

# Missing Persons:

Refugees Left Out and Left  
Behind in the Sustainable  
Development Goals



**Rescue.org** 

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## Acknowledgements

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# Definitions

**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The 17 SDGs broadly state the objectives which all 193 UN Member States have agreed to work towards to achieve “a better and more sustainable future for all.” (See Appendix 1 for details.)

**SDG target:** For each SDG, there are multiple targets, which are more specific, measurable objectives. There are 169 targets in total. Progress toward these targets is used to assess progress toward each goal.

**SDG indicator:** For each SDG target there are multiple measurement indicators, which are used together to assess progress toward each target. There are 232 indicators in total.

**Leave No One Behind (LNOB) commitment:** As part of the 2030 Agenda, Member States pledged that the SDGs would be met for all nations and people and for all segments of society, and that they would endeavor to reach the furthest behind first.

**Voluntary National Review (VNR):** Countries assess their own progress toward the goals, indicators, and targets and present the results as a Voluntary National Review (VNR) at an annual UN forum. These VNRs are used to define each country's priorities to implement the SDGs. Participation is optional; some governments have already presented twice since the first VNRs in 2016, while others have never presented a VNR. Increasingly, cities are also presenting their own VNRs.

**National Development Plan (NDP):** Countries define their funding priorities for development objectives on an annual or multi-annual basis. When adopting the SDGs, countries committed to integrate them into future development plans. However, there is no accepted, standard protocol to help states meet this commitment.

# Introduction

In 2015, the world came together to agree to a shared agenda for peace and prosperity, to end poverty, improve health and education, reduce inequalities, and drive economic growth. This agenda was centered on 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by all countries by 2030, coupled with a commitment to Leave No One Behind. Now—ten years out from the agenda's deadline—UN Member States will make their first high-level assessment of progress towards achieving the goals. The headline findings will be that countries are far off track to meeting the goals and immediate action is needed to course-correct.

Last year, in a report titled “SDG Progress: Fragility, Crisis and Leaving No One Behind”, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Overseas Development Institute (ODI) sounded the alarm about how far fragile states were falling behind—and the results were staggering: Four out of five fragile and conflict-affected states were found to be off track to meet the SDGs. Other sources confirm this. The SDG Index shows that the four countries lagging the furthest behind<sup>1</sup> are reeling from conflict and overlapping crises, including displacement crises.<sup>2</sup>

This year, the IRC has taken a closer look at refugees, given their concentration in fragile contexts and their particular vulnerabilities.

## Refugees left behind

There are 25.9 million refugees around the world and the vast majority of them have found refuge in poor and unstable countries, often ones that neighbor their country of origin. Twelve out of the fifteen countries hosting the highest share of refugees are fragile.<sup>3</sup> Global statistics show that refugees are worse off than their peers. Refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than their non-refugee peers, and just 23 percent of refugee adolescents attend secondary school compared with 84 percent globally.<sup>4</sup> Displacement can

be a driver of poorer outcomes. Whereas 15 percent of all Syrian marriages in Jordan included a child bride in 2014, that number soared to 36 percent in 2018.<sup>5</sup> Being a refugee can also mean facing increased barriers to self-reliance. The five economies with the most restrictions on women seeking employment include four of the top refugee hosting countries.<sup>6</sup>

Our analysis of refugees' progress towards the SDGs below these global headlines is highly concerning. In Lebanon, nearly 70 percent of Syrian refugees live below the national poverty line, compared to 26 percent of their Lebanese peers.<sup>7</sup> And in Ethiopia, just six percent of Eritrean children have reached reading fluency by grade 4, compared to 15 percent of Ethiopian children.<sup>8</sup> In Lebanon, nearly three times as many Syrian refugee households as Lebanese households are not able to meet their nutrition needs.<sup>9</sup>

## Refugees left out

But you will not find these statistics in any official SDG progress reports, where refugees are all but invisible. Of 42 countries that submitted 2019 Voluntary National Reviews—an optional self-assessment of national progress toward the goals—just 13 mentioned refugees as meriting specific attention. Not one single VNR includes data on refugees to measure their progress towards the SDGs.

Refugees' exclusion from VNRs is illustrative of what we call the “SDG refugee gap”. This gap is represented by a lack of data on refugee well-being, the exclusion of refugees from SDG monitoring frameworks and national reporting, and the failure to include refugees in national medium- and long-term development planning.

The great promise of the 2030 Agenda is that it represents a shared vision and commitment by all 193 UN Member States. But this conversation led by and between Member States misses a critical factor: it leaves out refugees and other forcibly displaced people, rendering these populations in dire need, neglected and ignored.



A young Syrian boy, age 5, in the Ghazze camp in eastern Lebanon. Photo credit: Tara Todras-Whitehill/IRC and Sesame 2017

### **But, it is not too late**

Two key events could make 2019 a watershed year for closing the SDG refugee gap. Heads of State will come together at an SDG Summit during the high-level segment of the UN General Assembly in New York in September. Their Declaration—a roadmap for the next decade of progress towards the SDGs—should define a clear path for how countries can include refugees in their SDG plans and measure progress. This Declaration must be followed immediately by action if the next decade is to be one of progress. One opportunity to do so is in December when global leaders assemble in Geneva for the inaugural Global Refugee Forum; there, they should make concrete pledges to refugee inclusion: inclusion in national education systems and in local economies; inclusion in national development plans; and inclusion in voluntary national reports on SDG progress, supported by efforts to align the targets and indicators that will measure progress against the Global Compact on Refugees with those used to measure progress for the SDGs.

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*The “SDG refugee gap” is represented by a lack of data on refugee well-being, the exclusion of refugees from SDG monitoring frameworks and national reporting, and the failure to include refugees in national development planning.*

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# Measuring Progress for Refugees: the SDG Refugee Gap

The exclusion of refugees and other crisis-affected populations from the SDGs begins with the goals, targets and indicators set by UN Member States. Across the 17 goals, 169 targets and 230 individual indicators, refugees, displaced people, and people affected by crisis are rarely, if ever, mentioned.<sup>10</sup> The household survey data that inform much SDG analysis also rarely include refugees. This means there is no clear guidance or incentive for countries to include these marginalized groups in their national development planning or in their national review of progress towards the SDGs. Although a small number of refugee-hosting countries, such as Uganda, Colombia and Ethiopia, have started to align their action plans to meet the longer-term needs of refugees with their national development plans, refugees are typically excluded from the actual plans.

IRC analysis of VNRs finds that:

- **Not one VNR included socioeconomic data on refugees to measure refugees' progress towards the SDGs.**
- **While 41 out of 42 countries that submitted VNRs in 2019 mentioned the Leave No One Behind commitment,<sup>11</sup> just 13 mentioned refugees as meriting specific attention.**
- **Among the 15 countries hosting the largest refugee populations that have submitted VNRs since 2016, 10 do not mention the needs of refugees.**

Table 1 shows which VNRs submitted by countries hosting more than 20,000 refugees have meaningfully mentioned refugees. Ultimately, simply mentioning refugees are being left behind is insufficient to measuring, monitoring and targeting this vulnerable population as part of efforts to achieve the SDGs.

The exclusion of refugees and people caught in crisis from structures built to focus efforts and monitor SDG progress is in part a reflection of the historical division between humanitarian and development approaches. Although the international community, spurred by the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and Grand Bargain, has tried to prioritize bridging the humanitarian-development nexus in protracted displacement contexts, refugee responses continue to largely be addressed with short-term approaches that are separate from and not necessarily coordinated with development plans. While donors and humanitarian agencies like UNHCR broadly support the SDGs, they have been reluctant to align their systems with the Goals. For instance, draft indicators developed by UNHCR to measure progress against the recently adopted Global Refugee Compact barely align with the SDGs. At European Union level, despite commitments to policy coherence for development,<sup>12</sup> there remains insufficient alignment between the EU's various external policies, with development, security, migration sometimes pulling in different directions. As a first step to change this, the EU should adopt the SDGs as the guiding principle to drive effective and coordinated outcomes across the full range of external actions.

Closing the SDG refugee gap is critical. Refugees are one of the most marginalized populations in stable and in fragile and crisis-affected countries, representing the “last mile” to reaching the SDGs. They are also among those whose lives would most benefit from the resources and actions that are supporting achievement of the SDGs. Measures of progress towards the SDGs that do not include refugees—as is the case today—are a misrepresentation of global progress. If we do not have data showing progress among refugees, we cannot say we have achieved the SDGs. Furthermore, the SDGs and UN Member States' commitment to Leave No One Behind are intended to be universal. Failure to meet the SDGs and this commitment for refugees would undermine the credibility of the international community and leave millions of people to suffer.

**Table 1. Top Refugee-Hosting Countries (>20,000 refugees) with Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)<sup>13</sup>**

*Countries highlighted in grey indicate that their VNR mentioned refugees as a population in particular need.*

Country	Refugee Population <sup>14</sup>	Mentions Refugees <sup>15</sup>	Includes Socioeconomic Data on Refugees	Year of VNR
Turkey	3,621,264	Yes	No	2019
Turkey	3,621,264	No	No	2016
Pakistan	1,397,629	No	No	2019
Uganda	1,131,545	No	No	2016
Germany	1,021,706	No	No	2016
Lebanon	974,629	Yes	No	2018
Bangladesh	943,240	No	No	2017
Ethiopia	920,961	No	No	2017
Sudan	908,692	No	No	2018
Jordan	705,762	Yes	No	2017
Chad	445,777	Yes	No	2019
Kenya	410,732	No	No	2017
Cameroon	360,162	Yes	No	2019
France	355,222	No	No	2016
Tanzania	295,866	No	No	2019
Iraq	281,905	Yes	No	2019
Sweden	242,725	Yes	No	2017
Egypt	239,741	Yes	No	2016
Egypt	239,741	No	No	2018
India	196,966	No	No	2017
Italy	180,829	No	No	2017
Algeria	177,881	No	No	2019
Niger	177,286	No	No	2018
Rwanda	148,055	Yes	No	2019
United Kingdom	124,018	Yes	No	2019
Venezuela	122,874	No	No	2016
Malaysia	112,654	No	No	2017
Canada	110,123	Yes	No	2018
Netherlands	102,899	Yes	No	2017
Thailand	102,223	No	No	2017
Switzerland	98,530	No	No	2016
Switzerland	98,530	No	No	2018
Ecuador	93,822	No	No	2018

Country	Refugee Population	Mentions Refugees	Includes Socioeconomic Data on Refugees	Year of VNR
South Africa	89,285	No	No	2019
Mauritania	84,078	No	No	2019
Afghanistan	78,384	No	No	2017
Belgium	59,208	No	No	2017
Norway	58,107	No	No	2016
Greece	55,565	Yes	No	2018
Australia	52,729	Yes	No	2018
Congo - Brazzaville	40,740	Yes	No	2019
Denmark	36,100	Yes	No	2017
Serbia	30,935	Yes	No	2019
Nigeria	25,426	No	No	2017
Burkina Faso	24,798	No	No	2019
Mali	24,366	No	No	2018
Finland	21,599	No	No	2016
Nepal	20,949	No	No	2017

# Barriers to Measuring the SDG Refugee Gap

Well-being measures such as poverty levels, learning outcomes and nutrition levels, are not regularly or systematically collected for refugees. Several factors contribute to the current lack of available data on refugee outcomes and on their progress towards the SDGs.

Most refugee-hosting countries—from Colombia to Cameroon and from Ethiopia to Bangladesh—do not collect data or produce statistics on refugees. Refugees, particularly those living in camps, are generally not included in national household surveys.<sup>16</sup> In some cases, lack of refugee inclusion is due to limited capacity of the national statistics office (NSO) or lack of mandate to collect and disaggregate data on refugees. In others, it may be there are political implications of providing detailed data on the status of refugees. For instance, governments may fear that providing this data may suggest that refugees receive preferential treatment to citizens living in similarly vulnerable circumstances.

Instead of relying on governments to collect data on refugees, the UN system—specifically UNHCR—leads on the data collection and publication. UNHCR collects data with the primary purpose of targeting aid to those who need it most. Regional and country situation overviews and operational updates therefore emphasize the number of people reached with programs and the current or projected needs of a refugee population in a country or regional crisis. Data on outcomes or information about levels of income, consumption, employment, health, and education are rarely reported. Even when these outcome-level data are collected, the indicators do not always align with measures used in household surveys, making them incomparable with SDG indicators. For instance, the World Food Programme (WFP) may collect data on the number of refugees living below the Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB) and use it as a poverty measure, whereas the SDG indicator is the percentage of people living below the international poverty line of US\$1.25 per day. Another challenge is that after data collection is completed, UN agencies often retain their data, siloed from nationally representative data, which prevents comparisons

between the well-being of host populations and refugees. (See Appendix 2 for more details.)

## How Do Refugees Measure Up?

In the absence of critical data on refugee well-being, is it possible to estimate refugee progress towards the SDGs in select settings—and, if so, how do they measure up against citizens in their host country? This section seeks to assess this in two countries with high numbers of refugees.

For this exercise, select SDGs were chosen as indicators of well-being: Goal 1: Zero Poverty, Goal 2: Zero Hunger, Goal 4: Quality Education, Goal 5: Gender Equality, and Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. Two countries were selected as illustrative case studies: Ethiopia and Lebanon. These countries were chosen not only because they host some of the largest refugee populations, but also because they have expressed commitment to long-term development-led approaches to addressing refugee needs and ensuring refugee well-being. (See Box 1 for background on the refugee crises in these countries.) While the authors attempted to include additional country case studies for other major refugee-hosting nations, such as Chad and Niger, the data was far too limited to produce meaningful insights.

**Goal 1: Zero Poverty and  
Goal 8: Decent Work and  
Economic Growth**



By 2030, 85 percent of people who are extremely poor – some 342 million people – will live in fragile and conflict affected states.<sup>21</sup> This includes refugees, who typically find refuge in poor, fragile countries. A major barrier to decreasing poverty levels is a lack of access to employment. One study that looked at access to work rights in 15 host countries, hosting a total of 5 million refugees, found that 7 of those countries legally barred refugees from formal work.<sup>22</sup>

### Box. 1 Background on the Refugee Crises in Ethiopia and in Lebanon

Ethiopia hosts 905,831 registered refugees and asylum seekers, originating mainly from South Sudan, Somali, Eritrea, and Sudan.<sup>17</sup> Ethiopia hosts the second largest refugee population in Africa, the majority of which live in 26 camps established across the country, although 11.6 percent (105,034 refugees) live outside of camps in Addis Ababa. In September 2016, Ethiopia became one of the first countries to agree to implement UNHCR's Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). In January 2019, Ethiopia amended its Refugee Proclamation, granting refugees the freedom of movement, the right to work, and access to education outside of camps, which had previously been limited.

Lebanon hosts roughly 1.5 million refugees.<sup>18</sup> Globally, Lebanon hosts the highest number of refugees relative to its population; refugees make up almost one-quarter of the population.<sup>19</sup> The Government of Lebanon has committed to making its education system more accessible to refugees, completely waiving fees to public primary schools. Syrian refugees have the freedom of movement within Lebanon if they hold a legal residency card; however, the vast majority of Syrian refugees do not have such permits. Syrian refugees can also seek employment, although the type of employment they can access is limited to the cleaning, construction and agriculture sectors.<sup>20</sup>

Although refugees are eligible for formal employment in 17 of 20 major refugee-hosting countries, in practice they often face barriers to seeking decent work opportunities.<sup>23</sup> Decent work, fairly paid, in safe conditions, with job security, is scarce for refugees. Barriers to decent work include restrictions on freedom of movement, opaque and costly administrative processes, and discrimination. Many refugees therefore find employment in the informal economy, which presents a number of protection concerns such as exploitative working conditions.

When people, including refugees, cannot meet their own needs or those of their family, they are often forced to resort to strategies that increase their vulnerability to harm. Income generation and economic well-being can mitigate potential negative coping strategies—such as child labor, early marriage, drug and human trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation—that refugees may adopt to escape poverty.

#### **Below the headline data: A DEEP DIVE LOOK AT LEBANON AND ETHIOPIA**

In Lebanon, 69 percent of refugee households live on less than US\$3.84 per day,<sup>24</sup> the national poverty line, compared to 26 percent of Lebanese households.<sup>25</sup> The presence of an unprecedented number of refugees has transformed the landscape of poverty and inequality in Lebanon. The World Bank estimates that some 200,000 Lebanese have been pushed into poverty, adding to 1 million Lebanese who were already impoverished.<sup>26</sup>

Lebanon's national unemployment rate is 6.69 percent, while 40 percent of the Syrian refugee labor force is unemployed (Figure 1).<sup>27</sup> Only one in four refugees who are employed have a regular job.<sup>28</sup> Refugees also earn less than nationals. On average, refugee women earn 56 percent of the hourly rate of host population women, and refugee men earn 62 percent of the hourly rate of host population men.<sup>29</sup> Over half (52 percent) of refugee households depend on informal credit, and 48 percent rely on assistance from humanitarian organizations for income.<sup>30</sup>

In Ethiopia, up to two out of three refugee households live below the international poverty line of US\$1.90 per day per person,<sup>31</sup> compared to one in four host-community households (Figure 2).<sup>32</sup> Ethiopia's VNR shows significant progress in poverty reduction among citizens, from 38.7 percent in 2004/2005 to 29.6 percent in 2015/2016, and a budgetary commitment to poverty reduction.

Ethiopia's national unemployment rate is just 1.8 percent,<sup>33</sup> and there is no available data for employment rates of refugee populations. While refugees from Somalia, Eritrea, and Yemen in Addis Ababa have long been employed informally in skilled and unskilled work, refugees only just gained legal authorization to work outside of camps in January 2019.<sup>34</sup> Qualitative studies have found that in these informal arrangements, refugees often receive lower wages than Ethiopians for similar work and employment can be ended arbitrarily as refugee employees have no legal

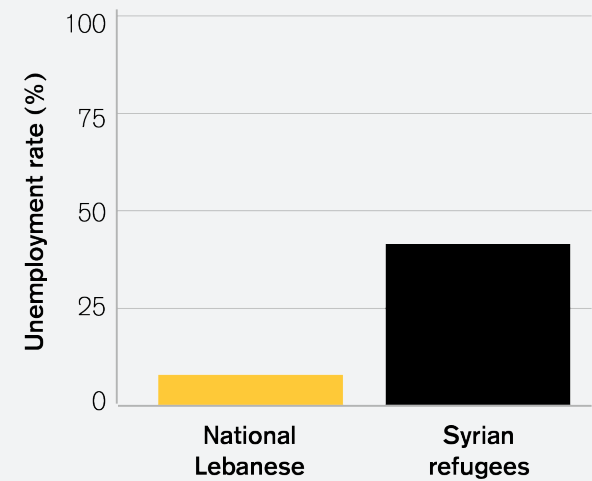
recourse.<sup>35</sup> In addition, refugees have been prohibited from obtaining a business license without an Ethiopian partner and promise to share profits; this limits refugees' potential income from self-employment opportunities.<sup>36</sup>

**Scaling-up solutions to reduce poverty, increase employment and drive economic growth**

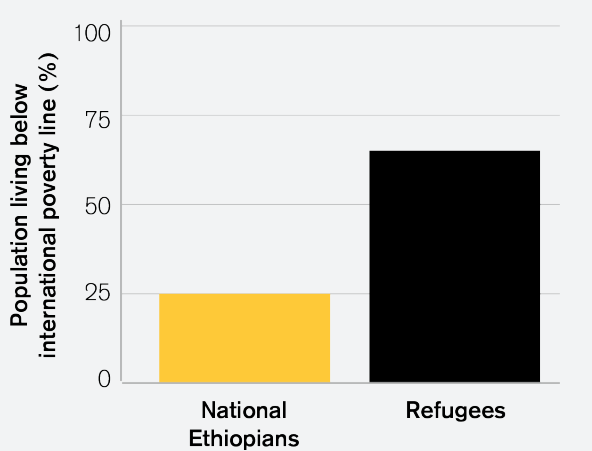
Allowing refugees to have access to decent work opportunities, and thereby generate a stable income, can help reduce poverty levels and aid dependency over time. While approaches to increase refugee employment are emerging, they are not yet at scale. These solutions largely hinge on refugee-hosting governments upholding refugees' right to work by permitting equal labor market access and access to decent work, including employment and self-employment, and their freedom of movement. Research shows that when refugees work, they can not only start to provide for themselves and their families but also have a positive impact in the longer term, with increases in GDP and in average incomes for the local population.<sup>37</sup>

Many refugee-hosting countries, which face large levels of unemployment among their national population, require international support to give refugees access to the formal labor market. Donors must provide adequate multiyear financing for livelihoods programs, such as those that help refugees develop skills to match labor market needs and support them in their job search. International financial institutions and wealthier countries can also create economic incentives to generate more jobs through increased public and private investment; innovative solutions, like offering trade concessions for companies that employ refugees, are being tested and should be scaled if proven to have significant impact. Employers and the private sector also have an important role to play in expanding economic opportunities (see Box 2).

**Figure 1. Syria refugee unemployment rate six times that of Lebanese**



**Ethiopia: Two-thirds of refugees and one-quarter of citizens live below the poverty line**



*Allowing refugees to have access to decent work opportunities, and thereby generate a stable income, can help reduce poverty levels and aid dependency over time.*

## Box 2. The Role of Business

The private sector has a vital role to play in contributing to the achievement of the SDGs for refugees. In countries affected by crisis, business can create economic opportunities and invest in skills, resources, capacity, financial services and vital infrastructure. In stable contexts, business can contribute to the social and economic inclusion of refugees by providing employment and training opportunities. Companies and employers themselves can benefit from an expanded talent pool, create a new customer base, diversify supply chains and drive innovation while empowering refugees and host communities on their path to self-sufficiency and financial independence.

Private finance is also critical to financing the SDG Agenda, but it is not currently reaching refugees. The Refugee Investment Network estimates only one percent of grant-based philanthropic investment in the Sustainable Development Goals from 2016 to 2018 has been designated for migrants and refugees.<sup>38</sup>

The business case for refugee economic inclusion is strong and business-led advocacy and vocal support for expanding the SDGs to refugees is powerful and influential. The Business Refugee Action Network, co-founded by the B Team, Ben and Jerry's, Virgin, the Tent Foundation and the IRC, will launch the *Business Takes a Stand for Refugees* statement at the UN General Assembly in September 2019. The statement calls on governments to include refugees in the SDGs by: (1) aligning the Global Compact on Refugees to the SDGs; (2) measuring progress on the SDGs for refugees; and (3) creating and supporting a policy environment open to refugee employment and economic inclusion by removing policy and regulatory barriers to refugees' economic opportunities. Growing endorsement of this statement reinforces the strong business support for refugee inclusion in the SDGs.

## Goal 2. Zero Hunger

Acute malnutrition is a major global public health threat currently affecting at least 50 million children under five. The UN estimates that 489 undernourished people and 122 million stunted children live in countries affected by conflict.<sup>39</sup> By 2030, ODI and IRC have estimated that 84.4 million more people in fragile and conflict-affected states will be undernourished.

There is little available data that allows for the direct comparison of food insecurity and nutrition outcomes among refugee and host populations, which makes it difficult to compare outcomes and progress towards SDG 2. The prevalence of both severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) in children under five is regularly collected for refugee populations, and refugees are accounted for in analyses of food security using data from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). However, the SDG 2 indicator relies on a different measure, the prevalence of undernourishment



(PoU), collected in household surveys that typically omit refugee populations.

### Below the headline data:

#### A DEEP DIVE LOOK AT LEBANON AND ETHIOPIA

Given data limitations, the best comparison of progress on SDG 2 for refugee and host community populations in Lebanon finds that 10.9 percent of the Lebanese population lacks regular access to sufficient calories for a healthy and active lifestyle,<sup>40</sup> while 33.8 percent of Syrian refugee households are moderately to severely food insecure (Figure 3).<sup>41</sup> Similar estimates are not available for Ethiopia.

### Scaling-up solutions to reduce malnutrition

Despite the effectiveness of life-saving malnutrition treatment, current strategies fail to reach 80 percent of children who need care. New approaches and system-wide policy change are essential to revolutionize acute malnutrition treatment—the way it is provided, financed, and ad-

opted into global and national guidelines—particularly for refugees and other people caught in crisis. Today, children with SAM and those with MAM are treated two different protocols and two different products, which are delivered by two different UN agencies, UNICEF and WFP. The current system is inefficient and makes it difficult for children to get the care they need.

The way forward is to create simplified treatment process— one that allows children with severe or moderate acute malnutrition to be treated through one program that uses one treatment product and is delivered by one UN agency as lead. IRC research and other studies have shown it is effective to treat children with SAM and MAM together.

One way to help bring this simplified program to scale is through the use of community health workers who can test and treat children in their villages, instead of in health facilities. In conflict and crisis-affected countries, traveling to a health clinic for treatment can be dangerous. Bringing testing and treatment straight to communities and to children in their homes has proven effective for other health concerns, like malaria, and should be applied to malnutrition to reduce morbidity and related mortalities. In July 2019, Principals of several UN agencies committed to develop a global plan on Wasting and to publish comprehensive, updated World Health Organization guidelines for treating acute malnutrition. This is a critical step toward the programmatic and policy change needed to expand access to treatment for acute malnutrition.

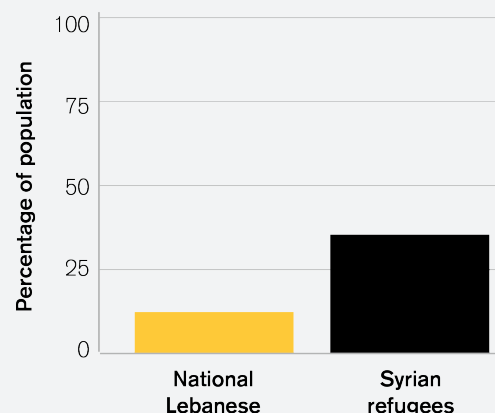
#### Goal 4: Quality Education

One half of school-age refugee children are not receiving an education.<sup>42</sup> Refugee children are five times more likely to be out of school than their non-refugee peers.<sup>43</sup> Just 23 percent of refugee adolescents attend secondary school compared with 84 percent globally.<sup>44</sup>

Displacement disrupts education. Refugees often lack consistent access to quality formal education due to policies



**Figure 3. Nearly three times as many Syrian refugee households as Lebanese households cannot meet nutrition needs**



that prohibit or restrict their enrollment in public schools. Even when the policy environment allows for refugees to enter formal schools, they may face numerous barriers including difficult requirements for registering in new schools, schools being far from where refugees live and hard to reach due to limited, unsafe or costly transportation options and prohibitive costs of uniforms and school supplies. Enrollment does not guarantee that children attend, learn and remain in school; often refugee children may face challenges with a different curriculum or language of instruction. While quality non-formal learning opportunities such as community-based education or tutoring programs often help children enter and succeed in the formal system, these programs may not be allowed, certified or prioritized by donors.

The availability of statistics on enrollment for refugees is in part a reflection of the SDG target indicators requiring disaggregation of data by status (it is one of a handful of indicators that does this), as well as the education sector's hyper focus on raising the alarm about the number of children in crisis and conflict settings who are out of school. However, these data do not capture whether children are attending or learning in school; they do not convey whether children are gaining the skills to read, write or do math at an appropriate grade level.

## Below the headline data:

### A DEEP DIVE LOOK AT LEBANON AND ETHIOPIA

In Lebanon, the latest data show that 20 percent of refugee children were enrolled in pre-primary education in 2018, compared to 80.8 percent of Lebanese children. In addition, net primary enrollment is 86.4 percent for Lebanese children but only 61 percent for Syrian refugee children.<sup>45</sup> This low rate of primary enrollment exists despite policy efforts by the Lebanese government, such as instituting a second shift system in formal schools to accommodate the large number of refugees in need, waiving fees for primary public school,<sup>46</sup> and donor support to the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to provide access to formal education to all students between the ages of 3 and 18.<sup>47</sup>

In Ethiopia, only 54 percent of primary-aged refugee children were enrolled in primary education in 2017, but this number jumped to 72 percent in 2018.<sup>48</sup> Ethiopia is close to meeting its own target of 75 percent primary enrollment of refugee children. This dramatic progress demonstrates the potential impact that setting a target specifically for refugees can have on achieving progress. Refugee enrollment still lags behind Ethiopian children, who have a 100 percent primary enrollment (Figure 4).

### Scaling up solutions to achieve quality education

Over half of the world's refugees are children<sup>49</sup>, who are or will be in need of schooling. Yet less than two percent of humanitarian financing goes to education. Reaching refugee children with quality education requires dedicated resources directed at achieving learning outcomes as well as a policy environment that enables refugees to get a quality education. Host government policies need to facilitate enrollment, attendance and learning for refugees. This means including refugees in education sector plans, putting in place flexible registration processes and requirements, and aligning curricula and language of instruction to refugees' needs. Where the formal education system is inaccessible to refugees, host governments should allow implementation of quality non-formal education alternatives, such as remedial tutoring, accelerated learning, and community-based education, with clear pathways to the formal system.

Ensuring quality education for refugees requires donors to invest in interventions that are based on the best available

evidence on what works to enable refugee children to enroll, attend, and learn. There is a growing body of evidence in this space. Promising solutions include training teachers to address the specific social and emotional needs of refugee children and early childhood development programs to prepare students for success in school and beyond.

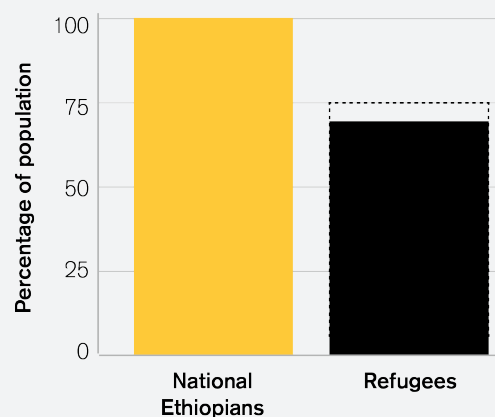
### Goal 5: Gender Equality

One in five women who are refugees or displaced by an emergency experience sexual violence.<sup>50</sup> Child marriage tends to rise in refugees contexts; for example, whereas 15 percent of all Syrian marriages in Jordan included a child bride in 2014, that number soared to 36 percent in 2018.<sup>51</sup>



According to Equal Measures 2030's 2019 SDG Gender Index, which measures gender equality across the Goals, 40 percent of the world's women and girls live in states which are failing on gender equality—and the bottom 10 countries in the Index are fragile and conflict affected countries.<sup>52</sup> As of 2014, the 15 largest refugee-hosting countries together had 170 women-only legal restrictions on seeking employment.<sup>53</sup> The five economies with the most restrictions on women seeking employment include four of the top refugee hosting countries.<sup>54</sup>

**Figure 4. Refugee enrollment in primary education nears target in Ethiopia, but still less than national levels**



Women and girls caught in crisis face increased risks of violence and discriminatory practices. Refugee women experience unique challenges in accessing decent work, including discriminatory laws and social norms, services to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, increased vulnerability in conflict-affected settings, and inadequate support for unpaid care and domestic duties.

#### **Below the headline data:**

#### **A DEEP DIVE LOOK AT LEBANON AND ETHIOPIA**

##### **Gender-based violence:**

##### **CHILD MARRIAGE AND INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE**

In Lebanon, the most recent statistics available from UNICEF, which are from 2009, indicate that nine percent of Lebanese girls are married as children.<sup>55</sup> More recent data are available for Syrian refugees in Lebanon: early marriage among Syrian refugee girls (ages 15-19) increased from 22 percent in 2017 to 29 percent in 2018.<sup>56</sup> Although many Syrian families recognize the harm of child marriage, they have few alternative options in refugee camps to provide their daughters with security and reduce their perceived economic burden.<sup>57</sup> In addition, intimate partner violence (IPV) among displaced Syrian women in Lebanon is 11.7 percent, as compared to the current rate of 8.9 percent for Lebanese women.<sup>58</sup>

In Ethiopia, 40 percent of girls were married as children as of 2016,<sup>59</sup> and 32.5 percent of Ethiopian women have experienced IPV.<sup>60</sup> There are no equivalent data for all refugee populations in Ethiopia; however, one study in Shimelba refugee camp in northern Ethiopia found that 31 percent of refugee women had experienced IPV in their lifetime.<sup>61</sup>

##### **Economic empowerment: EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES**

In Lebanon, 21.2 percent of Lebanese women and 6 percent of refugee women are employed, compared to 63.8 percent of Lebanese men and 27 percent of refugee men.<sup>62</sup> Within populations, there are disparities. Surveys show that Syrian refugee men are four times more likely than women to participate in the labor force; 73 percent of Syrian refugee men participated in the labor force compared to only 16 percent of Syrian refugee women.<sup>63</sup> Refugee women earn US\$0.17 for every US\$1 that refugee men earn whereas Lebanese women earn \$0.44 for every \$1 Lebanese men earn.<sup>64</sup> There are no comparable data for Ethiopia.

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*Closing gaps in refugee women's earnings and employment could boost their economic contribution by as much as 80 times.*

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##### **Scaling up solutions to improve gender equality**

GBV services received just 0.12 percent of the US\$41.5 billion of humanitarian funding from 2016 to 2018. This means that that, on average, less than US\$2 in GBV services is allocated to each woman or girl at risk in crisis and conflict settings.<sup>65</sup> These funds should be tripled.

Investments to combat violence against women and girls, early and forced marriage must address gender inequality, which is the root cause of the abuses, as well as context-specific drivers of these practices, such as economic instability. They should also provide direct service delivery to communities wherever GBV is taking place. Solutions must center on women and girls themselves, while also creating empowering environments. Programs like IRC's Girl Shine, which supports girls in emergency settings to develop and attain financial goals, increase self-confidence, become self-reliant, develop a system of support, and feel supported in a safe and healthy environment, have shown significant positive impacts. Girl Shine equips girls with more skills while also working with parents and caregivers.<sup>66</sup>

Closing gaps in refugee women's earnings and employment could boost their economic contribution by as much as 80 times. In Lebanon, it would boost GDP by 33.5 times – or by US\$913 million.<sup>67</sup> Closing the gap will require both policy reforms, such as legislation that gives women the right to work and own a business, and economic empowerment programs that can transform gender discriminatory barriers to women's economic inclusion. Programs that enable women to access information about their rights and resources available to them, as well as build their vital skills, such as basic numeracy and literacy, can increase women's economic chances.<sup>68</sup>

### **Box 3. Colombia: Home of the Newest Major Displacement Crisis**

Colombia has been lauded as a champion of the SDGs.<sup>69</sup> It incorporated the SDGs into its national development plan and formally adopted a strategy to implement the Goals. Its progress transcends paper commitments; Colombia's poverty headcount more than halved between 2002 and 2017.<sup>70</sup>

However, this progress is on shaky ground. Since 2015, over four million Venezuelans have fled their country, and Colombia now hosts 1.4 million of them—more than any other country in the region.<sup>71</sup> Colombia is also home to 7.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), and the number of Colombians who fled their homes due to violence more than doubled from 2017 to 2018.<sup>72</sup> Despite gains to reduce poverty, for the first time since 2002, national poverty rates did not decrease from 2017 to 2018.

Despite real and perceived risks, Colombia has maintained a welcoming policy environment for Venezuelan refugees and migrants. Over half of Venezuelans displaced in Colombia possess a visa or a special stay permit, which gives them access to formal employment, education, and health care.<sup>73</sup> In August 2019, Colombia announced it will give citizenship to children of Venezuelan refugees born within its borders.<sup>74</sup>

The growing population of Venezuelans inside Colombia is putting pressure on social services. The number of Venezuelans treated for health emergencies increased from 1,450 to 100,000 between 2015 and 2017; these cases included communicable diseases which had previously been eradicated in the country.<sup>75</sup> Approximately 161,000 Venezuelan children in Colombia (48.6 percent) are enrolled in school.<sup>76</sup> By comparison, Colombia's national net primary enrolment rate is more than 91 percent.<sup>77</sup> Among displaced Venezuelans who had settled, 78 percent identified a job as their greatest need, while 57 percent cited food.<sup>78</sup> In comparison, the national unemployment rate for the Colombian labor force is 9.03 percent and the national Prevalence of Undernourishment is 6.5 percent.<sup>79</sup>

The sustainability of Colombia's welcome to Venezuelans depends on greater support from the international community, particularly increased funding for the UN's regional refugee and migrant response plan, and harmonization of policies across Latin America to ensure greater responsibility-sharing within the region. Failure to make progress in these areas will lead to Venezuelans falling further behind and an even wider gap between displaced Venezuelans and their Colombian hosts across SDG outcomes.

Colombia will present a VNR in 2020, which presents an opportunity for the country to be a leader among refugee-hosting nations and include socioeconomic data on refugees and migrants in the country and outline a plan to meet their needs alongside Colombian citizens. Failing to do so will jeopardize the country's ability to achieve the SDGs.

# 2019: A Watershed Moment for Closing the SDG Refugee Gap



South Sudanese girls participate in an IRC women and girls program in Bombassi refugee camp in Ethiopia. *Photo credit: Meredith Hutchison/IRC 2016*

The July 2019 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) was an important opportunity to take stock of overall progress on the SDGs, with a particular focus on quality education, decent work, reduced inequalities and other goals.<sup>80</sup> Official reports for the HLPF failed to recognize the refugee gap in any meaningful way; the reports simply highlighted the burden that refugees can place on their host communities. This was remedied in the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report, “The Future Is Now: Science for Achieving Sustainable Development,” which acknowledges that refugees are missing in the SDGs; although it does not offer a detailed plan for how to close the gap.<sup>81</sup>

In September 2019, Heads of State will come together at an SDG Summit held during the high-level segment of the UN General Assembly in New York to agree to a Declaration, which will serve as a roadmap for the next decade of progress towards the SDGs. This roadmap is a distinct opportunity for the international community to rectify its misstep, and define a clear path for how countries can and should include refugees in their SDG plans and progress measures.

In December 2019, global leaders will assemble in Geneva for the inaugural Global Refugee Forum to make pledges towards the objectives of the Global Compact of Refugees (GCR). This event provides three opportunities. First, it will serve as an opportunity for individual countries to make pledges that can catalyze progress for refugees, such as by pledging to include refugees in their national development plans and/or to expand refugees' access to education and decent work. Second, it will serve as an opportunity for the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UN Member States and development actors to agree on a set of targets and indicators to measure progress against the GCR—and ensure they align with the SDGs. Third, it will provide an opportunity for Member States to officially pledge to measure SDG progress for refugees, to support approaches to reaching them, and to include them in their VNRs and NDPs.

Together, these moments offer a chance for global leaders to recommit to leaving no one—not one refugee—behind and to align on a shared way forward.

# Recommendations

To fully realize Agenda 2030 for refugees alongside their national host communities, there are three core areas where immediate action is required:

## 1. Make refugees count

Poor development outcomes among refugees cannot be addressed when the magnitude of needs remains unknown. To ensure refugees and people caught in crisis are included in national, regional, and global efforts towards the SDGs, it is essential to collect and publish data and analyses that allow their comparison to host populations. This will require:

### **Aligning indicators and coordinating data collection.**

Humanitarian donors and implementers should align their outcome indicators with the SDG indicators. Indicators for the Global Compact on Refugees should align with the SDGs to the extent possible. With small changes to data collection, humanitarian sector data could be aligned with SDG indicators and used to support disaggregation by vulnerable populations. The UNHCR-World Bank Joint Data Centre should support this effort.

**Investing in national statistical capacity.** National statistics offices (NSOs) should include refugees in household surveys and work with humanitarian actors to fill data gaps on refugees. Donors and international financial institutions must provide adequate funding and technical support to governments to build the capacity of NSOs to include refugees in national statistics.

## 2. Include refugees in the plan

There is increasing recognition of the duration of refugee crises and the need for actors to meet their longer term needs, but this rhetoric has not yet been turned into meaningful action. To achieve the SDGs, donors, humanitarian and development partners, and host governments must commit to including refugees in SDG planning and monitoring. This will require:

**Prioritizing refugee inclusion in VNRs.** Thirty-eight countries have committed to present VNRs in 2020, including Jordan and Bangladesh, which are among the top refugee-hosting countries. These 38 countries, and any others that publish a VNR, should include data on refugee well-being in their report. At the Global Refugee Forum and in the next HLPF resolution at ECOSOC in 2020, UN Member States should

commit to include refugees in VNRs. The UN Secretary-General and senior UN leadership should make this a priority and encourage Member States to make this commitment. Future HLPF sessions must focus on the needs of refugees and official UN reporting should include data on VNRs and refugee well-being.

**Including refugees in national development plans.** UN Member States should include refugees in their action plans for achieving the SDGs, including national and sector-specific development plans. International financial institutions that provide technical assistance to low- and middle-income countries and support on the development of these plans should encourage the inclusion of refugees, and collaborate with humanitarian actors to do so.

## 3. Accelerate progress for refugee well-being

It is imperative to remove barriers and scale-up approaches to improve refugee well-being alongside national populations. This will require:

**Policy reforms.** UN Member States must institute policies that will enable refugees to become self-reliant and strengthen policies to protect refugees' rights and wellbeing. Refugee-hosting governments must uphold refugees' freedom of movement and their rights to education and to work. Donors and international financial institutions should support these policies through adequate multiyear financing and economic incentives (e.g. trade concessions), including through compact agreements. Refugee-hosting countries must also put policies in place that seek to improve gender equality, including those that will reduce violence and abuse against women and girls and that will support women's economic empowerment. UN agencies, governments, donors and the private sector must work together to alleviate policy barriers to more effective and efficient approaches, particularly in protracted crises, and ensure they support solutions and reporting frameworks that align with the SDGs.

**Evidence-based interventions.** The UN, government and humanitarian and development organizations must work together to continue to build a robust evidence base. Donors must invest in generating this type of evidence and direct resources to partners who can implement interventions known to generate improved outcomes.

# Appendix 1. Sustainable Development Goals, Targets and Indicators

Sustainable Development Goal (by 2030)	SDG target(s) (by 2030)	SDG indicator(s)
<b>1. NO POVERTY</b>	Eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.90 a day	Proportion of population below the international poverty line, by sex, age, employment status and geographical location (urban/rural)
	Reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions	Proportion of population living below the national poverty line
<b>2. ZERO HUNGER</b>	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture	Prevalence of undernourishment (PoU)
<b>4. QUALITY EDUCATION</b>	Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes	Proportion of children and young people (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex
	Equal access to quality pre-primary education	Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex.
<b>5. GENDER EQUALITY</b>	Eliminate forced marriages and genital mutilation	Proportion of women aged 20–24 years who were married or in a union before age 15 and before age 18
<b>8. DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH</b>	Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value	Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities

# Appendix 2. Barriers to Comparing Outcomes among National and Refugee Populations: Incomparable Measures and Lack of Public Data

## Goal 1

- Poverty levels of national populations can be measured by a Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), conducted by USAID and ICF International every five years on average, or by a Living Standards Measurement Study, conducted on an ad hoc basis by national statistical offices and the World Bank. Poverty is measured using international and/or national poverty lines.
- Poverty measures for refugee populations focus on household consumption and expenditure. The World Food Programme (WFP) measures percentages of the population below the minimum expenditure basket (MEB)—what a household requires to meet basic needs. This data is often made publicly available, but not always—as in Niger.
- Data on Syrian refugees in Lebanon were only available because UNHCR, WFP, and UNICEF funded and implemented a nationally representative study of refugee households in 2018 to improve humanitarian response in Lebanon. Such a time and resource-intensive process is not typical of needs assessments for refugees.

## Goal 2

- The prevalence of both severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) in children under five is regularly collected for refugee populations. They are also accounted for in geographic analyses of food security, using IPCC criteria.
- To measure food insecurity and malnutrition, countries typically estimate the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) at the national level using household surveys. The FAO has proposed an alternative measure, the Prevalence of Severe Food Insecurity, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Survey, but this has not yet been widely adopted. This measure is constructed using Gallup World Poll surveys, which do not typically include refugee populations.

## Goal 4

- Data on enrollment is often available for both national and refugee populations; however, only data on primary enrollment is consistently available.
- Data on attendance and learning outcomes is very limited. Literacy rates are often available for national populations, but not for refugees.

## Goal 5

- For national and refugee populations, little data is disaggregated by gender. However, there are some bright spots:
  - o Data on children enrolled in formal primary and pre-primary school
  - o Food security data (disaggregated by gender of the head of household)
- GBV data are difficult to collect under the best circumstances, given women and girls – especially refugees – face cultural and practical barriers to reporting instances of GBV.

## Goal 8

- Countries regularly measure and report unemployment and underemployment rates for national populations.
- Refugee employment is not legal in many countries and therefore there is little to no reported refugee unemployment rates. Although many refugees engage in work in the informal sector, data on informal employment is not collected.

## Notes

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- <sup>4</sup> UNHCR. 2017. Left Behind: Refugee Education in Crisis. <https://www.unhcr.org/left-behind/>
- <sup>5</sup> Al Jazeera. 2018. Child Marriage on the Rise among Syrian Refugee Girls in Jordan. April 18. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/04/child-marriage-rise-syrian-refugee-girls-180418084029464.html>
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- <sup>7</sup> UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP. 2018. Vulnerability Analysis for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR-2018). <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/67380>
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- <sup>9</sup> FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2018. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018. FAO. <http://www.fao.org/3/i9553en/i9553en.pdf> and UNICEF, UNHCR and WFP. 2018. Vulnerability Analysis for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR-2018). <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/67380>
- <sup>10</sup> Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators. 2016. Final list of proposed Sustainable Development Goal indicators. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/11803Official-List-of-Proposed-SDG-Indicators.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> 47 countries are listed as submitting VNRs in 2019, but only 42 VNRs were available at the time of writing. VNRs were not available for Oman, Eswatini, Nauru, Fiji and Guatemala.
- <sup>12</sup> European Commission. 2019. 2019 EU Report on Policy Coherence for Development. [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/news-and-events/2019-eu-report-policy-coherence-development\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/news-and-events/2019-eu-report-policy-coherence-development_en)
- <sup>13</sup> Several countries that host the largest refugee populations, such as Iran, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the United States, and South Sudan, were omitted from this analysis because they have not submitted VNRs. Countries in Latin America that are hosting large number of refugees and migrants are also excluded as UNHCR does not have comprehensive data on these populations.
- <sup>14</sup> UNHCR. 2019. Mid-Year Trends – 2018. <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/statistics/unhcrstats/5c52ea084/mid-year-trends-2018.html>
- <sup>15</sup> This means the VNR mentions refugees beyond the contexts of being a burden and a country giving international aid to help refugees elsewhere.
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- <sup>23</sup> Zetter, R. and Ruadel, H. 2016. Refugees' Right to Work and Access to Labor Markets – An Assessment: Part II Country Cases. Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development. <https://www.knomad.org/publication/refugees-right-work-and-access-labor-markets-assessment-country-case-studies-part-2>
- <sup>24</sup> The World Bank proposed \$3.84 per day as the national poverty line for Lebanon in 2011. Caution should be used comparing these numbers; there has been no nationally representative study of household income in Lebanon since 2007. The World Bank does not currently publish poverty rates for Lebanon, arguing that past estimates do not accurately predict poverty rates today.
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- <sup>26</sup> World Bank Group. 2019. Lebanon Overview. Accessed September 1. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview>.
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- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
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