Two Years On:
Syrian Refugees in Lebanon
ALEF – Act for Human Rights
At the end of September 2013 there were 763,097 registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon, over 70% of which are women and children.

The Lebanese government has estimated that there are already 1,000,000 Syrians in Lebanon, taking into account migrant labourers and persons who have not approached UNHCR.
The total appeal by UNHCR was for $1,216,189,393, of which only $529,659,196 was received.

The Lebanese government’s share of the funding appeal is just under $450 million, none of which has been received.

Government appeal for funding through a multi-donor trust fund managed by the World Bank.
Lebanon is not party to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of refugees, or its additional protocol of 1967.

Lebanon is under customary and peremptory obligations to protect refugee rights and insure the safeguarding of human dignity and security.

Article 32 of the Lebanese Law of Entry and Exit (1962) stipulates that foreigners who illegally enter the territory can be imprisoned for one month to 3 years, fined, and deported.
In the absence of a legal protection framework, previous refugee situations have instead been dealt with through Memoranda of Understanding between the Lebanese government and UNHCR preventing deportation and minimizing arrests.

The 2003 MOU does not apply to Syrian refugees however.
In the course of 2013, UNHCR has been working on developing a new Memorandum of Understanding with the Lebanese government.

- Reception of refugees
- Status determination
- Temporary permits
- Durable solutions
- Regular information exchange
- Joint training
- Strengthening of response capacity
The Policy of Disassociation

- The ‘spill-over’ of the Syrian conflict in Lebanon became more tangible over the course of 2013
- Since January 2013, security within Lebanon continued to deteriorate
- A unified response by the Lebanese government is missing, as can be noted in the divergent discourses used by Ministers and politicians in media statements.
- Contention was also reflected in disagreement over terminology, whereby it was agreed that Syrians would be referred to as “displaced” as opposed to “refugees”
Many refugees complained of receiving too much of one type of assistance, such as mattresses, and too little of what they truly need such as food and rent assistance.

Refugees complained of the conditions under which they had to collect assistance, reporting overcrowding, shoving, and humiliation by humanitarian workers and Lebanese security officers at the locations of collection.
Problems:
1. UNHCR partners vs non-UNHCR NGOs
2. Duplication
3. Overcrowding
4. Not Needed
UNCHR has been criticized for its shortcomings in effective facilitation during coordination meetings, which are still occurring through sectorial working groups, as opposed to a cluster mechanism. These meetings have also been criticized for being too focused on fundraising and for being primarily for information sharing as opposed to operational decision-making.
The current centralized approach to registration is particularly concerning when it comes to newcomer refugees that enter the country irregularly. Some of these refugees have to travel a distance to reach the closest UNCHR registration centre. This distance may involve crossing at least one checkpoint, which puts them at risk of arrest and detention.
As of October 2013, UNHCR, WFP and partners will be cutting back on assistance to families as they can no longer afford a blanket coverage. Families noted that they had been depending on WFP’s vouchers for food and now they are lost as to how to proceed in the absence of job opportunities or support. ALEF raises questions regarding the effectiveness of the appeal process.
It is understandable that targeting on a case-by-case basis is impossible given the caseload, it must be noted that there is a risk that this targeting exercise has excluded vulnerable families as a result of its automated nature.
88% of refugees enter Lebanese territory regularly through official border crossings. For those that enter irregularly, their stay in Lebanon is restricted to specific areas with little possibility for movement. So far, the international and regional community has encouraged and commended the Lebanese government for its open-border policy.
In July 2013, the General Security announced that border agents would no longer admit Syrians coming from what were deemed ‘safe’ areas in Syria.

ALEF has not been able to verify this but urges further investigation.

ALEF found viable allegations that Palestinian refugees are in fact being systematically refused at the Masnaa border in addition to being denied exit permits within Syria by the Immigration and Passports Directorate.
Access to Asylum in Lebanon

* Syrian families/individuals that are refused at the border cannot attempt to enter again before a year has passed

* At the outset of the conflict in 2011, the Lebanese government was initially resorting to arrests and detention of Syrians entering illegally

* In response to a local and international outcry, several statements by government officials have ruled out the policy of deportation
cases of falsification of papers and entry stamps have been reported, which places Syrian refugees at risk of arrest and detention
Syrians are granted entrance permits for a period of 6 months, renewable for another 6 months for free.

Family member should renew papers at the General Security for a fee of $200, or exit and re-enter the country.

ALEF urges the General Security to revise its payment policy.
Access to Asylum in Lebanon

- ALEF is concerned that official policy towards Syrian refugees remains unclear and divided along political lines.
- ALEF warns against the politicization of security policies, noting that refugees have reported fear of the army intelligence and the influence of pro-regime political parties on refugee and security policies.
Syrian refugees, whether in urban or rural settings, generally resort to self-imposed restriction of movement in order to protect themselves.

Refugees that have entered irregularly, or those that have not renewed their papers for one reason or another, are also restricted to their places of residence for fear of arrest and detention.

Families associated with combatants or ex-combatants, or those that have strong political affiliations in Syria, generally fear being tracked down by the Syrian regime or pro-regime Lebanese authorities.
curfews on Syrian nationals imposed by a number of municipalities across the country

Syrian refugees are also deliberately targeted around major security incidents
Syrian shelling on Lebanese borders in the North and the Bekaa continued in the course of this year, putting the lives of local and refugee communities at risk. Cross-border snipers as well as landmines. Kidnappings have occurred in reaction to instances were Lebanese nationals have gone missing in Syria such as the case of the nine Lebanese hostages in Aazaz.
• Syrian labourers or migrant worker are subject to exploitation by employers who can manipulate wages and dismissals arbitrarily
• ALEF detected cases of theft targeting Syrian migrant workers, who have little recourse to justice.
The arrest process often involves verbal abuse and humiliation at the least, especially when the army or army police are involved.

Documentation-related arrests increase and decrease sporadically but there are no systematic arrests.

ALEF was unable to collect accurate figures although estimates that have been previously announced place the number at around 6,000 detainees.
“Syrians that are not Palestinian originally are worse off because they are completely unprotected; if I walk in the street and a little child hits me, I can’t do anything to defend myself; I have to belong to a certain faction to be able to defend myself”.
“Our neighbor’s 14 year old daughter was spotted once by a man who lives nearby and is 15 years older than her. He went to the family to ask for her for marriage; the family didn’t want and she refused by he kept on pressuring them that in the end they married her off”. 
“The children are so restless, they are so bored and can’t leave the house and they are being a lot more difficult. Even my husband is a lot more irritable now and he’s changed with me even. For me, I don’t have anyone to talk to when I am feeling down”.
“They make things difficult for you; you have to go to a doctor and pay diagnosis then you get a referral from the doctor in order to be accepted into the hospital; what if I don’t the cost of a diagnosis? I don’t have money for x rays”. (Beirut)
“Giving birth is the biggest problem we are facing because most hospitals nearby are not letting pregnant women in without proving that they can pay for the delivery. We usually either ask {local aid worker}, or a sheikh to help us out in this situation”. (Tripoli)
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What needs to be done?
1. Durable Solutions
2. Comprehensive and holistic assistance strategies
3. Deal with the Syrian Refugee as a long term crisis in which durable solutions will be reflected in addition to developmental form of assistance that will target both host and refugee communities.
* Expedite efforts to secure a trust fund for Syrian refugees and host communities in order to avoid the negative consequences of unemployment, poverty, and tension between both the refugee and host communities.

* Support local, community-based assistance initiatives in order to empower beneficiaries and strengthen the capacity of both refugee and host communities in relief as well as general development.
Ensure that funding is inclusive of the developmental and poverty-reduction needs of the Lebanese host communities in order to ease assistance-related tensions among the refugee and host communities.

Start exploring the long-term refugee returns’ strategies, by enabling conditions conducive to return, when security situation allows in Syrian areas of origin. Thus, tackle, among others, development factors that render the return in safety and dignity as per international standards.
* Address frequent security incidents between host and refugee communities with a comprehensive security plan that takes into account the right of refugees to protection and the security of hosting community members.

* Ensure that security measures are accompanied with developmental initiatives such as job creation in order to tackle the root causes of discontent among refugee and host communities.
Address allegations regarding refusal at the borders for Palestinian refugees from Syria in order to avoid *refoulement* and arbitrary refusal.

Train General Security personnel at the borders on refugee case assessment or establish protection hosting centers at borders by relevant relevant UN agencies or partners/INGOs.