

Syrian refugees in Lebanon need targeted efforts to rebuild their lives

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The number of people fleeing violence, poverty and conflict is skyrocketing worldwide and refugees often become permanently displaced. Syria's decade-long civil war has caused millions of people to

flee the country, with many settling in neighboring Lebanon.

Governments and humanitarian organizations provide aid to the refugees, but contributions from donor countries have failed to meet rising needs in recent years. That makes it even more important to know where aid can be most effective.

"We need to do better in terms of who, where, and how to target [humanitarian aid](#). If we can identify the areas where people can benefit more, we can ensure the funding makes a greater impact," says Angela Lyons, associate professor in the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics at the University of Illinois.

Humanitarian aid is often focused on immediate needs, but Lyons says it's important to also take a longer-term perspective and help people acquire skills and resources to rebuild their livelihoods and prevent future poverty.

Lyons is lead author on a study that analyzes the [economic situation](#) for Syrian refugees in Lebanon. She and co-author Josephine Kass-Hanna, Saint Joseph University of Beirut, serve on a Think20 (T20) task force that provides advice and counsel for the G20, a global economic forum comprised of 19 countries and the European Union.

Lyons and Kass-Hanna published their findings in the [Economic Research Forum \(ERF\)](#) working paper series, and submitted the information in policy briefs to the T20/G20 and to humanitarian aid organizations.

Lebanon, a small country located along the western border of Syria, has received one of the largest influxes of refugees. About 1.5 million Syrians have arrived in Lebanon, now making up more than 20% of the country's population of 6.8 million people.

Recently, Lebanon has experienced a severe economic and social crisis with galloping inflation, currency devaluation, and instability.

"On a per capita basis, Lebanon is bearing one of the biggest burdens of the Syrian refugee crisis, while the country is facing its own economic and political turmoil. This creates a lot of tension between Lebanese people and Syrian refugees," Lyons says.

Lyons and Kass-Hanna partnered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Program (WFP), and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to obtain data from the organizations' annual surveys with Syrian refugee households across Lebanon. Using information from the 2018 survey, Lyons and Kass-Hanna constructed a multi-dimensional index estimating current and future poverty along five major dimensions: health and food security, education, living standards, employment, and security and social inclusion.

"We're creating a livelihood index so the organizations can see exactly where the weak points and deprivations currently are. The index helps to better identify who is currently poor and better predict who has the greatest chance to jump out of poverty if they receive assistance with things like better education and job-skills training," Lyons explains.

"Our multi-dimensional approach helps [humanitarian organizations](#) better coordinate how they can work with development agencies to address longer-term outcomes for education, health, employment, personal security, assimilation, and social inclusion," she says.

Based on their findings, the authors identify four pillars of intervention that would help build resiliency and alleviate risk of future poverty, which they recommend the G20 endorse. They include providing digital skills training; building employment opportunities; promoting access to

digital financial solutions (which will help refugees engage more fully with society); and establishing a set of goals and benchmarks to measure progress towards poverty reduction.

The study also highlights the importance of addressing poverty in a broader context.

"We need to focus not just on [poor people](#) but also on poor places. Often, development economists are focused on identifying who is poor and how we can address their immediate needs, especially with [refugee](#) populations and forcibly displaced populations. But we need to also think about this in conjunction with poor places to understand how aid can be most effective," Lyons explains.

The authors say their work can also help make a stronger argument to donor countries about the need for aid.

"It's time for the international community to commit to more coordinated burden and responsibility sharing through more sustainable support that goes beyond humanitarian relief. Developmental aid should aim to enhance the self-reliance and long-term resilience of refugees while helping host countries improve their infrastructure and economies," Kass-Hanna states.

Adds Lyons, "Our work provides concrete policy recommendations to the G20, helping them make a stronger case from the perspective of donors that they do need these dollars. It helps clarify how the G20 countries can play a role in bridging the disconnect between the humanitarian short-term need efforts and the development longer-term needs efforts, and how they can provide funding and support to coordinate these approaches."

The paper, "A Multidimensional Approach to Measuring Vulnerability

to Poverty of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon," is available online at the Economic Research Forum.

More information: Angela Lyons et al, A Multidimensional Approach to Measuring Vulnerability to Poverty of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2021). [DOI: 10.2139/ssrn.3787795](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3787795)

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