The Lebanese situation is therefore not a ‘classic’ refugee crisis, but rather a hybrid situation that is to some extent closer to an internal displacement context, despite significant legal constraints on Syrians in terms of residency and work. A donor representative explained:

I have an example of a family who lived in a building in Tripoli, with an elderly person who hadn’t gone out since arriving in Lebanon and probably didn’t have the [physical ability to do so]. It was a building with flights of stairs, probably no facilities in...
the bathroom, nothing, and this person had no wheelchair. Those people become a bit transparent, but there are contextual and structural difficulties: locating people, managing to follow [up on] them.

In a country where the wounds of past wars are still healing, refugees from Syria have been welcomed with compassion. Over time, however, the psychological trauma of the war is being forgotten. With their relatives at home still in danger and prospects for the future in ruins, Syrians have to live with the stigma of being refugees and the shame of being dependent on aid. These traumas are rarely spoken about openly, making them difficult to identify and address. Aid interventions need to integrate more localised decision-making with the affected population, particularly with young people, who have been violently propelled into adult life, carrying a heavy load supporting their families but unable to get on with their lives, get married and start a family of their own.

From stability to longer-term development?

Seven years after the Syrian crisis began, and with no resolution in sight, its impact on Lebanon continues to grow. It is very unlikely that every refugee from Syria will be able to return home, at least in the near future. While the aid response has helped to establish a degree of stability in the here and now, the question remains how the transition can be made to longer-term development. If stability is not to become stagnation, future aid programmes will need to adopt a political vision of society, embracing the specific dynamics of this context and aiming for social transformation. Refugees may be at the centre of current debates and of the aid response, but they continue to be excluded from decisions that will have an impact on their lives. They, along with other vulnerable people in Lebanon, will need to be given a voice.

- Nawal Karroum, Groupe URD

This write-up is based on a case study conducted for the SOHS 2018 by Groupe URD. The full case study can be found at:

sohs.alnap.org

Adam Patterson/ DFID