Lost:

Syrian Refugees and the Information Gap

Internews

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Photos by Nicole Tung, for Internews

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Almost three years into the conflict in Syria, one fundamental humanitarian challenge remains largely unaddressed: the need to reach refugees with the regular, timely, accurate and actionable information they need to survive, protect their families and make decisions affecting their future.

INTRODUCTION

In humanitarian disasters, people affected by the unfolding tragedy need more than the physical necessities of life: they also have an urgent need for information. In the wake of civil war, survival can depend on knowing the answers to questions such as: What is the extent of the damage? Should I stay with my family or cross the border? Where can I get clean water? Is it safe to go back home? In these desperate circumstances, rumors and misinformation spread rapidly, compounding confusion, stress and vulnerability. Independent reliable information enables people in the midst of crisis to take an active role in their own survival and recovery.

"Giving vulnerable people the right information at the right time is a form of empowerment," writes Jonathan Walter, Editor of the 2005 World Disasters Report. "It enables people to make the decisions most appropriate for themselves and their families and can mean the difference between being a victim or a survivor."

SUMMARY

As the Levant braces for what is forecast to be a bitter winter, and with no end in sight to the conflict in Syria, Internews research amongst refugees in camps and urban locations in Lebanon reveals high levels of frustration and confusion amongst refugees about where to turn for help. Many of them are too afraid even to register with UNHCR for fear that their personal details will leak back to the Assad regime. Many more talk of feeling "lost" in a world of rumour and disinformation

UNHCR in August 2013 recognized the fact that "the growing number and needs of the refugees, as well as the serious pressures they are placing on host communities, now require UNHCR and its partners to complement their emergency response activities with comprehensive and proactive strategies that focus on more extensive and effective outreach to out-of-camp refugees."

Yet there is so far little evidence of any comprehensive strategy or investment in such

"Poor information flows between aid workers and refugees is a real challenge. We need to invest in strategies that can help refugees make their own decisions and become agents in their own survival."

BOB KITCHEN, DIRECTOR OF IRC EMERGENCY RESPONSE

outreach. Various agencies are employing piecemeal tactics to communication through counseling lines, SMS and face-to-face outreach, yet all of these have their limitations. Furthermore it is clear from Internews research presented here that all current outreach tactics are fundamentally undermined by a profound lack of trust and/or understanding on the part of the refugees about what they are being told, and by whom.

Humanitarians interviewed in the course of compiling this report say that the huge surge of refugees over the last six months has brought the regional aid operation to a turning point. The International Refugee Committee (IRC) has the largest relief operation in the region, spanning Syria and all four surrounding countries.

Bob Kitchen, Director of IRC Emergency Response acknowledges that: "Poor information flows between aid workers and refugees is a real challenge. We need to invest in strategies that can help refugees make their own decisions and become agents in their own survival."

Perhaps the most significant challenge will be how to win the trust of a population in which mistrust of media and officialdom in general has become so deeply rooted over decades of living under the Assad regime. Syria has a long history as one of the most media-oppressed countries in the world (Reporters Without Borders' Press Freedom Index ranks Syria 176 out of 180 countries) and large swathes of the people, particularly those in rural

areas, have long distrusted the Ba'athist dominated press, radio and TV. Even though internet activists are a key part of the struggle against the regime, a long history of internet censorship means that there isn't a deeply ingrained culture of internet use. In the rural communities from which many of these refugees come, people remain suspicious of these mediums, especially after rumors indicating that the government was tracking IP addresses and arresting activists.

Fear of the Syrian security apparatus is likewise deeply embedded in these populations – many of them have family and friends still left behind and many of those are fighters. Refugees fear that by handing over their personal data to UNHCR, they will endanger themselves, and potentially their family back in Syria. "I was afraid there, why would I not be afraid here?" said one. "Hezbollah monitors everything." The sad truth is that this is not an altogether unrealistic assumption: it's no secret that Hezbollah operatives are active inside Syria on the side of the Assad government regime. A UN official later confirmed that while they did not give beneficiaries' private information to the Lebanese authorities, if they were asked to, she would have to comply.

Many of the refugees in Lebanon are illiterate, poorly educated and unsophisticated in their understanding of the situation in which they find themselves. Aid providers should not assume that providing information about humanitarian services is enough to address the situation. The

Fatima Kharwutli, sitting next to her father, displays damaged family documents that were saved in a fire that broke out in their apartment last week in the Shatila camp of Beirut, Lebanon, on Monday, February 11, 2013. The Kharwutli family are Syrians from Idlib province but fled the violence for Lebanon.

high prevalence of mistrust calls for strategies designed to not only to provide refugees with information about humanitarian services, but also a consistent stream of "information about information," very simple messages or stories in which aid providers seek to establish a shared understanding with the refugees about the fact that much confusion, misinformation and rumour exists and offering them some basic reassurances about the mandates and "trustability" of UNHCR and other agencies.

The findings outlined here pose both unique challenges and opportunities for programs seeking to provide humanitarian information to Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

There is a strong case for urgent coordination between humanitarian agencies working inside Syria and in the surrounding countries to design beneficiary communication strategies that:

1. are based on an understanding of the ways in which refugees currently uptake and exchange information;

2. tackle the issues of widespread mistrust, and

3. seek to infuse current cross-border information flows with a consistent stream of reliable and actionable humanitarian information.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Refugees describe themselves as "lost":

Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in an atmosphere of rumors, half-truths and misinformation that is hampering their access to aid services, undermining their ability to fend for themselves and compounding vulnerability with confusion and frustration. Post-Distribution Monitoring (PDM) reports by INGOs highlight that families are confused with regard to what they are entitled to receive during distribution and therefore didn't receive what they expected.

2. Lack of information is both chronic and acute:

Almost without exception, refugees testified to lacking reliable information about where and how to find assistance with the basics of day-to-day living. This unmet need was consistently described by people in all five locations from a wide variety of demographics and backgrounds as being both chronic (i.e. part of people's experience inside Syria and persisting through their entire journey) and acute (i.e. a source of daily stress and frustration in the host country).

3. Humanitarian communication efforts are patchy, small scale, uncoordinated:

Whilst there is a growing recognition in the humanitarian community for the need for outreach, efforts by humanitarian organizations to exchange information with refugees, or to put in place effective mechanisms for communicating with their beneficiaries have so far been patchy, small scale and not strategically coordinated.

4. Issues of trust are a fundamental barrier to engaging refugees:

Trust is a fundamental factor affecting refugees' access to reliable information and will continue to have significant implications both for traditional delivery of aid and for specific programs seeking to deliver humanitarian information.

a) Overwhelming reliance on word-of-mouth: A significant majority cite other people/ friends/family as main sources of trusted information. This fact clearly highlights the vital importance of understanding and engaging with the local information ecosystem inside Syria as a way to positively influence the accuracy and quality of the information transmitted via word-of-mouth.

b) Syrian and Lebanese media and humanitarian and other "official" sources are not trusted: Refugees do not trust Syrian and Lebanese media as they are perceived to be politicized and polarized. Similarly, humanitarian workers and local government official rank at the bottom in terms of trust.

c) Mistrust of UNHCR registration system alienates refugees from the humanitarian community: Large numbers of refugees cite lack of trust as the main reason they do not register with UNHCR in the first place: they fear their personal information may not remain confidential. This mistrust and the resulting failure to register has

immediate and potentially life-threatening repercussions, isolating large numbers of refugees at the outset from potential primary sources of humanitarian information as well as humanitarian assistance.

5. Refugees rely on SMS and WhatsApp:

Reliance on word-of-mouth as a primary source of information for most refugees has extended to significant reliance on mobile phone and SMS (Whatsapp for those with enabled phones who can afford data bundles) as the main channels of information flow both inside Lebanon and cross-border.

Phone charges in Lebanon are prohibitive for many refugees. Despite the existence of some SMS systems to inform refugees about the date, time and location of different distributions, relief workers note that a significant portion of the targeted populations still don't show up to collect the assistance due to problems with the SMS system. Post-distribution surveys indicate that these problems range from not receiving the SMS, being texted on the wrong phone number, lack of mobile phone coverage in the area they live, or not being informed by the owner of the telephone number (i.e. Syrian families often do not have a telephone number when they arrive to Lebanon and they provide outreach workers with telephone numbers of friends or neighbors who then inform them of the SMS when the distribution is already over, or do not inform them).

6. Reliable local media sources are absent:

There is a significant absence of radio usage and overall lack of access to and interest in local media. Satellite TV is cited as the main media source for news and entertainment however neither of the most trusted channels cited by refugees (Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya) carry the local information they need.

7. Refugees are misled from the point of departure:

Many interviewees spoke of the climate of rumour and misinformation that exists inside Syria, giving concrete examples of how they had been misled. Some even suggested they would not have left Syria if they had fully understood the situation in Lebanon. This climate is both caused by, and a result of, mistrust of news sources, and over-reliance on word of mouth and personal networks.

8. Refugees' information priorities are news about home and work:

Refugees cite "news from home" as their primary information need, and yet express indifference to "political news," preferring instead to talk about daily life issues with their communities in Syria. Their second expressed priority information need is "information about how to get work" rather than "information about how to get aid." These priorities appear to be consistent with a population reluctant to register, reluctant to engage with aid providers, keeping up close daily links with home and maintaining expectations of being able to provide for themselves in the host country.

A Syrian woman from Kafr Zeitoun describes how the conflict in her country has destroyed her family's livelihood, claiming that people loyal to the government have also moved in to her house near the Lebanese border.

9. Refugees do not have contact with officials and aid-agencies:

Most of those interviewed, who were unregistered, indicated that they do not talk to government officials or aid providers, and that nobody contacts them directly except the press. The more highly educated and wealthy populations reported that they are able to contact both government officials and aid providers, but never do because they believe there would be no benefit in doing so. The conclusion is that the poor communities do not understand their right to request an audience with officials.

10. Refugees have deep uncertainty about where to go next:

Regarding the future, 50% of respondents want to stay in Lebanon, either because they will wait until the situation improves at home, or because they don't know where to go from Lebanon, or because they don't have the means to leave. When asked where they would go 17% said they don't know and 75% said they wanted to move permanently to other location/countries. Countries mentioned: Turkey (Istanbul), Germany, Sweden, USA and few mentioned EU.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) International and regional governments, humanitarian agencies and funders must place an urgent and public priority on the provision of information to Syrian refugees and the opening of two-way channels of communication with displaced populations as a form of aid in itself and as a strategic tool for improving the delivery of humanitarian aid.

"People need information as much as water, food, medicine or shelter. Information can save lives, livelihoods and resources … And yet it is very much neglected. Aid organizations have focused on gathering information for their own needs and not enough on exchanging information with the people they aim to support."
— 2005 World Disasters Report, IFRC

Eight years after the case was so clearly made by the world's largest relief organization, that "information is also a vital form of aid in itself," it is tragic to hear Syria's refugees say that they find themselves lost in a world of rumor and misinformation, without wide-scale access to independent, reliable sources of actionable information to help them make decisions about their daily lives. It is equally disturbing to hear from relief workers that the lack of early attention to or investment in comprehensive strategies to communicate with the Syrian refugee population is now challenging the effectiveness of humanitarian work on the ground.

In a complex emergency such as this, in which the politicization and polarization of media and information sources is a factor contributing to the conflict, many humanitarian actors are only too well aware of the sensitivities and potential pitfalls of information management and dissemination in the region. However, this is not a reason to shy away from bold initiatives that have the potential to fill information voids and mitigate the harmful effects of rumour and propaganda. Piecemeal approaches can exacerbate the problem with information inequity (inconsistent flow, content and reach of information). Humanitarian Communication in the Syria context now urgently requires the same level of attention, investment and expertise as programming in the other humanitarian sectors.

2) Donors and policymakers must provide dedicated resources and support to information aid.

Donor governments and policymakers must not only recognize and advocate for "information as aid," but must provide dedicated funding for humanitarian actors to include coherent, coordinated plans to provide information to and communication with refugees and host communities as core components within their current emergency response and winterization and resilience strategies.

As part of the above, donors must make provision for adequate assessment of local information ecologies in order to understand the information and communication needs of populations in different locations, what channels of communications/media they have access to, and which of those they trust.

Funding provision should also be made for adequate

monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian communications programming so that funders may be assured of the cost-effectiveness of these interventions and begin to mainstream them into humanitarian funding programs.

In the longer run, donor institutions must increase their level of understanding, sophistication and expertise on issues related to communication with local communities.

3) Effective humanitarian communication requires strategic leadership and agency coordination

UNHCR, as leading agency in the refugee response, must take a leadership role in acting on its statement of August 2013: "the growing number and needs of the refugees, as well as the serious pressures they are placing on host communities, now require UNHCR and its partners to complement their emergency response activities with comprehensive and proactive strategies that focus on: more extensive and effective outreach to out-of-camp refugees."

UNHCR should lead the engagement and coordination of key humanitarian partners in the design, roll-out, implementation and monitoring of a multi-sectoral communications strategy for Syrian refugees and host communities. Such leadership requires dedicated human resources to set up and chair a nimble coordination group to coordinate the range of activities that will be required, and should include the expertise of media development

MISTRTUST LEADS TO A LACK OF INFORMATION

There are 13 distribution centers around Beirut alone – in the entire country there are nearly 90. The reluctance of many refugees to register with the UN system has immediate and potentially life threatening repercussions. Not only are they on their own in sourcing basic provisions for survival, but they complain of a crippling lack of information in general. Their most immediate need is for information on everyday life: shelter, food, water, doctors for their children and information about schooling.

organizations and other agencies specialized in Humanitarian Communications.

Assessment will be a vital first phase of action. UNHCR should speedily initiate a multi-sectoral assessment to gain a clear overview of the current patchwork of information and communication initiatives. Suitable expertise needs to be drafted in from agencies qualified to do information needs assessments amongst refugee populations and media/information landscape research.

Any resulting strategy cannot be limited to conventional messaging tactics: it needs to be multi-platform and multi-channel, and include low-tech (e.g. community mobilisers, town hall events, and information posts), high-tech (e.g. SMS, hotlines, humanitarian news sites), plus local media partnerships and capacity-building as appropriate.

It is vital that communication and information

A view of a street in the Palestinian camp of Shatila in Beirut, Lebanon, on Monday, February 11, 2013. In recent months, spillover from the Syrian war has caused Shatila to absorb thousands of people fleeing the violence.

programming efforts are coordinated also with humanitarian agencies working inside Syria, that have access to displaced and conflict-affected populations. Despite the enormous challenges in doing so, providing people with reliable and useful information before they leave their homes or make decisions to cross the border will greatly offset the confusion that refugees experience when they cross the border.

4) Host Communities require and deserve parallel plans for communication and information exchange

Lebanese host communities have been placed under enormous social and economic stress that is already manifesting in resentment and hostility towards refugees and carries the potential for more significant national destabilization. Host communities have very specific information needs and concerns. They access, consume and share information in different ways and through different channels than refugees, such as local media and the Internet. It is critical to assess host country information and communication needs and create a parallel strategy to address them that will include working with Lebanese mainstream media. As one humanitarian worker put it, "it has to be a community-centered approach, not a refugee-only strategy." This strategy should include information that addresses security, stability, access to social services and social cohesion within host communities, provides them with information that they can share with refugees, and that has the potential to mitigate conflict.

5) Multiple "Toolbox" options must be tested and rolled out. Tools may include:

- Reception centers on the border, registration centers and other key, more central locations across the country must effectively become information hubs for refugees and host communities. Medical facilities, main transportation lines (i.e. buses and bus stops), schools, food distribution points and shops to redeem food vouchers and e-cards (i.e. electronic food vouchers) can become one-stop-shops where people can access useful news and information about services and events in their area and provide feedback through face-to-face meetings with aid workers or suggestions boxes.

- Non-registered Syrian and Syrians of Palestinian origin deserve special consideration as this report documented many cases of refugees unwilling to register and/or caught up in conflicting information between UNHCR and UNRWA.

- Welcome cards to be provided at all possible access points, containing basic details about refugees' new situation and status, registration locations, the services that may be available to them, including contact details of organizations and other relevant useful information that can guide them in their new environment.

- "Information stewards" (i.e. community mobilizers, social workers) should be deployed at reception points, registration centers and other key locations of concern to address critical information needs of refugees as they enter the country or congregate in their host communities. Stewards are responsible for disseminating actionable and useful information, addressing refugees' questions, and, importantly, listening to their feedback and complaints. These must be systematically captured, taken back to relevant coordination bodies and incorporated as far as possible into programming and evaluation.

  Adequate training, briefing, resourcing and support for these information stewards is paramount as they are the face of the humanitarian community and therefore tasked with the critical role of dealing with "customer services" which can sometimes entail threats to their physical security. As one humanitarian worker put it, "We get the angry faces in the field. People make us responsible for decisions that we don't even know what the process is or have the answers for."

- A humanitarian multi-media news and information service for Syrian refugees and host communities could provide relevant local information for

communities across the country that can be disseminated on a variety of platforms; SMS, online, print. An initiative of this nature will require partnerships between humanitarian organizations and specialized media development agencies.

- SMS news service: Depending on the scale of the demands for information, a free SMS service could be set up to send timely and well-targeted information and/ or emergency announcements to lists of subscribers. Such services are scalable and can be either mass distribution or relatively targeted. Free SIM card distribution can be one tactic to get refugees onto distribution lists. Multiple options exist for the design and rollout of these services. Collaboration between humanitarians, IT specialists and Telecoms is required for efficiency and wide-scale impact.

- TV screen and information boards can be set up reception centers and key safe locations with content loops and visuals and snippets of relevant information, regularly updated as required to help reinforce the information, particularly for those with low literacy levels, the elderly and disabled.

- Free telephone hotlines/call in center: Despite the fact that there are several existing hotlines, the cost of calls is a significant barrier to refugees. Free telephone hotlines can be provided to manage questions, feedback and concerns by refugees and host communities. Again, adequate training, briefing, resourcing and support are paramount for smooth operation of such hotlines.

- Town hall and community events: Entertaining community events are an effective vehicle for dissemination of humanitarian information: singing, dancing, and theatre can all be part of community information services.

- Free internet roving cafes: Internet is listed as one of the three main sources of information Syrian refugees used before coming to the camp. Considering the significant number of young refugees, simple container-housed Internet cafes can be a viable option in key locations.

- Suggestion boxes: The biggest drawback of suggestion boxes is that they can tend to become one-way dead ends for refugees contributions. Suggestion boxes need to come with their own outreach. People need to understand what they are for. Boxes need to be monitored and some sort of feedback loop is needed to inform users what action is being taken as a result of suggestions received.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION: SNAPSHOT

Mobile Phones:

Most Syrian refugees reported having a cell phone. While not all had the capability to make immediate calls, many reported paying for data in order to use applications such as Whatsapp. With a Lebanese SIM card, it is possible to either pay to charge the SIM card in order to make calls, or pay out money to purchase "days" to extend the validation period of the SIM. One month of validation costs only 12000 LL ($8), while that amount of money is equal to or less than eight minutes of total talking time to Syria and 22 minutes of talking inside Lebanon. Many refugees opted to pay for days so that they could have a working line.

- Only 14% of interviewees did not have cess to a mobile phone

- 40% of those who have access to a cell phone own a smartphone

- 14% of those who have access to a cell phone could not make calls at the time of interview due to lack of credit.

- Main use of mobile phones is calling and receiving phone calls, sending and receiving SMS; few take photos and browse social media.

- Whatsapp is extremely popular as a method of communication among all classes of refugees.

- In general, those with higher education preferred SMS, while direct calls are preferred in the less educated populations.

- 66% of people interviewed stated it would be extremely useful to receive aid information on their mobile phones.

COSTS:

1 min = 36 American cents

1 local SMS = 9 cents
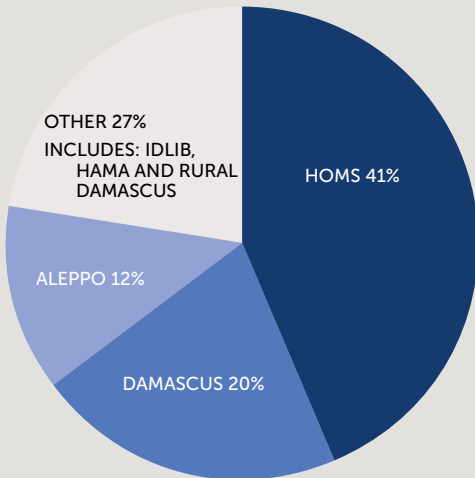
1 international SMS = 18 cents

1 local MMS = 36 cents

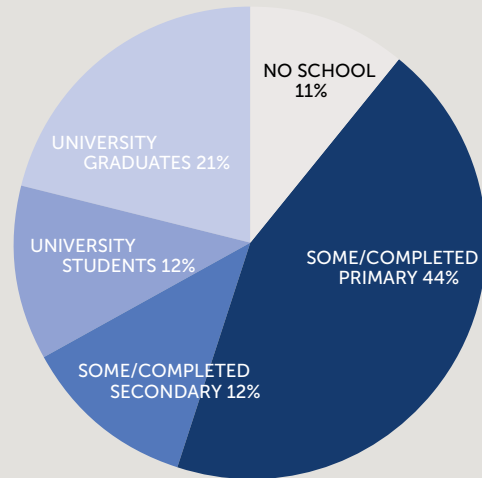1 MB = 50 cents (without package)

Whatsapp:

The mobile application for smartphones, Whatsapp, is a major channel for communication among Syrian refugees. Whatsapp has a comparative advantage of allowing its users to exchange instant messages at a significantly lower marginal cost than other mobile-based text messaging services. In addition to low cost, Whatsapp messages are difficult to track thus considered a secured platform of communication among a large bunch of Syrian refugees. As a result, Syrian activists and refugees rely heavily on Whatsapp for coordination and planning for meetings away from government's surveillance software.
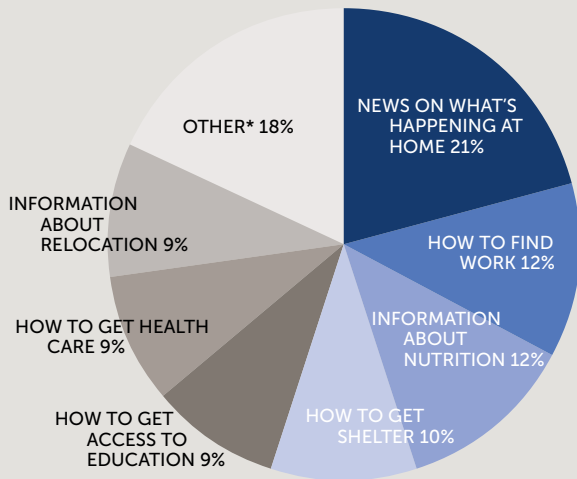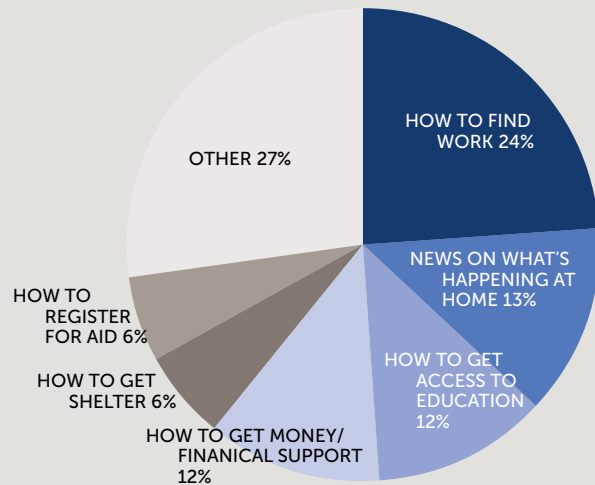
RESPONDENTS' CITY OF ORIGIN

HOMS 41%

OTHER 27%
INCLUDES: IDLIB, HAMA AND RURAL DAMASCUS

ALEPPO 12%

DAMASCUS 20%

RESPONDENTS' LEVEL OF EDUCATION

NO SCHOOL 11%

UNIVERSITY GRADUATES 21%

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS 12%

SOME/COMPLETED PRIMARY 44%

SOME/COMPLETED SECONDARY 12%

INFORMATION NEEDED: MAIN PRIORITIES

NEWS ON WHAT'S HAPPENING AT HOME 21%

OTHER* 18%

INFORMATION ABOUT RELOCATION 9%

HOW TO GET HEALTH CARE 9%

HOW TO GET ACCESS TO EDUCATION 9%

HOW TO GET SHELTER 10%

INFORMATION ABOUT NUTRITION 12%

HOW TO FIND WORK 12%

*OTHER INCLUDES: HOW TO REGISTER FOR AID, THE SECURITY SITUATION HERE, SECURITY DEVELOPMENTS BACK IN SYRIA, HOW TO GET FOOD, AND GENERAL NEWS ON LEBANON.

INFORMATION NEEDED: SECONDARY PRIORITIES

HOW TO FIND WORK 24%

OTHER 27%

HOW TO REGISTER FOR AID 6%

HOW TO GET SHELTER 6%

HOW TO GET MONEY/ FINANICAL SUPPORT 12%

NEWS ON WHAT'S HAPPENING AT HOME 13%

HOW TO GET ACCESS TO EDUCATION 12%

Internet:

50% of interviewees reported having access to Internet, though many complained of slow and expensive access. Of those with access:
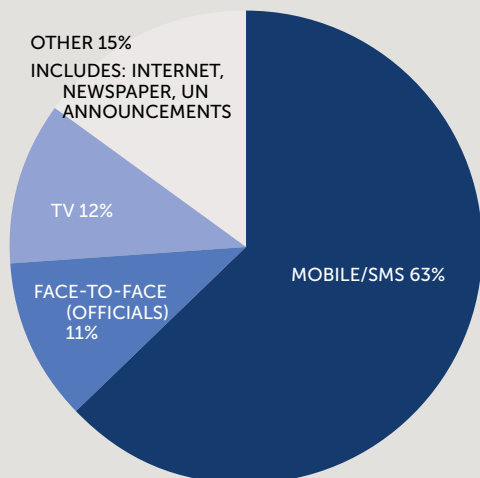
- 80% can access Internet daily and anytime, primarily at home or via a personal mobile phone.

- 18% have increased/improved their access to Internet in Lebanon.

- 27% use social media as a means of

obtaining information, via the primary channels of Facebook, Twitter, and Skype.
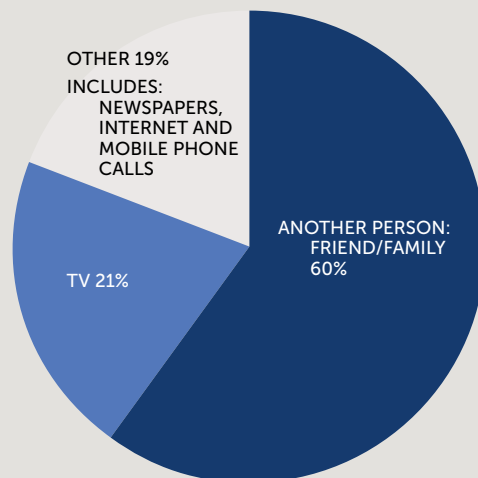
Television:

For coverage inside Syria, news channels such as Al Arabiya and Al Jazeera rely mainly on videos that activists upload on YouTube. Those videos, mostly filmed using camera-phone, are usually of low resolution, which makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the actual situation in Syria and are generally deemed to be unreliable sources of information. In addition, the political ties of some powerful news channels led Syrian

OTHER 15%
INCLUDES: INTERNET, NEWSPAPER, UN ANNOUNCEMENTS

TV 12%

FACE-TO-FACE (OFFICIALS) 11%

MOBILE/SMS 63%

OTHER 19%
INCLUDES: NEWSPAPERS, INTERNET AND MOBILE PHONE CALLS

TV 21%

ANOTHER PERSON: FRIEND/FAMILY 60%

refugees to question their credibility and to a large extent abandon those channels that are commonly accused of advancing their own political agendas.

- 22% of respondents don't have access to a working TV

- Half of those (11%) said they choose not to watch TV

- Main location for watching TV was in the home, camp or a settlement.

Newspapers:

Hardly any Syrian respondents use newspapers for information. Only 10% of respondents read newspapers at all. This is hardly surprising considering the politicization of both the Syrian and Lebanese press. Most popular daily newspapers published in Syria are state-owned, so Syrian refugees distrust the information that newspapers provide. Other newspapers that are not directly state-owned still typically carry some Ba'athist political alignment. Lebanese newspapers such as Al Akhbar, Al-Waseet, Al-Nahar, Al-Hayat, among others, are accessible to Syrian refugees. However, a lot of Lebanese newspapers are perceived as pro-Hezbollah.

Radio:

The long history of the suppression of media and the control of radio stations have led Syrian refugees to distrust the content broadcast. Radio use is not prevalent among Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon. The majority of radio stations in Syria are government-controlled; therefore, Syrian refugees hardly listen to radio because they expect to hear government propaganda. UNESCO has sponsored the creation of a new station to provide useful information to help Syrian refugees, and there are a number of new internet radio initiatives looking to broadcast in FM in the region, but most refugees appear unaware of these stations. Only 34% of those refugees surveyed in Lebanon have access to working radios, approximately and only 3/4 of those with access actually use it. People use the radio mainly to listen to music.

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON: BACKGROUND

By the end of 2014, the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon is slated to reach 1.6 million, or 37 percent of Lebanon's total population, according to World Bank estimates.

In its most recent assessment in September 2013, the World Bank reported that the influx of Syrian refugees is placing Lebanon's economy under tremendous pressure. It estimates that during the 2012-2014 period, the conflict may cut GDP growth by 2.9%, push nearly 170,000 Lebanese into poverty, and double the country's unemployment levels to 20%. The combination of lower revenue and higher expenditures (due to an increase in public services demand) will also widen Lebanon's fiscal deficit by a total of $2.6 billion, adding $57.billion to its total public debt, or 134% of its GDP in 2012.

Even before the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011, the Lebanese state struggled with a weak infrastructure and insufficient public services. The addition of over a million refugees is only exacerbating its current shortfalls. Electricity averages about 18 hours per day, public water services are limited to three days per week, and growing demand for health services will likely lead to a decrease in quality. In December 2012 alone, Syrian refugees accounted for 40 percent of primary health care visits. This surge in demand is only made worse by the lack of water and sanitation infrastructure, which has led to a resurgence of infectious diseases and the return of previously absent diseases.

The World Bank assessment cites a rise in social tensions between incoming Syrian refugees and the Lebanese population. The largest concentrations of refugees are hosted among the population in northern and eastern Lebanon, where poor, mostly farming communities already struggle to survive. While wealthier Syrians have settled in urban communities and suburbs outside of Beirut, this increased demand for housing is also driving up rents for everyone.

Regarding labor, Lebanese citizens complain that refugee laborers, who are willing to work for less, are threatening their livelihood. This is especially the case in the farming industry, where the average wage is LBP 20,000 ($13) per day, while incoming Syrian refugees are willing to charge only half of that. The World Bank estimates that the labor supply will increase by between 30 and 50 percent — mostly impacting women, young, and unskilled workers. With nearly one million Lebanese already living below the poverty line and weak social safety nets (SSN), the situation is projected to deteriorate.

Humanitarian assistance is also, to a degree, causing a rift between the Syrian refugees and local populations. As they arrive in Lebanon, refugees register their status with the UNHCR, which allows them to receive monthly food and hygiene kits, as well as, in rare cases, cash for rent. While this assistance is often seen as insufficient by refugees, it strains relations with locals who receive no such benefits.

RESEARCH METHODS

The fieldwork of the survey consisted of 10 days of research across various locations in Lebanon. Interviews were conducted at the following locations:

- Sabra & Shatila settlements (suburbs of Beirut)

- UN Registration Centers (Beirut & Tripoli)

- Tanak camp (Tripoli)

- Lian camp (Bekaa)

- Downtown Beirut Street.

Three ground researchers conducted interviews with more than 100 subjects on information usage and access inside Lebanon and Syria using a survey template created by the Internews Center for Innovation & Learning. Fieldwork took place between September 30 and October 10, 2013. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes.

The interviewees came from across Syria and were a mixture of various age groups, male and female, with a diversity of backgrounds – the educated, the elite, and people from rural communities who more often than not, could not read and write. The language spoken was predominantly Arabic, though about 10% had some working knowledge of English and less than 1% knew French.

- Respondents were 26% female/74% male.

- 56% were under 34yrs, 38% fell between 34-54yrs, and 6% were older than 54yrs

- 26% of the Syrian refugees interviewed had jobs or were currently working in Lebanon, while 74% did not

COMPANION REPORT

The research contained in this report was led and coordinated by award-winning foreign correspondent Janine di Giovanni.

Janine is a contributing editor to *Vanity Fair,* a contributing writer to the *New York Times, Granta, Newsweek* and many others. A member of the Council on Foreign Relations, she frequently lectures on human rights abuse around the world.

Her most recent writings on Syria include "7 days in Syria" published in *Granta.*

"Lost," a narrative account of her interviews with Syrian refugees in Lebanon accompanies this report, published on *Syria Deeply* and by Internews.

http://www.janinedigiovanni.com/biography.html.

ABOUT INTERNEWS

Internews is an international non-profit media development organization whose mission is to empower local media worldwide to give people the news and information they need, the ability to connect and the means to make their voices heard.

Formed in 1982, Internews has worked in more than 90 countries, and currently has offices in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and North America.

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