



Little Faith in Lebanese Parliamentary Elections amidst Unbearable Socio-economic Conditions

REFUGEE PROTECTION WATCH

Since 2019, the Refugee Protection Watch (RPW) coalition has conducted research and advocacy efforts on the socio-economic conditions and protection risks facing refugees as well as host communities in Lebanon. RPW consists of four NGOs (Basmeh & Zeitooneh, ALEF, PAX, 11.11.11), and a social enterprise (Upinion) that complement each other in terms of focus and expertise, and share values and a common goal: to achieve durable solutions for people affected by the Syrian Crisis, so both host communities and refugees.

Lebanese parliamentary elections will take place on 15 May, at a time of unprecedented financial and economic hardship and an ever increasing climate of hate speech and scapegoating of Syrian refugees¹. The desperation of the people living - and trying to make ends meet - on Lebanese soil is demonstrated by the fact that since 2020, nearly 40 boats have departed from Lebanese shores in an attempt to reach access to rights, safety, and livelihoods in Europe. People have more often than not lost their lives on these dangerous trips. A month ago, at least six people drowned after their ship was stopped by the Lebanese military before it reached international waters.²

Against this backdrop, RPW conducted an online conversation with its community of respondents. In this conversation, it captured the perceptions, expectations, and fears of 289 individuals, of which at least 100 are Lebanese nationals, and 181 Syrians residing in Lebanon³. The male-female ratio of the panel is 9:5. This document contains a summary of the main findings per thematic.

¹<https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1298862/social-affairs-minister-criticizes-consequences-of-lebanon-hosting-syrian-refugees-as-international-conference-begins.html>

²<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/25/lebanon-boat-survivors-wait-for-news-of-missing-loved-ones>

³ The remaining 8 respondents have not disclosed their nationality.



Elections: Little Hope on the Horizon

The **majority of both groups (69% of Lebanese and 50% of Syrian respondents)** indicated that they think **nothing will change after the parliamentary elections in terms of services and infrastructure** that fall under government responsibility. 14% of Lebanese and 20% of Syrian respondents even think that **'things will get worse'**.

"[Things will only get worse] because every person who gets into the parliament or ministerial council begins to search for money and bribes and forgets the poor people who elected them, and none of them seeks to improve the situation of the country, rather they seek positions and money" Lebanese woman, aged between 36 -45 years old

Relations between host and refugee communities

A plurality of Syrian respondents (41%) expect that the **tension** (e.g. the rise of violence, crime, and xenophobia) **between host and refugee communities will increase**. A plurality of Lebanese respondents (32%) expect that things will remain as they are, but almost equal percentages think that tensions will increase or they simply 'don't know'. **Less than 2% of overall respondents expect tensions to decrease**.

Lebanese respondents were asked what they 'believe the government's policy on refugees from Syria should be and why?'. **37%** of respondents indicated: **"The return of all Syrian refugees to their homes"** (some mentioned a 'dignified return'). **23%** demanded to **"treat Lebanese as Syrians and provide them with aid"**.⁴

33% of Syrian respondents indeed think that 'the parliamentary elections will affect their current situation'. **35%** of this group explain in an open-ended question that they **fear new parliament members will vote for their (forced) return**. Also, **27%** think that **the economic situation will worsen**, which will affect their situation in Lebanon in terms of livelihood.

"We do not know how MPs will deal with us, nor whether they will enact new regulations such as deportation and not hiring Syrians." Syrian man, aged between 36-45 years old

"Some candidates may take advantage of the refugee issue, as it is a cause of the current economic situation, and that refugees are draining the country's resources." Syrian woman, aged between 26-35 years old

Socio-economic Deterioration

A remarkably low 3% of the Lebanese respondents currently have a regular job, and none of the Syrians. The majority of the sample (58% of Lebanese and 64% of Syrian respondents) are **unemployed** - but do want to work. This percentage is even **73% among all female respondents**.

⁴ The remaining respondents indicated they do not know, don't care, and/or provided invalid answers.



The main reasons provided for the unemployment are:

- Lack of available jobs, and no one is currently hiring.
- There is discrimination, and most employers prefer to employ Lebanese nationals.
- The wages are too low, and the cost to get to work is even higher than the actual pay.
- Disabilities prevent people from finding jobs that they are able to perform.

"I am trying to find a job, but the transportation cost is more than the money that the employer will give me, and because I am Syrian, it is difficult because many people do not want to work with Syrians." Syrian woman, aged between 26 - 35 years

Nearly three-quarters (73%) of those who do (irregular) work stated that **the salary is no longer sufficient to make ends meet**, as its value has decreased and prices soared.

Basic Needs

When asked about the ability to 'ensure basic needs on a daily basis', a shockingly high **76% of Lebanese and 70% of Syrian respondents answered opposingly**: they are not able to guarantee their basic needs. At the same time, **a plurality of both groups (51% of Lebanese and 40% of Syrian respondents) indicated they "did ask for help but did not receive it [since November 2021]"**. A quarter of both respondent groups did receive help once [since November 2021]. Lebanese more often did not ask for help (18%) than Syrian respondents (3%).

Electricity Shortages

The lack of electricity has affected all aspects of life of our respondents. **41% of respondents reported that their education efforts were severely thwarted**. The lack of electricity also had a negative impact on at least **39% of our respondents' mental health and ability to care for their children's well-being**. Finally, necessary daily chores (among which safely storing food) and work were the main things negatively affected by the power outages for at least 27% of the respondents. Some people also **rely on electricity for life-supporting gadgets**.

"My children sleep frightened because of the darkness and the power outages. We do not have alternative lights. We wait for the electricity to be able to charge phones or wash some clothes. Life in Lebanon has become very difficult." Syrian woman, aged between 26 - 35 years old

"Yes, it affected me a lot. I am a university student. I really need the internet and electricity. I failed the previous semester because of the lack of internet, in addition to the very high costs. A highly unbearable situation" Syrian man, aged between 26 - 35 years old



Bleak Outlook

When Lebanese respondents were asked about concrete plans for leaving Lebanon in the coming six months, more than half **(55%) indicated that they want to leave, but don't know yet how**. Only **17% of respondents - less than one-fifth - answered that they plan to stay in Lebanon** in the coming six months. These findings demonstrate the reality that it is increasingly hard for people to imagine a future in Lebanon, under the current deteriorating conditions.

The same question was posed to Syrian respondents. A strong majority **(70%) are planning to leave for a third country but have no plan to do so**. Only six people want to leave and have a concrete plan for it, while **only two people said that they are planning to go back to Syria**. These findings are reflective of the increasing difficulty to secure visas and other travel arrangements for Syrian refugees and their perception of being stuck in a hopeless situation in Lebanon.

Lingering Lack of Legal Protection

Two-thirds of Syrians (66%) didn't manage to renew their residency (legal status) since COVID-19 restrictions have eased. Reasons vary between the (known, but dragging) inability to get a sponsor (kafl) for many, having entered Lebanon illegally, lost or damaged Syrian ID cards or documents, and the lack of money to pay for fines to rectify previous unlawful presence.

"We do not have enough money to settle our situation and renew the residency. The money is not enough to pay the rent or even afford basic food items," Syrian woman, aged between 26 -35 years

"The residency renewal used to be through the UN, but the Lebanese government's decisions prevented me from renewing the residency and transferring me to obtain residency through a sponsor, and I don't have a sponsor or the money." Syrian man, aged between 36- 45



The Refugee Protection Watch (RPW) Coalition is an initiative between Basmeh and Zeitooneh, ALEF Act for Human Rights, PAX, 11.11.11 and Upinion.

