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## **Syrian Self-Settlement in Lebanon's 'Arrival Cities'**

Refugee Livelihoods in Tripoli, Beirut and Tyre

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### **Introduction**

The informal areas, slums and shanty towns found in cities around the world are the first point of arrival for rural-to-urban migrants, labourers and refugees, and thus have been labelled 'arrival cities'. The epithet was coined by Doug Saunders (2011: 18–20) to capture their role in providing migrants with a foothold in urban and peri-urban areas, often in defiance of zoning and building regulations. Considering their localized character, they can more aptly be termed 'arrival sites' and are a key feature of the cities and towns in the Middle East. Arrival sites provide refugees and migrants with a foothold in the city and offer socio-economic integration, self-sufficiency and for some, upward social mobility. Yet, recent research challenges the narrative of arrival cities as sites of upward social mobility and emphasizes the diverse outcomes caused by the settlement choices of migrants (Meeus et al. 2019: 2).

This chapter furthers this debate by analysing refugee self-settlement in select cities and neighbourhood sites in Lebanon.<sup>1</sup> 'Arrival city' is a promising analytical concept for the comparative analysis of settlement choice and outcomes for the urban displaced and migrants (Taubenböck et al. 2018). In this chapter we use 'arrival city' as an analytical lens for examining settlement choices and livelihood outcomes of Syrian refugees living in disadvan-

tagged urban neighbourhoods and informal settlements in Beirut, Tripoli and Tyre (Map 1.1). The three cities differ in size, economy and administrative capacity to cater for refugees, as do individual neighbourhoods. Refugees do not settle in cities as such, but rather in neighbourhoods, each with different characteristics, although they typically share their building typologies and urban form with informal settlements and slums (*ibid.*).

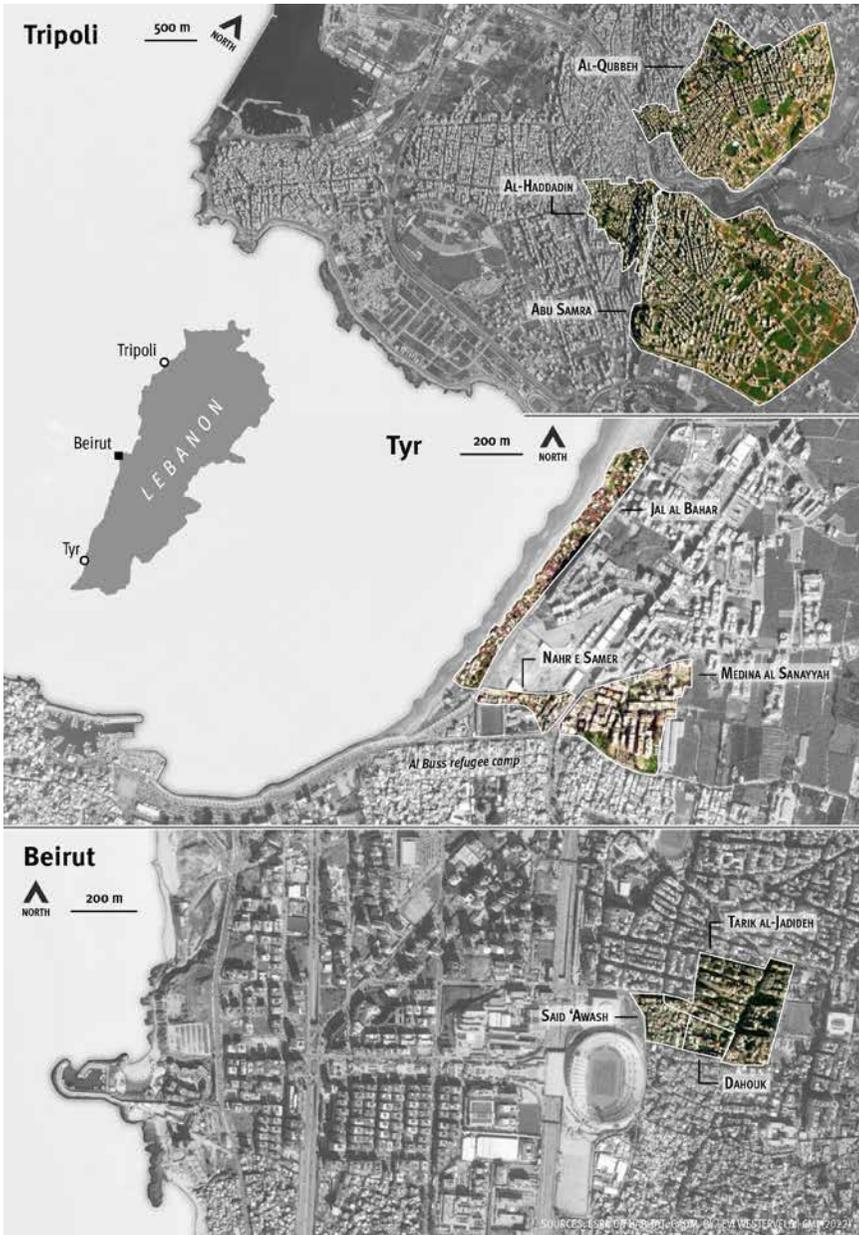
Refugee self-settlement is closely related to what has been termed ‘arrival infrastructures’, defined as comprising legal, administrative and material conditions that influence settlement choices and outcomes for the urban displaced (Meeus et al. 2019; Kreichauf and Glorius 2021). Arrival infrastructures differ both between cities and across neighbourhoods and housing (shelter) stocks and influence settlement outcomes, which also depend on refugee agency. Refugee urbanism also alters neighbourhood characteristics, as refugees transform neighbourhoods, quarters and shelters not only as city dwellers, but as city-makers (Fawaz et al. 2018).

The following section provides an analysis of self-settled refugees from Syria living in Beirut, Tripoli and Tyre that together account for about a third (three hundred thousand) of Lebanon’s Syrian refugee population. The neighbourhoods examined here belong to the most vulnerable percentile of the urban areas where self-settled refugees live (UNHCR 2015), often alongside other disenfranchised and poor groups.<sup>2</sup> They can broadly be defined as poverty-stricken mixed residential areas and settlements defined by informality, many of them with buildings that are structurally unsound (‘red-flagged’) and in danger of collapse (Table 1.1).

This chapter draws on background data on cities, neighbourhoods and shelters, as well as author-generated data from field research, small-N surveys and semi-structured focus group and personal interviews.<sup>3</sup> The results show that the factors influencing refugee self-settlement include affordable housing, employment opportunities and social networks, especially the presence of family and kin. The chapter ends with the role of ‘arrival cities’ in shaping the reception, housing and service provision for the urban displaced.

## Lebanon’s Urban Refugee Crisis

Lebanon is a highly urbanized society where two-thirds of the population live in major cities, with Syrian refugees and the urban poor confined to the poorest and most vulnerable areas (Boustani et al. 2016: 12; Atallah and Mahdi 2017: 15). Unlike the neighbouring countries of Jordan and Turkey (Chatty 2017), Lebanon did not set up formal camps to house refugees, seeing camps as a prelude to later settlement. Nonetheless, informal tented settlements were established in Beqaa valley as one of four shelter categories



**Map 1.1.** Map of the cities and neighbourhoods under study. Levi Westerveld, © CMI.

**Table 1.1.** Overview of cities and neighbourhoods under study.

City				Neighbourhood/s		
Name	Pop. (sq.km <sup>2</sup> )	Refugees *	Refugee impact	Name	Type	Quintile **
Tripoli	0.5 mill (24.7 sq. km)	100,000 (S) 32,000 (P)	<i>Significant</i>	Abu Samra	MRA	1
				al-Qubbeh	MRA	1
				al-Haddadin	MRA	2
Beirut	2.2 mill (19.8 sq. km) ***	220,000 (S) 100,000 (P)	<i>Localised</i>	Tariq al-Jadideh	MRA	1
				Daouk	IS-G	1
				Said 'Awash	IS-G	1
Tyre	0,22 mill (6.7 sq. km)	16,000 (S) 70,000 (P)	<i>Significant</i>	Nahr al-Samer	MRA	1
				Al-Madineh al-Sanaa'iyeh	MRA	1
				Jal al-Bahar	IS-G	1

**Legend:**

S – Syrian refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS)

P – Palestinian refugees

MRA – Mixed-residential area

IS-G – Informal settlement – ‘gathering’

(\*) Population figures are crude estimates due to the lack of census data and the dynamic refugee situation.

(\*\*) A total of 251 Most Vulnerable Localities (“cadastre”) were identified and ranked into five quintiles (each 50 cadastre): 1 (most) to 5 (least) vulnerable (UNHCR, 2015).

(\*\*\*) Greater Beirut covers 200 sq. km, and includes the city proper (Beirut Governate, 19.8 sq. km) and adjacent municipalities.

created in the response to the Syrian displacement crisis (UNHCR 2012).<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, the Lebanese government withdrew from managing the refugee influx, except in promoting the return of refugees and limiting the ability of Syrians to enter and remain in Lebanon (Knudsen 2017). Instead, the burden of refugee management was shifted to underfunded municipalities that varied in their ability and stance towards Syrian refugees (Mourad 2017; Nachebe 2019). The local implementation of these policies thus contributed to an opaque, arbitrary and inconsistent refugee governance (Stel 2020).

The influx of close to 1.2 million Syrian refugees taxed Lebanon’s underdeveloped housing market and public services, exacerbated by weak local governance, insufficient public resources and widespread corruption. On arrival, Syrians sought affordable rentals through the same channels as the

urban poor, which led to a rapid, unregulated expansion and subdivision of rental units, leading to overcrowding and urban densification (Fawaz 2017). The fallout from Syria's civil war and multilayered governance, financial and public health crises in Lebanon after 2019 added to the acute vulnerability of host and refugee populations alike. Vulnerability surveys have found a decline in extended families and an increase in smaller (nuclear) family unions. Two-thirds of the refugees rent accommodation in residential buildings, but there is a gradual shift towards residence in non-residential structures across almost all governorates (UNHCR et al. 2018: 2). In addition to Lebanon's two no's – 'no refugees and no camps' – there is also a third 'no': no urban policies. The combination of the three has led to non-recognition of refugees, no formal settlement assistance and no effort to organize or provide adequate housing for the displaced (Knudsen 2018). Lebanon has ratified neither the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 extension. Instead, refugee governance is based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the UNHCR, with Lebanese authorities authorizing residency permits (Janmyr 2017). However, many refugees either failed to obtain permits or were later unable to renew them due to the exorbitant fees, thereby denying them legal residency – a trend that has increased since 2015.<sup>5</sup> Thus, most Syrians are now at risk of being detained or deported (Chaccour 2022).

Despite the recent policy shift towards the urban displaced, neither the UNHCR's policy on 'alternatives to camps' (UNHCR 2014) nor the strategic policy documents offer guidance on how to engage cities with urban refugees. There are neither concrete recommendations on how to manage such refugee influxes, nor viable alternatives for integrating refugees in urban areas (Muggah and Abdenur 2018: 8). The importance of this has only increased as the growth of cities and urbanization has magnified the number of 'urban refugees' globally. Some countries have pursued new modes of aiding the urban displaced, such as area-based approaches (ABAs), but face issues in implementation due to a lack of funding and questions around the sustainability of interventions. The integration and sustainability touted as possible benefits of urban settlement depend on upholding the rights of the urban displaced regarding their 'right to the city' (Fawaz 2012) and access to housing, employment and public services. These are factors that vary greatly between urban areas and across neighbourhoods. The pull factors of cities include better and more options for employment and public services (water, electricity and internet) and access to healthcare, education and transportation, but access often depends on cost, availability, information flows and distance (Crisp et al. 2012; Harb et al. 2018; Forster 2021). However, and as is evident from Lebanon, Syrian refugees face several legal restrictions, in addition to a sectarian rhetoric portraying them as a security risk, economic burden and demographic threat.

## Housing and Settlement in Tripoli, Beirut and Tyre

Beirut, Tripoli and Tyre, the three ‘arrival cities’ examined in this chapter, differ in many respects: size, ethnic composition, refugee impact and economic means; yet all of them have informal areas and poor neighbourhoods with self-settled Syrian refugees (Table 1.1). The aid response to Syrians in Lebanon focused predominantly on impoverished Syrians, rather than the well-to-do, and the targeting of programming was informed by classifications of vulnerability on the municipal level (Kikano et al. 2021; UNHCR 2015). The selection and ranking of the ‘most vulnerable localities’ were based on a multi-deprivation index (MDI) that included income levels, access to water and sanitation, and housing conditions (Mourad 2016). In the most vulnerable subsection (‘percentile’) of these localities, self-settled refugees from Syria (54.1 per cent) and deprived Lebanese (35.8 per cent) cohabit (UNHCR 2015). In this chapter, we examine nine localities that belong to the most vulnerable percentiles (Table 1.1), across a north–south transect and using a mixed-method approach that combines background data (UNHCR, UNDP, UN-Habitat) with small-N surveys and ethnographic interviews (URBAN3DP 2020).

Most of the neighbourhoods surveyed are part of deteriorating city centres – a product of the civil war era (1975–90) and post-civil war deindustrialization, the centralization of finance and the bureaucracy in Beirut, and the lack of investment in secondary cities such as Tyre and Tripoli. The political stability and economic prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s made the middle class move from the city centre to new homes in peri-urban suburbs and rent their old homes to rural Lebanese migrants (Gilsenan 1996). The many master plans for Beirut and Tripoli, obsessively commissioned but rarely implemented, created legal frameworks that continue to define much of the urban fabric even with irregular implementation (Verdeil 2005). During the civil war, population transfers along ethnic and religious lines were accompanied by ‘quiet encroachment’ on public and private land and the construction of illegal and unplanned buildings (Bayat 2013). Other irregular spaces, such as the Armenian and Palestinian refugee camps of the 1920–40s, were incorporated into the urban sprawl to become hybrid city-camps (Fawaz and Peillen 2003). During the post-civil war period, some of the unplanned buildings were regularized (Verdeil 2005), but political connections and weak governance led to the expansion of informal areas that provided investment opportunities for businessmen, property developers and neighbourhood strongmen. The post-civil war building boom created new sectarian enclaves (Bou Akar 2018), and tensions over housing increased with the influx of displaced Syrians who were accused of inflating the cost of rent while simultaneously receiving international aid (Kikano et al. 2021).

The 1992 abolition of the old rent law that capped rents and new legislation on construction in 2004 enabled a construction boom in the 1990s and the 2000s (Ashkar 2015; Marot 2015). However, instead of alleviating the post-war housing crisis, this led to a demolition-and-construction boom, with luxury apartments offered for sale to the wealthy members of the Lebanese diaspora and Gulf country investors. The influx of Syrians after 2012 intensified the subdivision of rental units and utilization of properties not designed for human occupation (Fawaz 2017). Industrial and commercial workshops and buildings were retrofitted with the bare necessities, often lacking basic amenities including plumbing (Kikano et al. 2021). The improvised living quarters were essential in absorbing the displaced but led to overcrowding (Fawaz 2017). Despite the poor quality of housing, rent consumes on average 30 per cent of monthly income (sometimes more) and is the second largest expense for Syrians in Lebanon after food (UNHCR et al. 2017: 55). Interventions aiming to reduce the burden of rent through time-delimited rental support such as the Occupancy Free of Charge (OFC) scheme have so far neither proved successful nor sustainable (AUB and Save the Children 2020).

The surveys from select neighbourhoods in Beirut, Tripoli and Tyre show that the decision to leave Syria was often a collective family decision and that most fled in groups consisting of household units together with relatives and in-laws (URBAN3DP 2020). Occasionally, single male 'pioneers' who had left Syria to avoid being drafted in the army facilitated the settlement of their families in Lebanon a year or two later. Family reunions meant that the demography of the Syrians matched that of the host population, contradicting the stereotype of the entrepreneurial, young and male 'urban refugee' (Buscher 2018).

Across the cities surveyed, self-settlement is predominantly urban-to-urban (85 per cent), that is, Syrian refugees who hail from cities tend to resettle in cities, with the important exception of Tyre (addressed below). The survey results and interviews indicate that Syrians in Lebanon settle in cities and neighbourhoods based on three main factors. On the city level, the presence of kin, either close family or relatives, was the main factor in settlement choice. At the neighbourhood level, the cost of housing and opportunities for employment were the two primary factors for settlement (Table 1.2).<sup>6</sup> Following their arrival in Lebanon, Syrians integrated into a parallel community of co-nationals, with links to the host community through employment and other connections. This phenomenon is indicative of the barriers to integration and the importance of kinship in settlement decisions. Despite the relative stabilization in many areas in Syria after 2017 and the economic crisis in Lebanon after 2019, nearly all the respondents (89 per cent) surveyed in March 2021 did not intend to return to Syria (UNHCR 2021: 6).

**Table 1.2.** Factors influencing the choice of settling in cities and neighbourhoods (as percentage of survey responses, N=450).

City	Neighbourhoods	Choice of city				Choice of neighbourhood				
		Relatives	Previous visit	Diaspora present	Other (*)	Rental costs	Employment options	Household expenses	Services (health, admin, etc.)	Other (*)
Beirut	Tariq al-Jadideh Daouk Said 'Awash	76	8	8	8	39	14	9	11	27
Tripoli	Abu Samra al-Qubbeh al-Haddadin	77	8	11	4	90	0	6	0	4
Tyre	Nahr al-Samr Al-Madineh al-Sanaa 'iyyeh Jal al-Bahar	63	28	4	5	64	17	1	6	12

Source: URBAN3DP (2020)

(\*) The "other" category was not disaggregated.

## Tripoli

In 2017 Tripoli's population was estimated at 508,000, including about 100,000 Syrians (Table 1.1). Despite a strong sense of Tripolitan identity, communal conflict linked to civil war-era grievances escalated after the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011 (Gade 2017). Since the earliest poverty studies in the 1950s, Tripoli has been Lebanon's poorest city, yet its urban topography includes a pocket of prosperity between al-Tall, the main square on the outskirts of the Old City, and the al-Mina port, surrounded by lower-middle-class neighbourhoods (Nemeh 2012). Tripoli's economic deterioration is linked to the establishment of the French Mandate in 1920, which divorced the city from long-standing mercantile networks extending into Syria (Chahal 2015). The city industrialized rapidly after the 1920s, driven by the Iraqi Petroleum Company headquartered in al-Qubbeh and the Beddawi refinery, as well as some fifty other factories and mills (Lefèvre 2021). In 1948–49, Palestinian refugees settled in Tripoli, with the two refugee camps Nahr el-Bared and Beddawi, and the adjacent areas served as hosting cores for the urban poor.

The post-civil war deindustrialization was exacerbated by a lack of economic investment and the concentration of financial wealth in Beirut, as well as political bickering, elite rivalry and communal conflict. Over the past decade, extreme poverty, defined as living on less than USD 3 a day, increased from 52 per cent in 2012 to an estimated 70 per cent in early 2021 (Geldi 2021). The many attempts at regenerating Tripoli's economy since the late 1990s, focused on renewing the city's dilapidated infrastructure and promoting heritage tourism in its Mamluk-period urban core, have not been successful. The settlement of Syrian refugees reflects historical linkages between Tripoli and the Syrian cities Homs, Aleppo and Hama, and these are evident in kinship linkages between Tripoli residents and those living in Syria's border cities. The presence of relatives in Tripoli, at times through mixed-nationality marriages, is a driver in city selection (Forster and Abdalkader 2021: 16). Nearly all the surveyed households stated that the reason for settlement in a neighbourhood was related to the low cost of rent (Table 1.2). Living conditions are poor, with exposure to pollution and noise. Safety is a major reason for choosing a specific neighbourhood across all cities. However, only half of Syrians surveyed in Tripoli said they felt safe there. Indeed, with intermittent armed conflict in the city, nearly all the respondents identified 'man-made hazards' in Tripoli, compared to two-thirds in Tyre and about one-third in Beirut (*ibid.*: 11).

Overall, the Syrian refugees in Tripoli endure acute overcrowding, with about half living in five square metres per person (UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP2015: 58). Housing shortages are reflective of property speculation in the Old City and the construction of new luxury accommodations in ar-

eas such as Dam w-al-Fares. Working-class areas such as Abu Samra and al-Qubbeh have seen rapid urbanization over the past twenty years, but a lack of investment and maintenance has made housing standards deteriorate. The most critical livelihood issue in the surveyed neighbourhoods was employment (82 per cent) and more than two-thirds of households were indebted to their relatives or shopkeepers. Almost a third of households in Tripoli reported that school-aged children contributed to household income, compared to a quarter in Tyre and a sixth in Beirut. Housing insecurity and unemployment mean that one-third of the households have moved at least once during the past six months in search of more affordable accommodation. Additionally, more than a third of the respondents were planning to change accommodation to lower the cost of rent, indicative of frequent resettlement as a marker of urban precarity. As noted by one interviewee in al-Shalfeh: ‘I want to move, but I cannot find a cheaper place. At the same time, I cannot afford the rent here.’

### *Abu Samra (with Al-Shawq and Al-Shalfeh)*

Abu Samra was formerly the location of summer holiday homes for Tripoli’s middle classes, and residential homes for Tripoli’s working professionals began to be built there in the 1950s (Nahas and Yahya 2001: 86). The neighbourhood is located on the southern plateau above the Abu Ali river channel in the ‘cadastre’ of Zeitoun. A mixture of residential, commercial, waste- and agricultural land, Abu Samra also contains the informal settlements of al-Shalfeh and al-Shawq. In al-Shawq, Syrian refugee households constitute between 65 and 75 per cent of the population (Campbell 2020: 12), and some have created private ‘courtyards’ that are screened off around the ground floor apartments with sticks, poles, tin sheeting and tarpaulins, some bearing the UNHCR logo. A deprived area, al-Shawq is targeted by several NGO interventions such as schooling and homework support, psychosocial workshops and regeneration and greening initiatives.

Abu Samra was severely damaged by internal clashes during the civil war and is the site of recurring and violent tensions. On average, the homes are some of the most spacious in Tripoli and the area has the largest rental market in the city due to the transience of formerly rural Lebanese who rent their properties to Syrians (UN-Habitat 2016: 56). As a result, the Zeitoun cadastre has the highest ratio of Syrians vis-à-vis Lebanese in Tripoli (ibid.: 40). Despite newer homes and slightly higher than average rents (around USD 150 a month), four-fifths of the households noted that their housing was inadequate. The Syrians living in Abu Samra are predominantly from urban, middle-class backgrounds, with class differences contributing to social tensions with the rural Lebanese residents.<sup>7</sup>

### *Al-Qubbeh*

Located on the eastern bank of the Abu Ali river, the al-Qubbeh neighbourhood expanded from the Old City up the hillside to the Qubbeh plateau (*qubbeh* translates as 'dome') beginning in the 1920s and coalesced around the French-built military barracks constructed in 1937. By the 1960s, the neighbourhood included the headquarters of the now defunct Iraqi Petroleum Company (Gulick 1967: 206). A primary driver of the neighbourhood's growth was the migration of rural populations from the predominantly Sunni rural districts north of Tripoli. The area consists of mixed residential and commercial areas with small-scale agriculture along the periphery, including the grazing of animals on unused plots as residences fall away to olive groves. Housing is 'low-quality' and on the eastern edge, where new informal apartment buildings were constructed after 2010. Of the estimated sixty thousand residents in al-Qubbeh, around twelve thousand are Syrians, one-fifth of whom settled in the neighbourhood prior to 2011 (UN-Habitat and UNICEF 2018: 20–21). Al-Qubbeh offers the cheapest accommodation and living expenses in this sample of Tripoli. The satisfaction with accommodation in al-Qubbeh is high, with four-fifths reporting it as 'adequate', but still citing concerns regarding overcrowding, harassment, noise, pollution and dampness. Opportunities for employment are slightly better than, for instance, Abu Samra, in part due to the pre-war Syrian pioneer population settled in the area and a large commercial sector in the neighbourhood (New Street and Cedar Street), but the wages are among the lowest in the three areas surveyed.<sup>8</sup>

### *Al-Haddadin*

Situated between Abu Samra and Nejme Square, al-Haddadin is one of the most densely populated areas of Tripoli, with an estimated population of about seventy-eight thousand (UN-Habitat 2016: 36). It is an important commercial area that hosts a section of the fresh goods market, as well as being a node through which residents pass daily on their commutes (Nahas and Yahya 2001: 88). Like much of the Old City, the infrastructure in al-Haddadin has become dilapidated and many houses bear the scars of communal conflict (*ibid.*: 87, 102; Harake et al. 2016: 7).

In 2015, about fifteen hundred Syrians lived in al-Haddadin. In 2020, nearly a third of surveyed households hailed from rural areas, compared to a sixth in Abu Samra, and only 2 per cent in al-Qubbeh. The reasons for settling in al-Haddadin were more varied than with respect to Abu Samra and al-Qubbeh. Survey responses included the presence of co-nationals including former neighbours, as well as previous knowledge of the area. The rural and farming background of Syrian residents is reflected in the survey

responses, which highlighted multiple vulnerability markers, including the lowest levels of formal education and a lower rate of skilled workers. In addition, the rate of post-settlement displacement is twice that of Abu Samra and al-Qubbeh, and there is a higher level of debt among households. Al-Haddadin has the most expensive rents in the sample and the highest percentage of children not enrolled in school (26 per cent), compared to, for instance, 15 per cent in Abu Samra. Satisfaction with housing quality is low and homes are substantially smaller than in other areas, with about half of the residents living in apartments sized 10–29 square metres. However, the centrality of the neighbourhood, low transportation costs, slightly better yet still limited services and reduced noise due to scarce traffic were all highlighted as benefits of settlement.

## **Beirut**

The capital Beirut has by far the largest economy among the cities surveyed and the greatest diversity in employment sectors, as well as in the ethnic and sectarian make-up. Some two hundred thousand Syrians reside in the urban agglomeration of Greater Beirut Area, which comprises the city proper and adjacent municipalities, with an estimated population of around 2.2 million (Table 1.1). The civil war solidified ethnic enclaves of the ‘Muslim’ west and ‘Christian’ east that feature strongly in the contemporary demography. The post-civil war reconstruction of the city centre demolished many historic buildings and displaced the original inhabitants and wartime squatters (Becherer 2005). Many of the war-displaced resettled in the capital’s southern suburbs during the 1990s. Sabra is one of the largest informal areas since the establishment of the Shatila refugee camp in 1949, and a premier destination for Syrian refugees since 2012 (Knudsen 2019).

Syrian settlement in the three surveyed neighbourhoods of Sabra – Said ‘Awash, Daouk and Tarik al-Jadideh – highlighted that employment prospects are among the most cited reasons for settling there. Although the low cost of housing was noted as a main reason for selecting a particular neighbourhood (39 per cent of households), the reasons for settling in Beirut were more varied than in Tripoli or Tyre, highlighting transportation, low household expenditures and the availability of services including education and healthcare. In Sabra, nearly all the male respondents had part-time employment and one-fifth were employed full-time or had one or more adult family members with a valid work permit, which was substantially higher than in non-Beirut neighbourhoods. Indicators highlighted other beneficial aspects of settlement in the capital: the households had the lowest incidence of school-aged children working (3 per cent) and only 4 per cent of households had moved in the previous six months.

Host–refugee and refugee–refugee relations were also the least contentious in Sabra and only 6 per cent of households reported problems among groups in their neighbourhoods, likely due to the Palestinian majority in the informal areas such as Sabra. Regarding Lebanese hosts and relations with other refugee groups (mostly Palestinian), the large majority (80 per cent) of the Syrian households responded that relations were respectful. In the surveyed neighbourhoods, nine out of ten respondents reported feeling safe. Rent was listed as the main livelihood difficulty across surveyed neighbourhoods. As stated by a Syrian woman in her late twenties: ‘Food, clothes and rent are cheap: . . . [the] problem is finding money to pay the rent’.

### *Tariq al-Jadideh (Gaza Buildings)*

Tariq al-Jadideh is a mixed residential neighbourhood, forming the northern part of Sabra and including refugees living in the former Gaza Hospital buildings. The hospital complex was commissioned by the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in the late 1970s but was closed during the civil war after extensive damage. The gutted buildings then became a temporary shelter for Palestinian families displaced from elsewhere in the capital. The buildings are nominally under PLO ownership, but as the latter were unable to afford refurbishing, they became de facto resident-controlled (Knudsen 2019). Palestinians are still in the majority among the about 450 households in the buildings, but around half of the flats have, since 2012, been sublet to refugees displaced from Syria. A smaller number of Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi and Egyptian migrants live in the buildings’ dark and humid basement flats. There is no formal committee in charge of managing the buildings, but self-styled gatekeepers collect fees for renovation and water. Interviews with residents confirm that living costs and household expenses in Palestinian-majority areas are cheaper than in other parts of Beirut. The Shatila camp nearby and the Sabra street market provide cheap foodstuffs and untaxed goods from Syria, as well as opportunities for employment and lower start-up costs for entrepreneurial and skilled workers (Dahdah 2014). Although households noted the presence of relatives nearby, many of whom had settled in the area before 2011, most residents found their way into the buildings after being tipped off by members of their social networks.

Some households have family members living nearby or elsewhere in Lebanon, but few benefit from support from kin because relatives are in similar circumstances. None of the households in the Gaza buildings receive remittances from abroad, and the families mostly keep to themselves. For some, living among Palestinian refugees is easier due to both groups’ outsider status in Lebanon. Most of the residents benefit from food vouchers and hygiene kits distributed by a Palestinian NGO, and some also receive

rental support from the UNHCR. Despite NGO-assisted upgrades to the buildings a decade ago, the residents live in overcrowded, humid and damp conditions that cause a range of chronic ailments (Zabaneh et al. 2008).

### *Daouk*

Daouk is an informal settlement and Palestinian ‘gathering’ in Sabra, the latter of which is provisionally defined as a cluster of twenty-five or more Palestinian households. Established in 1968 and named after the original landowning family, property rights are contested with implications for housing standards and service delivery. The demography of Daouk reflects Syrian self-settlement since 2012; of the 400 homes in the gathering, 200 are now rented to Syrians, while 150 Palestinian and 50 Lebanese families live in the remainder. There are no Asian residents, a result of the community having not allowed them to settle. Although interviewed households mentioned discrimination, the consensus highlighted amicable relations in the community. Acceptance of Syrians in Daouk is facilitated in part due to the high number of co-nationals, many originating from the same villages. There is also a perception that Syrians and Palestinians are both subaltern groups lacking civil rights, thus facing similar challenges and prospects.

As an informal settlement with a mixed population, Daouk provides affordable housing and proximity to local employment opportunities. Daouk’s houses are strung along narrow alleyways of slightly better quality than those in neighbouring Said ‘Awash (detailed below). Daouk is managed by a Popular Committee, but municipality services are not extended to the area. The reasons for settling in Daouk were related to the presence of family members as well as the availability of NGO assistance. A local NGO provides food vouchers to more than two hundred Syrian households and vocational training for women. There are no international NGOs working in Daouk. Syrian households received assistance from the UNHCR in the past, but this was discontinued following funding shortages and cost-cutting within the organization in 2020. Services – water, electricity and waste disposal – are accessible but require the payment of fees. Households adopt cost-cutting measures such as using the free clinic provided by UNRWA and Doctors without Borders, as well as taking children out of school.

### *Said ‘Awash*

Said ‘Awash, like Daouk, is an informal Palestinian ‘gathering’, built on squatted public land. Thus, land tenure is contested and most of the buildings are small and in disrepair. Said ‘Awash comprises around 450 households, which include Syrian (200), Palestinian (70) and Lebanese households (70),

as well a handful of Asians. The gathering is managed by a five-member Popular Committee organizing community services and resolving disputes. The municipality does not service the area, but many benefit from in-kind support from the local NGO. Other services are available at cost; therefore, most households dispose of their own household waste rather than paying a fee.

The main reasons for settling in Said 'Awash were related to the presence of relatives, the opportunities for work, the cost of housing and the availability of public services such as electricity and water. The lower cost of living means that most interviewees in the area found living conditions fair compared to other areas in Beirut (although this was still only 40 per cent). To access healthcare, Syrian households who are not entitled to use the UNRWA clinics are hamstrung by the high costs of private medical services. Some families leave the neighbourhood to attend the Doctors without Borders clinic. Employment options are limited within Said 'Awash, but residents can find work in Sabra's markets and stalls. Employment in the informal sector was challenged in 2019 when the Ministry of Labour cracked down on Syrian-owned businesses and the employment of Syrians across Lebanon. Livelihood assistance is also limited to food vouchers from a local NGO, in addition to basic support from the UN, UNRWA in the case of Palestinians and the UNHCR for Syrians.

## **Tyre**

Following decades of rural-to-urban migration and repeated refugee influxes, Tyre has become the country's fourth largest city with an estimated population of 200,000 (UN-Habitat 2017). The dense urban core includes Lebanese residents (approximately 78,000), as well as camp-based (approx. 70,000) and out-of-camp Palestinian refugees (approx. 37,000) (Table 1.1). Most of the Palestinian refugees live in one of the three refugee camps – al-Buss, al-Rashedieh and Burj al-Shamali – as well as in several informal 'Palestinian gatherings' and adjacent areas. Since 2012, displaced Syrian and Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) added an additional 10 per cent to the urban refugee population (approx. 16,200), and settled in the dilapidated urban core and in or adjacent to the refugee camps.

Despite the city's strategic seaside location, fertile land and political patrons (the Amal Movement), Tyre has suffered from a slump in tourism, agriculture and trade. As a result, residents living in the urban core are now among Lebanon's most vulnerable (UN-Habitat 2017: 43, 59). Poverty levels for the Lebanese and the Syrian and Palestinian refugees are higher than the national average, as are unemployment rates (37–43 per cent), with

most engaged in low-skilled labour in construction, the service industry and agriculture. The household expenditures in Tyre are among the highest in the country and the monthly per capita income the lowest, leaving refugee families indebted and food insecure (*ibid.*).

Settlement in particular neighbourhoods was most often motivated by the proximity of employment, with a fifth of the respondents employed in the agricultural sector. Relatives and acquaintances were instrumental in facilitating the search for accommodation and employment in Tyre. Transience is also evident in terms of displacement within Lebanon, whereby 95 per cent of respondents had been displaced at least once. Of the three cities examined in this chapter, Tyre stands out as having the highest number of Syrians (27 per cent) reporting that they had previously visited or had prior knowledge of the city, in contrast to 8 percent in Beirut and Tripoli (Table 1.2). This was, for instance, the case with Palestinian refugees displaced from Damascus's ruined Yarmouk camp who fled to the Palestinian camps and gatherings in Tyre through kinship networks. Despite the close ethnic, religious and cultural ties between the Palestinian residents and those displaced from Syria (PRS), there are differences in gender roles, customs and hospitality that keep them apart and limit social interaction.

### *Nahr al-Samar*

Nahr al-Samar is an informal settlement that was founded after the Palestinian exodus from Palestine (*nakba*) in 1948–49. The land is owned by the local municipality and occupied by an estimated 156 households, including thirty-five Syrian and twenty-eight Palestinian households. The buildings in the neighbourhood are illegal, but tacitly permitted by the municipality despite a lack of documentation. In 1960, constructions became more durable, using materials such as concrete and stone. The footprint of the area grew during the early stages of the civil war after 1975 when oversight was minimal. Before 2011, Nahr al-Samar consisted predominantly of two- and three-storey buildings with ground-floor shops, but the mixed residential buildings expanded after the influx of Syrians. As an informal settlement and Palestinian 'gathering' the area is not serviced by UNRWA, with basic services provided by the municipality (Yassin et al. 2016). There is no Popular Committee in Nahr al-Samar, but the Palestinian community sends a representative to coordinate with the Popular Committee in the adjacent Palestinian gathering, Jal al-Bahr (see below).

Occupying houses of 'middle building quality' (UN-Habitat 2017: 76), the Syrian residents of Nahr al-Samar explained that they felt safe in the area. Several residents described living in Nahr al-Samar as 'better than Beirut' or the countryside, where transportation and access to work was

an issue. In addition, relatives were living nearby (sometimes in the same neighbourhood), the apartments were larger and their location meant that commutes to work were often short and on foot. Primary issues, on the other hand, related to the ban on repairing houses, overcrowding and the many car repair shops in the area that pose hazards for children in addition to being a source of noise and pollution. Generally, however, interviews highlighted that many residents were satisfied with their housing in terms of quality and location. The nearby al-Buss refugee camp, for instance, provides access to free clinics and schools for Palestinian residents (and PRS), as well as cheaper foodstuffs in the street markets lining the camp, with the nearby seaside promenade functioning as a recreational area, especially among the youth (Perdigon 2008).

### *Al-Madineh al-Sanaa'iyyeh*

Al-Madineh al-Sanaa'iyyeh ('Industrial city') is an informal settlement and mixed residential neighbourhood located on formerly agricultural land based on a lease agreement between local landowners and Palestinian families displaced from Upper Galilee in 1948. Industrialization began in 1958, when a confectionary factory was built there and was followed by the construction of the first single-storey bungalows nearby. In 1975, some of the bungalows were sold or rented to Palestinians and Lebanese nationals relocated from the Israeli border. During the next decade, the footprint of the area grew following the construction of mostly Palestinian-owned mixed commercial-residential blocks. Several apartments in the area were rented out to migratory Syrian labourers before 2011. The settlement now comprises around 420 households. The majority are Lebanese, while about seventy-seven Syrian and PRS households live in a mixed residential area that includes several workshops, auto repair facilities and parts dealers. The Palestinians in the neighbourhood can access UNRWA services in nearby al-Buss camp. There is no Popular Committee in the area, although the PRS are registered with the Popular Committee in al-Buss. Like elsewhere in Tyre, PRS and Syrians took diverging paths of settlement, with PRS settling first in or alongside Palestinian areas before finding their way into the neighbourhood (Knudsen 2018). Many of the Syrian refugees spent time in border villages in the Beqaa valley before consecutive resettlements landed them in Tyre.

Like in nearby Nahr al-Samar, the residents suffer from pollution and noise from workshops, traffic and diesel generators, as well as overcrowding. The location, however, is adjacent to the city centre and has access to cheaper goods in markets along the al-Buss camp. Moreover, many residents combine rural (agriculture and seasonal) work with urban (service,

construction, artisanal and skilled) work. There are no restrictions on entering or leaving the area, yet Syrians and PRS newcomers avoid socializing with the resident Palestinian and Lebanese neighbours, reflecting the tendency to restrict social interaction with majority groups. One said: 'I feel that we're not accepted by the community . . . actually we are very cautious that we don't interact with people in [the] community because if we do, problems could occur.'

### *Jal al-Bahr*

Jal al-Bahr is an unofficial Palestinian refugee camp, also referred to as a 'gathering', established in 1948 by Palestinian Bedouins on municipal land, adjacent to the Nahr al-Samar neighbourhood. The original tents were replaced by more durable shelters of concrete and stone as late as the 1960s. By this time most of the animals had disappeared and many of the original Bedouin residents turned to inshore fishing (Allan 2020), which is now a main source of livelihood in the neighbourhood. During the first phase of the civil war, reconstruction and restoration of the buildings saw residents rebuild homes and the footprint of the settlement was enlarged, with houses strung out along the beach close to the city centre. Since 2012, PRS have settled in Jal al-Bahr, most of whom were linked to the area through kinship networks. Many of them hail from the ruined Yarmouk camp in Damascus that was besieged by the Syrian army. The gathering has a total population of around two thousand, comprising about 156 Palestinian households as well as about sixty-two Syrian and Palestinian refugee households from Syria (Knudsen 2018). Many of the refugees from Syria have been unable to renew their residence permit, and therefore avoid leaving the gathering for fear of being arrested. Some are still able to find menial jobs such as car cleaning and vending, while others are supported by resident relatives and in-laws.

The building quality in Jal al-Bahr is 'very poor', with run-down houses covered with metal roofs (*zinco*), and the residents live under threat of eviction due to squatting on public land. During the winter, storms and gale-force winds damage homes and erode foundations. With insufficient drainage, seasonal flooding and torrential rains inundate the lower-lying sections. While the residents are neither permitted to enlarge nor improve their homes, emergency repairs have been allowed with funding from an international NGO. The gathering has Popular Committee representation through one seat in the Jal al-Bahr refugee camp assembly. Another characteristic of the Jal al-Bahr gathering is poverty-induced migration, primarily to Berlin, Germany. The migrants have turned absentee landlords in the gathering and may subsidize rent, allowing some households to live rent-free.

The main avenue for settling in the neighbourhood is utilizing networks of relatives and acquaintances, many of whom live in the gatherings and camps nearby. Although residents struggle to pay the rent, the leaky and damp houses and flats in Jal al-Bahr are cheaper than the housing in the nearby al-Buss refugee camp, but they are also further from the city centre, and the residents must commute by foot along the heavily trafficked road or pay transportation costs. The neighbourhood has public space for the children to play along the beach, but the beachfront is littered with plastic waste. Overall, however, the residents consider the neighbourhood to be calm, especially compared to other places where they have lived.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have examined settlement choices and livelihood outcomes across three cities in nine localities that are among Lebanon's most vulnerable as defined by recent surveys. Despite many similarities – run-down houses, insufficient or non-existent public services – the neighbourhoods examined here differ in size, density and ethnic composition. Across the cities studied here, the main settlement factors are linked to familial and kinship ties in combination with social networks. The self-settlement process is shortened as time passes, with 'pioneers' easing settlement for subsequent arrivals. At the neighbourhood level, accessing affordable housing and employment are key placement factors. This, in turn, leads to distinct settlement pathways, which are either swift and enabled by familial and kinship links (Tripoli), or incremental across border villages and peri-urban sites in search of improved livelihoods (Beirut and Tyre).

The three 'arrival cities' differ in their capacity to accommodate self-settled Syrian refugees, with Beirut hosting the largest number, and Tripoli and Tyre having the highest ratio of refugees to residents, with implications for the displacement impact on the urban fabric and hosting cores. The economies of the cities differ markedly too, with Beirut being the country's economic and political centre, compared to the economic decline of secondary cities like Tripoli and Tyre. Nonetheless, since 2019, all households are struggling in the wake of the combined economic, political and health crises affecting the country. At neither the country nor city level have specific urban policies been formulated or implemented, a fact that is reflective of the decentralized approach that has left reception to local communities reliant on support from UN agencies and local and international NGOs.

Most of the refugees have settled in mixed residential areas and informal settlements, and some also in the light industry zones vacated by Lebanon's ailing manufacturing sector. The poorest Syrian refugees predominantly settle in the country's most vulnerable areas, including in the vicinity of Pales-

tinian refugee camps, reflective of the social protection that refugee camps and adjacent 'grey areas' offer. These are the areas with the lowest rents and the greatest availability, leading to residential overcrowding when families and relatives share the same flats or premises, with time resolved by splitting families into smaller units and households. The general lack of secure tenure (due in part to verbal contracts) in combination with inflated rents makes refugees resettle in search of affordable housing and better living conditions, with frequent resettlement a sign of urban precarity and vulnerability. This is also evident in the resort to child labour, a 'negative coping mechanism' that is correlated with income poverty among the most vulnerable refugee households and consistent with countrywide surveys on refugee livelihoods.

The availability of employment differs between the three cities; Beirut has the largest economy, with refugees employed as day labourers and hired hands in low-paid work, primarily in construction, service sectors and sidewalk peddling. This is consistent with findings in other Middle East capitals and primary cities such as Amman and Istanbul, which also hold the largest number of refugees, reflecting their greater options for employment, residence and service provision. Tripoli, a Sunni majority city, has been caught up in economic decline and communal conflict, which together with widespread unemployment have impoverished both the middle class and refugee communities. In Tyre, the long-term settlement of Palestinian refugees and Syrian displaced converge, with employment in the local agri-business only offering low-paid, seasonal work, in combination with inshore fishing and vending.

Syrian refugees predominantly settle among co-nationals in low-income neighbourhoods and informal settlements where refugees, migrants and the urban poor cohabit. Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS) are more often found in, or adjacent to, Palestinian refugee camps and informal settlements ('gatherings'). In the low-income and underserved areas, refugee and emergency urbanism has made refugee camps amalgamate into mixed city-camps that serve as housing cores for the urban poor and refugees alike. The housing standard is generally very poor, with Beirut residents paying the highest rents for the least habitable shelters. Informal areas and gatherings typically have the weakest infrastructure with only rudimentary water, sanitation and electricity provision, some only accessible at added costs to residents. The same applies to the availability of schools, hospitals and other underfunded and undersupplied public services, which refugees are often unable to access due to lack of capacity or lack of funds, forcing them to seek out charitable and other free-of-charge alternatives.

There is limited capacity in all three cities to cater to refugees, with the UNHCR acting as an intermediary for the state. Overshadowing these limited capabilities are the legal frameworks governing Syrian refugees in Lebanon that curtail rights and freedoms and are designed to promote in-

voluntary return or secondary migration. The humanitarian aid to refugees is undersupplied and limited to cash transfers (e-cards from the UNHCR), housing allowances (often reduced or discontinued) and in-kind aid (food vouchers and hygiene kits) from local NGOs. Current aid levels are underfunded and under-dimensioned, and that is causing living conditions and livelihoods to decline amid the country's economic malaise and governance crisis. Suffering from chronic poverty and saddled with debt, refugees are forced to seek out piecemeal and short-term NGO support where and when this is available, with frequent resettlement a sign of precarity.

Taken together, this chapter has demonstrated the role of arrival infrastructures in shaping the reception, housing and service provision for the urban displaced in the cities and urban sites under study. Self-settled refugees reside in underserved sites and low-cost shelters, with settlement choice and pathways guided by social networks, kinship ties and livelihood issues. The predominant neighbourhood types are mixed residential and informal areas, with smaller numbers residing in refugee camps, gatherings and converted buildings. Disenfranchised refugees suffer from a lack of services and social protection, which increases their vulnerability and deepens poverty. Easing legal restrictions, increasing employment opportunities and improving access to affordable housing would go a long way in reversing these trends and making 'arrival cities' a key element in empowering 'urban refugees' as new urban denizens.

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## Notes

1. 'Arrival cities' have structural and functional similarities with what have been termed 'cities of refuge'. Cities of refuge are predominantly settled by displaced persons and refugees, and they vary in their capacity to cater for new entrants due to rudimentary or non-existent reception facilities, damage from armed conflict, or financial and administrative constraints (World Bank et al. 2017).

2. The naming of administrative divisions includes the Ottoman period *caza* (district), the French *cadastre* (a register showing details of land ownership) and present-day municipalities and vernacular neighbourhood boundaries. This means that population figures, ethnic composition and housing stock depend on how residential areas and neighbourhoods are defined and circumscribed.
3. The data for this article draws on intermittent fieldwork between 2016–18 and includes semi-structured, focus group, and life history interviews with Syrians and Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS), collected with the help of local research assistants who in the case of Beirut were facilitated by a local NGO. Additional data were collected during 2019–22, through author-designed surveys covering fifty households in each of the nine localities, or 150 households in each city (URBAN3DP 2020). In addition, members of Popular Committees, academics, NGOs, urban planners and architects were interviewed.
4. The categories include collective shelter (CS), informal tented settlement (ITS), small shelter unit (SHU) and rented houses (RH).
5. After 2015, the only route to legal residency for Syrians was through sponsorship costing USD 200 annually per family member over 15. The prohibitive costs also increased the number of unregistered Syrians after 2017 when the renewal fee was waived (UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, 2017, 2018).
6. As described by interviewees, relatives or family facilitated the initial move to their selected city and could potentially impact the decision to settle in a neighbourhood. However, neighbourhood settlement would usually be facilitated by a wider array of social ties and the agency of individual refugees, including through activities such as door-knocking, engaging concierges and asking conationals (rarely Lebanese unless they had been settled for a while) if they were aware of opportunities for accommodation or employment.
7. Abu Samra had the highest number of households that lived in privately owned houses in urban areas in Syria before 2011. This is as opposed to al-Qubbeh, where Syrian households were living in self-owned apartments in urban areas in Syria before 2011, thus indicating differences in wealth prior to displacement (URBAN3DP 2020).
8. The hyperinflation during the survey period (February–July 2020) means that wages, rent and other economic estimates are unreliable due to daily fluctuations in exchange rates and the rapid increase in prices.

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