



# Finding Economic Opportunity in the City

Lessons from IRC's Cash and Livelihoods Programmes  
in Cities within Lebanon and Jordan

International Rescue Committee | AUGUST 2016





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FRONT COVER: A Syrian refugee laying sewage pipes in a municipality outside of Beirut, Lebanon as part of an IRC cash-for-work programme.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Urban areas are defined in part by the density and scale of the built environment.

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# Executive Summary

Today, more than half of the world's displaced people live in urban areas<sup>1</sup> and the average length of displacement is 25 years.<sup>2</sup> The humanitarian sector must adapt to meet the challenges of an urbanising world and the increasing role of cities as places of refuge and economic opportunity, as well as sites of heightened risk of crisis, marginalisation and inequality.

One of the primary reasons that refugees are increasingly moving to cities is to find work. Ensuring that urban refugees can access viable economic opportunities is therefore a critical component of any urban humanitarian response strategy.

This report underlines the importance of programming that promotes economic wellbeing, with a particular focus on cash assistance,<sup>3</sup> livelihoods support programming<sup>4</sup> and highlights linkages between the two. It also shines a spotlight on the various opportunities<sup>5</sup> and challenges<sup>6</sup> that urban areas present for the achievement of long-term economic self-reliance for the most vulnerable city dwellers, while providing insight on how humanitarians may leverage the former and address the latter.

The findings and recommendations draw upon experience from the International Rescue Committee (IRC) cash assistance and livelihoods programming in urban areas in Lebanon and Jordan. The findings recognise that while cash assistance is a vital component of many first-phase humanitarian operations in urban areas, humanitarians should look further for ways to link cash assistance to sustainable livelihoods interventions in order to support longer-term economic self-reliance of both the displaced and impacted host communities as displacement crises endure.

This report contributes to the continuing discussion around how to improve urban humanitarian response. The findings and recommendations are intended to build on the growing evidence base around best practice in urban humanitarian response. This report is not an evaluation, but rather a product to inform and influence operational practice and policies in ongoing and future urban responses.

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP: The majority of the world's refugees live in densely populated urban areas such as Beirut, Lebanon.

OPPOSITE PAGE BOTTOM: In the urban areas of Lebanon, finding decent work is challenging given increased competition for jobs.

RIGHT: Bourj Hammoud, a town adjacent to Beirut known for its bustling street commerce, has many small businesses that employ Syrian refugees.

*Samer Saliba/IRC*

## Key Research Question

This report looks at IRC's experiences in cash assistance and livelihoods programming in Lebanon and Jordan in the context of the Syrian regional response.

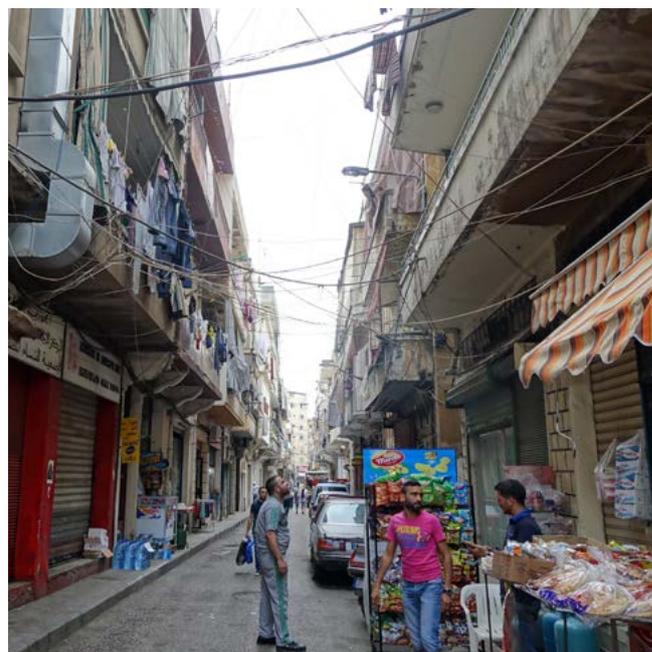
It explores opportunities and challenges inherent to cash and livelihoods programming, identifying good practices and ways to integrate other relevant sectors in order to produce better outcomes for clients.

Specifically, it addresses the following question:

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How do humanitarians support sustainable livelihoods among crisis-affected populations comprised of people with varying skillsets, educational backgrounds, and needs as they reside in complex urban areas that already fail to address the needs of the most vulnerable?

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## Findings

The findings in this report highlight the complexity of urban humanitarian programming in the case of Lebanese and Jordanian cities. The recommendations suggest ways to overcome the challenges and leverage the opportunities in urban contexts in order to better support the economic self-reliance of programme participants and benefit the communities in which they reside.

The main findings are:

- 1 Cash assistance and livelihoods programmes both play a central role in urban humanitarian response. They can be more effective when bundled, flexible, and creative, and when they strive to achieve multiple outcomes.**
- 2 Collaboration and trust-building with local, municipal, community-based, and private sector actors supports efficiency, sustainability and adapts programmes to the local context.**
- 3 Livelihoods programming in urban areas has the potential to support social cohesion.**
- 4 Advocacy is an important programming tool, crucial for improving the regulatory environment and generating a narrative on livelihoods that increases space for engagement.**

## Recommendations

- 1 Ensure that livelihoods programmes in urban areas consist of diverse approaches to achieving economic self-reliance. Cash-transfer programming, wherever possible, should therefore be used in tandem with livelihoods support for displaced and affected host populations. Livelihoods programming should be coordinated with and supportive of work being done to achieve outcomes besides just economic wellbeing.**
- 2 Partnership, collaboration, and trust-building with urban stakeholders is important in delivering effective livelihood programming in urban areas. Humanitarians responding to urban crises should pursue more collaboration with local stakeholders and focus on building positive working relationships with municipal structures.**
- 3 Cash assistance and livelihoods programmes in urban areas should explicitly endeavour to promote social cohesion.**
- 4 Advocacy should be viewed as an integral programming tool in cash-transfer and livelihoods programmes. It has the potential to significantly improve programme outcomes. Advocacy needs to be carefully calibrated according to the specific context in order to maximise its effectiveness and avoid potentially backfiring.**

## IRC's Principles of Urban Humanitarian Response

The IRC has been working in cities and towns impacted by humanitarian crises for decades and our experience shows that urban settings require new approaches to delivering assistance. We are currently exploring innovative ways to support the displaced and host communities in urban contexts to survive, recover and rebuild their lives. We are dedicated to not only meeting the immediate needs of affected populations, but to also fostering recovery, resilience, and self-reliance in the aftermath of a crisis, so that affected populations are safer and healthier, with less disruption to their education, economic wellbeing, and ability to influence decisions that affect them, and the city is able to better cope with future shocks and stresses. We are committed to improving our response to urban crises and sharing our experience and evidence with the wider humanitarian community.

While there is no effective one-size-fits-all approach, the following principles can guide an effective response to humanitarian crises in urban contexts.



### **WORKING WITHIN A COMPLEX CONTEXT**

As no two cities are alike, no two cities in crisis are alike. Effective urban humanitarian response requires a full understanding of the scale and complexities of the local context, its interconnected systems and stakeholders, and the way in which diverse urban communities live within it and alongside one another. To be most effective, humanitarian actors working in an urban context should take into account local power dynamics, social networks, existing structures, systems and geography in order to identify suitable entry points and opportunities to leverage the distinct characteristics of the city or town.



### **SUPPORTING RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE**

Building long-term recovery and resilience must be considered from the outset of a crisis, as the transition from emergency response to recovery can be rapid and normally involves a period in which the two phases overlap. Cities operate on longstanding and interconnected networks of service provision channels (such as education, health, and legal services), markets, governance structures and social systems. Humanitarians should strive to work within these systems, to avoid their duplication or disruption, and to work in ways that leaves them stronger and better able to ensure long-term recovery and resilience.

RIGHT: Amman, Jordan's capital city, is home to over 170,000 Syrian refugees. Meeting their needs requires humanitarians to adapt to the urban context. *Samer Saliba/IRC*



### **URBAN PARTNERSHIPS, COLLABORATION AND INCLUSION**

Cities are shaped by a multitude of international, national and local actors from multiple sectors, including government, civil society organisations (CSOs), the academic community, the private sector and development practitioners. These diverse actors, who possess valuable knowledge of and influence over how the city functions, form networks that humanitarians can leverage to inform effective and inclusive responses. Their understanding of how the city operates and provides services, as well as how legal and social frameworks affect the lives of urban residents and communities is a critical, but often overlooked, resource. Humanitarians should support local authorities and service providers to coordinate responses while leveraging the emergence of national and locally led response networks to ensure that activities and advocacy are well coordinated. Such an approach will help build local and sustainable capacity for preparedness and response while striving for the inclusion and empowerment of marginalised groups, such as women and minority groups.





# Introduction

This report is an output of the International Rescue Committee's (IRC) advocacy and learning partnership on urban humanitarian crises with the UK's Department for International Development (DFID).

## Report Overview

Using a combination of primary qualitative data and desk-based research, this report aims to shed light on the following questions:

- How do humanitarian and municipal actors view the role of the urban context, and associated opportunities and challenges of programming for refugee and host populations in urban areas?
- What have been the dynamics between INGO, government actors, and private sector actors in urban areas?
- What benefits can be achieved by linking cash assistance with livelihoods support programmes in protracted urban crises?

Seeking to analyse urban emergency response from both humanitarian and local government perspectives, the process began with a desk review, followed by a series of "observational visits" and semi-structured interviews with humanitarian aid workers, municipal authorities, and local community-based actors in locations in Lebanon (Beirut, Mount Lebanon, and Byblos) and Jordan (Amman and Mafraq). The IRC has programmes in all locations except Byblos. The focus of the interviews encompassed collaboration between humanitarians and the government sector, and the economic challenges and opportunities associated with the refugee crisis. The IRC's Urban Response Learning Manager conducted all research for this report.

The structure of the report starts with a brief overview of the increasingly urban phenomenon of emergencies and humanitarian action, and the implications of this new reality for livelihoods programming. Next, it presents the work IRC has been conducting in urban environments in Lebanon and Jordan, with a discussion of the broader context of the Syrian refugee response.

The two sections that follow outline the findings gleaned from the research and, drawing directly on these findings, recommendations aimed at strengthening the appropriateness and effectiveness of humanitarian response in urban settings.

## The Urbanisation of Humanitarian Action

The humanitarian landscape is changing. The world is urbanising rapidly and conflict, natural disasters and displacement crises increasingly impact urban areas.<sup>7</sup> More than half of the world's displaced people live in urban areas<sup>8</sup> and the average length of displacement has reached an astounding 25 years.<sup>9</sup>

Urban environments present a host of challenges and opportunities for humanitarians as they respond to crises. Urban areas are often densely populated, with diverse and highly mobile populations. They usually comprise a plethora of government, civil society, private sector and academic institutions, and urban populations usually depend on social, political, technical and economic systems, rather than the natural environment, for a living.<sup>10</sup>

Urban populations tend to be characterised by high levels of inequality in terms of social, economic and legal status. Crises can exacerbate these inequalities and intensify the gap between the rich and poor, the powerful and the marginalised.<sup>11</sup> A recent report by the British Red Cross finds that "vulnerability in urban areas is heightened by inadequate and/or unstable income (often with problems of indebtedness), high unemployment, the need for cash to meet basic needs in urban markets, and inadequate, unstable or risky asset bases."<sup>12</sup> With heightened vulnerability comes a higher likelihood of negative coping mechanisms such as prostitution and transactional sex, child labour and early marriage.

The greater demographic diversity that exists within urban populations (compared to that of a camp for refugees or internally displaced persons, for example) also translates into a greater diversity of needs. In such settings, displacement may not be the most critical determinant of vulnerability and identifying appropriate targeting criteria for inclusion in programming is therefore a complex process. Further, when the potential cohort of participants in any programme includes both host and displaced populations, the demand for support is greatly increased.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Beirut hosts nearly 300,000 registered Syrian refugees, many of them struggling to afford life in the city.

## Introduction (continued)

An influx of displaced persons can put strains on existing social structures, infrastructure, markets and other resources, creating or exacerbating societal tensions (or worse). Even when urban systems are robust enough to bear the weight of a burgeoning population, just the perception that a city is struggling to cope can strain social cohesion, and potentially prompt authorities to impose constraints on the rights of displaced persons.

Often more accustomed to operating in camps or remote locations, humanitarians must adapt to the new urban reality with innovative approaches to meeting the needs of crisis-affected populations and to support the city and its systems.

To date, evaluations of humanitarian response efforts in urban settings show that the international humanitarian system repeatedly fails to sufficiently adapt to the new urban reality.<sup>13</sup> Urban humanitarian programming and response is currently insufficient to meet the needs of both displaced populations and host communities and fails to facilitate recovery, or to promote long-term self-reliance of the affected populations. The IRC, in collaboration with a number of other organisations,<sup>14</sup> is committed to strengthening its own understanding and that of the broader humanitarian sector with regard to what is needed to improve humanitarian operations in urban areas. To this end, this report is part of a collective effort to inform programming and fill evidence gaps within the wider humanitarian sector.

Humanitarian actors conventionally meet the immediate needs of displaced populations through direct delivery of services and assistance. Urban response requires a rethink of this approach, however, due to the number and variety of stakeholders and pre-existing systems and services.

In an urban setting, programming that focuses on cash assistance and livelihoods support has shown to offer many benefits over the direct provision of goods or services that substitute or bypass the role of markets. Livelihoods programming, done well, bolsters the independence and autonomy of participants, whose engagement with markets as entrepreneurs, employees and consumers contributes to the vitality of the local economy. Given the opportunity to earn an income, vulnerable refugee and host populations can prioritise the use of their resources as they see fit. A focus on cash and livelihoods at the onset of crisis can address the limitations on choice that have tended to prevail under the traditional emergency response model, where humanitarians step in as direct providers of goods and services.



## Opportunities and Challenges in Supporting Livelihoods in an Urban Environment

Access to cash to meet basic needs and the ability to secure sustainable livelihoods are recognised as critical in reducing the vulnerability of crisis-affected populations in urban areas. The Feinstein International Center finds “consensus among organizations working with both local populations and refugees [in urban areas] about the need to shift ... to a self-reliance model enhanced by sustainable livelihoods programming”.<sup>15</sup>

Urban areas present opportunities for self-reliance that do not exist in camp or rural contexts; the maturity of urban market economies, for example, makes them more resilient, and the diversity of skill sets needed and catered for within the urban workforce can provide opportunities for a wider range of job-seekers.<sup>16</sup> It is for exactly such reasons that people who are displaced are often drawn to cities.

Urban areas also present numerous challenges to achieving sustainable livelihoods, however. In spite of the diversity of potential employers and income-earning opportunities, cities often have higher pre-crisis levels of unemployment than rural areas, and the onset of a crisis – and an influx of people who have been displaced – will often increase already intense competition for jobs and exacerbate existing social tensions.<sup>17</sup> In these situations the likelihood increases that displaced populations and the urban poor will face exploitation, marginalisation and mistreatment.

ABOVE: Urban refugees often struggle to afford decent shelter and many in Lebanon claim unfinished or abandoned buildings as their home. While the Syrian families living in this unfinished building do not pay rent, they also lack running water.

Livelihoods programming for displaced populations and vulnerable host communities in urban areas is extremely complex. This is because:

- 1 People in need of support are likely to be dispersed throughout the broader urban population rather than concentrated in a single area (as they would in a camp).
- 2 Host populations may face livelihoods challenges that are equal to or even more severe than those facing people who have been displaced.
- 3 In urban settings, the risks facing displaced populations are often exacerbated by the relative complexity of the social, economic and political environment. Additionally, humanitarians' efforts to respond to identified risks in cities need to navigate existing local structures and actors, whereas in camps, these structures are often absent.
- 4 Non-camp settings impose expenditures – particularly rent and food – for which there would be significant support in a camp. Economic self-sufficiency is therefore a critical issue for displaced families and individuals and demand for livelihoods programming in urban settings routinely outstrips the humanitarian sector's capacity to deliver.

## Growing Reliance on Cash-transfer Programming

Where a market analysis shows that appropriate goods and services are available, humanitarian organisations are increasingly opting to provide cash, rather than in-kind assistance. This stems from the recognition that basic needs can often be met more effectively via existing markets (so long as people have the necessary financial means), allowing greater flexibility, security and relative autonomy for recipients of support.<sup>18</sup> Cash assistance can also have positive impacts on the local economy and the host population that depends on it. The IRC's report, *Emergency Economies: The Impact of Cash Assistance in Lebanon*, highlights the beneficial impact of cash programming on the local economy and on beneficiaries through successful partnership with local banks.<sup>19</sup>

RIGHT: Helping entrepreneurs grow their businesses – and advocating for their right to work – is a sustainable approach to supporting economic self-reliance in cities.

## Focusing on Sustainable Economic Self-reliance

While cash-transfer programming has proven extremely effective in helping recipients meet their immediate needs, experience shows that the benefits of cash assistance tend to be short-lived, with little influence on sustainable economic self-reliance.

Provision of cash assistance in the first phase of an emergency can, however, be complemented from the outset by programming that helps recipients to establish and maintain economic self-reliance in the mid- and longer term.<sup>20</sup> Based on research conducted for this report, this appears to be a neglected aspect of urban humanitarian response. An Overseas Development Institute (ODI) study notes that “for the displaced in protracted [urban] situations, livelihoods and protection were crucial areas for intervention, yet neither was a prominent focus in humanitarian projects... There were few efforts to find out what skills displaced residents had, or how these skills could be used to create employment opportunities.”<sup>21</sup>

Legal and policy environments in urban settings often present serious barriers to economic self-reliance for refugees. Frequently, they face exclusion from the formal labour market, for example. Hostility, discrimination or even violent conflict can flow from public perceptions that increased competition for employment has exacerbated unemployment for host populations, or pushed wages down.

These constraints are not necessarily immovable. Efforts by humanitarian actors to transform the policy environment at the national level or attitudes and practices locally have had success (most recently, and perhaps significantly, in Jordan, with changes to the process by which Syrian refugees can obtain work permits). The place of advocacy within livelihoods programming is therefore also considered in this report.



## Key Research Question

In light of the above, this report looks at IRC's experiences in cash assistance and livelihoods programming in Lebanon and Jordan in the context of the Syrian regional response. It explores opportunities and challenges inherent to cash and livelihoods programming, identifying good practices and ways to integrate other relevant sectors in order to produce better outcomes for clients.

Specifically, it addresses the following question:

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How do humanitarians support sustainable livelihoods among crisis-affected populations comprised of people with varying skillsets, educational backgrounds, and needs as they reside in complex urban areas that already fail to address the needs of the most vulnerable?

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BELOW: One of three Syrian families that have claimed a single abandoned building in Mount Lebanon as their home.



# Urban Cash and Livelihoods Programming in Lebanon and Jordan

At the end of March 2016, as the Syria refugee crisis entered its sixth year, there were just under 1.05 million Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR in Lebanon<sup>22</sup> and approximately 638,000 in Jordan.<sup>23</sup> Only Turkey hosts more Syrian refugees from this conflict.<sup>24</sup>

The majority of these refugees, when free to choose, have gravitated to urban areas, with large numbers in Beirut and Mount Lebanon in Lebanon, and in the cities of Mafraq, Irbid, and Ramtha in northern Jordan, near the Syrian border. The IRC implements programmes in several sectors in both countries, with its cash assistance and livelihoods programmes expanding.

The financial burden of displacement is heavy. When Syrian refugees cross the border into Lebanon or Jordan, they usually have to abandon their livelihoods,<sup>25</sup> and face soaring expenses when establishing themselves and living day to day in their destination.

## Severe Restrictions on Refugees' Work Rights

In Jordan, refugees are able to apply for work permits. Fees for work permits range from USD170 to USD1,270 (depending on the employment sector).<sup>26</sup> Although this cost is supposed to be borne by employers, in practice it has generally been passed on to refugees, a burden many cannot afford.<sup>27</sup> An additional obstacle has been the requirement that all foreign workers must obtain a security clearance from the Jordanian Ministry of the Interior. For many Syrian refugees, whose personal documentation was destroyed or lost prior to their arrival in Jordan, or who arrived via unofficial border crossings, another obstacle was a requirement that they produce a passport or proof of legal entry into the country.<sup>28</sup> A lack of documentation was also a barrier to meeting the requirement that applicants obtain security clearances from the Jordanian Ministry of the Interior.<sup>29</sup>

The result of these accumulated obstacles is that very few Syrian refugees obtained work permits. A recent International Labour Organization (ILO) study found that "practically all Syrian refugees working outside camps do not have work permits and are as such employed in the informal economy and outside the bounds of Jordanian labour law."<sup>30</sup> IRC staff working in Jordan report that many refugees who applied for a work permit had their applications denied or stalled, while many more simply did not apply at all. By the estimate of the Jordanian Ministry of Labour, the number of Syrian refugees working without permission is between 160,000 and 200,000.<sup>31</sup>

Happily, the Government of Jordan has recently introduced measures to remove some of the barriers discussed above. These include a temporary waiver (for 90 days) of the fees employers should pay to obtain work permits for Syrian refugees, and an opportunity to regularise the status of refugees who have already been hired without a permit.<sup>32</sup>

There would still be restrictions on the types of jobs open to Syrian refugees (construction, agriculture, the service industry, food and beverages, wholesale and some factories) but their rights would be no more constrained than those of other migrant workers in Jordan.<sup>33</sup>

Also, Syrian refugees are now able to use identity documentation issued by UNHCR and the Jordanian Ministry of Interior to obtain work permits, rather than passports and proof of legal entry to Jordan.<sup>34</sup>

Almost 640,000 Syrian refugees are registered with UNHCR in Jordan, with more than 85 per cent living outside of camps. A recent study showed nine out of ten Syrians living outside camps live below the Jordanian poverty line of JOD68 (USD87) per capita per month.<sup>35</sup>

BELOW: As the Syrian refugee crisis endures, refugees are increasingly moving to cities such as Beirut searching, in part, for economic opportunities and decent living.





ABOVE: Generally speaking, the longer Syrians are displaced, the more debt they accrue. This means that sustainable approaches to achieving economic self-reliance are crucial to helping refugees meet their needs, particularly in urban areas where the cost of living is greater.

## Poverty and Spiralling Debt

The 2015 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrians Living in Lebanon<sup>36</sup> found that for the 4,105 Syrian refugee households surveyed, food and rent alone consumed an average of USD493 per month, and the average gap between income and expenditures was USD300 per month. This gap, combined with restrictions on employment, have produced an ever-increasing debt spiral for Syrian refugees. Almost 90 per cent of households surveyed were found to be in debt in 2015, compared to 81 per cent in 2014. The average amount of money owed by households in debt had also increased significantly, from USD674 in 2014 to USD842 in 2015. In many districts, the average household debt topped USD1000.<sup>37</sup>

The situation is similar in Jordan, where an estimated 90 per cent of Syrian refugees residing outside camps are living below the Jordanian poverty line (USD95 per person per month) and depend on humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs.<sup>38</sup> More than 60 per cent of Syrians living outside of camps in Jordan were assessed in 2015 as having either a high or severely vulnerable level of debt per capita.<sup>39</sup>

Many humanitarian organisations use cash assistance to support Syrian refugees. In Lebanon, this is coordinated through the Lebanon Cash Consortium.<sup>40</sup> The consortium conducts multi-purpose cash transfers to vulnerable refugee households in Lebanon with the aim of empowering recipients “to use assistance in a way that best meets their needs, and will also inject resources into the local economy”.<sup>41</sup>

While cash assistance has proven an effective way to meet short-term needs, feedback from participants in cash-transfer programmes has shown that few managed to save or invest any of their cash allotments, meaning that the benefits of such programmes were of limited duration. Accordingly, organisations in the Syria Regional Response are beginning to focus more on livelihoods support as a means to helping people to achieve longer-term self-sufficiency, offering employment services, opportunities to gain workplace skills and experience and, more recently, financial training, microenterprise and business development support.

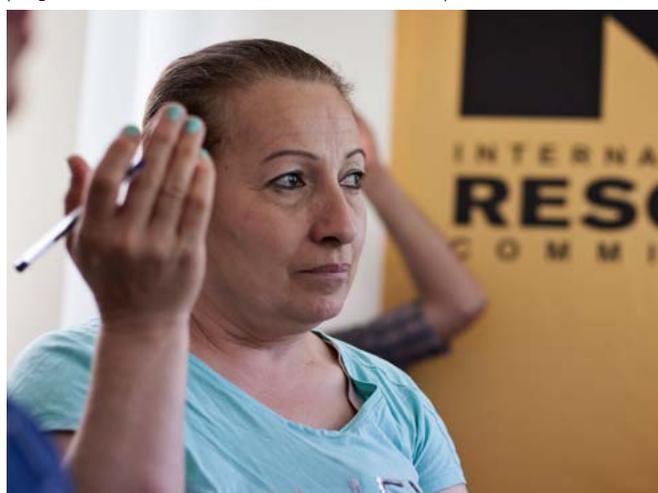
# IRC's Economic Recovery and Development Programmes

In its 2020 Strategy, the IRC commits to improving people's lives in five main areas – health, safety, education, economic wellbeing, and power – while also actively working on narrowing the gender gap. This outcomes-based framework guides the organisation's programming decisions worldwide.

The IRC, which has been operating in Lebanon since 2012 and in Jordan since 2007, is responding to the Syrian refugee crisis in part by implementing economic wellbeing programmes in urban areas. Through complementary cash assistance and livelihoods programmes, and by using each to achieve multiple outcomes, IRC's Economic Recovery and Development programs aim to secure economic self-reliance for displaced and vulnerable host populations while supporting targeted communities to both meet their basic needs as well as generate income and assets. This focus on linking cash assistance and livelihoods better enables the IRC to accommodate the diverse challenges, vulnerabilities and capacities that can be found among affected populations in an urban crisis.

The aim of the IRC's economic well-being programmes is to achieve a more holistic approach to supporting affected populations, with linkages between programmes of other humanitarian sectors that facilitate integrated service delivery and capacity building. For example, within cash assistance and livelihoods programs, protocols are established to facilitate referrals to protection programmes, housed in the same location, to enable easy, discreet access.

BELOW: The IRC's Livelihoods Centre in greater Beirut offers vocational training, as well as a myriad of other programmes, for all nationalities and levels of experience.



## Box A: Lebanon

The nexus of the IRC's economic recovery and development service model in Lebanon is the Livelihoods Centre, which is a conduit through which participants can access integrated training, legal empowerment and employment services. Although the centres' services are open to applicants of any nationality, the main target groups are acutely vulnerable registered and unregistered Syrian refugees and Lebanese households. The IRC operates centres in Akkar (a more peri-urban area) and Mount Lebanon (in a location near and accessible to central Beirut).

At the centres, job-seekers are able to take advantage of intensive counselling services, with some also receiving training in marketable skills and – within the constraints of the Lebanese labour regulations – opportunities for on-the-job learning/apprenticeships and short-term cash-for-work projects. Employers can access accurate labour market information and receive technical assistance aimed at removing obstacles to expanding job opportunities. Budding entrepreneurs, meanwhile, can get support to develop their ideas, create business plans and receive small start-up grants. Clients meeting certain vulnerability criteria are referred to cash assistance of various kinds (including multi-purpose grants under the Lebanese Cash Consortium, or emergency cash assistance).

Through the range of services available at livelihoods centres, the IRC provides targeted assistance to build household income, mitigate negative coping strategies and develop skills that will be useful in the local employment market, in the household and in rebuilding Syria. Protection principles are mainstreamed through the work of the livelihoods centres to ensure that clients receive services that provide them with safe, dignified, opportunities relevant to their skills and to the needs of the labour market.

## **Box B: Jordan**

As of June 2016, the IRC's cash assistance programme in Jordan has reached more than 5,400 vulnerable Syrian and Jordanian households. Operating in the cities of Mafraq, Irbid, and Ramtha, the IRC provides three types of cash assistance: six months of unconditional payments (JOD120-180 a month) for women assessed to be facing significant vulnerability, one-off cash supplements to help families meet the cost of equipping themselves for winter, and one-off emergency cash assistance for those facing a specific emergency risk. Funds are delivered through pre-paid ATM cards and via hawala distributions (a method of transferring money whereby an agent in one location distributes funds to recipients upon confirmation that equivalent funds have been received by his/her associate in another location). Women are identified through IRC case management and counselling services as well as through sister agencies targeting vulnerable women.

In addition to receiving the cash women are given the option of attending discussion groups that provide basic financial literacy and training around how to better control and manage their new cash resources in the household.

In September 2015, based on beneficiary feedback, IRC launched a pilot focused on providing additional longer term livelihood solutions to women, building on their existing skills and networks and foundations laid through cash assistance programs. The IRC, with support from Making Cents International, developed a nine session long "managing your finance" training curricula aimed at supporting the development of home based businesses. Throughout the training women are brought together through networking sessions to discuss and share business ideas. At the end of the training, women who have developed viable business plans are eligible to receive small start-up grants.

BELOW: For women living in the urban areas of Jordan, the IRC offers support around home based businesses.

*Timea Fauszt/IRC*



# Key Findings

The findings in this report – which reflect research carried out in cities in Jordan and Lebanon – highlight the complexity of humanitarian programming in urban contexts, validating much of the established thinking on what constitutes good practice and offering some further observations and recommendations for urban humanitarian responders.

The aim of this report is to identify ways in which humanitarian action may overcome challenges and leverage the opportunities presented by urban contexts when working to support self-reliance among economically vulnerable refugees and host populations. In light of that aim, the main findings can be summarised as follows:

- 1 Cash assistance and livelihoods programmes both play a central role in urban humanitarian response and can be more effective when bundled, flexible, creative, and strive to achieve multiple outcomes.
- 2 Collaboration and trust-building with local municipal, community-based, and private sector actors supports efficiency, sustainability and appropriate programmes to the local context.
- 3 Livelihoods programming in urban areas has the potential to support social cohesion.
- 4 Advocacy is an important programming tool, crucial for improving the regulatory environment and increasing the space for engagement in livelihoods opportunities.

Given the complexities of the urban environment, there are opportunities and challenges (or risks) associated with each finding. While this report describes them separately, these opportunities and challenges are often closely interconnected. For example, while urban market economies provide more diverse employment and income-generation opportunities (when compared to rural subsistence lifestyles or camp environments), they may also feature fierce competition for those opportunities, generating tensions and conflict. In line with the principle of Do No Harm, which should underpin all humanitarian action, organisations engaged in economic-recovery programming in urban areas must therefore ensure that they have a solid understanding of the context they are working in, so that they can implement strategies that leverage the opportunities while addressing (or at least not exacerbating) the challenges. Along with a discussion of each of the findings, below, note has been made of associated opportunities and challenges that were identified during the research.

## **Finding 1: Cash assistance and livelihoods programmes both play a central role in urban humanitarian response. They can be more effective when bundled, flexible, and creative, and when they strive to achieve multiple outcomes.**

There has been growing recognition for some time that cash, rather than material assistance, may best serve the needs of crisis-affected populations in urban areas. Further research is needed, however, on how cash assistance can be leveraged beyond meeting short-term needs, to support sustainable economic self-reliance. The addition of “managing your finance” trainings along with cash assistance is one attempt to do this, but it is impossible to draw conclusions as to its effectiveness so soon after its introduction.<sup>42</sup>

IIED’s research on cash transfer programming in urban areas reaches similar conclusions, noting that the evidence supports “a role for cash transfer programming in first phase urban humanitarian response objectives and potentially contributing to longer-term development objectives”<sup>43</sup> while recognising that achieving “effective and sustainable urban humanitarian cash responses” requires a confluence of several factors, achievement of which would be “no easy task”.<sup>44</sup> Qualitative indications emerging from IRC’s livelihoods programmes in Lebanon and Jordan – particularly those programmes that link beneficiaries directly to employment opportunities – gives cause for optimism that connecting cash assistance and livelihoods programmes may lead to more sustainable economic wellbeing.

Livelihoods programmes can, by engaging more fully with urban market economies, tap into a wide range of options to enable beneficiaries to secure their own economic wellbeing. People facing situations of significant vulnerability often rely on a combination of income-generation approaches to support themselves. It makes sense, then, that programming that is integrated, flexible and strives to achieve multiple outcomes is needed to best take advantage of these realities.

## Key Findings (continued)



ABOVE: Using a small grant from the IRC, a Lebanese entrepreneur was able to open her small business in a town in Mount Lebanon, helping support both herself and the local market.

## Opportunities and Challenges

### **OPPORTUNITY: UTILISING URBAN MARKET SYSTEMS IN LINKING CASH ASSISTANCE AND LIVELIHOODS PROGRAMMES**

Urban markets are often more resilient than those in rural areas due to their maturity and the scale and diversity of goods and services, as well as jobs, they encompass. In urban settings, then, market dynamics present a particular opportunity for humanitarian livelihoods and cash assistance programming as part of an emergency response. This has been observed by both the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP)<sup>45</sup> and IIED.<sup>46</sup>

Inclusive, resilient, and responsive markets are well positioned to provide crisis-affected populations the goods, services, and income-generation opportunities they need.<sup>47</sup> Urban markets, with their diversity and size, can feature a

greater number of income-generation opportunities that may be strengthened to meet a wider variety of needs. Providing both cash assistance and livelihoods programming that works through and in support of markets in urban settings present significant advantages in flexibility and efficiency, as well as enabling rather than undermining the autonomy and dignity of beneficiaries and the market itself.

Urban markets open up opportunities to change the way humanitarian programming through cash transfer programming is conceived – going beyond sector-specific objectives to a more holistic understanding of market systems, and considering how assistance can meet immediate survival objectives whilst contributing to broader economic recovery.<sup>48</sup>

Programmes that use and leverage market forces or, better still, which serve to strengthen local economies in urban areas therefore have the potential to achieve



ABOVE: The increased cost of living in urban areas forces refugees to find shelter any way they can, often within unfinished buildings.

the dual outcomes of supporting market resilience while at the same time supporting the self-reliance of crisis-affected host and displaced populations.

All of IRC's livelihoods programmes in Lebanon and Jordan strive to work through market systems and are informed by market assessments wherever possible. This often leads to greater efficacy and scale of livelihoods programmes as they are tailored to meet market supply and demand.

#### **CHALLENGE: TENSIONS ARISING FROM INCREASED COMPETITION FOR JOBS**

When a refugee influx to an urban centre results in increased competition for employment, goods and services (or even just the perception of it), combined with increased residential density and social diversity, the result is often heightened social tensions. This has certainly been observed in Lebanon and Jordan.

In Lebanon, the issue of competition manifests in public and political discourse and is reflected in national policy. The available information on the real impact of Syrian refugees on the Lebanese labour market is inconclusive,<sup>49</sup> but the perception is nonetheless widespread that Syrian refugees are taking jobs from Lebanese workers; this is a frequent topic of conversation. Similar sentiments are found in Jordan.

Given that organisations planning livelihoods programmes must consider the potential implications of increased competition in each employment sector they intend to engage, the greater diversity of sectors existing in urban areas also brings with it a heavier burden for programme planning. Whereas jobs in the rural areas of Lebanon and Jordan tend to be limited to agriculture, construction, factory work or civil service, those in urban areas range widely, from the hospitality industry to technical roles in the healthcare sector.<sup>50</sup> Skills training or career counselling services offered in IRC's livelihoods centre in Beirut, then, need to respond to a wider range of market sectors than those offered in peri-urban Akkar.

#### **CHALLENGE: INCREASING COST OF LIVING**

Relying on the market as the mechanism through which programme participants meet their needs comes with the risk that increased demand may put upward pressure on the cost of living. In such situations, many refugees face a debt spiral that is difficult to escape and which can lead to negative coping mechanisms. In a situation where the cost of living is increasing and options for self-reliance continue to be constrained, it can also be difficult for cash and livelihoods programmes to ensure they continue to adequately address participants' growing needs.

#### **CHALLENGE: EXPLOITATION OF REFUGEES' PRECARIOUS SITUATION**

Refugees with only limited work rights face increased risk of exploitative practices such as false offers of employment, unfair wages, harsh or unsafe working conditions. IRC staff implementing livelihoods programming say that such exploitation is widely reported in both Lebanon and Jordan by programme participants. More on this challenge – along with potential ways of addressing it – is provided in **Box C on page 18**.



### Box C: Addressing Exploitation of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon

Poorly regulated urban economies provide room for the private sector to exploit the precarious legal position of Syrian refugee labourers. Staff in IRC's livelihoods centres in Lebanon have observed that repeated experiences of exploitation often lead to a deep scepticism regarding whether it is possible for refugees – regardless of their levels of education or skills – to earn a fair wage within the urban economy. Their pessimism about their prospects of supporting themselves is reflected in a tendency to approach humanitarian organisations for cash assistance, rather than employment support.

IRC staff report that the multiple outcomes approach taken at the livelihoods centres in Lebanon – where clients can access job-search advice, legal counselling, skills training and apprenticeship programmes – has been instrumental in restoring confidence in clients that fair working conditions are possible. IRC works with employers, too, advocating for fair wages and decent work, and offering clarification on the constraints that exist around hiring Syrian refugees and the space that nonetheless exists for providing them employment.

Programme participants have reflected to staff that the fair treatment they receive at the centres and the fact that the small-medium enterprises (SMEs) offering refugees positions have been vetted by IRC give them reassurance that someone is looking after their rights. Feedback from SMEs working with IRC indicates that they see participating in IRC programmes as a way of contributing to the humanitarian response. IRC is continuing to seek ways to make SMEs feel even more engaged with the organisation's work and to better scrutinise the fairness, motivation, and behaviour of its SME partners.

### In Practice

The IRC's unconditional cash assistance and livelihoods programme in Mafraq, Jordan provides an example of supporting client centred, flexible, and market based responses to address a range of needs for vulnerable populations. The programme was introduced after a 2012 evaluation of women's protection and empowerment programmes found that a lack of access to financial resources was exacerbating the protection risks facing refugee women. Beneficiaries said they wanted a dignified type of support that empowered them to make their own decisions and to address basic needs, ultimately easing tensions within the household. In response, the IRC introduced an unconditional cash assistance programme providing women<sup>51</sup> with, on average, USD200 a month over a six-month period. The programme reached approximately 5,400 households between May 2013 and June 2016, and a 2015 evaluation of the programme showed that 80-90 per cent of the allocations were used for rent, and the majority of what remained was spent on food.

Routine monitoring of the cash assistance programme showed that although cash assistance succeeded in giving women the means to manage their own household expenditures, the vast majority of recipients were not able to save or invest any of the money they received and at the end of the programme, they returned to a situation of financial vulnerability. In light of this, the IRC is has added more longer term focused interventions, including training on personal financial management and small business development (for women participating in cash assistance programmes, or referred from other IRC programmes). The goal of the training is for participants to have the skills that will help them achieve longer-term financial wellbeing or possibly establish a home-based small business.

BELOW: Women living in Mafraq, Jordan rely on financial resources to address their risks, particularly within their households. *Samer Saliba/IRC*



OPPOSITE PAGE TOP LEFT: The IRC's programmes in Lebanon have helped many clients feel safe rejoining the workforce.

BELOW: In Beirut, the IRC links child protection and livelihoods programming in partnership with local community-based organisations. Here, Syrian refugees contribute to the beautification of the Mar Elias Palestinian refugee camp in Beirut.



## Box D: Addressing the Needs of Street and Working Children of Beirut

IRC's Beirut programme to address protection risks facing children begging or working in the street (selling tissues or shining shoes) provides an example of "urban programming" versus simply "programming in urban areas". Conceived initially as a response to child protection issues, the concept for the programme was adapted once it was established that economic deprivation and lack of livelihoods opportunities for parents and caregivers were key drivers behind the phenomenon of children working in the street.

In light of this, the IRC team offered caregivers and parents of street and working children the opportunity to participate in a cash-for-work programme that involved collaboration with a local community-based organisation in Mar Elias refugee camp for Palestinians in Beirut.

Similar to Jordan, IRC's Lebanon program has developed its core competencies based on the feedback of clients. Feedback received by the IRC's livelihoods centre in Beirut indicates that participants generally considered that they were better served when they were able to exercise choice regarding which programme(s) they participated in. By providing a range of complementary services around economic recovery, IRC's integrated programming respects and supports participants' autonomy to determine and prioritise needs for themselves.

Clients of the centre typically develop a basic employment profile and then (based on their specific needs, educational background, past work experience, preferred working hours, and any disability that may impact them in the workplace) choose services in consultation with staff. The menu of services includes job referral, counselling on job-hunting, vocational training, legal counselling, micro-enterprise grants, apprenticeship, literacy programmes, cash-for-work, or English-language training. So, for example, someone with a wealth of work experience might choose job referrals or perhaps a micro-enterprise grant over vocational training (or they could opt for a combination of services).

This project is an interesting example of an urban programme, and reflects IRC's Principles of Urban Humanitarian Response in the following ways:

- The problem being addressed – children living, begging and/or working in the street is particular to urban settings;
- Flexible programme design made adaptation possible, so that the programme would address root causes of a problem rather than just ameliorating its effects;
- The approach taken is holistic and strives to achieve multiple outcomes around both child safety and economic wellbeing;
- It partnered with an existing community-based organisation responsible for the maintenance of the camp, the Mar Elias People's Committee;
- It achieved outcomes for both participants and the camp where the beautification project took place;
- There was active collaboration on a shared project by Syrian refugees and Palestinian residents of the camp, in an effort to promote meaningful interaction and greater social cohesion.



ABOVE: A young Syrian from Aleppo, after receiving training from the IRC, now works as an apprentice hairdresser in Bourj Hammoud.

One concrete example is that of an Iraqi refugee who had experience as a butcher, and who might have benefited from a grant to establish his own small business. His immediate priority, however, was to access the USD200 he needed to renew his Lebanese residency permit. Without that, other opportunities would be meaningless. He therefore decided that enrolment in the IRC's cash-for-work programme best served his most urgent needs.

Beyond linking economic well-being programmes, meeting the needs of the most vulnerable urban residents also requires a multiple outcomes approach. As **Box D on page 19** shows, perhaps the best example is of IRC Lebanon's programme targeting children living or working in the streets. In analysing the protection needs of such children, IRC's livelihoods and child protection teams identified that economic vulnerability of children's families was one of the key reasons for their being on the street. Similar programmes meant to address multiple outcomes are previously discussed in **Box C on page 18**, which discusses how the IRC is addressing both exploitation and income generation, and in the example of the economic well-being programme in Jordan, which addresses a wide range of women's needs. By addressing the precarious financial situation of the family, IRC aimed to simultaneously improve the protection situation of the children. Eliminating sectoral silos permits more responsive, well-targeted programming that achieves multiple outcomes.

## **Finding 2: Collaboration and trust-building with local, municipal, community-based, and private sector actors supports efficiency, sustainability and adapts programmes to the local context.**

Leveraging the partnership of municipal, community-based, and private sector actors often leads to improved programming, not only for individuals facing high levels of vulnerability but entire communities as well.<sup>52</sup> Partnerships between INGOs and local actors, particularly local municipalities, are not simple equations. They must be carefully structured to achieve outcomes that align with shared priorities.

Partnerships should not undermine the general responsibilities or mandates of the non-governmental, governmental, and private sectors, but rather seek to leverage capacity and resources around shared goals. To do this, each actor must be willing to focus more on common aims than on where their priorities differ, and must work to find partners that are trustworthy.

Trust comes with time, accountability, and specificity of partnerships and projects. When INGOs partner with the public sector under an agreement that is very specific in its scope and aims, the risk of over-promising is reduced.

Over time, these partnerships may become more meaningful and opportunities to increase scale may appear. In conducting the research for this report, it was noted that all of the economic recovery programmes visited that had the approval or participation of municipal authorities enjoyed a level of trust that made it possible for IRC to "push the boundaries" of what was possible in livelihoods programming. Given the need to utilise to the maximum extent possible the limited space permitted by central government policies for the support of refugees' economic self-sufficiency, this represents an important aspect of the programme design.



ABOVE: The IRC's cash-for-work programmes in Mount Lebanon support municipal public service needs, such as laying sewage pipes.

## Opportunities and Challenges

### **OPPORTUNITY: PARTNERSHIPS WITH A DIVERSE RANGE OF LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS**

By their very nature, urban areas provide a greater depth and breadth of local actors with whom humanitarians might develop partnerships.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, it has been observed that both national and local government agencies tend to be more active in urban areas than rural ones.<sup>54</sup>

The same is true of the private sector, whose robust presence in urban areas provides multiple channels of partnership, be it through job placement, apprenticeships, or job training. These types of partnerships engage the private sector as a long-term partner in humanitarian programming, supporting benefits not just for the most vulnerable but also potentially contributing to the bottom line of their businesses. As a recent report from ODI states: "Moving beyond stereotypes and developing a more nuanced understanding of the possibilities and limitations of engagement between businesses and humanitarian agencies is necessary in order to take advantage of potential opportunities, and to support the markets and businesses people rely on for their livelihoods."<sup>55</sup>

### **CHALLENGE: DISCORDANT POSITIONS ON REFUGEE INCLUSION AT THE CENTRAL vs MUNICIPAL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT**

While national authorities have made clear their determination to avoid any incentive for the presence of Syrian refugees to become permanent – severe restrictions on refugees' work rights being the manifestation most relevant for livelihoods programming – many municipal

authorities have proved willing to take a pragmatic approach to the refugee crisis, and even to recognise opportunities within it. Managing this divide between municipal and central government approaches to refugee inclusion is a challenge to humanitarian programming.

### **CHALLENGE: POTENTIAL POLITICISATION OF HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMMES**

Partnering with municipalities, with their linkages to local politics, can lead to a blurring of the apolitical humanitarian position. Partnering with other stakeholders, such as private sector actors or community-based organisations can carry similar risks where those stakeholders are affiliated with a particular political stance. Even geographical designations can come with political connotations (for example, a particular political group being affiliated with a neighbourhood or region within a city, such as Hezbollah's affiliation with south Beirut), and the location of humanitarian programmes must also take this into consideration. Given this heightened risk of politicisation, understanding the local dynamics of power, politics, and stakeholder priorities is paramount in urban areas.

### **In Practice**

Municipality staff interviewed for this study reported that INGOs, informed by an awareness of central government policies, had a tendency to assume local government actors would not be interested in or willing to collaborate on projects that did not fully align with those policies. In reality, that is not necessarily so. Taking Lebanon as a case in point, there is a clear policy at the level of central government that humanitarian programming must not create incentives for refugees to remain permanently in the country.

## Key Findings (continued)

In reality, however, municipalities do not always adhere strictly to national policies and have proved willing to pursue flexible and creative ways of addressing the crisis, including partnering with INGOs. One municipal official interviewed for this report said he felt that INGOs approached him from a default position of distrust. In his experience, INGOs did not take the time to understand his willingness to include them in forward-thinking, community-based initiatives. Despite this, he still saw a critical role for INGOs in addressing the crisis, particularly given the lack of resources and capacity of the municipality in some areas.

Partnerships with local governmental or private sector entities can result in greater efficiency and sustainability, as well as better appropriate programmes to the local context. For example, IRC's apprenticeship program, realised through partnerships with private sector actors, benefits both refugees – who are able to engage in remunerated work – and the businesses they work for – which receive nominally “free” labour for a period of four months.

Likewise, the micro-enterprise grants program in Lebanon, begun in September 2015, looks to the private sector as a means of achieving greater scale. It provides financial and basic technical support to Lebanese-owned micro-businesses assessed to have the greatest potential to grow, and therefore to take on more employees from among target groups. These programmes, along with the cash-for-work programme (a municipal partnership) and programmes for street and working children (in partnership with community-based organisations) already discussed, leverage partnerships with local actors in ways that maximise the benefits of all involved.

Despite the fact that the central governments of both Lebanon and Jordan restrict refugees' right to work to some degree, municipal governments have proved willing to collaborate with the humanitarian sector to establish income-generation opportunities for refugees. Municipal authorities, aware of the increased demand on public services resulting from the influx of refugees, have been open to the IRC's proposal to address the issue via its cash-for-work program, engaging participants to support municipal services such as garbage collection, road maintenance and community beautification projects, among others. Through this effort, the IRC and local municipalities work together to make refugees part of the solution rather than the problem.

### **Finding 3: Livelihoods programming in urban areas has the potential to support social cohesion.**

The potential for poorly planned and exclusively targeted livelihoods programming to undermine social cohesion or exacerbate social tension has long been recognised. Where social tension is greater, instances of harassment, exploitation, or even physical violence are more likely.<sup>56</sup> Less well recognised, and it seems rarely embraced, is the potential for livelihoods interventions to promote social cohesion. Anecdotal evidence, however, indicates that livelihoods programmes can enhance social cohesion between displaced and host communities to some degree. This goal should be considered a critical component of urban humanitarian response.

In Lebanon, where social cohesion in many parts of the country was tenuous even before the refugee crisis, the ILO recently observed that: “livelihoods and jobs are critical for social cohesion.... As such, efforts need to be intensified to ensure that host communities have access to jobs and income and at the [same] time ensure that refugees have access to livelihoods.”<sup>57</sup>

### **Box E: Definition of Social Cohesion**

For its purposes, this report uses the following definition of social cohesion: “The nature and set of relationships between individuals and groups in a particular environment (horizontal social cohesion) and between those individuals and groups and the institutions that govern them in a particular environment (vertical social cohesion). Strong, positive, integrated relationships and inclusive identities are perceived as indicative of high social cohesion, whereas weak, negative or fragmented relationships and exclusive identities are taken to mean low social cohesion. Social cohesion is therefore a multi-faceted, scalar concept.”<sup>58</sup>

## Opportunities and Challenges

### **OPPORTUNITY: ENHANCING SOCIAL COHESION THROUGH LIVELIHOODS PROGRAMMING**

Livelihoods programming provides opportunities to enhance social cohesion. In turn, greater social cohesion can enhance outcomes of economic wellbeing, safety, or empowerment. This is because, in addition to legal barriers, urban refugees often face social barriers to income generation opportunities, public service provision, or other aspects of urban life. They are often discriminated against, exploited, or face threats of violence from those who perceive them as a threat to their own livelihoods. Ensuring that both refugee and host populations jointly participate in livelihoods programming may help to reduce these social barriers, improve each group's perception of the other, and contribute to social cohesion.

### **CHALLENGE: INCREASED RISK OF SOCIAL TENSION AND ASSOCIATED IMPACTS ON COMMUNITIES**

Poor and/or deteriorating social cohesion is a negative consequence to be avoided in its own right; it also has flow-on impacts in terms of “equitable access to public spaces, urban governance around refugees in terms of access to basic services, livelihood opportunities, and access to humanitarian and development assistance”.<sup>59</sup>

### **CHALLENGE: LACK OF EVIDENCE BASE TO GUIDE PROGRAMMING**

Social cohesion (or its absence) is the result of a complex web of interacting, context-specific factors, and at the best of times, it is a complicated task to demonstrate cause and effect in efforts to promote it. Documented efforts to do so in the context of livelihoods programmes is currently rare, and so practitioners do not have the benefit of an evidence base upon which to build their programming.

### **In Practice**

The IRC has embraced the challenge of working to promote stronger social cohesion through its livelihoods programmes in Lebanon, particularly via the cash-for-work, vocational training and apprenticeship programmes. Opportunities are provided for both host community members and refugees, but the aim goes beyond simply ensuring participation of diverse groups within a population; rather it extends to actively promoting interaction between participants that is collaborative and meaningful. Projects are chosen that offer clear benefits to the local community or local employers as well as beneficiaries.



ABOVE: Vocational training in the IRC's Livelihoods Centre gives people of different backgrounds the opportunity to interact in ways they wouldn't normally, allowing them to build relationships and promoting some measure of social cohesion.

In IRC's vocational training and apprenticeship programmes, refugees (typically Syrian or Iraqi) and Lebanese beneficiaries participate as equals, sharing a classroom and learning the same set of skills. In apprenticeship programmes (permissible under Lebanese labour regulations as “on-the-job training”) Syrians, Iraqis, and Lebanese apprentices are trained in Lebanese workplaces for four months, while receiving a stipend from the IRC. In both programmes, feedback from participants at the end of the programme period indicated that they viewed other nationalities more positively. Perhaps more telling still is the fact that a significant number of Lebanese employers who took on Syrian or Iraqi apprentices for four months decided to retain their services after the IRC's involvement ended.

## Key Findings (continued)

The IRC's Livelihoods Centre in Mount Lebanon is located in an area where several neighbourhoods of the greater Beirut area abut. Anyone who walks in is eligible to register for cash or livelihoods assistance and the centre – which had registered more than 2,200 people in its first six months of operation – receives a mix of Lebanese, Syrian, and Iraqi visitors each day. The Centre itself provides a space for members of different communities to interact with one other, be it through the vocational trainings already discussed or the children's area, provided so that parenting/childcare duties don't prevent men and women from accessing programmes. While the provision of safe spaces for interaction between various groups has been acknowledged by beneficiaries as an important factor expected to promote social cohesion, more work is needed to identify concrete ways to achieve this outcome through programming, and to measure the results.

BELOW: Lebanese employers who take on Syrian refugees as part of IRC's apprenticeship program often decide to retain their services. As one employer stated, "I wanted to help refugees to make sure they learn an occupation that they can use to support themselves."

### **Finding 4: Advocacy is an important programming tool, crucial for improving the regulatory environment and generating a narrative on livelihoods that increases space for engagement.**

Syrian refugees come to urban areas looking for work while national policies restrict them from finding it legally. Exclusion from formal urban markets has been shown elsewhere to keep displaced populations trapped in a cycle of poverty,<sup>61</sup> and there is nothing to suggest that the case would be different for Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Jordan.

Even within the constraints of a restrictive legal and policy environment, INGOs in Lebanon and Jordan have worked to promote respect for Syrian refugees' rights.

In Jordan, the requirements that had to be met in order for Syrian refugees to obtain a work permit were prohibitive. Fees that should have been borne by employers were passed on to refugee applicants and documentation was necessary that many refugees lacked. Documentation rules have been amended (in April 2016) and should no longer present such a barrier, and fees have been temporarily waived during a "grace period" in which employers can regularise the status of refugees who had been informally employed.



In Lebanon, national law limits Syrians to jobs in sectors that are not in competition with the Lebanese workforce. Additional restrictions and changing regulations on legal stay further limit the opportunities for refugees to access assistance and livelihoods. The vast majority of Syrian refugees are therefore forced to either work illegally or not at all. These refugees are part of a bigger economic dilemma in Lebanon, where the ILO estimates that 44 per cent of the labour force works informally without contracts or social protection.<sup>62</sup>

To the extent that advocacy is pursued, however, it tends to be seen as an activity apart from programming. Treating advocacy as a programme tool to be routinely employed in pursuit of better outcomes is an approach that seems somewhat neglected.

## Opportunities

### **OPPORTUNITY: STRATEGIC COLLABORATION AND COORDINATION HELPS TO ESTABLISH AND CEMENT RELATIONSHIPS**

In pursuing advocacy around shared objectives, INGOs could establish relationships and build trust with local actors in the private sector and/or local government. The benefits of these partnerships have already been discussed, above, in terms of offering benefits in efficiency and scale.

## In Practice

Both Lebanon and Jordan are middle-income countries with strong central governments that develop policy frameworks that – in principle – must be implemented at all levels, right down to the municipality. Municipal authorities interviewed for this report expressed frustration at the constraints that national policies imposed on local-level efforts to improve the situation. The view was that centralised policy frameworks were sometimes out of touch with the realities on the ground. A number of local authorities indicated they were willing to view the influx of Syrian refugees as an economic opportunity but were unsure how they could act on this willingness given the restrictive policy environment. In Lebanon, municipal actors said they looked to INGOs to play more of an advocacy role, and to “push the thinking of political structures”.

Byblos, in Lebanon, serves as an example of the national-local disconnect. A representative of the Byblos municipal authority said that the municipality viewed itself as a forward-thinking entity and that it was generally spared many of the political divisions that faced municipalities elsewhere in Lebanon given that the majority of city council representatives have no affiliation to a political party.

## **Box F: The Criticality of Context – Comparing IRC’s Livelihoods Centres in Beirut and Akkar**

The IRC operates livelihoods centres in urban Beirut and peri-urban Akkar region, and a comparison of the activities of the two offers an excellent demonstration of how varying urban settings offer different programming opportunities and also require different responses. Differences between the Beirut and Akkar livelihoods centres include:

- In Beirut, vocational training focuses on skills needed in workplaces such as offices, commercial kitchens, mechanical workshops and some building trades (such as electrical) whereas in Akkar, while there is demand for some of these skills, vocational training generally tends to be oriented more towards the needs of the agricultural sector.
- Private sector partners working with the livelihoods centre in Beirut tend to request more highly skilled workers, and job-seekers attending the Beirut centre have tended to have a higher-level skillset.
- Conversely, staff in the livelihoods centre in Akkar are more likely than colleagues in Beirut to find a ready supply of labourers for unskilled positions.
- The cost of living has been shown to be higher in Beirut than in Akkar, so cash assistance programmes in Beirut generally require higher allocations.
- Staff report observing more tensions between refugee and host communities in the more urban Beirut and Mount Lebanon areas than in Akkar.
- Competition between refugees and Lebanese workers for jobs is perceived by staff to be less acute in Akkar. This is possibly due to the fact that much agricultural and construction work was carried out by migrant labour even before the Syria crisis.<sup>60</sup>
- In the initial phase of IRC’s livelihoods centres, clients in Akkar were more likely to request cash assistance, while in Beirut, there was greater demand for livelihoods support.

## Key Findings (continued)



Because of restrictions around work rights, many of the approximately 2,500 Syrian families living in Byblos worked informally in under-served sectors of the local economy where positions (such as plumbers or electricians) had long gone unfilled and where a need consequently existed. While refugees working informally arguably strengthened the local economy by meeting a need for services, this situation nonetheless carries serious risks, such as exploitative working conditions or legal consequences ranging from arrest through to revocation of residency. Given the constraints imposed at the level of the central government, however, the municipality feels unable to find a solution.

Few INGOs to date have committed to engaging in advocacy around this issue. There does not appear to be an evidence base, either, that interested organisations could draw on to guide their advocacy for a more conducive legal and policy environment, or to show how taking such an advocacy position might impact INGO standing in the eyes of central governments. The Feinstein International Center at Tufts University cautions against “blanket” advocacy for refugees’ right to work, recognising that urban refugee settings often have a political environment that is “unsupportive” of livelihoods programming, which they fear will put refugees in competition with local people for jobs, and provide an incentive for refugees to remain in the country. “In such a context,” they advise, “advocacy must be carefully considered, in order to avoid making the situation worse.”<sup>633</sup> Despite the need for caution, it is important to recognise that space for advocacy does exist – particularly on behalf of working refugees – and that this idea should be further explored as the crisis continues.



TOP: Syrians living in Lebanon and Jordan face legal restrictions to work, limiting the ability of INGOs to help them find long-term economic opportunities strictly through programming.

ABOVE: Byblos, thirty-seven kilometres north of Beirut, seeks to distance itself from the politics of the Lebanese capital. O. Mustafin/Wikimedia

# Recommendations for Humanitarian Actors

Based on the key findings, this report puts forth the following recommendations meant for humanitarian actors seeking to design and implement economic recovery and development programs in urban areas. These recommendations should be considered along with the IRC's Principles of Urban Humanitarian Response.

## Recommendation 1:

**Ensure that livelihoods programmes in urban areas consist of diverse approaches to achieving economic self-reliance. Cash-transfer programming, wherever possible, should therefore be used in tandem with livelihoods support for displaced and affected host populations. Livelihoods programming should be coordinated with and supportive of work being done to achieve outcomes besides just economic wellbeing.**

Cash-transfer programmes have proved crucially important in urban emergencies, enabling affected populations to access the goods and services they need in the short term with a far greater degree of autonomy than that afforded by "traditional" distributions of goods. Given the increasingly protracted nature of displacement, it seems clear that cash assistance should be connected at the earliest opportunity with livelihood programming in order to support longer-term, sustainable economic self-reliance.

Given the diversity of backgrounds, work experiences, and vulnerabilities of urban populations, livelihoods programmes should provide multiple entry points, opportunities and combinations of services that support economic self-reliance. By designing livelihoods programmes that are bundled and integrated with programming from other humanitarian sectors to achieve multiple outcomes, beneficiaries are able to prioritise their own needs, and to exercise choice as to how they go about meeting them. This should contribute to improved quality of life for beneficiaries. Training and business support programmes need to look beyond participants' vulnerability, and consider their backgrounds, motivations, and their ability to put training and financial support to work for income generation.

## Recommendation 2:

**Partnership, collaboration, and trust-building with urban stakeholders is important to delivering effective livelihood programming in urban areas. Humanitarians responding to urban crises should pursue more collaboration with local stakeholders and focus on building positive working relationships with municipal structures.**

When working in urban areas, humanitarian organisations should look to collaborate and partner with key urban stakeholders to deliver more effective livelihoods programmes. Urban stakeholders include municipalities, community-based organisations and the private sector. Working with these actors results in livelihoods programmes that are more feasible, appropriated to, and sustainable in the urban context. It also helps to ensure that the aims of humanitarian programmes are better harmonised with community development outcomes.

- The importance of understanding the local context and how urban areas and the broader environment operate as a system is crucial. Humanitarian actors should avoid making assumptions about the attitudes and interest of municipal authorities regarding possible partnerships.
- Successful collaboration will lead to more sustainable outcomes not only for the beneficiaries directly involved with programmes, but also for the broader population of the municipality.

### Recommendation 3:

#### **Cash assistance and livelihood programmes in urban areas should explicitly endeavour to promote social cohesion.**

Given that livelihoods programming has the potential to enhance social cohesion between displaced and host communities, as has been seen in anecdotal evidence from IRC programs, humanitarians should make improving social cohesion an explicit aim of livelihoods programmes rather than seeing it as an incidental benefit. Social cohesion is worth pursuing as an end in and of itself, but it additionally offers an environment in which programming options are expanded and where impacts of humanitarian assistance are more likely to be maximised.

Wherever possible, humanitarians should go beyond simply *including* both host and displaced populations in livelihood programming and instead design programmes to promote active and equal participation and collaboration. While more research is required on how to create and measure social cohesion, the negative consequences of social tension, such as exploitation or resorting to negative coping mechanisms, are clear and must be addressed.



### Recommendation 4:

#### **Advocacy should be viewed as an integral programming tool in cash-transfer and livelihoods programmes. It has the potential to significantly improve programme outcomes. Advocacy needs to be carefully calibrated according to the specific context in order to maximise its effectiveness and avoid potentially backfiring.**

Sustainable economic self-reliance requires an enabling legal and policy environment around the right to work and to formally participate in the economy. Humanitarian actors should look for opportunities to support their cash assistance and livelihoods programmes with strong, evidence-based local advocacy. Municipalities that view refugees as a potential benefit to the local economy may serve as an unexpected ally in supporting the advocacy of the humanitarian community.

At the national level, if governments could be persuaded to accord freer work rights to refugees, for example, INGOs would enjoy a greatly expanded range of programming options, rather than having to operate in the narrow “grey area” that so far has been their only option. Carefully calibrated advocacy aimed at improving the legal and policy environment around refugees’ work rights should also be embraced as an integral part of programme implementation.

Local and international non-government organisations should ensure that they coordinate their livelihoods advocacy with UNHCR, especially in settings where there is a Livelihoods Coordinator. This will ensure a unified front and avoid the conflicting messages and positions that can undermine the effectiveness of advocacy efforts.

LEFT: While more research is required, encouraging meaningful interaction between different populations – such as Syrians and Palestinians living in Beirut – may help address the consequences of social tension.

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- 5** This report discusses opportunities to utilise existing urban systems, enhance social cohesion, and partner with local stakeholders typically present in urban areas.
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# Annex A: Detailed Methodology

## Terms of Reference

With a focus on cash assistance, livelihoods support programming, and local community development in Lebanese and Jordanian cities, specific research objectives include:

- Consider how humanitarian and municipal actors see the opportunities and challenges of programming for refugee and host populations in urban areas and how each views the role of the urban context in the crises response.
- Explore the dynamics between international NGOs, government actors and private sector actors in urban areas.
- Explore the benefits of cash assistance as compared to livelihoods support programmes in protracted urban crises.

## Approach

This report combines primary qualitative data (gathered via observational field visits and semi-structured interviews in Lebanon and Jordan) with desk-based research on the Syria regional response and urban humanitarian response more generally.

Interviewees included humanitarian aid workers, municipal authorities, and community-based actors in Beirut, Mount Lebanon, and Byblos in Lebanon, and in Amman and Mafraq in Jordan. Locations were chosen for: a) the presence of IRC programming, b) the availability and willingness of a municipal representative to speak to the researcher. The information was triangulated to arrive at the key findings.

The findings of this report prioritise evidence specific to the Syria regional response. It is not, therefore assumed that the findings and recommendations made here would apply equally in other regions. Rather, they are meant to serve as a case study, and to contribute to the ongoing conversation around improving urban humanitarian response.

## Process

The research sought to gain insight from both humanitarian and municipal actors operating in the same cities to analyse humanitarian action from their varying perspectives. Semi-structured interviews focused on humanitarian and government-sector collaboration and the economic challenges and opportunities associated with the refugee crisis, including the roles refugee communities can play in a city's economy. The IRC's Urban Response Learning Manager conducted all research for this report.

## Desk-based Research

The IRC conducted a desk review of materials available via ALNAP's Urban Humanitarian Response Portal, a comprehensive online database of humanitarian publications on the topic of urban response.<sup>64</sup> Material was categorised under: cash, livelihoods, and the Middle East region. The timeframe for publication was within the past five years.

## Observational Field Visits

The field visits took place during September, 2015 and focused on close observation of the IRC's cash assistance and livelihoods support programmes in Jordan (primarily in Mafraq) and Lebanon (primarily in the greater-Beirut area). Informal interviews were conducted with field staff implementing programmes.

This close observation of IRC's programmes in Lebanon and Jordan significantly informed the development of the case studies found in this report.

## Semi-structured Interviews

The IRC's Urban Response Learning Manager conducted semi-structured interviews with:

- IRC staff based in Beirut, Amman, and Mafraq;
- current municipal officials of Amman, Beirut, Byblos, and Mafraq; and
- former municipal officials of Bourj Hammoud.

For current or former municipal officials, the only criterion was that they served in the municipal office (or nearest equivalent). Given the sensitivities of the research topic and limited time in country to conduct the research, availability was a key factor in choosing informants. Key questions of the semi-structured interviews appear in Annex B.

During all semi-structured interviews, the purpose of the research was fully explained but written consent was not sought. Respondents were invited to skip questions or stop the interview at any time. In light of the informality of the interviews, the names of interviewees are not provided. Likewise, while the report frequently attributes information to municipal representatives, it does not mention which representatives are associated with which findings.

# Annex B: Interviews

## Stakeholders Interviewed

Humanitarian organisations (besides the IRC) interviewed for this report include: MercyCorps, World Vision International, and the Norwegian Refugee Council. Past or current municipal actors interviewed include: the municipalities of Beirut, Bourj Hammoud, and Byblos in Lebanon and the municipalities of Amman and Mafrq in Jordan. Community based organisations include the People's Committee of the Mar Elias Palestinian refugee camp (a permanent refugee settlement located in the centre of Beirut), and Badguer, an Armenian cultural and community centre in Bourj Hammoud.

## Key Interview Questions

### Interviews with Municipal Authorities

- What are your short- to medium-term plans for your town/city/region?
- What are your long-term plans for your town/city/region?
- What steps are you taking to reach your goals?
- What is the role of the community in your planning process?
- How has the recent refugee crisis affected those plans?
- How have you adapted to those changes?
- In your view, what is the responsibility of local or international NGOs working in response to the crises within urban areas?
- What efforts have you made to partner with/work collaboratively with NGOs operating in your town/city?
- What specific urban projects/strategies/policies could you foresee partnering with an NGO to achieve?
- How has the current refugee crisis affected social cohesion in your city/town?

- Have you considered strategies for using the current refugee crisis as an opportunity to strengthen urban systems, particularly the local economy?
- Is your town/city working to strengthen the local economy?
- If so, what strategies do you employ to achieve this?
- Are you partnering with the private sector to achieve these goals? What about NGOs?
- What are the strengths of your town/city's economy?
- What are its weaknesses and how can they be addressed?
- Do you believe refugees should have a role in an urban economy? If so, what should their role be?

### Interviews with Humanitarian Actors

- What challenges does the urban context present in achieving your desired outcomes, particularly when it comes to sustaining those outcomes over a protracted time period? What about opportunities?
- How closely, if at all, do you collaborate with municipal actors and other public service providers to achieve your desired outcomes in urban areas?
- Where they exist, why are there gaps in collaboration and public sector engagement?
- How does your programming in urban areas differ from that of non-urban areas, particularly regarding delivery mechanisms?
- Do you prioritise activities that restore, leverage, or strengthen urban systems (social, governance, markets, and infrastructure) and avoid duplication of service provision or market distortions?
- Does your programming within urban areas differentiate between refugee and host beneficiaries?

- Do you work to better understand the long-term goals of the towns/cities in which you work? Do you work to align humanitarian and city planning efforts? Can you provide examples?
- What would you do differently the next time you work in an urban setting?
- How is your programming working towards the self-reliance of beneficiaries within urban areas, particularly given increased cost of living and competition for jobs?
- What is your view on the role of cash-transfer programming in urban areas, particularly as a long-term solution?
- What are challenges to scaling up the delivery of livelihood programming in urban areas? What are challenges to achieving greater impact?  
*Probe: what are the challenges to helping more people and helping them better?*
- Do you work to provide an enabling environment for livelihood opportunities for both host and displaced communities? Please provide examples.

## Defining Urban

Given their interdependency and the fluidity between them, distinguishing between urban and rural areas is an imperfect – and sometimes unhelpful – endeavour. What's more, categorising our world as either urban or rural risks painting a false picture of human settlements today. Nonetheless, it is important to highlight the key differences between the megacity and the remote village, understanding that the majority of people live in places somewhere in between.

With this in mind, urban areas are different from rural ones given the number, density, and diversity of their stakeholders, their residents and the communities they represent. Their political, social, and service provision structures and systems are also more complex and interconnected. The concentration of resources, reliance on cash based economies, and the scale and density of the physical environment in urban areas also differs from rural. What's more, displaced populations within urban areas are often hidden and can be further marginalised from society as they face legal and social barriers to accessing local services, particularly health and education, employment and supporting themselves beyond in-kind humanitarian assistance.

In the ongoing conversation about good practice in urban humanitarian response, there is not yet agreement on a definition for the term "urban area". This reflects the fact that national governments use varying operational definitions. Given that the research for this report focuses on urban areas that can be clearly defined as cities, the terms "cities" and "urban areas" are used interchangeably.

BELOW: The "Ras Beirut" neighborhood of Beirut, now home to many Syrians, is densely populated and known for its bustling main street.

*Samer Saliba/IRC*





This report is generously funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) through the DFID–IRC Advocacy and Learning Partnership on Urban Crises. The partnership is part of the DFID Urban Crises Program, which involves the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED).

Products and events resulting from the partnerships are produced in coordination with the Global Alliance for Urban Crises.

To learn more about the Global Alliance, please visit [www.urban-crises.org](http://www.urban-crises.org).



## Acknowledgements

This report is authored by Samer Saliba, the Urban Response Learning Manager of the International Rescue Committee (IRC).

This report serves as a knowledge product in a series focusing on evidence and lessons on improving urban humanitarian response. It greatly benefits from the work of and support and commentary from the following IRC staff: Roy Abi Jaoude, Jarrett Basedow, Sheree Bennett, Steve Catling, Lisa Dipangrazio, Lucy Earle, Naim Frewat, Jo Henderson, Sawsan Issa, Sara Mabger, Alan Moseley, Barri Shorey, Zeina Shuhaibar, Wendy Taeuber, Miriam Zmeter and several others in IRC's Lebanon and Jordan country offices.

This report is edited by Robyn Kerrison and designed by Ros Mac Thóim.

All photographs are taken by Jacob Russell for the IRC unless otherwise noted.

The author thanks his colleagues, the municipalities and community-based organisations interviewed for their contributions.



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