

For Immediate Release



Two studies from AUB warn of health, economic, and security threats related to the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon

Beirut, Lebanon- 18/07/2013 -A world report published by *the Lancet*, a leading medical journal, last month and co-authored by Fouad M. Fouad, health sciences professor at the American University of Beirut, warned that the Syrian refugee crisis could risk turning into a regional catastrophe, now that most of the healthcare facilities in Syria have been destroyed and those of neighboring Lebanon and Jordan, have been overwhelmed with the influx of massive numbers of refugees.

“The flow of refugees, which could reach 3.5 million by the end of the year by UN estimates, is crippling public health systems in neighboring countries and could bring about their collapse,” said the Lancet report, which was co-authored by Adam Coutts of Cambridge University.

The report added that in Lebanon, all public services are overwhelmed. For instance, by the end of 2013, the UN estimate there will be 450,000 Syrian children in the Lebanese public school system compared to only 350,000 Lebanese, noted the researchers. Moreover, wages and foreign investments are declining; urban sanitation and water supplies are failing; and schools and health care facilities are overcrowded. Moreover, although primary and secondary health-care services are available to Syrians in Lebanon, refugees face large out-of-pocket payments, which are beyond the means of many refugees. UNHCR will only cover a proportion of expenses (75%) for secondary care and provide no coverage for catastrophic illnesses requiring chemotherapy, dialysis, or blood transfusions. These costs have to be met by the individuals themselves or local NGOs. Meanwhile, only registered Syrian refugees are entitled to UN assistance.

In Syria, there have been exponential increases in communicable disease outbreaks of measles, typhoid, leishmaniasis, acute diarrhoea, and hepatitis and the risks of epidemic outbreaks in the coming months are severe. Since the national health services are not functioning optimally, Syrians often rely on neighboring countries for health care.

In Jordan, the number of Syrians in public hospitals has increased by almost 250 per cent over the past 5 months, while those requiring surgical operations outside the refugee camps increased by almost 600 per cent, the report revealed.

“Given recent announcements by the USA and European Union to provide lethal assistance to the opposition and the looming battle for Aleppo, it is likely that the refugee population,

humanitarian needs and challenges will rapidly increase over the next six months,” noted the report. “Yet the response capacity lags behind and is misdirected to actual needs.”

Meanwhile, a policy brief disseminated by the AUB Issam Fares Institute for public policy and international affairs also warned of the negative economic impacts on Lebanon of the poorly managed Syrian refugee crisis.

The brief overviewed the results of a study on the impact of and responses to Syrian forced displacement in Lebanon and is based on fieldwork in the Sunni-village of Bebnine and a national opinion poll with a representative sample of 900. The study was conducted by the Norway-based Fafo Institute for Applied Studies which produces evidence-based policy research.

Although the Lebanese government estimates the presence of more than one million refugees in Lebanon, only 570,000 refugees were officially registered or awaiting registration with the UN by the end of June 2013, said the Fafo study. Unregistered refugees are not eligible to UN assistance, which means local services and communities end up being further stretched.

The initial Lebanese hospitality towards Syrian refugees has become strained due to increased competition for scarce employment, particularly in the unskilled sector, the study notes. According to Fafo’s poll most Lebanese believe that the Syrians are taking their jobs and causing wages to decline. “Aid to Syrian refugees allows them to combine aid and work as a livelihood strategy, an opportunity closed to most poor Lebanese, thus marginalizing the host population,” the study warned. For the Lebanese, particularly those lacking formal education and depending on the unskilled labor market, the resulting competition is devastating. Many lose their jobs altogether or alternatively are forced to accept lower salaries than before.”

The study concluded that economic disparities created by unequal livelihood possibilities are generating Lebanese resentment and ambivalence towards Syrian refugees. “Economic exclusion and lost hope for the future can increase the recruitment of young men to militant groups, thus increasing the potential for war in Lebanon,” it added.

The IFI-Fafo AIS policy brief offered a set of recommendations:

- Introduce cash for work programs for refugees to alleviate social tensions created by labour competition caused by Syrian refugees’ opportunity to combine aid with low paid jobs.
- Target both poor Lebanese and Syrian households in aid operations, but in a careful way to avoid creating new aid dependencies.
- Strengthen a coordinated registration process when refugees arrive locally, preferably by empowering local authorities to have an overview of categories of registered refugees, the aid they are receiving and coordination between local NGOs and aid networks operating in the field.
- Provide additional support to vulnerable refugees who are unable to navigate in a disorganised aid landscape, particularly during the two first months.
- Implement programs and activities responding to community tensions, prejudice and intolerance.

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,000 students. AUB currently offers more than 100 programs leading to the bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full service 420-bed hospital.

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