



**REFUGEE
PROTECTION
WATCH**

**“I have not known the taste of safety for
ten years”**

Syrians trying to survive in Lebanon and Syria

Introduction launch

Background

- RPW coalition: **public launch** of report on protection and returns, annual report 2021
- Event is **livestreamed and recorded**
- **Interactive:** both with audience and the RPW panel

Agenda

- **Welcome & Introduction.** 5 mins.
 - **Mentimeter:** 5 mins.
 - **Keynote Access Center for Human Rights.** 10 mins.
 - **RPW 2021: Findings & Conclusions.** 25 mins.
 - **Interaction with the Panel.** 15 mins.
 - **Q&A.** 20 mins.
 - **Wrap up.** 5 mins.
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Background

Refugee Protection Watch (RPW)

- **Increasing risks of forced and premature return**
- **Need for information** about conditions upon return and conditions leading to push to return.
- **RPW coalition:** 5 organisations (Basmeh & Zeitooneh, ALEF, Upinion, PAX and 11.11.11) with different backgrounds and expertise.
- **Research - including feeding back to respondents -and advocacy**
- **Longitudinal research** on protection and return, with the **UNHCR thresholds as a basis.**

Research

Research questions

- » What are the current realities of return for Syrian returnees from Lebanon?
 - » To what extent can current refugee returns from Lebanon be considered safe, voluntary, informed and dignified?
 - » What are the priority needs and concerns of Syrian refugee returnees from Lebanon?
 - » To what extent are the UNHCR Protection Thresholds and Parameters for Refugee Return to Syria being met within Syria, and what are the main gaps experienced by refugee returnees?
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Research

Setup & Methodology

- UNHCR Protection Thresholds and Parameters for Refugee Return to Syria as the main analytical framework
 - Longitudinal research approach
 - Syrian refugee and host communities across all governorates in Lebanon
 - Refugee returnees in three Government of Syria (GoS)-held areas of Syria (Damascus City, Rural Damascus and Homs Governorates)
 - Extensive desk research
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Research Methodology, continued

- **Qualitative methodology inside Syria:**
 - Interviews with Syrians returned to Syria from Lebanon
 - Data collection round 3:
 - March 2021 (n= 119)
 - Data collection round 4:
 - August 2021 (n=135, from which 110 are the same as in round 3)
- **Quantitative methodology in Lebanon:**
 - Digital conversations with Syrians and Lebanese residing in Syria.
 - 5 conversations in 2020/2021:
 - Oct/Nov 2020 (n=237)
 - Nov 2020 (n=432)
 - March 2021 (n=571)
 - July 2021 (n=614)
 - Sept 2021 (n=408)

Key Findings: *No Safe Return*

“I have not known the taste of safety for ten years. There is no safety as long as people are in this state of poverty, injustice and displacement. The darkness and the cut off electricity also frightens me and stresses me out.”

Female, 36, Damascus City

“We are scared of the security forces and the detentions of those who had left Syria and then returned.”

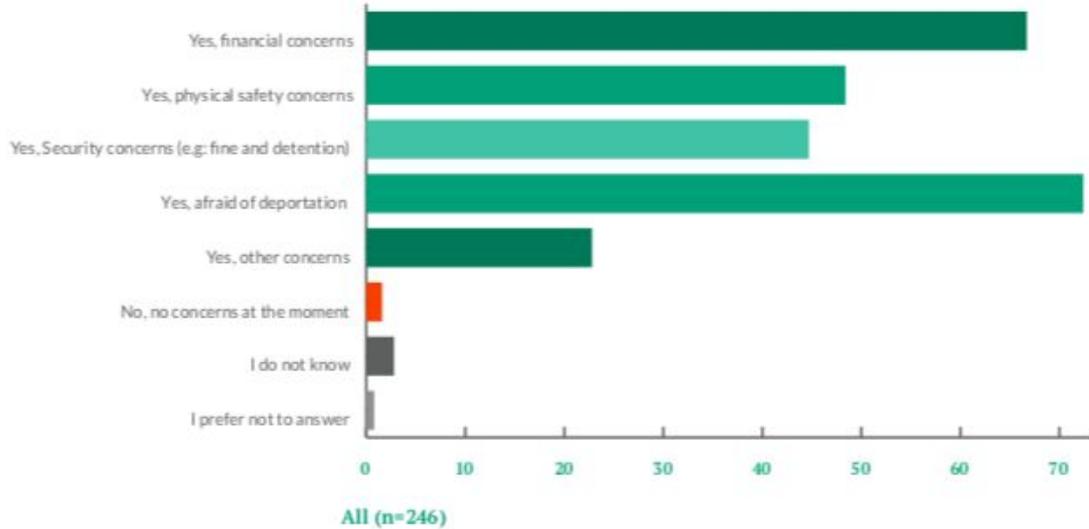
Female, 31, Homs

Key Findings: *No Safe Return* (Syria Data)

- Returnee respondents inside Syria, across regions and gender, stated that fears of the security forces, forced conscription to the military, arbitrary detentions, the remnants of war, as well as increased thefts are still present.
 - 70% of returnee respondents in Syria are concerned that either they themselves, friends or relatives will be forcibly conscripted into the Syrian Arab Army.
 - 60% of women returnee respondents reported not feeling safe moving during the night, due to fears such as being afraid of sexual violence or abuse.
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Key Findings: *No Safe Return* (Lebanon Data)

Do you have any concerns about staying in Lebanon? What are these concerns? (September 2021)



- 72.4% of Syrian respondents in Lebanon stated that fear of deportation was one of their top concerns.
 - Only 0.8% of Syrians currently residing in Lebanon are thinking about returning to Syria.
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Key Findings: Lack of *Voluntary & Informed* Return Decisions

"[Our reasons for return were] the difficult situation in Lebanon and most importantly the bad treatment. They consider that because I'm a Syrian refugee I'm a beggar and I'm eating at their own expense or that I'm taking their jobs; of course the majority thinks that, not everyone."

Male, 33, Douma

"I returned to Ghouta as soon as the road was opened and the siege was lifted and found the situation to be different from how my relatives and friends had described it to me. When I met them and asked them about the reason, they told me they were scared to talk over the phone and tell me how bad the situation was."

Male, 39, Rural Damascus

Key Findings:

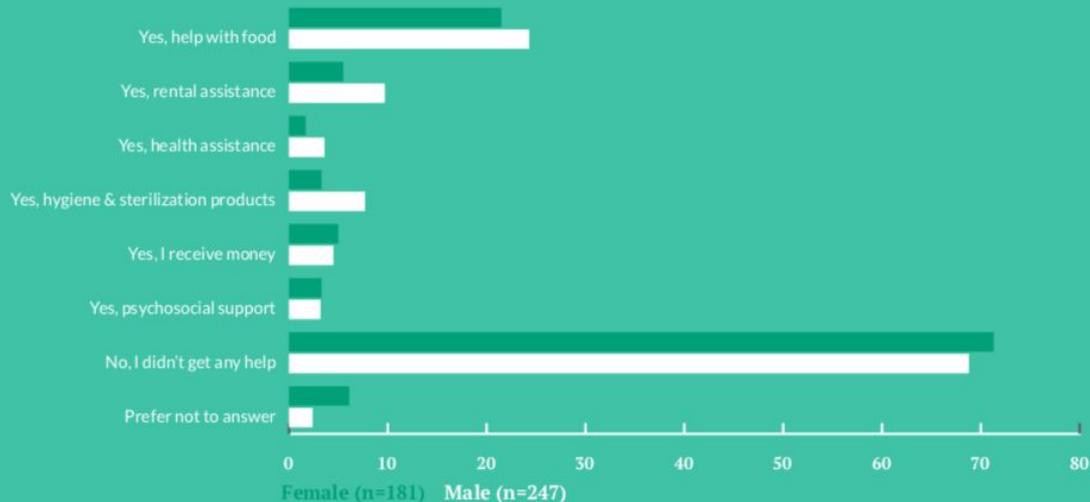
Lack of *Voluntary & Informed* Return Decisions (Syria Data)

- 72% of returnee respondents in Syria reported that the difficulties of living in Lebanon were the main reason that pushed them to go back to Syria.
 - Further reasons to go back included the stop of bombings, family related reasons (such as sickness or death), the inability to pay medical treatment in Lebanon or the fear of losing property in Syria.
 - 26% of returnee respondents in Syria reported not having had access to enough information about the situation inside Syria before they returned.
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Key Findings:

Lack of *Voluntary & Informed* Return Decisions (Lebanon Data)

Have you received any type of assistance since January 2020? (July 2021)



- Despite 79.5% of all respondents in Lebanon reporting that they are not able to cover their living costs, 70.5% in July 2021 were not receiving any kind of humanitarian assistance since January 2020.
 - Men had more access to aid than women.
 - All respondents indicated that they were primarily in need of support to cover basic necessities, with the greatest needs being rent (76.1%), food (67.9%) and healthcare/ medicine (39.8%).
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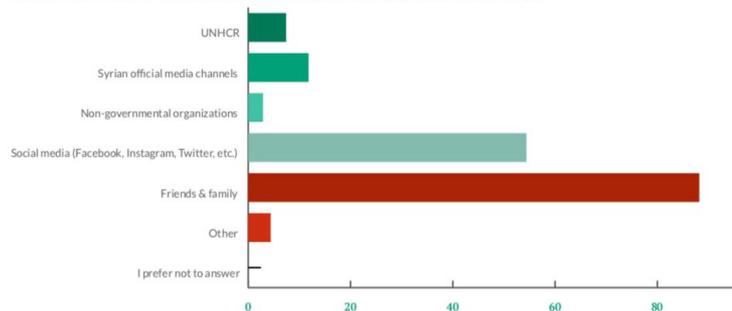
Key Findings:

Lack of *Voluntary & Informed* Return Decisions (Lebanon Data, continued)

“There are thefts at night, harassment over house rents, and tension due to bad economic conditions. There are also increasing accusations of refugees for the reason of bad economic conditions.” Female, Syrian, 36 - 45

- **90.5% of Syrian respondents in Lebanon reported feeling increased tension within their communities.**
- **Only 27.8% of Syrian respondents in Lebanon stated that they have reliable information about their areas of origin in Syria.**

How did you receive information about your area in Syria? (September 2021)



Key Findings: Lack of a *Dignified* Return

“Things did not go as we had planned for them before our return, and the living, educational and social situations are very bad and not up to the standard.”

Female, 60, Rural Damascus

“The most important thing is improving schools and education; the problem is that every now and then a kid gets injured or killed from remnants of the war and there’s no one in charge working regularly on the removal of the remnants.”

Male, 37, Douma

Key Findings: Lack of a *Dignified Return* (Syria Data)

- Syria's dire and deteriorating economic situation has resulted in enormous levels of poverty and lack of many essential services.
 - Only 29% of respondents in Syria were able to cover their basic household necessities and needs.
 - Access to services in Syria such as electricity, water, food, education and healthcare is highly limited, either as they are non-existent, non-affordable or in bad quality.
 - When asked about household priorities, the most frequently mentioned were electricity, access to fuel/diesel/gas, better education, better health services, as well as generally better stability and security.
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Key Findings:

Violations of Housing, Land, and Property Rights (Syria Data)

- **74% of the houses of respondents have been damaged or robbed.**
 - **Only 17% have finished repairs so far.**
 - **25% of respondents reported that they are at risk of losing their current place of residence.**
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Key Findings: *Absence of UNHCR Access & Monitoring*

“No [I would not contact UNHCR], in Syria everything is known to the security and intelligence forces and they could cause me problems.”

Male, 40, Homs

“I don’t know where [UNHCR] has headquarters or an office and I don’t trust the people who work in it.”

Male, 32, Rural Damascus

Key Findings:

Absence of UNHCR Access & Monitoring (Syria Data)

- Only 3% of respondents had been followed up on by UNHCR.
 - When asked if they would contact UNHCR if they were ever to face an issue in their place of residence, 88% of the respondents reported that they will not do so due to their *distrust* in UNHCR's capabilities, a lack of UNHCR presence and security fears.
 - UNHCR currently does not have any system in place to systematically monitor whether current returns to Syria can be considered safe, voluntary, informed and dignified,
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Key Findings: *Aggravating Impact of COVID-19* (Syria Data)

- The biggest impact of COVID-19 was the reduction in working hours, where a majority of respondents reported a further decline in their income and livelihoods as a result.
 - The closure of the border with Lebanon, the COVID-19 test imposed at the border, and the deterioration of the economic situation in Syria due to COVID-19, discouraged people from returning.
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Key Findings: *Impact of COVID-19* (Lebanon Data)

- 71.3% of the respondents in Lebanon indicated that they were not vaccinated against COVID-19. Among the Syrian respondents this percentage was higher (78.7%)
 - Even though 14% of respondents do not know where and how to get the vaccination, the majority (69.3%) of the respondents were aware where they could receive information about the COVID-19 vaccination programme.
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Key Findings: *Lack of durable prospects*

“We have no other place that we can go to, that’s why we will stay in Syria.”

Female, 41, Homs

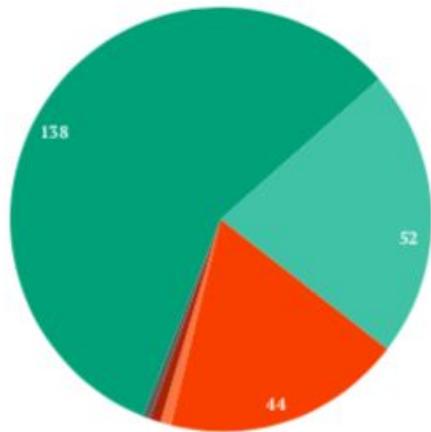
“My brother-in-law came back with me to see what the situation was like in the country, and he didn’t like it and said that even if Lebanon is more expensive than Syria, it’s still better and there are services available, so he returned to Lebanon and he is thinking of immigrating. My father also returned but he couldn’t adapt or integrate so he traveled to Iraq.”

Male, 39, Douma

Key Findings: *Lack of durable prospects* (Syria Data)

- 40% of returnee respondents in Syria are thinking about leaving Syria again as soon as they can.
 - 63% of returnee respondents in Syria know someone who has re-returned to Lebanon from Syria.
 - 93% of returnee respondents in Syria stated that their relatives abroad do not currently think about returning to Syria.
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Key Findings: *Lack of durable prospects* (Lebanon Data)



Given these concerns, what are your plans?
(September 2021)

57.7% Leaving Lebanon and going to a third country

21.8% I do not know

18.4% I will stay in Lebanon

0.8% Moving inside Lebanon

0.8% Leaving Lebanon and returning to Syria

0.4% I prefer not to answer

- 44.6% of respondents in Lebanon in July 2021 reported that they knew someone who had re-returned to Lebanon from Syria.
 - Economic hardship in Syria (37.7%), evasion of military service (31.2%), and harassment by security officials (26.0%) were among the reasons for their re-return.
 - 57.7% of Syrian respondents in Lebanon would like to leave Lebanon and going to a third country.
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RPW

Main Conclusions

- **Conditions in Syria are not conducive for a safe and dignified return, while the deteriorating situation in Lebanon makes a voluntary and informed return decision impossible.**
 - **Syrian refugees in Lebanon are stuck in limbo while conditions around them are worsening. There are no viable prospects of durable solutions.**
 - **UNHCR Protection Thresholds are NOT achieved. - and NO structural measuring and reporting against them is in place.**
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RPW

Recommendations

- **Durable solutions/ Syria not safe**
 - EU and EU member states should develop and implement a strategy and response to the Syrian refugee crisis, which is based on the UNHCR framework of “durable solutions”
 - Maintain the position that Syria is not a safe destination of return.
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RPW

Recommendations

- **Access to Safe routes, Asylum and Non-Refoulement**
 - EU and its member states should increase safe routes to Europe, including increasing resettlement places.
 - States should uphold the right to asylum and put an immediate end to illegal pushbacks.
 - The government of Lebanon should commit to a moratorium on summary deportations and GSO-facilitated returns, and stop implementation of its “Return Plan”.
 - Lebanon should allow UNHCR to resume registration of Syrian refugees, uphold the right to claim asylum for Syrians (incl for Syrians who “re-returned”), and allow for ease of access to legal residency in the country.
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RPW

Recommendations

- **Monitoring and Information-Sharing**
 - Create international monitoring mechanism to monitor conditions for safe, voluntary and dignified return to Syria (per the UNHCR Protection Thresholds), including reporting on information gaps and protection risks.
 - Increase efforts to ensure that refugees from Syria who consider returning have sufficient access to objective, reliable and up-to-date information about current conditions in their area of return in Syria,
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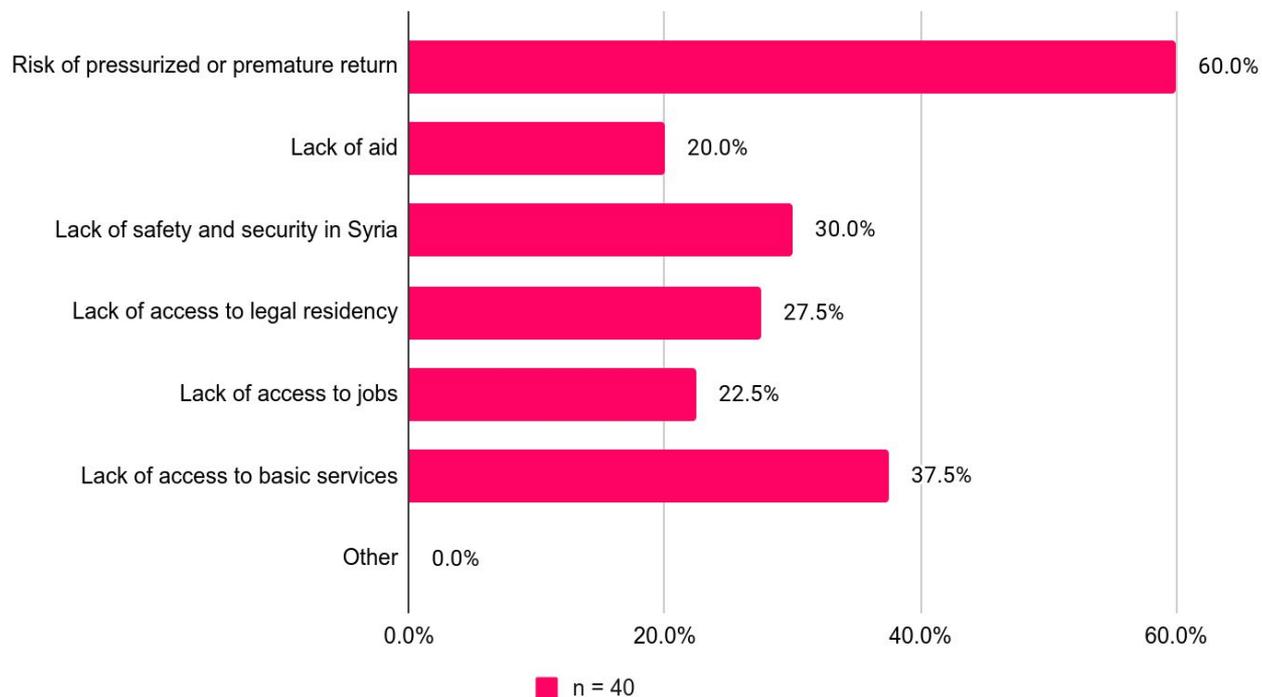
RPW

Recommendations

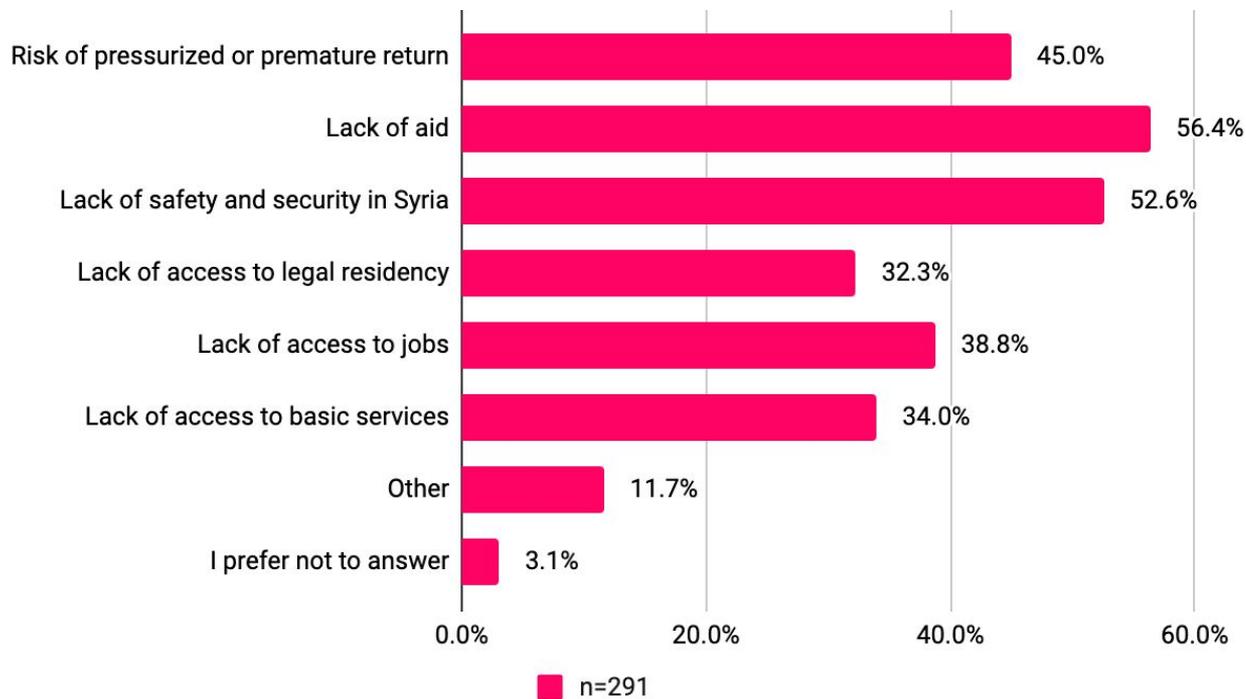
- **Humanitarian, development and peacebuilding support**
 - Donors should commit to sufficient, predictable, flexible and multi-annual humanitarian, development and peacebuilding funding to refugees and host communities in Lebanon, through dedicated mechanisms, taking into account the OECD DAC recommendation on the “triple nexus”
 - Donors should ensure that humanitarian organisations in Lebanon receive the full value of donor funding, with access to U.S. Dollars and/or other foreign currency.
 - **Localisation**
 - Ensure that a diverse set of Syrian CSOs is structurally included in, and have greater power in, discussions and decision making about refugee policies
 - Make more resources available to local research initiatives focusing on protection in areas of return and in refugee-hosting countries.
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The Panel & Mentimeter

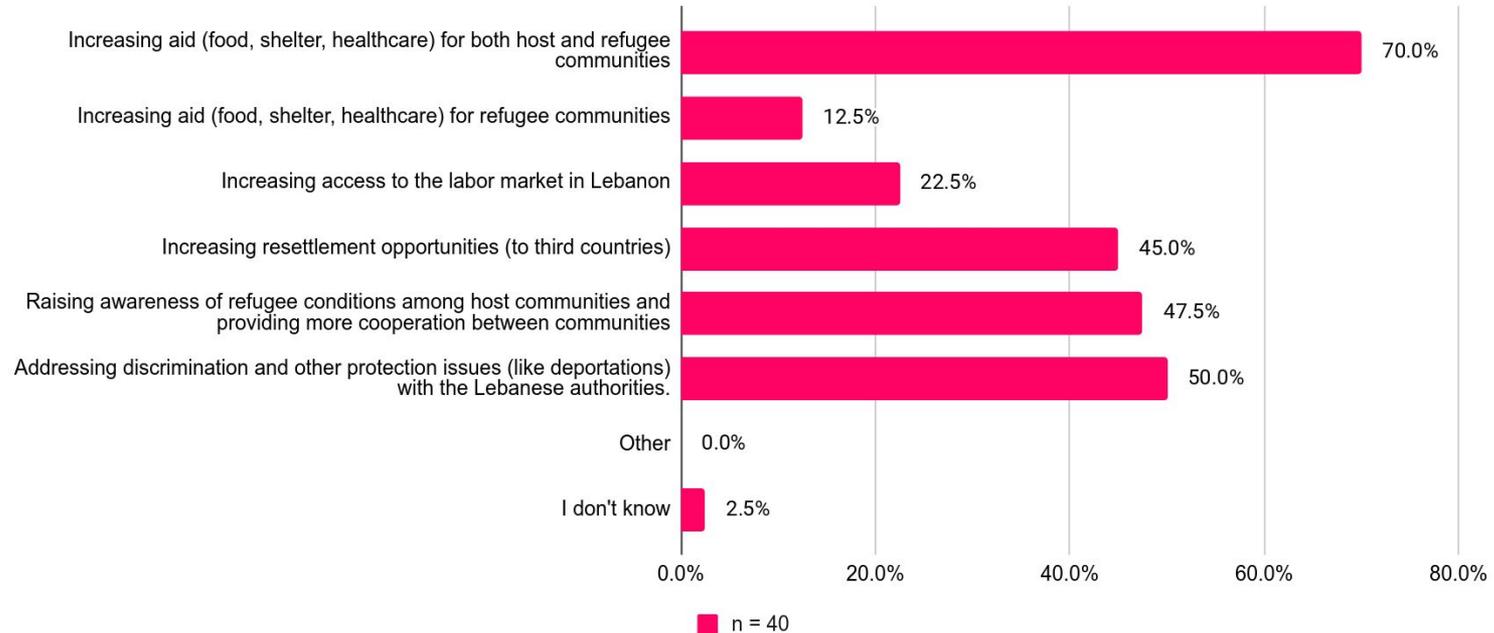
What are the most pressing **protection issues**? - Mentimeter



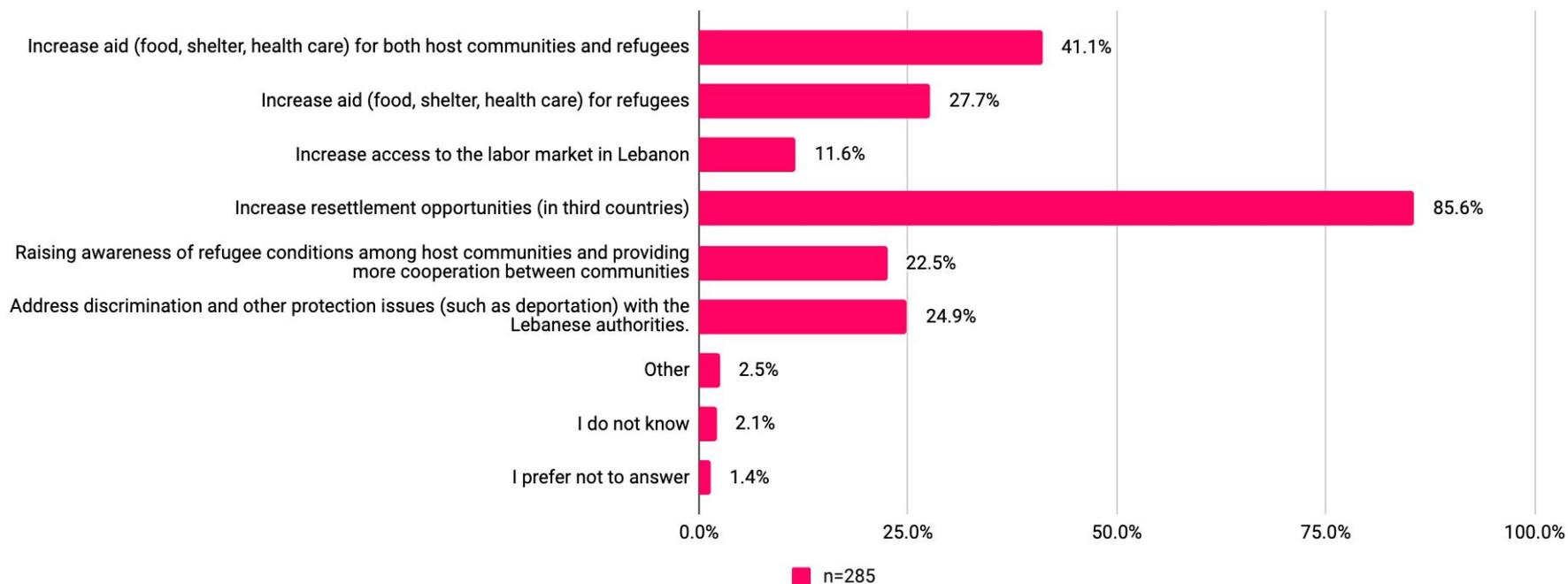
What are the most pressing **protection issues**? - Panel



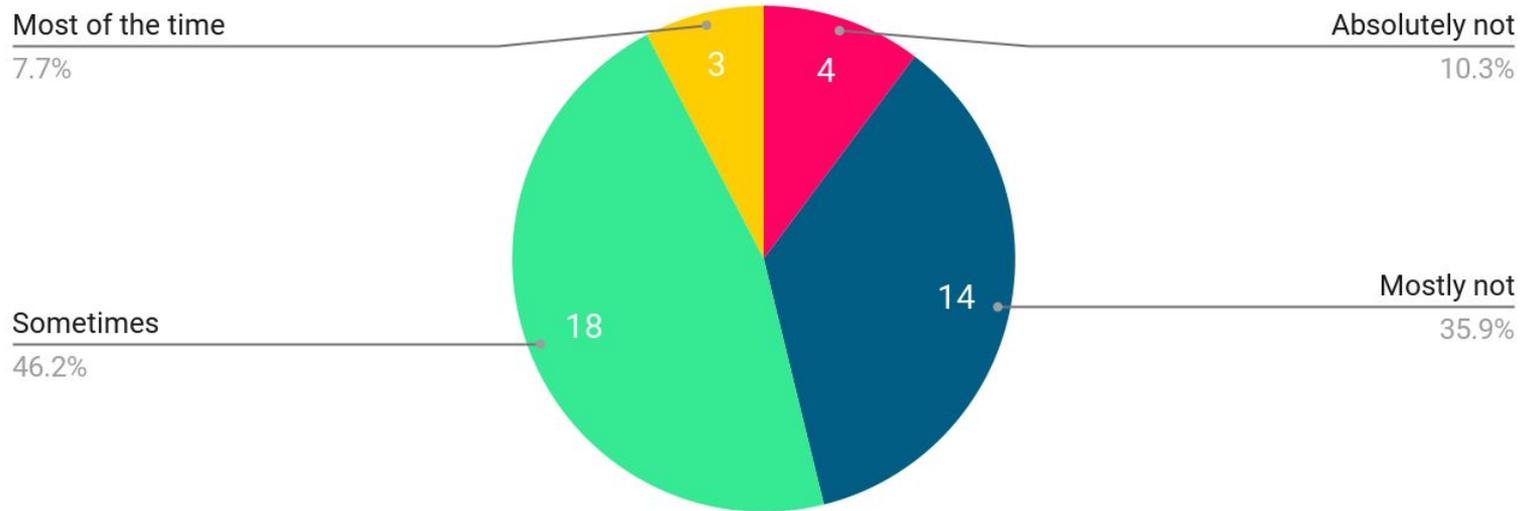
What do you think is a good **solution** to tackle the increased tensions? - Mentimeter



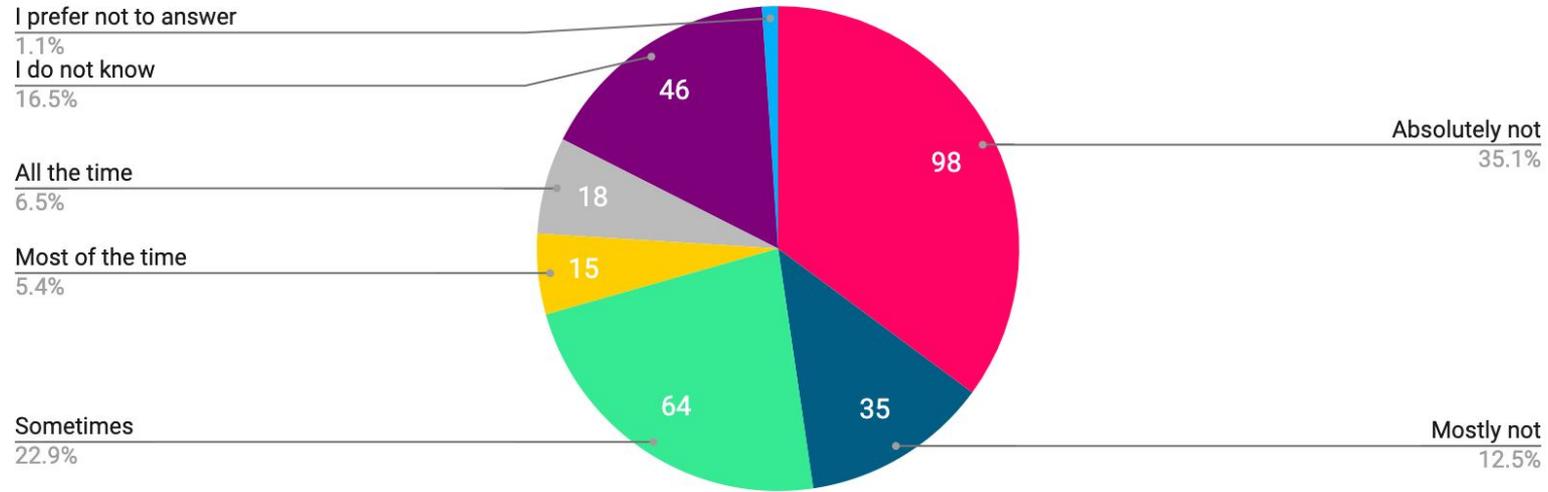
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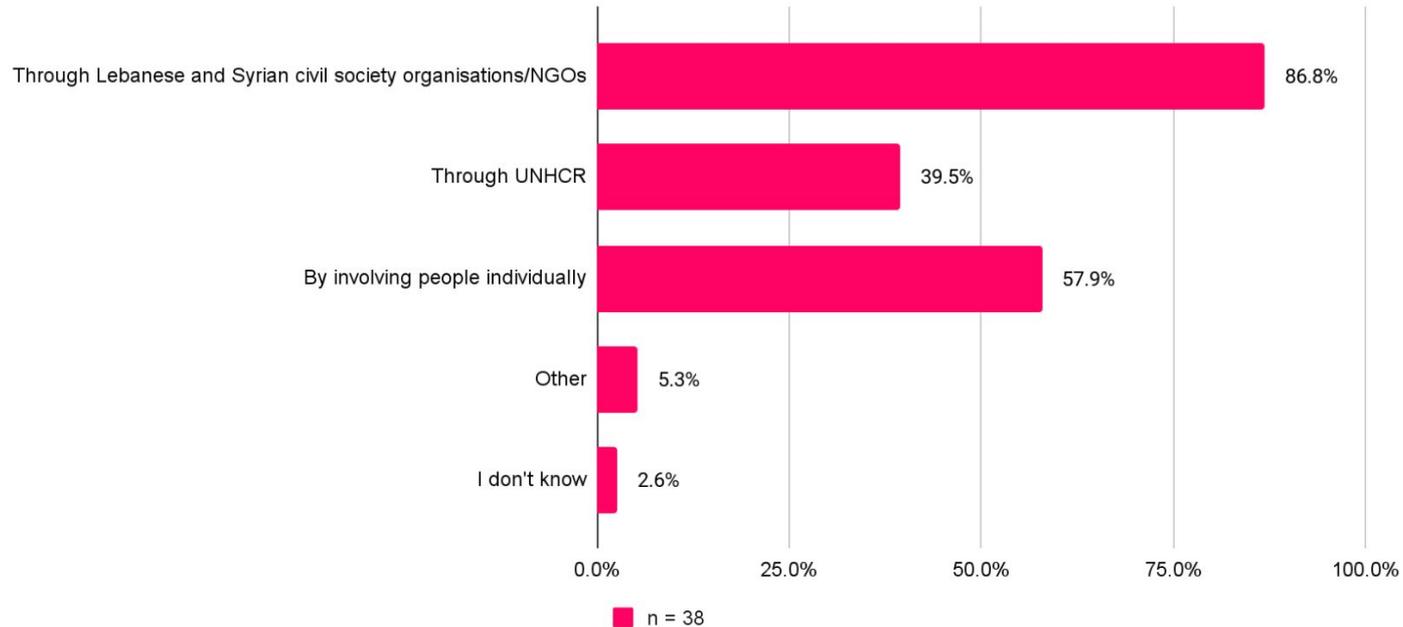
To what extent in your opinion are the voices of Syria's displaced heard? - Mentimeter



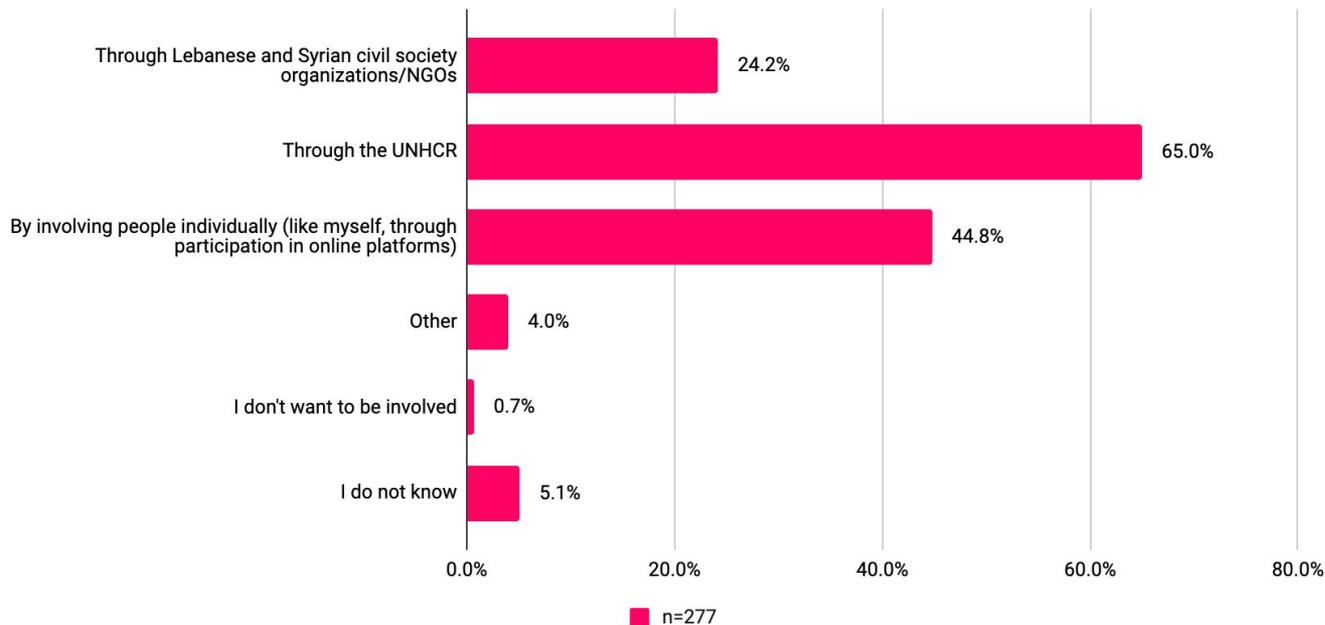
To what extent in your opinion are the voices of Syria's displaced heard? - Panel



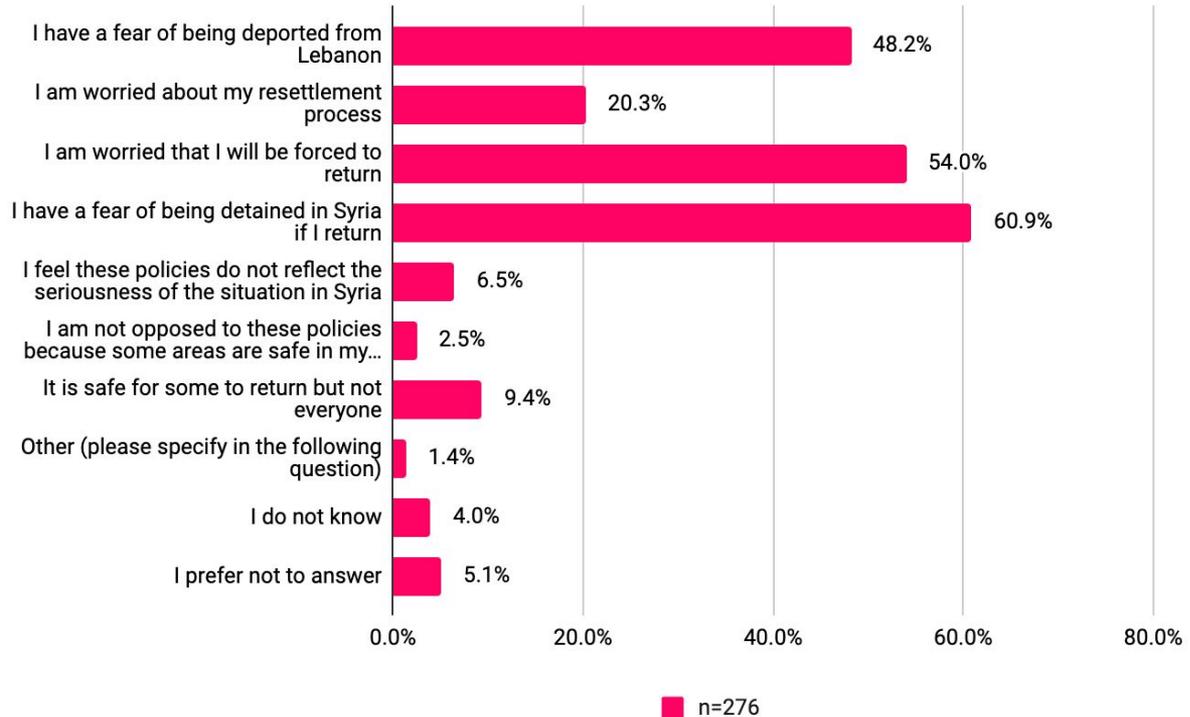
How do you suggest **improving/increasing the involvement** of Syria's displaced in these discussions? - Mentimeter



How do you suggest improving/**increasing the involvement** of Syria's displaced in these discussions? - Panel



How do you feel about the current policies on **return** to Syria and the normalization of relations between some countries and the Syrian government?





**“I have not known the taste of safety
for ten years”**

Syrians trying to survive in Lebanon and Syria

Report can be found online and will be distributed in the coming days.

www.refugeeprotectionwatch.org