



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT
ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC
POLICY & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
معهد عصام فارس للسياسات العامة
والشؤون الدولية



IDRC • CRDI

Canada

CASE STUDY

THE LEBANON POLICY AND RESEARCH NETWORK ON DISPLACEMENT

A knowledge sub-ecosystem
on forced displacement



As part of an initiative funded by the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in collaboration with the Local Engagement Refugee Research Network (LERRN) at Carleton University and the African Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC) in Kenya, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut conducted this research project seeking to generate a more nuanced understanding of how localized knowledge ecosystems on forced displacement can be effective, policy impactful and sustainable. This project builds on earlier research undertaken in 2019 and 2020 which aimed to support an evidence-based understanding on how to localize research on refugee and forced migration issues in key regions of the Global South. The aim of this phase is to transition from anecdotal to evidence-based insights on how localized “ecosystems” of research, civil society, and refugee-led initiatives produce new forms of knowledge on displacement issues that have an impact on policy and practice.

Project researchers set out to understand how localized knowledge ecosystems in Kenya and Ethiopia in East Africa and Jordan and Lebanon in the Middle East produce, translate, and use knowledge to effect change. This was achieved through in-depth case studies of knowledge ecosystems, sub-ecosystems, and entities that make up knowledge ecosystems in each of the four included countries. For the purpose of this study, and in the context of forced migration, the study adopted the following definition of knowledge ecosystem:

Localized knowledge ecosystems include actors with lived experience, research actors, practitioners who produce and use knowledge on forced migration (including, but not limited to, NGOs/INGOs, research centers, institutes, networks and universities and academics) who coordinate with each other to advance new knowledge production within this system and translate and mobilize this knowledge to influence policy, practice, action and discourses, and narratives to advance the well-being of refugees.

For the definitions used in this project and an overview of the research conducted in East Africa and the Middle East, read our working paper [here](#).

The research team for this project included Nasser Yassin (Co-Principal Investigator), Kassem Kassak (Co-Principal Investigator), Yara Mourad (Program Manager), Nadia Nameh (Project Coordinator), Maysa Baroud (Lead Consultant and Author - Lebanon Case Studies), and Zein Soufan (Lead Consultant and Author - Jordan Case Studies).

Beirut, July 2023 © All Rights Reserved.

The case study is published by the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut. It can be downloaded from IFI’s website: <http://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi>

The views expressed in this document are solely those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs, the American University of Beirut, or its partners.

This case study or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner without the express written permission of the publisher, except for the use of brief quotations.

INTRODUCTION

Lebanon is host to various refugee populations, including 830,000 registered Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2022). At the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis, the Government of Lebanon (GoL) adopted a 'no-camp policy' regarding hosting Syrian refugees (Yassin et al., 2015). As such, the majority of Syrian refugees live among the most vulnerable and poorest localities in Lebanon, in urban and rural settings, in Palestine refugee camps, and in informal tented settlements across the country (Atkis Strategy, 2016; United Nations Development Programme, 2017). In particular, the crisis has exerted pressure on Lebanon's weak public institutions and infrastructure and, compounded by Lebanon's ongoing social and economic crisis, has increased vulnerabilities for Syrian refugees and Lebanese host communities (Interagency Coordination Lebanon, 2022).

The impact of this crisis has been used as a scapegoat by local politicians looking to deflect responsibility in the face of Lebanon's compounded crisis. Lebanon's deteriorating social and economic situation, as well as the negative political discourse and associated media coverage around the protracted refugee crisis, have worsened relations between Syrian refugees and their host community members, as perceived by both communities (Geha & Talhouk, 2018; Reality Check Approach Team, 2019; ARK-UNDP, 2021). Misperceptions about aid received by refugees have also contributed to resentment between the two communities (Reality Check Approach Team, 2019).

The Lebanon Policy and Research Network on Displacement (LPRND), hosted at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB), was created in September 2016 to respond to the growing anti-refugee sentiment in Lebanon and the region, and to respond to misperceptions around the refugee crisis and its impact. This case study¹ aims to highlight the types of knowledge produced by the LPRND and its members, how the various members collaborate and share knowledge with one another, and how they coordinate with one another to advance knowledge on forced displacement in Lebanon and beyond.

METHODOLOGY

Prior to the selection of the LPRND as a case study, a mapping exercise of various entities working on refugee and forced displacement in Lebanon was conducted. The mapping exercise was followed by a validation exercise, which entailed conducting a telephone survey with identified entities to ensure their eligibility as members within the greater knowledge ecosystem in the country or as a knowledge sub-ecosystem. The mapping and validation exercise resulted in a database of entities, which served as the sampling frame for the selection of case studies. Comprised of various stakeholders who are involved in the discussion around forced displacement in Lebanon, the LPRND serves as an example of a knowledge sub-ecosystem on forced displacement, with knowledge on forced displacement being produced and disseminated within and by the network, and also, by its members separately from the network, either individually or in partnership with one another.

A mixed methods approach was employed for this case study, comprised of qualitative and quantitative research tools. Data was collected between December 2021 – February 2022. In addition, project-relevant documents, such as narrative reports, were reviewed. A total of eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with network members (n=7, including six network members and the LPRND Secretariat) and with a representative from the UNHCR (network supporter). Interviewees were purposively selected based on the type of organization (for example, local NGO, non-governmental human rights organization, Syrian-led organization, faith-based organization) and on the number of

⁽¹⁾ This case study was commissioned by the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut as part of a joint IDRC/LERNN research study aiming to understand how localized knowledge ecosystems of research, civil society, and refugee-led initiatives produce new forms of knowledge that have an impact on policy and practice. The case studies are meant to provide an in-depth look at the nature and function of localized knowledge ecosystems in the Middle East and North Africa region.

years of membership in the network. See Annex 1 for a list of current LPRND members. Semi-structured interviews were conducted online via a secure video-conferencing application. Before reaching out to LPRND members, the Secretariat shared an email informing them about the study and its purpose. The research team then contacted potential participants via email, which explained the aim of the research and their rights as a participant in the study.

In addition, an online self-administered questionnaire including open-ended and closed-ended questions was shared with 25 network members² via email, to which 18 network members responded, including the Secretariat. The questionnaire was piloted prior to its dissemination to ensure clarity. For members who had participated in a semi-structured interview, the online questionnaire was adjusted to avoid repetition of questions. The questionnaire inquired about members' roles and contributions to the network, including knowledge production and sharing with other network members, as well as how their organization collaborates with members within the network. The online questionnaire, developed via Google Forms, was administered from February to March 2022. Participants were reminded to fill out the questionnaire by email or telephone two weeks after it was initially shared with them. In addition, a short online communications questionnaire was shared with the Secretariat to gather information on the types and frequency of knowledge produced by the network, the network's dissemination mechanisms, and its online presence and activities.

Analysis of qualitative data gathered through the semi-structured interviews was conducted using a thematic approach. Data gathered through the online questionnaire was treated as qualitative data and analyzed using a thematic approach. All data were triangulated to highlight emerging and common themes. Ethical approval to conduct this study was obtained from the American University of Beirut Institutional Review Board (Protocol #SBS-2021-0296). Consent to participate was obtained from participants.

Limitations

Although the case study provides some insight into the ways that local actors share and use knowledge on forced displacement, given the case study approach used, the findings of this research cannot be generalized to other similar networks or organizations in Lebanon. This is also due, in part, to the sampling approach used, which was a purposive, non-random approach. To the best of our ability, an effort was made to ensure impartiality in the selection of participants for the in-depth interviews through the systematic selection of a variety of organization types (for example, local NGO, non-governmental human rights organization, Syrian-led organization, faith-based organization) to represent the network. Nevertheless, given the purposive, non-random approach, there remains a chance of selection bias. The use of this systematic approach in the selection of participants also inadvertently resulted in the selection of some organizations whose experience as producers of knowledge on forced displacement specifically was new; however, their experience provided some insight into other issues important to the case study, such as the factors that influence the production of knowledge on forced displacement in Lebanon. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews were supplemented by data gathered from the remaining network members through an online questionnaire.

⁽²⁾ This number refers to the total number of organizations represented in the LPRND, including the Secretariat, and excluding experts. As the questions in the online questionnaire were mostly relevant to organizations, the questionnaire was only shared with representatives of organizations within the network.

ABOUT THE LPRND

The LPRND first came together in 2016 under the umbrella of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Network for Civil Society and Displacement as Lebanon's local civil society network. Like Lebanon's local network, similar networks were also created at the time in all countries in the MENA region with a UNHCR office. In Lebanon, in particular, a representative from the UNHCR initially brought the idea forward to a small group of local stakeholders and partners of the UNHCR (representing various types of organizations) to create an independent network that would work on displacement issues. The network thus began working at the policy level to influence policy discussions around the refugee crisis, integrate an evidence-based approach to policy, and dispel rumors and false information about the refugee crisis in the country. Additional impetus for the network's creation was its alignment with the 2016 Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework's (CRRF) "whole of society" approach to the refugee crisis. The CRRF encourages the inclusion of the *whole of society* in the response to refugee issues, including strengthening the role of various non-governmental stakeholders, such as civil society actors, in refugee-hosting countries (UNHCR, 2018).

The LPRND brings together around 30 local civil society organizations (CSOs), including NGOs, faith-based organizations, academic or research institutes, and think tanks, in addition to experts (academics and policy advisors) who are working on forced displacement issues or with refugee communities, and provides them with a common platform for national dialogue and action. In the past, the network has also included media representatives. IFI was identified as the network's Secretariat due to its being an academic institute known for its neutral approach, respectability and trustworthiness among stakeholders (both local and international), and its capacity to act as a convenor. This diversity in members allows a holistic approach to the issues the network addresses, as each member brings in their expertise and viewpoints.

LPRND members include organizations established pre- the Syrian refugee crisis and organizations established in response to the crisis in 2011 or after. Many network members have been involved in the refugee crisis response since its onset. They work across multiple governorates in Lebanon, including in Palestinian refugee camps and informal settlements, while few also work at a regional level, including in Syria. Several provide direct services and aid to refugees and host communities (such as through health, livelihoods, protection, or education programs, microfinancing, or gender-based violence or gender equality service provision). Some members also lead or are part of other groups and networks working on displacement issues. For example, ALEF facilitates the Working Group for Persons Affected by the Syrian Displacement Crisis in Lebanon (PASC), while Amel, Al Majmoua, and Makhzoumi Foundation were among the co-founders of the Lebanon Humanitarian and Development NGO Forum (LHDF), a coordination platform for local NGOs active within the framework of the Syrian refugee crisis. Others work towards promoting the rule of law or protecting human, social, and economic rights for all. Few (such as research institutes and think tanks) primarily conduct research on public policy or migration issues, among other issues.

Despite working in various sectors, all network members are knowledge producers, translators, consumers, and/or mobilizers of knowledge on forced displacement (Alexander et al., 2022). The majority produce some form of knowledge on forced displacement, whether for internal purposes (such as for strategy development, learning, or monitoring and evaluation purposes) or research and/or advocacy purposes and acknowledge the importance of knowledge and evidence to inform advocacy around refugee issues. When asked why they joined the LPRND, several network members shared that they joined specifically because of the network's focus on research on the refugee crisis. As one participant shared, "the idea of having a research network around refugees' issues is very relevant, and very much needed [...] in order to be able to engage in a relevant, effective, meaningful advocacy around these issues [...]" (Participant C).

Indeed, knowledge production and sharing are key to the LPRND's mission. Among the network's national objectives (as stated in the network's Mission and Vision document) are the "exchange of information among members to strengthen their capacity and enable them to make informed decisions to the benefit of refugees and host communities in Lebanon" and "to inform and influence policy-making on displacement at the national level." As a network, the LPRND serves as a national platform for consultation and cooperation among civil society actors in Lebanon, who have, in the past, come together to address and respond to the negative narrative about refugees in the country. Among the various activities undertaken by the network, members endorse joint statements, for example, leading up to Lebanese parliamentary elections or in preparation for global conferences, such as the 'Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region' Brussels Conference or the Global Refugee Forum (GRF).

LOCALIZATION

Funding sources

The LPRND Secretariat has been supported by the UNHCR since its establishment, with the aim that the network will eventually become financially self-sustainable by applying for funding. Despite this support, the UNHCR's role in the network is more one of facilitator and advisor than that of donor. Funding from the UNHCR is sometimes used to cover network-specific activities, such as commissioning research papers, events, and workshops related to the network's yearly priorities (discussed further below). Organizations represented within the network do not directly receive any part of this fund but do benefit from capacity-building workshops organized by the Secretariat. The network, through the Secretariat, has also supported various initiatives among members, such as an upcoming book (in Arabic) on the Syrian refugee question 10 years after the Syrian uprising and war, to which various members have contributed chapters. Members also benefit from the knowledge being produced and shared within the network and by other network members.

Network members apply for and secure their organizational funding or apply for joint funding in partnership with other members in the network to conduct their activities, including knowledge production. Funding is obtained from a variety of sources, the majority of which comes from international donors and organizations. Although a couple of the members shared that funds or projects are donor-driven, several mention searching, to the extent possible, for donors with agendas similar to theirs, who work on similar topics, or whose values align with theirs. Organizations will also try negotiating with donors to ensure that projects remain aligned with their organizational objectives. Larger and more established organizations, or members who rely on funding from various donors (rather than on a single source of funding), mentioned that they have more freedom when choosing donors and, thus, in choosing research and programmatic directions. Relying on diversified funding sources is important for localization (Alexander et al., 2022). Donors sometimes approach these larger, more established organizations to work together due to their reputation and track record. In turn, the local partner is able to influence the power dynamics between them. These characteristics, along with familiarity with the local context, also give organizations some power in setting the agenda or in convincing donors to tweak the agenda to respond to actual needs on the ground. In these ways, members ensure that their agendas, and the knowledge they produce, remain localized. Some of the members also receive funding from foundations or private donors.

Interestingly, among all members who participated in a semi-structured interview, funding was cited as a significant challenge to their organization's sustainability and that of other CSOs and NGOs in Lebanon. One member noted that funding opportunities for research and advocacy are decreasing, with multiple organizations applying for these limited opportunities, thus, creating a competitive environment among them. For some, the response to this has been to apply for joint funding with other organizations, including with other network members. This decrease in funding is due to a shift in donor priorities, for example, towards providing direct aid and relief for communities in light of Lebanon's

ongoing social and economic crisis. However, competition for funding has always been an issue in Lebanon (Abi Yaghi et al., 2019). As some participants explained, competition among local actors is partly due to multiple organizations having overlapping mandates and multiple donors providing funding for the same sectors or similar projects—which also sometimes results in duplication of work (Participant A, Participant B).

Setting the agenda

Once a year, members of the LPRND meet to select the network’s priorities or themes. Based on these priorities, a plan of yearly activities, including a research agenda, is developed. Knowledge gathered by network members through their work, including by implementing NGOs and partners who include refugee staff and staff from the communities in which they work, coming directly from the ground, is taken into consideration when setting the network’s agenda for the year, ensuring a bottom-up approach in agenda setting. Through its members, the network can take into account the lived experiences of refugees and the insights of actors directly involved in the refugee crisis response in Lebanon when deciding its yearly priorities. Members suggest priorities based on their ongoing programs and projects, and on emerging issues relevant to the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis, in line with the network’s objectives and correspond to advocacy areas they should focus on for the year. Network members also come together to address urgent issues that may arise throughout the year, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, or more recently, public school strikes and the closing of second or “afternoon” shift classes for Syrian students. While the UNHCR is represented at these meetings and does advise on priorities based on its own work (such as on results from surveys or fieldwork) and agenda, priorities are ultimately voted on and selected through a democratic process by the network members, who are familiar with the local context and who have first-hand experience of what is happening on the ground.

It is important to mention the factors that influence individual network members’ agenda-setting, as they bring their own experiences and suggestions to the table when the network priorities are being set. Several members mentioned beneficiary and community needs as key factors they consider when setting their agenda. A few members also mentioned conducting needs assessments and relying on feedback from participants (including refugees) during project evaluations. For some, input from field officers was also important in this regard, as field officers were working on the ground and in direct contact with refugees and host community members. Among a few organizations, the input of staff, particularly staff from Syria in Syrian-led organizations, was also mentioned as a factor influencing agenda-setting. As one participant noted, “[...] network members are on the ground, they are service providers in one way or another, they are amongst the refugees themselves on the field. So, they often know what sort of needs are expressed by them. And part of our own work also involves refugees with interviews, with fieldwork, whether we’re asking about access to health, access to education, access to vaccination [...]. So, refugees’ voices are often included in most of the work that members do” (Participant A).

Other factors that influence agenda setting include the regional and local context, government policies, and wanting to influence current policy discourse, as well as relevance to their own strategy, programming, or research priorities. One member mentioned organizational capacity and alignment with the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan priorities. Only a couple of the members who responded to the online questionnaire mentioned the role of donors and looking for funded projects when setting their organization’s agenda. While the current policy context is considered when setting the network’s agenda, policy-makers within this ecosystem are primarily consumers of the knowledge produced by the network. For the network and the organizations that comprise it, donors and other international actors are both consumers and mobilizers of the knowledge they produce, although donors do sometimes influence agenda-setting.

Still, the trust that the network and its members have gained, the reputation they have established among donors and international organizations, their familiarity with the local context, and their direct engagement with local communities give them negotiating power to set their (research) agendas. As per Shivakoti & Milner (2021), this power to set their agenda emerges as a key moment of localization for local actors. In turn, actors, in this case, the members of the LPRND, produce knowledge on the Syrian refugee crisis that responds to actual on-the-ground needs and locally pertinent issues and “mobilize this knowledge to influence policy, practice, action and discourse and narratives to advance the well-being of refugees and others who have been forcibly displaced” (Alexander *et al.*, 2022, p. 10).

LPRND ACTIVITIES, INFLUENCE, AND REACH

The LPRND and its members have been active in addressing misperceptions around refugee issues in Lebanon since the network’s inception through conducting research, presenting facts on social media, developing publications, issuing policy briefs, organizing roundtables, and issuing advocacy and joint statements, discussed further below. Some network members also participate in parliamentary committee meetings and are in regular contact with policy-makers and their political advisors.

Knowledge production and sharing by the LPRND and its Secretariat

Knowledge products³ are a primary output for the LPRND. In line with the priorities for each year and emerging local refugee issues, the network through the Secretariat produces or co-produces several types of publications on forced displacement, including joint statements, research reports, policy documents, and infographics. Most publications are published in both English and Arabic to ensure a wider reach. The network and its members engage in multiple steps of the knowledge production process: they collect data, produce knowledge, disseminate it, and use it for advocacy purposes. Ultimately, they work towards influencing public opinion through this knowledge, as well as local and international policy, under a common goal to enhance protection for refugee communities in Lebanon, particularly Syrian refugees.

Research reports are usually commissioned and written by experts in the particular field. They go through a peer-review process, and reviewers are usually selected from among the network members. Previous reports have covered issues around return, the Global Refugee Compact, and, more recently, the impact of Lebanon’s social and economic crisis on refugees’ livelihoods. Reports are presented to relevant stakeholders during dialogues or closed discussions and provide recommendations to enhance refugee protection and well-being in Lebanon. Report findings are sometimes translated into policy briefs targeting decision-makers and infographics targeting media and the general public. Infographics in particular have been very effective and efficient in transmitting knowledge about the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon, as they are accessible to multiple audiences. In the past, they have picked up much attention, stimulating dialogue around key refugee issues. Furthermore, the network strives to translate the knowledge produced within its ecosystem into recommendations that can be shared and used by relevant stakeholders, such as the UNHCR, other international stakeholders, and local policy-makers, aiming to bridge research with decision-making at a national level.

The Secretariat acts as the focal point of the network and shares relevant knowledge products, funding opportunities, and relevant events with network members via a mailing list, in addition to organizing

³ Given the UNHCR’s advisory and supporting role to the network, the agency reviews network products, sometimes giving feedback based on the agency’s local experience. Other times, the UNHCR may opt out of including their logo on the research product or opt to add a disclaimer to the product to say that it does not necessarily represent the UNHCR’s views.

events, meetings, and capacity-building workshops for members. Capacity-building workshops have covered topics such as social media presence, conducting research and literature reviews, and communicating with policy-makers. Events hosted by the network include conferences, webinars, and stakeholder dialogues on relevant displacement issues, particularly those pertaining to the Syrian refugee crisis. Members can also share their knowledge products with other members through the Secretariat, and meetings are held throughout the year where members discuss their ongoing programs and activities. The Secretariat also gathers data on the work being conducted by network members, maps their research products and activities, and then shares these with other members, so that members are aware of who is working on what. Several participants reiterated the exchange of knowledge and opportunity for networking as a benefit of membership in the network. As one member noted, the selection of access to vaccination for refugees during COVID-19 as a network priority allowed them to learn more about the topic, and to undertake advocacy work around vaccinations for refugees: “Because we don’t work a lot on the health situation, and for example, the vaccination access [...] this was, I think, a very good added value for us. We were able to advocate [...] regarding this” (Participant B).

Most notably, through the Refugee Research and Policy Program at IFI, the network published three volumes of the Fact Book ‘101 Facts & Figures on the Syrian Refugee Crisis’, based on data collated from secondary sources. The Fact Book aimed to inform the discussion around the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon and to counter false information being shared by multiple sources by providing key facts and figures on the crisis in an easy-to-understand format (see all three volumes [here](#)). Daily facts, like other outputs by the network, were shared online via several social media platforms through a ‘Fact of the Day’ campaign, and through other communication channels. This campaign and the daily facts, in particular, garnered much popularity, being reshared widely by various stakeholders and sparking much discussion online while increasing awareness among the general public and relevant stakeholders about the Syrian refugee crisis, which was based on evidence. Each year it was published, the Fact Book was distributed to ministers, members of the parliament, UNHCR field offices across the country, other UN agencies, ambassadors, INGOs, NGOs, and CSOs working on the refugee crisis. It was also distributed to media, including television media personalities, radio personalities, newspapers, and magazines. In 2017 alone, there were over 100 media mentions connected to the ‘Fact of the Day’ campaign, 10 TV interviews, 923,000 impressions on Twitter, and over 1 million related engagements on Facebook.

Through its work, the network can also reach key stakeholders, including policy- and decision-makers in Lebanon and internationally. Several network members have come together on multiple occasions to endorse a joint statement. For example, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, several network members released a [joint statement](#) addressed to the Lebanese government and international organizations regarding Lebanon’s COVID-19 vaccination program, whereby they provided recommendations to them regarding the inclusion of displaced populations in Lebanon’s vaccination program (LPRND, 2021). Another example of engagement with local policy and decision-makers occurred in 2018 ahead of the Brussels II Conference. The network held a roundtable discussion at Lebanon’s Grand Serail (headquarters of the government), which was attended by non-governmental organizations and network members. Attendees, including network members, presented their perspectives on the Syrian refugee crisis to the prime minister at the time. Several network members also sign a yearly pledge to “work towards producing facts and evidence-based research on refugees.” For example, in 2019, several network members, including CSOs, academic institutions, and faith-based organizations, participated in the Global Refugee Forum, titled “Developing Evidence-Based Research to Influence Policy Making in Lebanon,” and made pledges in support of refugees.

At the international level, the network participates in the yearly Brussels Conference by being represented at the event, participating in panels, co-hosting a side event, or endorsing joint statements.

Also, in 2018, the network co-hosted a panel discussion (side event) at the Brussels II Conference, whose speakers were all network members. This event brought together European and international policy and decision-makers and Lebanese policy researchers, CSO/NGO representatives, and activists to discuss “the policy landscape governing the management of the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon.” Most recently, in 2021, the network, along with other networks in Lebanon, signed a joint statement ahead of the Brussels V Conference aiming to provide an analysis, situation report, and recommendations to key stakeholders on social stability and refugee protection, as well as on ensuring access to services for refugees amidst Lebanon’s ongoing crisis (LHIF et al., 2021). Several participants highlighted the importance of these joint efforts. As one participant shared, “...we learned as a network that it’s best to work together, join our forces...we have our messaging around Brussels unified because it gives more power when you have a unified statement and you present certain unified statements such as the [statement] we presented in Brussels” (Participant A); especially in that working together gives local NGOs power when presenting to local and international state actors. As noted by Participant G, the network members’ joint efforts in preparation for such events pays off: “[...] tremendous work happened before, we worked a lot, up until we had a really clear message we delivered in Brussels. And I think out of the countries facing the Syrian refugee crisis I think we were one of the best [...] more or less a campaign. It wasn’t like just sharing thoughts, it was very strategic and well structured.”

Also related to the Brussels conferences, in 2019, the network provided media representatives representing Lebanese news outlets and international media reporting from Lebanon with training on reporting on and using proper messaging regarding the refugee crisis. For example, in 2019, leading up to the Brussels III Conference, media members were invited to a closed roundtable, where the network gathered the media representatives’ perspectives on the refugee crisis and asked them what messages they would like to relay to Lebanese officials as well as donors at the Brussels conference. The meeting also included a discussion of research findings from studies conducted on the refugee crisis and a discussion of the conflicting positions of Lebanese public officials on refugee return to Syria to come up with recommendations on the issue to influence public policy and opinion. The outcome of this workshop was a WhatsApp group including network members and the media, which served to feed media representatives with data and evidence to correct and counter false information being shared by Lebanese politicians attending the Brussels Conference that year.

Due to their close relationship, the network’s influence also extends to the UNHCR. The UNHCR and other UN agencies turn to the network and its members when deciding on how to address critical issues, for example, on the question of return, and their input is often taken into consideration. One network member mentioned the importance of being able to “sit at the table” with the UNHCR through the platform provided to them by the network, as this allows more “openness in discussing issues outside of any formal structures,” such as issues related to direct aid provided to refugees or the issue of voluntary return (Participant D). In the past, network members were invited to discuss the general situation of refugees in Lebanon and where they see the crisis heading with the UNHCR Representative to Lebanon at the time, and their input on the current situation and context helped inform UNHCR’s direction and programming.

The network has remained true to its objectives since its inception. Nevertheless, with the onset of the Lebanese social and economic crisis in 2019 (increasing inflation, devaluation of the local currency, increasing unemployment and poverty), and the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, there was a pause in some of its activities. In particular, the network stopped sharing the daily facts about the Syrian refugee crisis, mainly to decrease the focus on refugees, as issues related to refugees were deemed an especially sensitive topic at the time. Furthermore, post the August 4 Beirut Blast in 2020, several network members shifted their work temporarily to an emergency response to support both host community members and refugees impacted by the blast with direct aid and relief.

Activities undertaken by network members

Network members also undertake their own knowledge production activities related to the Syrian refugee crisis, whether to inform their strategy and programming, for monitoring and evaluation purposes, or for academic and/or advocacy purposes. Some members report generating data and knowledge on forced displacement together, producing knowledge outputs/publications together, or using knowledge or data on forced displacement generated by another member in the network to inform their work. In some instances, this data is used for developing knowledge outputs or is translated into policy outputs to be used with policy-makers. Knowledge outputs produced by network members (individually or in partnership with one another) range from research reports to policy briefs but also include creative forms of knowledge, such as songs, artwork, and stories. These types of outputs are in line with a broader definition of knowledge as suggested by Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2020) and used for this project, “including oral history, artwork, media articles, and radio shows, NGO reports, government statistics, works of art, and academic publications” (Alexander et al., 2022, p. 9).

Several members (including the Secretariat) report mobilizing the knowledge they produce to influence the discourse on refugees and forced displacement in Lebanon and internationally or to influence practice or programming related to refugees and forced displacement. In addition, the knowledge produced is sometimes mobilized by network members to influence or lobby with their potential donors, for example, through highlighting actual needs on the ground. Knowledge products are also used to showcase the importance of the work being done locally to donors and international actors, in some cases, to mobilize financial support or to mobilize them to engage in or support advocacy efforts. Several members reported that they share the knowledge produced by their organization back with the communities with whom they work; this is important both for validation and for ensuring an inclusive approach in response to the refugee crisis.

Some members also report co-organizing joint events on forced displacement or participating in events organized by another network member. Events can be open or closed and may include workshops, conferences, webinars, launch events, stakeholder dialogues, and consultations. Members of the network also collaborate in other ways, including through applying for funding together, sharing resources, implementing programs or projects with one another, referring beneficiaries to one another, or participating in other networks or coalitions on forced displacement with one another.

Factors that explain the LPRND’s influence and reach

In addition to some of the factors mentioned previously, such as the diversity of its members, and their familiarity with the local context, several other factors also explain the network’s influence and reach. The creation of a Secretariat for the network provided it with a degree of independence. Members have the freedom to speak directly and openly while sitting at the table with key stakeholders, including the UN and other international agencies, as well as local and international policy-makers. This loose nature also allows the network to remain relevant, as they come together quickly around issues as they arise, for example, as they did at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic or in response to the growing anti-refugee rhetoric in Lebanon, and to suggest ways in which these issues can be addressed to enhance refugees’ protection. Through the development of joint statements and the signing of pledges, the network serves to amplify network members’ voices toward their common goals, including countering the negative narrative about refugees in the country.

Nevertheless, this loose nature also acts as a barrier to the network's influence and reach. Although members are already conducting and sharing knowledge with each other, participants note that more can be done in this regard, highlighting the network's potential to conduct research and create an evidence base for advocacy purposes which all network members can rely on. As one participant noted, members should "plan together what research [to conduct], identify research gaps, do research together, exchange recommendations and issues and then agree on what to do with that information moving forward...all linked to the priorities...that they have set forth" for that year (Participant H). Indeed, there is a need to gather and mobilize knowledge within the network and by network members more systematically.

The packaging of knowledge on the crisis in an easy-to-understand, concise way has also been crucial to the network's reach, as it ensures that data is accessible to a wide variety of stakeholders, including the public and policy-makers. Through campaigns such as the 'Fact of the Day' campaign, the network has managed to increase awareness and spark the necessary dialogue to address the negative narrative around the refugee crisis in Lebanon. Sharing facts and infographics through social media platforms and engaging with media outlets also widened the network's reach. Another important factor regarding dissemination is the access to various communication channels available to the network through its membership. For example, network members are also members of other networks and coalitions. Network members also have their own established relationships with key stakeholders, such as local and international policy-makers, which have been capitalized on by the network, for example, at the Brussels Conferences. Being a member of the network has also created synergies and collaboration opportunities among some network members, who acknowledge the negotiating power they have gained through working together.

Several members acknowledge that the local context in Lebanon, which is constantly changing and highly dependent on public officials and their political affiliations, acts as a significant barrier to the potential influence and reach of knowledge products in general, and the network in particular, especially with regards to influencing policy-making. Members note that politicians tend to have their agendas and opinions on the refugee crisis. These usually shift from election to election, depending on who is in power. Politicians' agendas and opinions affect both the narrative around the refugee crisis and the level of political importance given to enhancing refugees' protection at a national level, and sometimes limit the tangible impact the network can have at the policy level.

CONCLUSIONS

This case study presented how knowledge is produced and shared by the Lebanon Policy and Research Network on Displacement (LPRND) in Lebanon and discussed the influence and reach the network has achieved through its knowledge outputs and other activities. It also highlighted how knowledge is produced and shared by individual network members and the synergies between them. Indeed, the network's greatest strength lies in its members' diversity and expertise, inter-relationships, and connection to the local context. The latter, along with the inclusion of the voices of the networks' various members, some with lived experience, to set its yearly priorities, contributes to the network's localization. Funding sources and agenda setting were also discussed, both for the network at large, as well as for its members. Despite mainly relying on international donors for funding, members emphasize searching for donors whose goals and agendas align with theirs to ensure that their work continues to respond to needs on the ground. In addition, the majority of members rely to a large extent on needs assessments and on the local and policy context to set their agendas, thus, contributing to the network's localization.

Over the years, the network and its members have established a reputation for themselves both locally and internationally through their work towards enhancing refugees' protection in Lebanon. As a result, they are always invited to participate in conferences and events relevant to the refugee crisis, and their statements and positions regarding responses to the crisis are well-regarded. The network's knowledge outputs have reached various stakeholders, including the public, media, local and international NGOs, local policy- and decision-makers, and international policy- and decision-makers. Individually by each of its members and as a network, knowledge is produced for various purposes, disseminated in multiple forms, and used for advocacy purposes both locally and internationally, with the common goal of dispelling rumors around the refugee crisis and responding to the local anti-refugee rhetoric with evidence. Though there is a need for knowledge within the network to be gathered and shared in a more systematic manner, the network has managed to inform the ongoing debate around Lebanon's refugee crisis and has indirectly contributed to refugee protection in the country, through both local and international actors.

REFERENCES

- AbiYaghi, M., Yammine, L., & Jagarnathsingh, A. (2019). *Civil society in Lebanon: The implementation trap*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre, Lebanon Support. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/paper/civil-society-lebanon-implementation-trap>
- Alexander, H., Baroud, M., Gezahegne, K., Kassak, K., Mourad, Y., Nameh, N., Nyaouro, Du., Oucho, L., & Soufan, Z. (2022). *Moments of negotiated independence: Localized knowledge ecosystems on forced migration in East Africa and the Middle East* [Working Paper No. 20]. LERRN: Local Engagement Refugee Research Network. <https://carleton.ca/lerrn/wp-content/uploads/LERRN-Working-Paper-20-Localized-Knowledge-Ecosystems-Alexander-et-al.pdf>
- ARK, & UNDP. (2021). Regular Perception Surveys on Social Tensions throughout Lebanon, Wave XI – ARK. <https://www.ark.international/ark-blog/wave-xi>
- Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, E. (2020). Recentring the south in studies of migration. https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10090219/1/Fiddian-Qasmiyeh_%5B25741314%20-%20Migration%20and%20Society%5D%20Introduction.pdf
- Geha, C., & Talhouk, J. (2018). Politics and the Plight of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon. <https://www.aub.edu.lb/Documents/Politics-and-the-Plight-of-Syrian-Refugees-in-Lebanon.pdf>
- Interagency Coordination Lebanon. (2022). Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) Inter-Agency Situation Update Current Operational Environment in Lebanon (January 2022). <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/inter-agency-lebanon-crisis-response-plan-lcrp-situation-update-current-operational-1>
- LHIF, PASC Working Group, LPRND, & LHDF. (2021). Asylum amidst collapse: Viewpoints on Lebanon in the struggle to survive amidst economic devastation and the pandemic. <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/asylum-amidst-collapse-viewpoints-lebanon-struggle-survive-amidst-economic>
- LPDC, CAS, & PCBS. (2018). Population and Housing Census in Palestinian Camps and Gatherings in Lebanon - 2017, Key Findings Report. <http://www.lpdc.gov.lb/DocumentFiles/Key%20Findings%20report%20En-636566196639789418.pdf>
- LPRND. (2021). Joint Statement: COVID-19 Vaccination Program. <https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/news/Pages/20210211-covid-19-vaccination-program-english.aspx>
- Reality Check Approach Team. (2019). Qualitative Research on Social Tensions, Lebanon Round 2, Year 1. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/72722>
- Shivakoti & Milner. (2021). Beyond the partnership debate: Localizing knowledge production in refugee and forced migration studies. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrs/feab083>
- Yassin, N., Osseiran, T., Rassi, R., & Boustani, M. (2015). *No place to stay? Reflections on the Syrian refugee shelter policy in Lebanon*. Refugee Research and Policy in the Arab World, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs. https://scholarworks.aub.edu.lb/bitstream/handle/10938/21213/20150907_noplacetostay.pdf?sequence=1
- UNHCR. (2018). Two Year Progress Assessment of the CRRF Approach. <https://www.unhcr.org/media/two-year-progress-assessment-crrf-approach>
- ES/2018/07. <https://www.unhcr.org/research/evalreports/5c63ff144/year-progress-assessment-crrf-approach.html>
- UNHCR. (2020). Regional Strategic Overview 2017-2020 (2019 overview). https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/67370_0.pdf
- UNHCR. (2022). Lebanon. <https://www.unhcr.org/lebanon.html>

ANNEX 1 – LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS IN THE LPRND

Name of Entity	Type of Entity
Abaad – Resource Center for Gender Equality	Local NGO
Access Center for Human Rights (ACHR)	Non-governmental human rights organization
Adyan Foundation	Faith-based NGO
Al Majmoua	Non-profit micro-finance institution
Alef – Act for Human Rights	Non-governmental human rights watchdog organization
Amel Association International	Local NGO
Arab NGO Network For Development (ANND)	Civil society network
Basmeh and Zeitooneh	Syrian-led NGO
Center for Lebanese Studies	Independent academic institution affiliated with the Lebanese American University
Faculty of Law and Political Science – Saint Joseph University (USJ)	Faculty at academic institute
House of Peace	Community-based social peacebuilding project
Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs (Secretariat of the LPRND)	Research-based, policy-oriented institute based at the American University of Beirut
Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS)	Non-governmental think tank
Lebanese Relief Council (Leb Relief)	Local NGO
Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH)	Non-governmental human rights organization
Institute for Migration Studies - Lebanese American University (LAU)	Policy-driven and network-oriented research institute
Legal Agenda	Research and advocacy non-governmental organization
Makhzoumi Foundation	Local, private NGO
Middle East Council for Churches (MECC)	Faith-based organization
Middle East Institute for Research and Strategic Studies at Notre Dame University - Notre Dame University (NDU)	Research institute
Najdeh Association	Local NGO
Orthodox Youth Movement	Faith-based organization
Refugees=Partners	Research-based initiative
SAWA for Development and Aid	Syrian-led NGO
Syrian Center for Policy Research	Syrian-led think tank
The Lebanese Organization for Studies and Training (LOST)	Local NGO

About the Refugee Research and Policy Program

Lebanon and the Arab region are facing one of the largest refugee crises spawning serious public policy challenges. Given this context, the Refugee Research and Policy program generates refugee related/policy-oriented research that addresses an existing knowledge gap in the field of refugee studies. Moreover, the program seeks to enrich the quality of debate among scholars, officials, international organizations, and civil society actors, with the aim to inform policymaking relating to refugees in the Middle East and beyond.

About the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs

Inaugurated in 2006, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut is an independent, research-based, policy-oriented institute. It aims to initiate and develop policy-relevant research in and about the Arab world. The Institute aims at bridging the gap between academia and policymaking by conducting high quality research on the complex issues and challenges faced by Lebanese and Arab societies within shifting international and global contexts, by generating evidence-based policy recommendations and solutions for Lebanon and the Arab world, and by creating an intellectual space for an interdisciplinary exchange of ideas among researchers, scholars, civil society actors, media, and policymakers.

ABOUT LERRN

LERRN is the Local Engagement Refugee Response Network bringing together global researcher and practitioners committed to promoting protection and solutions with and for refugees. The aim is to reshape the discourse and politics of the global refugee regime by enhancing the role of civil society in all stages of the development and functioning of the regime. This is done through partnered and collaborative research, various capacity building activities, knowledge mobilization tools, and promoting the value of refugee participation.



Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs
American University of Beirut
P.O. Box 11-0236 Riad El Solh / Beirut 1107 2020 Lebanon



www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/



961-1-350000 ext. 4150



[Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs](#)
[IFI](#)



+961-1-737627



[aub.ifi](#)



ifi.comms@aub.edu.lb



[aub.ifi](#), [aub.ifi](#)



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC
POLICY & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

معهد عصام فارس للسياسات العامة
والشؤون الدولية