The growing influx of Syrian refugees to Lebanon has strained its socio-economic fabric, piling pressure on employment opportunities, housing, trade, and infrastructure capacities (basic services). Tensions between Syrian refugees and their Lebanese host communities have led to intercommunity clashes, and it thus becomes imperative to identify the indicators of social instability and ways to reduce them.

A research project initiated by Save the Children (SC) and in association with faculty at AUB assessed the social psychological dimensions of Syrians and Lebanese relations in the Bekaa, Sahel Akkar and Wadi Khaled.

**Study Design and Sample**

The study used a multi-stage, multi-method research design, and included 17 focus group discussions and a quantitative survey administered to a representative sample of 1200 participants (600 Lebanese and 600 Syrians) from Akkar and the Bekaa. The survey included measures of contact quantity and quality, various perceptions of threat measures, perceptions of corruption, support for discriminatory policies, as well as measures of support for violence and intercommunity conflict.
The research study found that perceptions of threat between both communities varied in type (whether existential, economic, symbolic or status-honor) and across regions (Bekaa, Sahel Akkar, Wadi Khaled). Among Lebanese nationals, perceptions of Syrian refugees as symbolic and economic threats were particularly high (>90%) in all three regions, with respondents asserting that Syrian refugees are a threat to their value system, way of life, and to their economic livelihood. A majority of Lebanese nationals also perceived refugees as an existential and status/honor threat. On the other hand, over 70% of Syrian refugees perceived Lebanese nationals as symbolic and economic (but not existential) threats – especially in Wadi Khaled.

Perceptions of corruption did vary between the two communities: more than a third of Syrian refugees perceived INGOs, local businesspersons, property owners and healthcare institutions as corrupt, while the Internal Security Forces (ISF) family leaders and municipality officials were not perceived as such. Lebanese nationals reported lower corruption rates, and only a fifth rated INGOs as corrupt.

The study also found that violence indicators toward Syrian refugees were relatively high among Lebanese nationals, particularly in Akkar. Furthermore, the study found a relatively high potential for violence towards INGOs among Syrian refugees residing outside Informal Tented Settlement (ITS).

**Recommendations and Policy Implications**

*To reduce negative attitudes between the Lebanese and Syrian communities this study recommends parties to:

• Reduce Syrian refugees’ perceptions of INGO bias and corruption by reforming aid delivery and address concerns about exclusion and corruption in healthcare delivery

• Devise better strategies to prevent intermediate providers of basic products and services (e.g. health care organizations, food stores and property owners) from taking advantage of Syrian refugees’ vulnerable situations

• Redirect aid distribution to focus more on Syrian refugees residing outside ITS

• Implement developmental projects targeting host communities that might improve municipality infrastructure, basic services and economic prospects, and create employment opportunities for the youth

• Increase the presence of ISF personnel in sensitive areas, and increase the Lebanese government’s involvement in addressing Syrian refugee issues as well as host community problems.

• Highlight common value systems and worldviews that are shared between Syrian refugees and Lebanese nationals through normative interventions and actions (e.g. festivities, common projects).*