange visits during national and religious holidays but do not maintain any other social connections. The Palestinian youth we spoke to expressed their hope to improve relationships with the village youth, while the latter were more hesitant and, above all, unwilling to visit the camp for security reasons. Peacebuilding initiatives would therefore need to build confidence first; either in small youth groups that bring Palestinians and Lebanese youth together, or through digital projects and storytelling to deconstruct prejudices and stereotypes. These small groups or digital projects could then provide entry points to foster more social exchanges and events between the camp and the village which would then also gradually evolve to include other age groups.

The WhatsApp survey results also suggest that, despite different social and material conditions in Wadi Zeineh and Mieh Mieh, Palestinian refugees in both settlements shared a lived reality of daily stress and anxiety - how to survive; how

to be safe; how to feed and educate the children - and the fear of an uncertain future where life may get even worse.

Recommendations

Community members in both Mieh Mieh camp and village, and in Wadi Zeineh and Sibline, have proposed specific social stability and livelihoods interventions to address the challenges they face (see the gap analysis). In both Mieh Mieh and Wadi Zeineh, the priority is to create sustainable jobs, particularly for women and youth. Other priorities include concrete proposals to improve physical, environmental and social infrastructures of the gathering and the camp through safer roads and electricity, medical and mental health facilities, and gender-inclusive recreational spaces. Community members in all four locations also emphasised the importance of awareness-raising against gender-based violence, sexual harassment, drug addiction, and environmental management to make their settlements safer and healthier.

People's needs in Mieh Mieh camp were particularly acute. More dialogue and engagement with the mayor of Mieh Mieh village may help to improve the living conditions in the camp. The mayor has so far insisted that any project in the camp requires a parallel project in the village which may have discouraged organisations to work in the area thus far. Checkpoints make the delivery of food and other essential supplies unreliable which also causes further hardship. To address these challenges, community members suggested opening facilities for bread production in the camp in order to be more self-sufficient.

UNRWA's ability to provide services to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is threatened due to funding shortages. This could fuel more tensions amongst

vulnerable PRL, PRS and Syrians. It is therefore important that funding is increased for UNRWA, UNDP and other organisations working in the Palestinian camps and gatherings. Furthermore, the international community and partners on the ground should adopt an integrated approach to Palestinian communities in Lebanon that addresses both needs and rights. Many WhatsApp respondents emphasised that needs are rights and rights are needs: 'if we want to talk about the needs of the Palestinians, we would mention the ultimate need, which is giving the Palestinians their civil rights, instead of considering them as strangers'. Another respondent observed, 'regarding solutions, we all know that the first one lies in giving rights to Palestinians refugees, and not setting restrictions that suffocate them.'

More investment in the infrastructure of the camps and gatherings could also create more employment opportunities. The international community and Lebanese civil society should lobby the Lebanese government to ease restrictions on Palestinian refugees' access to the labour market and to strengthen their labour rights. This would help to improve Palestinian livelihoods and strengthen social stability. The protests that erupted in the context of the Ministry of Labour's decision were stoked not least by a strong sense of injustice of being categorised as 'foreigners' despite living in Lebanon for decades and having no country to return to. Many Lebanese study participants, particularly in Sibline, shared this sense of outrage.

Comprehensive youth engagement and empowerment is vital to prevent risks to social stability in the future. Concerns about youth and the next generation was paramount among Palestinian respondents. Community members in both Wadi Zeineh and in Mieh Mieh also described how unemployment,

mental health problems, drug addiction and sexual harassment troubled young people. Gender-inclusive youth facilities that provide spaces for recreation, learning, and exchange for all genders (both together and separately) would help to mitigate daily stress and foster better relationships amongst different youth groups.

A more integrated approach to protection and social stability which is sensitive to stigma, and which respects Palestinian political fears and demands is important. Many Palestinian respondents were suspicious of outside interventions, including those mandated by international organisations and NGOs, as they fear they are part of wider political efforts to deprive Palestinians of their rights to their homeland. Sensitive and transparent communication between these organisations and Palestinian communities would help to strengthen trust in this area. Efforts to address gender-based violence, such as domestic violence and sexual harassment, should also be carefully designed so as to avoid further stigmatisation of the Palestinian communities.

The international community should also engage with Lebanese authorities to ease the securitisation of Mieh Mieh camp. While most camp residents felt that the weapons-free agreement made the camp safer, they were disappointed that it was accompanied by further restrictions on their movement (e.g., barbed wire fences and more checkpoints). These measures make the lives of camp residents even harder and the daily humiliation of crossing checkpoints fuels frustration that can be exploited by political groups. It is thus important that Mieh Mieh camp residents reap the safety benefits of the camp's disarmament agreement.

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Annex

Questionnaire for Palestinian respondents

Introductory statement:

Hello, this is Kholoud. I am working as an independent consultant for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). UNDP in collaboration with UNRWA would like to ask you a few questions via WhatsApp voice message to better understand the needs, concerns and social relationships in the Palestinian Gatherings/Camps through the eyes of frontline staff members like yourself. We are conducting this study to provide an accurate reflection of your perspectives to organisations providing assistance in Lebanon.

Your messages will be anonymized, without any reference to your personal identity, and your identity will be concealed in any analysis or reports written from this research study as well as from UNRWA and UNDP staff.

Taking part in this WhatsApp survey is voluntary. If you agree to participate in this study, we will send you two to three questions each week for one month (xxx) that you can simply answer by sending us a voice or text message, as you prefer. We would be very grateful if you could share your insights and give us examples from your everyday experiences in the Gathering for us to better understand your situation and the situation of people you work/reside with. Please do not leave any answers blank, instead tell us why you prefer not to answer a question.

At the end of the month, upon completion of the survey, we will provide you with phone credit to compensate you for your data use to participate in the survey. This is a one-off compensation and there are no other direct benefits to you in participating in this survey, even though it is possible that information from this study could be used to improve public safety and community well-being in your area, now or in the future.

Please note that this phone number exists purely for the purpose of conducting this survey. This number does not provide any emergency services. For emergencies, please contact the police (112). For protection needs, refugees should contact UNRWA under the phone number +961 1 830 400. If you have questions about the survey, please call UNDP under this number: +961 76 621 331.

WhatsApp Questionnaire

1. Please give us some basic information about yourself: your gender identity, your age, your nationality, your occupation. In which Palestinian Gathering/camp you are working/residing? Please don't provide your name or any other personal information to help us to anonymize your data.
2. What are the main needs and issues in the gathering/camp you work/reside and why? How could they be addressed?
3. What are the main challenges or problems you encounter in your daily life as frontline staff working or residing in the Palestinian gathering/camp?
4. Do you feel safe in and around the gathering/camp during the day and at night? And if not, what makes you feel unsafe? Has safety improved or worsened over the last year and if so, why?
5. Gender-specific follow-up question:
 - 5.1. **Women:** Do you feel that safety and security concerns differ between men and women in the gathering/camp? What are the main insecurities you are facing in your everyday life as a woman?
 - 5.2. **Men:** Do you feel that safety and security concerns differ between men and women in the gathering/camp? What are the main insecurities you are facing in your everyday life as a man?
6. Are there any social tensions or conflicts in or around the gathering/camp you work/reside in? If yes, between what groups/population do you think tensions exist in your area of work/residency and what are the reasons behind these tensions?
7. Do categories such as nationality, class, gender, age, race and sect influence social relationships in and around the gathering/camp and if so, how?
8. How are relationships among Palestinians in the gathering/camp? Are there different relationships between Palestinians who came from Syria and those who have been in Lebanon for many years? If yes, how so?
9. Have you or people you work with been affected by unemployment or job competition? What are the reasons behind unemployment or job competition in or around the Gathering?
10. What are the main fears and concerns of Palestinians in Lebanon? How do they see the future?



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