

Crisis in Lebanon: Refugees & Political Instability



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Executive Summary

In the midst of the Syrian civil war, Lebanon has been faced with a humanitarian crisis, economic instability, and sectarian violence. The spillovers from the Syrian conflict were initially related to the influx of refugees into Lebanon. Lebanon has maintained a relatively open-door policy; however, the refugee influx increased exponentially in August 2013. This has had a significant economic and social impact: reducing economic growth, increasing poverty and unemployment, straining the delivery of public services, and increasing social fragmentation and political tensions. There has also been a resurgence of sectarian violence in Lebanon, with numerous reports of bombings, assassinations, and isolated battles between the army and sub-state militias. UNHCR and UN partner agencies have been actively assisting Lebanon in coping with the humanitarian dimensions of refugee flows; however, more assistance is still needed. Overall, the future and stability of Lebanon depends largely on the evolution of the Syrian conflict, the willingness of the international community to provide adequate humanitarian assistance, and maintaining the balance of sectarian tensions.

Background

Following 400 years of Ottoman rule, Lebanon was a French colony until it gained independence in 1943. Since independence, Lebanon's political system has been defined by sectarian power struggles. Traditionally, Christian Maronites were the most powerful group, followed by the Sunnis and lastly with the Shiites. However, throughout the second half of the twentieth century, the population growth of Sunnis and Shiites sharply exceeded that of Christians, which created deep political rifts.¹ These rifts erupted in a civil war from 1975 to 1990. Between 1976 and 2006, Lebanon has experienced major interventions by Israel and Syria. Israel and Hezbollah—a Shiite-based political organization and militia—have had sporadic attacks and counterattacks against each other and unresolved border disputes.² The current domestic political arrangement in Lebanon is based on a power-sharing agreement which guarantees each major sect a certain share of legislative and executive authority.³

Primary Stakeholders

Country	Impact	Effects
 Syria	Negative	(-) Since the breakout of the Syrian Civil War, more than 500,000 refugees have fled to Lebanon (4,000 a week). By the end of 2013, an estimated 30% of the Lebanese population will be Syrian refugees ⁴ (-) Smuggling of Iranian weapons through the Syrian border into Lebanon which has significantly increased the size of Hezbollah's arsenal ⁵ (-) Civil war has aggravated sectarian tensions between Sunnis and Shia Muslims in Lebanon
 Hezbollah & the March 8th Alliance (Supported by Shia Muslims)	Mixed	(±) Sent 2000-4000 fighters/experts into Syria to support Assad's forces to sustain arms flow, containing the Syrian conflict while igniting sectarian violence within Lebanon ⁶ (±) Has drawn substantial Shiite support by providing social welfare assistance in the absence of governmental action ⁷ (-) Hezbollah's military and weapons arsenal far outnumbers the Lebanese Armed Forces, giving them much free reign within the country ⁸
 Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) & the Government of Lebanon	Positive	(+) Implemented the Baabda Declaration, which called for all Lebanese parties to stay clear of regional and international conflict (i.e. Syria) ⁹ (±) Government has created safe zones for the influx of Syrian refugees, but lacks the resources to properly defend and maintain them ¹⁰ (+) The LAF has maintained order over Lebanon's internal violence, thus gaining legitimacy at the expense of the government, and has been critical in the interception of Syrian weapons to Hezbollah forces ¹¹ (-) Selective asylum for Syrian refugees by the government has been contributing to sectarianism and increasing political tension ¹²
 Future Movement & the March 14th Alliance (Supported by Sunni Muslims)	Mixed	(-) In response to Hezbollah's support of President Bashar al-Assad, Sunni Muslims have resorted to sectarian violence within Lebanon, including a recent bombing near a Hezbollah stronghold in Beirut that killed 27 and injured 200. ¹³ (+) March 14th Alliance has backed President Sleiman's call for Hezbollah to turn over its weapon arsenal to the state in an attempt to control their arms.

Secondary Stakeholders

Country	Impact	Effect
 United States	Mixed	(+) Pledged \$340 million in aid for regions suffering from Syrian refugee influx ¹⁴ (+) Will be providing substantial aid to Lebanon (\$8.7million) to support the LAF ¹⁵ (-) Continues to supply Syrian rebels with arms, aggravating tensions between Lebanese Sunnis and Shiites ¹⁶

 Iran	Mixed	(±) Has helped fund Hezbollah financially (estimated \$100-400 million annually) and militarily (provided them with military weaponry through Syrian smuggling ¹⁷), as well as aiding Assad's forces in Syria as well with roughly 4000 troops ¹⁸
 Israel	Negative	(-) Historic dispute with Hezbollah and Lebanese government over occupation of the Golan Heights; recently launched a jet strike into South Lebanon in response to Hezbollah rocket launch ¹⁹
 UN Refugee Agency	Positive	(+) Have appealed to the international community for US\$4.4 billion in relief funding to meet the host community needs to cope with Syrian refugees ²⁰ (+) Is providing critical social support for the refugee population in Lebanon

Risk Assessment Indicators

History of Armed Conflict	Deteriorating
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Armed Conflict: The 2006 Country Indicators for Foreign Policy (CIFP) Global Rank Score is 1.0, indicating a minor armed conflict with less than 1,000 battle related deaths.²¹ Since then, this trend has remained steady. In July 2006, between 1,000 and 1,200 deaths resulted from clashes between Hezbollah and Israel.²² In 2007, between 300 and 500 deaths resulted from clashes between the Lebanese Army and Fatah al-Islam.²³ In May 2008, clashes between the army and anti-government militias resulted in over 80 deaths.²⁴ Since 2011, the Syrian civil war there has resulted in a resurgence of sectarian violence. In August 2013, there were two bombings resulting in over 60 deaths.²⁵ Refugees Produced: Using 2006 as a baseline, the numbers of refugees increased by 32 percent by 2010. Since then, the numbers have decreased marginally, but in 2012 the numbers of refugees produced remains 23 percent higher than in 2006.²⁶ Refugees Hosted, IDPs, Others of Concern: The 2006 CIFP Global Rank Score is 3.6, indicating moderate numbers of refugees hosted, IDPs and others of concern. Between 2006 and 2011, the number of refugees hosted by Lebanon has fluctuated between 8,000 and 50,000 annually, with no consistent trend.²⁷ Between 2011 and 2013, however, Lebanon has hosted 914,000 refugees from the Syrian Civil War, which represents 21 percent of Lebanon's population. It is forecasted that Lebanon will host 1.6 million refugees by the end of 2014, representing 37 percent of the total population.²⁸ <p>Assessment: The spill-over of the Syrian civil war has culminated in isolated attacks in Lebanon and has resulted in an increasing numbers of refugees; both of these factors have caused increased economic and political instability in Lebanon.</p>	
Governance and Political Instability	Stable
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of Democracy: The 2006 CIFP Global Rank Score is 9.0, indicating that Lebanon was strongly autocratic. Using 2006 as a baseline, the level of democracy remained steady through 2012.²⁹ Regime Durability: The 2006 CIFP Global Rank Score is 9.0, indicating low regime durability. Using 2006 as a baseline, the durability has remained constant through 2012.³⁰ The 2008 Doha Agreement affirmed confessionalism as the governing system, as sectarian opposition parties were given a veto power in the Lebanese Council of Ministers.³¹ Restrictions on Civil and Political Rights: The 2006 CIFP Global Rank Score is 8.0, indicating very low degrees of freedom. Using 2006 as a baseline, restrictions on political rights decreased slightly in 2010 and 2011, but returned to 2006-levels in 2011 and 2012.³² Restrictions on Press Freedom: The 2006 CIFP Global Rank Score is 7.2, indicating relatively low press freedom. Since then, the press has remained only partially free, but it has improved slightly. Using 2006 as a baseline, press freedom in 2013 improved by 11 percent.³³ Corruption Score: The 2006 CIFP Global Rank Score is 6.5, indicating moderately high levels of corruption. Since then it has improved. Using 2006 as a baseline, control of corruption improved by 10 percent by 2009. Control of corruption has gotten slightly worse since 2009, but in 2012 it remained 7 percent better than 2006 levels.³⁴ <p>Assessment: Governance and political stability has slightly improved since 2006, which should have a stabilizing influence.</p>	
Militarization	Stable
<p>Stabilizing Factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Military Expenditure (% of GDP): Although high according to the 2006 CIFP data –Global Rank Score of 8.6– military spending as a percentage of GDP slightly decreased –with low levels of volatility– from 4.5% in 2006 to 4.1% in 2012.³⁵ Imports of Conventional Weapons: Weapon imports to Lebanon has remained low according to the 2013 Global Peace Index.³⁶ Total Arm Force: Lebanon's total arm force stabilized between 2006 and 2011, slightly decreasing from 5.63% of the national labour force (2006) to 5.41% (2011).³⁷ However, 2012 data is missing and this might no longer be the case due to the start of the Syrian civil war that incited a significant increase of Lebanon's total military spending. <p>Destabilizing Factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Total military expenditures: Since 2006, total military expenditure has been steadily decreasing, going from 5.34\$ B in 2006 – constant 2011 US\$– to 4.29\$ B in 2011.³⁸ However, Lebanon reported 6.49\$ B worth of military expenditure in 2012, a 66% increase from 2011.³⁹ This recent high volatility is also reflected in Lebanon's Fraction of Regional Military Expenditure where, following a stable low decline from 5.1% in 2006 to 3.7% in 2011, it spiked to 6.49% in 2012.⁴⁰ <p>Assessment: While Lebanon's recent increase in military spending in lights of the Syrian civil war is significant, it is important to note that military expenditure as a percent of GDP remained stable at 4.1% in both 2011 and 2012,⁴¹ despite a 66% increase in total military spending. This situation might quickly deteriorate if the government responds to the spillover of Syrian crisis by increasing total military</p>	

spending through a reduction in social developmental investments –increase of military expenditure as a percentage of GDP.	
Population Heterogeneity	Deteriorating
<p>Stabilizing Factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Religious Diversity:</u> Political reforms following the 1975-1990 Lebanese civil war ensures adequate religious representation in government. For instance, the three highest-ranking offices are allocated to the three biggest religious groups: the President is a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies a Shi'a Muslim. In turn, these religious groups represent 30%, 29.8%, and 24% of the population respectively (2006).⁴² The political system also acknowledges the presence and political significance of the Druze, a religious minority representing 6.75% of the population,⁴³ which greatly mitigates the threat resulting from tensions.⁴⁴ • <u>Ethnic Diversity:</u> Lebanon is largely homogenous, claiming 95% of its population as Arabs.⁴⁵ 	
<p>Destabilizing Factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Palestinian Refugees:</u> The government of Lebanon greatly represses Palestinians, refugees from 1948-1967 living in overcrowded Lebanese camps. While they have recently been granted the right to employment, since 2001, Lebanese law prohibits any Palestinian from owning property or practicing certain professions.⁴⁶ As of August 2013, Lebanon is refusing access to new Palestinians who are seeking refuge from the Syrian civil war.⁴⁷ The estimated Palestinian population –prior to the Syrian crisis– is roughly 455,000 people, the equivalent of about 10% of the Lebanese population.⁴⁸ • <u>Religious Diversity:</u> The majority of Syrian refugees are Sunnis, which is greatly affecting the proportions of each groups.⁴⁹ 	
<p>Assessment: Since the civil war, Lebanon's stability has been dependent on its sectarian governmental structure. Large influxes of particular religious groups from Syria threaten to disturb the current fragile sectarian equilibrium, re-igniting inter-group tensions.</p>	
Demographic Stress	Deteriorating
<p>Stabilizing Factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before the crisis, Lebanon's <u>Population Annual Growth Rate</u> was declining and stabilizing at 0.96%.⁵⁰ 	
<p>Destabilizing Factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Total Population:</u> Current estimates of the Syrian refugee population in Lebanon reaches 914,000 people, with a predicted volume of 1.6 million by the end of 2014.⁵¹ This predicted influx of refugee is equivalent to 37%⁵² of the entire pre-crisis Lebanese population (4.38 million in 2011).⁵³ Most refugees are migrating to urban centers, which already accounts for 87.4% of the population (2012)⁵⁴ and persistently struggle to offer existing municipal services.⁵⁵ This also affects Lebanon's <u>Population Density</u>, already reaching 428 people per km² in 2011.⁵⁶ • <u>Youth Bulge:</u> While the youth population declined from 27.4% in 2006 to 21.6% in 2011,⁵⁷ it is estimated that 52% of all Syrian refugees in Lebanon are 17 years of age or younger.⁵⁸ 	
<p>Assessment: The eminent demographic stress resulting from the Syrian crisis is the most destabilizing factor to Lebanon's overall stability. In particular, the tremendous influx of young Syrians can lead to an exceptionally large youth bulge, where a substantial amount of unemployed and poorly educated youths greatly increases the state's political volatility and proneness to violence.</p>	
Economic Performance	Deteriorating
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before the crisis, the economy had taken a hit in 2009 but was still growing: GDP growth increased to 9.3% in 2008, then started to decrease to 1.4% in 2012⁵⁹. GDP per capita increased steadily from 2006 to 2012, going from just under 10,000 to 14,610 in 2012⁶⁰. The exchange rate and trade openness was stable, debt service was decreasing down to 11% in 2010 before increasing in 2011 to 13.4%⁶¹. Foreign direct investment had increased to 14.4% in 2008 then decreased steadily to 8.7% in 2011⁶². • <u>The influx of Syrian refugees</u> brought a new source of cheap labour to the country, as well as their monetary deposits⁶³; however, their presence has increased unemployment to over 20%, causing food and housing prices to inflate dramatically as well as decreasing local wage rates⁶⁴. This influx is expected to raise public expenditures by US\$1.1 billion, whereas lost government revenue is estimated at US\$1.5 billion in 2012 - 2014⁶⁵. • <u>The Syrian conflict</u> has reduced Lebanon's real GDP growth rate by 2.9% since 2012; it has also negatively impacted investor and consumer confidence in Lebanon. Trade routes to the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and to Iraq and Jordan are currently blocked by the war, leading to a loss of revenue⁶⁶. Tourism, which contributes over 70% of Lebanon's annual gross domestic product, dropped by 34% since 2010⁶⁷. • The EU has committed almost €235 million in support to Lebanon since the start of the Syrian crisis⁶⁸, in addition to the financial commitments made by governmental actors. 	
<p>Assessment: Before 2012, Lebanon's economy was doing well. The Syrian conflict and refugee inflows have negatively impacted the financial capabilities of the Lebanese government, increasing poverty and unemployment among Lebanese while taxing a tight budget in a country that already suffers from one of the highest debt levels.⁶⁹ The recent creation of the International Support Group for Lebanon on September 25, 2013⁷⁰ may take action to address this economic instability.</p>	
Human Development	Deteriorating
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Up to 2011, the indicators for Lebanon were improving: life expectancy had increased up to 80⁷¹; infant mortality rate had been declining since 2006 down to 8 deaths per 1,000 live births⁷²; modeled estimates of the maternal mortality rate showed that it was on the decline, to 25 (2008 – 2011) down from 31 (2003 – 2007)⁷³; and the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate stabilized at 0.1% of the population.⁷⁴ School enrollment rates were also up, with primary school enrollment at 95% and secondary school enrollment at 76%⁷⁵. However, these services were subject to problems of overcrowding at rural and low-income areas⁷⁶. • <u>The Influx of Syrian Refugees</u> is burdening the government's ability to provide educational, health, and social services to its citizens. Current Lebanese citizens are facing healthcare (medicinal), water, and electricity shortages; and decreased access to 	

health care and education.⁷⁷ The fiscal impact of the Syrian conflict has been estimated to range between US\$308 - \$340 million⁷⁸; approximately US\$1.4 – 1.6 billion are needed to reinstate access and quality of these services to pre-conflict levels⁷⁹.

Assessment: The Lebanese government will need increased monetary support to ensure that its population will be able to access health care, educational services and infrastructure that is equivalent to pre-conflict conditions.

Environmental Stress

Deteriorating

- Lebanon has been seeing increasing environmental stress. The population has continued to increase over the previous six years, from 399 people per square km in 2006 to 428 people per square km in 2011⁸⁰, and with a drastic surge since then from the refugee inflow. This increased demand has negatively affected freshwater resources⁸¹, which are on the decline from 1,159 cubic metres of freshwater resources per capita in the years 2003 – 2007 to 1,095 in 2008 – 2012⁸². The rate of deforestation has held stable at 0.4% per year, in contrast to the annual reforestation rate of 0.83%⁸³.
- Problems: Lack of reliable environmental assessment data, limited government resources for environmental monitoring, and recently consolidated environmental government institutions that are still internally fragmented.⁸⁴

Assessment: While the government and international community are taking steps to address the stress placed on the environment by the increased population, urbanization, and climate change, the lack of data and environmental awareness are hurdles to successful action.

International Linkages

Stable

Stabilizing Factors

- UN Organization Index: Lebanon received a 2.0 on CIFP Global Rank Score in 2006, which means it holds memberships among many UN affiliated organizations⁸⁵. Following the Syrian crisis, chiefs of all UN agencies and permanent members of the UN Security Councils established the International Support Group for Lebanon to support the country through the refugee crisis.⁸⁶
- Economic Organization Index: Lebanon holds a number of memberships among international economic organizations,⁸⁷ receiving a 5.0 CIFP Global Rank Score in 2006. However, Lebanon’s access to some of these organizations –such as the Gulf Cooperation Council– has been greatly reduced from the Syrian crisis, resulting in a lowering of economic activities beyond its borders.⁸⁸

Destabilizing Factors

- Prevalence of Armed Conflicts across Region: Lebanon has been subject to several regional conflicts, leading to intervention and invasions by both Israel and Syria. Both intervention and withdrawal from either Syria or Israel has led to mixed sentiments among the Lebanese population, enhancing internal tension by furthering sectarian divide.⁸⁹ In the current Syrian crisis, support for either the Syrian government or the rebels has prompted sectarian cleavages within Lebanon.⁹⁰
- International Disputes: The boundaries between Lebanon and Syria remain contested, leading to sporadic land disputes between the two countries.⁹¹ Lebanon also claims part of Israeli controlled Golan Heights as its own (Shebaa Farms).⁹² However, the United Nations Interim Force, present in Lebanon since 1978, has helped to mitigate the conflict between Lebanon and Israel.⁹³
- Military/Security Alliances Index: Most sectarian groups in Lebanon –including Palestinians in refugee camps– maintain active militias partly funded through international sources.⁹⁴ At times, the strength and influence of these paramilitaries eclipse that of the national army, seriously destabilizing international military and security agreements.⁹⁵ In turn, the prevalence of these militant groups has translated in very few international military/security alliances for Lebanon, receiving a CIFP Global Rank Score of 9.0 in 2006 for this index.

Assessment: At this point, Lebanon largely depends on international assistance in dealing with the large influx of refugees coming from Syria. That being said, while the creation of the International Support Group for Lebanon demonstrate a strong commitment from all major international organization to help Lebanon with the crisis, international pressure is still applied to Lebanon regarding the activities of its various paramilitaries and its refusal to accept Palestinian Syrian.

Breakdown of Scenarios Over the Next Six Months

Best Case Scenario	Worst Case Scenario	Most Likely Scenario
<p>The Syrian civil war is contained inside Syria's borders, thus restricting further spillover into Lebanon. This causes a decrease in sectarian violence between the March 8th (Shiite Muslims) and the March 14th Alliance (Sunni Muslims) as the war starts to come to an end. UNHCR and the international community alleviate the financial pressures of the refugee influx faced by the Lebanese government, as well as increase their quotas. While there is still lingering social tension due to the new presence of the refugees, the government and the international community maintain the institutions necessary to ensure continuation of civil society within Lebanon.</p>	<p>Syria's civil war continues indefinitely, causing high levels of refugee flows and spilling violence into Lebanon. The influx of refugees into the state overwhelms the government's capacity to provide basic social services for these groups and its own citizens, causing social unrest. The violence levels exasperate sectarian tensions between the March 8th and March 14th Alliance, leading to increased political violence. The growing crisis causes investors to pull out of the country, and financial assistance comes too little, too late. Lacking financial support and faced with high levels of social and political unrest, the governmental structures deteriorate under the stress of the Syrian crisis.</p>	<p>The conflict in Syria will continue to spill over into Lebanon. Hezbollah will continue to show their support for the Assad regime while the Lebanese government and March 14th Alliance maintain calls for Hezbollah to withdraw from the conflict, continuing to cause sectarian conflict in Lebanon. Refugees will continue to migrate and seek asylum in Lebanon, further augmenting financial pressures on the state and causing social unrest as poverty and unemployment deepen in Lebanon. The international community is strongly supportive of Lebanon, as evidenced by the creation of the International Support Group for Lebanon, and will take action to alleviate Lebanon’s financial pressure. This will ensure the Lebanese will face hardship, but not the hardship of state failure.</p>

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