

A street scene in Lebanon, featuring colorful buildings (yellow, blue, pink) and numerous strings of Lebanese national flags hanging across the road. The flags are white with red borders and a green cedar tree in the center. The street is lined with parked cars and a few people walking. The sky is overcast.

# Using Minimum Standards and Informal Systems to Shelter Displaced Populations in Lebanon

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lebanon has received displaced populations throughout its history, more recently, the country has experienced unprecedented increase of population. With over one quarter of its population representing displaced persons, predominantly from Syria, the country's resources and infrastructure are under extreme pressure.

With the position of the Lebanese Government to not allow permanent camps, humanitarian organizations have worked to find innovative solutions to improve shelter for vulnerable individuals in both the host community and displaced populations. This report focuses on shelter rehabilitation projects in the Mount Lebanon governorate. Specifically, twenty interviews conducted with partner organizations and municipality leadership regarding shelter activities, minimum standards, and coordination with stakeholders.

Findings show the need for developing context-specific standards for shelter rehabilitation projects, coordination with local authorities during the implementation process, and the awareness that working within a framework without durable solutions leads to functioning within the parameters of a community's informal governance system.

Recommendations include:

- (1) Clarify guidance documents for shelter rehabilitation projects in urban contexts
- (2) Identify and map local authority networks
- (3) Conduct vulnerability mapping
- (4) Shelter response in an urban context may need to shift from sectoral to cross-sectoral, or area-based, when a crisis becomes protracted
- (5) Prioritize immediate outcomes to build trust during area-based approaches for shelter rehabilitation



*Public space rehabilitation project in Tripoli, Lebanon. Photo credit: Miriam Hacker, 2018.*

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

BoQ	Bill of quantity
GoL	Government of Lebanon
HLP	Housing, land, and property
INGO	International non-governmental organization
ITS	Informal temporary settlement
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SSB	Sub-standard building
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in The Near East
WASH	Water and sanitation hygiene

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## INTRODUCTION

Global displacement has reached unprecedented levels in recent years, exceeding that of the Second World War [1]. In addition to this displacement, people have sought refuge in urban areas, increasing pressure on housing and infrastructure systems and adding to tensions between host communities and displaced populations. This report focuses on the protracted crisis in Lebanon which has the highest proportion of refugees to population, hosting over 1.8 displaced persons in 2017 [2], equivalent to over 25 percent of national population. The UNHCR estimates that 82 percent of refugees reside within the host community in residential and non-residential housing, which are predominantly urban areas that are already experiencing densification; over 80 percent of the overall population in Lebanon reside in urban areas [2, pp. 13, 150]. With this protracted urban shelter challenge, this report analyses the role of regulatory and governance mechanisms within shelter rehabilitation activities in urban areas through semi-structured interviews with national and international organizations assisting displaced populations, referred to as *partner organizations*, and municipal leaders in the Mount Lebanon governorate. Findings show that while partner organizations operate within the regulatory framework defined by the Government of Lebanon (GoL) (i.e. not implementing “durable solutions”), these same organizations contribute to the informal regulatory mechanism currently at play in local communities. For this study, informal systems constitute coordination with key focal leaders and municipality leadership not formally required to expedite shelter projects. Other reports have called for strengthening the urban planning framework on a national level to help formalize or restructure these informal planning networks in communities [3], but there still remains a need to understand the connection between these informal and formal systems, especially with the added participation from the international community [4]. These findings contribute to this ongoing conversation regarding informal governance mechanisms and provide an overview of experiences and recommendations from partner organizations involved with shelter projects and municipalities with vulnerable populations. Such recommendations intend to guide urban shelter activities in other similar contexts for the benefit of the population of concern<sup>1</sup>, which include both the displaced population and host community.

## REFUGEE SITUATION IN LEBANON

The start of the current crisis in Lebanon began in 2011 and 2012 when the country saw its populations of concern rocket from 13,000 to over 135,000 in one year’s time [5], [6]. The majority of the displaced populations represented Syrians fleeing their country. While Syrians represent a majority of the displaced population, other people or groups also have sought shelter, including displaced groups from Iraq and Palestinian refugees under the protection mandate of UNRWA. Lebanon has a history of receiving seasonal migrant workers from Syria, and when the Syrian conflict escalated, Syrians went to these temporary facilities on private land with family members. Refugees have also migrated to other shelter facilities in urban, rural and semi-urban areas with

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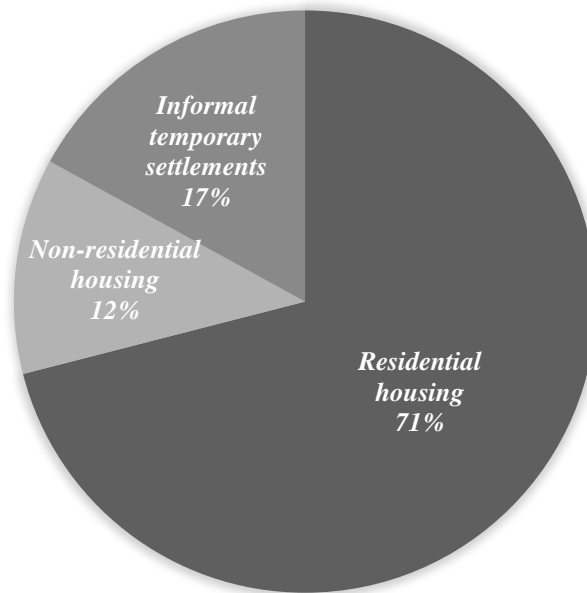
<sup>1</sup> Populations of concern include refugees, those seeking asylum, and those in refugee-like situations, as defined by UNHCR.

standard or sub-standard housing, as defined in Table 1 and visualized in Figure 1. Shelter facilities are located in both urban and rural areas and include both residential and non-residential buildings at varying levels of quality (i.e. standard vs. sub-standard). Due to the GoL’s “no-camp” policy, partner organizations are not allowed to construct or procure shelter solutions, but instead are permitted to provide temporary assistance or shelter activities which are not considered durable solutions. For example, a partner organization cannot rent an apartment building to provide housing to displaced persons but are allowed to assist families who live in a sub-standard building by providing non-structural upgrades. This has left displaced populations in poor living conditions and exacerbated resources of the host community, creating vulnerability for both groups.

*Table 1. Definitions for types of housing.*

<b>Types of Housing</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<i>Informal Temporary Settlements</i>	Settlements that were established in an unplanned and unmanaged manner, which means they are generally unrecognized (by municipalities/local authorities?) [7, p. 5]
<i>Collective Centers</i>	Location where six or more households share kitchen and bathroom facilities [8]
<i>Standard Building</i>	A structure that meets minimum standards for residential use (e.g. existing residential apartments, houses)
<i>Sub-standard Building</i>	A structure that is physically sub-standard. Sub-Standard Building is a general category that includes: unfinished houses, dilapidated/damaged houses, converted garages/shops work sites, etc. [8, p. 5]

*Source: Inter-Agency Shelter Sector Working Group, Lebanon [7], [8]*



*Figure 1. Types of structures used by displaced persons in Lebanon for housing [9, p. 136]*



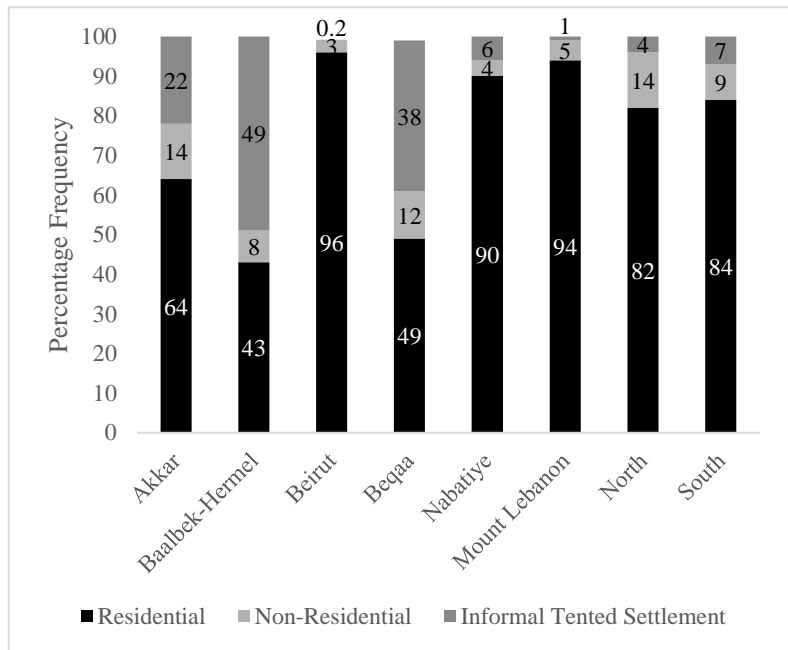
## METHODOLOGY

Between August and October 2018, 20 interviews were conducted with leadership in local municipalities (e.g. presidents, vice presidents) and employees with partner organizations (e.g. local nonprofit organizations, UN agencies, international organizations) (see Table 2 **Error! Reference source not found.**).

*Table 2. Interview overview, including respondent characteristics.*

	Number of Interviews	Positions Held	Years of Experience
Municipality	10	President Vice President Head of Construction Head of Infrastructure Point of contact with INGO	5-20
Partner Organization	10	Country Director Research Analyst Program Manager Shelter Infrastructure Coordinator Field Coordinator Shelter Officer Chief Field Infrastructure	2-15
Total	20	--	--

Data collection began by contacting the coordinator for the Lebanon Inter-Agency Shelter Cluster and using snowball sampling to find points of contact within partner organizations that were involved with urban shelter projects or shelter rehabilitation. Initially, data collection was focused in the Beirut and Mount Lebanon governorates due to the categorization vulnerability, combined with the percentage of displaced persons living in residential housing, 96 percent and 94 percent, consecutively (Figure 2). The interviews included in this study are based on response for interview requests, which were primarily from municipalities in Mount Lebanon.



**Figure 2.** Overview of housing types for displaced persons across governorates in Lebanon. Source: GoL and UN [2, p. 151].

Ten municipalities were interviewed in the Mount Lebanon governorate (Figure 3). Government interviews were arranged based on the most recent statistics available for vulnerability mapping in the Beirut and Mount Lebanon governorate (Figure 4 **Error! Reference source not found.**). Municipalities ranked for the highest or second highest level of vulnerability were indications of the presence of refugees as well as vulnerable Lebanese communities (Figure 5). These interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes and were conducted in Arabic or English depending on the respondent's preference. Questions explored the individual(s) role in the organization or municipality, their perspective on the current housing situation for both Lebanese and refugee population, shelter or infrastructure improvement activities they were familiar with, coordination with other stakeholders (i.e. GoL, municipalities, donors, partner organizations, private companies) and what they expected of the housing situation if the current circumstances continued into the coming years.

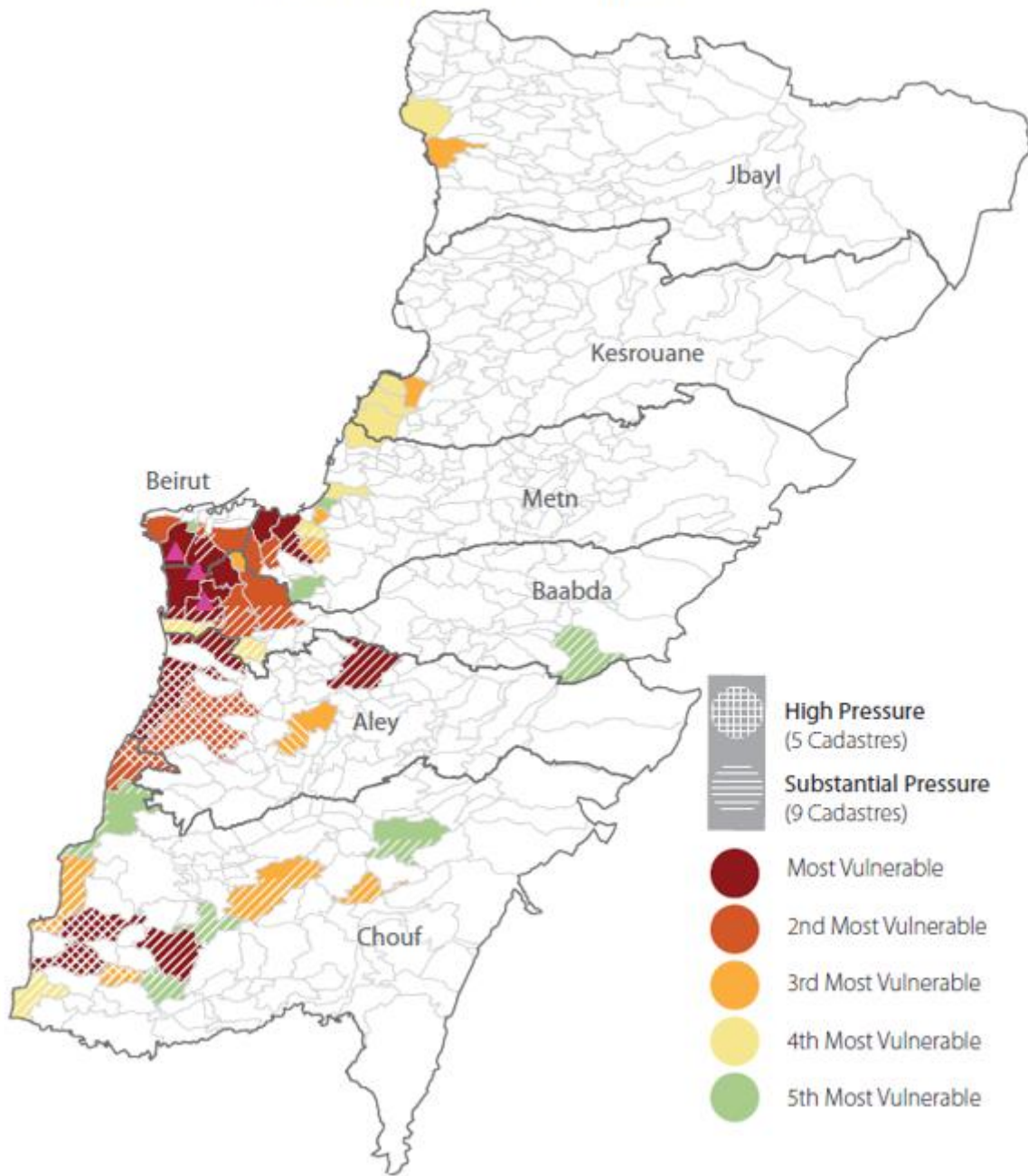
<i>Municipalities</i>	
Aamchit	Jdaidet El Matn
Aley	– Baouchriyeh
Aramoun	– Sadd El
Baisour	Baouchriyeh
Barja	Ketermaya
Beirut	Naameh
Choueifat	Quobbei

*Figure 3. List of municipalities interviewed for this study.*

### **Data Analysis**

Audio recordings from the interviews were first transcribed using online professional services, then translated to English as necessary using online professional services again. Transcripts were uploaded and analyzed using Dedoose software [10]. A qualitative approach, specifically thematic coding was used to observe any emergent themes relating to shelter activities, regulations, minimum standards, and other codes that frequently arose during the coding process. Applying thematic coding constitutes bringing an anticipated list of themes that are expected to be found in the interviews, and observing the frequency and utilization within the narratives [11]. In most cases, additional themes presented themselves during the coding process. For example, as interviews were analyzed for topics related to minimum standards and regulation, infrastructure emerged as a topic related to shelter activities that were discussed by respondents.

## Most Vulnerable Localities



*Figure 4. Most vulnerable localities within Beirut and Mount Lebanon governorates as of May 2016 [12].*

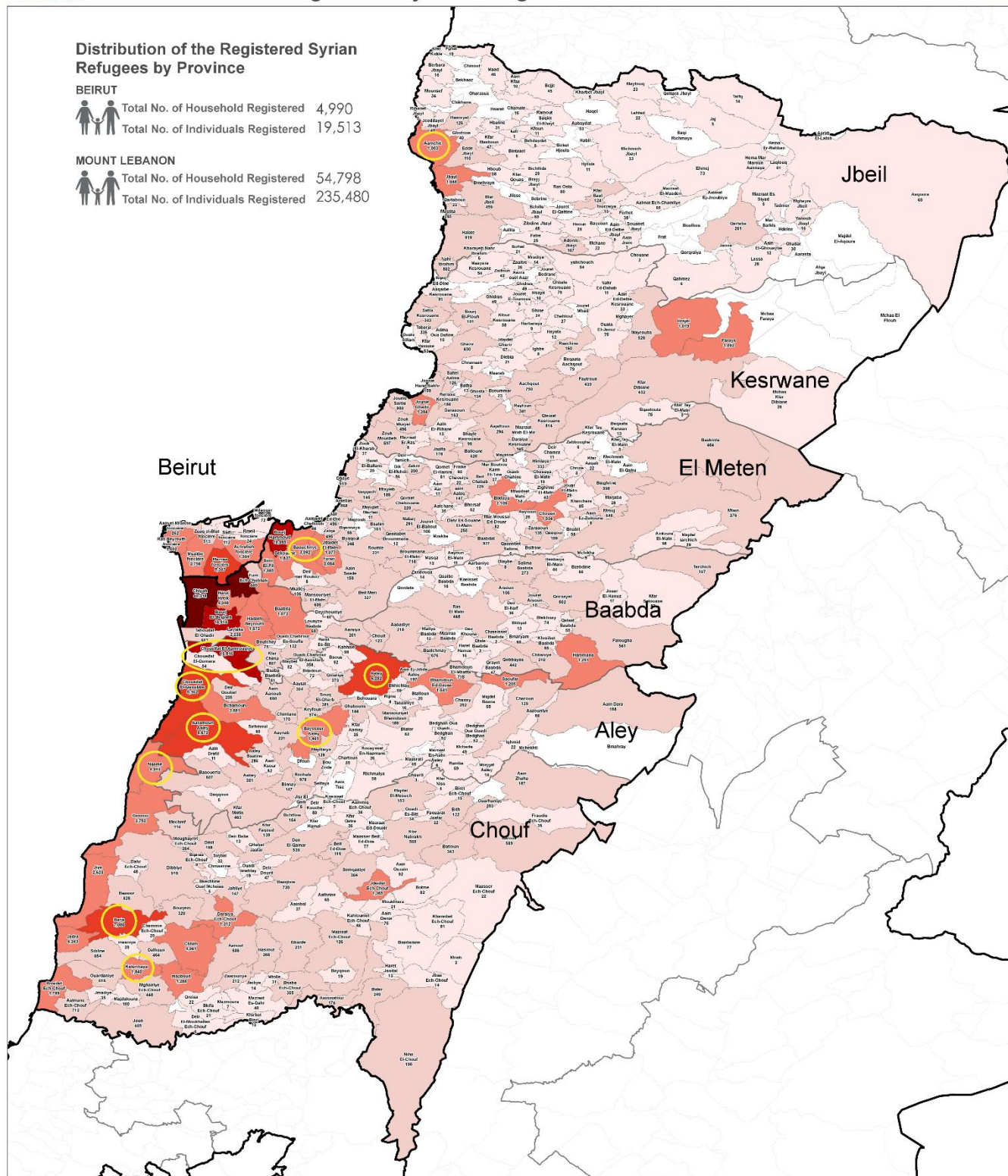


Figure 5. Distribution of registered Syrian refugees in the Beirut and Mount Lebanon governorates. Source: UNHCR.

Governorate  
 Caza  
 The No. indicates the registered refugees at the cadastral level  
 Municipalities interviewed for this study

0 5 10 KM

Figure 5. Distribution of registered refugees across the Beirut and Mount Lebanon governorates. Cadastrals circled in yellow represent participants in this study.

## **URBAN SHELTER IN LEBANON**

Lebanon did not sign the 1951 Refugee Convention, nor the 1967 protocol, removing limitations from the 1951 Convention to extend its scope to refugees fleeing beyond 1 January 1951 [13], [14]. Without this baseline agreement, negotiations with the Government of Lebanon (GoL) had to be established, defining the role of the international community in responding to the rapid migration of displaced persons from Syria into Lebanon after 2011. The GoL upheld a “no-camp policy,” preventing permanent/durable solutions being implemented in shelter and settlements assistance. This affected the types of materials distributed for shelter upgrading and preventing partner organizations from renting housing in urban areas to shelter displaced persons. Durable solutions were off the table, partner organizations began looking into other ways to improve shelter assistance for Syrian populations, such as cash transfer programs or shelter rehabilitation projects [2]. The following sections describe shelter rehabilitation activities in more detail as well as minimum standards that were developed for consistency in implementation.

### **Shelter Rehabilitation Projects**

Shelter organizations have taken multiple approaches to improve shelter in both rural and urban areas including distributing emergency shelter materials to improve weatherization and fire-proofing in informal tented settlements (ITS) [2], implementing cash-transfer programs [15], and shelter rehabilitation projects [2]. Each of these plays a critical role in improving the daily lives of the vulnerable population. The majority of refugees in Mount Lebanon reside in residential housing, representing standard and sub-standard buildings intended for residential use (Figure 2). Therefore, this paper focuses specifically on shelter rehabilitation activities due to the positioning of households in urban areas within Mount Lebanon. There are three major types of rehabilitation projects (Table 3): owner-led, beneficiary-led, and contractor-led. In all three modalities, a tenant-landlord agreement is made ensuring at least 12 months of rent without rate increase or eviction. This is the primary goal of the shelter rehabilitation projects: improve living conditions within sub-standard housing and improve tenure security for tenants [8], [16]. However, this intervention is met with barriers for implementation; partner organizations have to find landlords who see the cost-benefit of allowing upgrades in exchange for the rental agreement with the tenants. In some urban areas, cost of living is too high for landlords to view these shelter activities as incentive [17]. Additionally, tenants within these sub-standard buildings are less inclined to relocate due to the social and economic networks they’ve established in the community [16], [18].



*Table 3. Descriptions of implementation modalities for shelter rehabilitation projects.*

<b>Modality of Rehabilitation</b>	<b>Description</b>
<i>Owner-led</i>	The agency enters into a contractual agreement with the owner to undertake the works on the property. Payments are made in a phased manner based on progress against the agreed contract and Bill of Quantities (BoQ).
<i>Beneficiary-led</i>	The agency enters into a contractual agreement with the beneficiary to undertake the works on the property. Payments are made in a phased manner based on progress against the agreed contract and BoQ.
<i>Contractor-led</i>	The agency enters into a contractual agreement with a contractor. Payments are made according to progress based on the contractual documents signed between the agency and contractor.

*Source: Adapted from the Guidelines for the Rehabilitation of Sub-Standard Buildings (SSB) [8]*

In 2016, only ten percent of the targeted set of shelter needs in sub-standard buildings were met [9, p. 137]. The operation of partner organizations in urban areas also has an effect on the municipalities themselves and there has been a call to increase coordination activities with local authorities in planning projects due to the “excessive burden” that have been added to their municipal responsibilities [3], [14], [19]. While the informal social networks within municipalities have survived through dynamic population fluxes, researchers have identified the need to harness and better understand these networks in the path forward to stabilizing the housing situation for both Lebanese and refugee vulnerable populations [4]. Given these factors, this report targets the perspective of municipalities with large amounts of vulnerable populations in urban areas and partner organizations involved with shelter rehabilitation projects to better understand how regulatory mechanisms interact with vulnerable populations in urban areas.

### **Guidelines for Shelter Rehabilitation**

Regulations are a broad form of governance which create a baseline standard for delivery of service[20], [21]. Standards are specific rules and guidelines that are not necessarily required by law [22, p. 3] yet social repercussions exist when standards are not met. Regulatory governance is integrated into institutional governance through structures, like permitting processes for new construction. However, in the context of displacement and providing shelter, these structures are not applicable. In the case of Lebanon, shelter activities cannot be durable, resulting in intervention being well below the eligibility for participation in the permitting process. Humanitarian standards for shelter in urban settings and protracted crises have been recently developed for partner organizations (i.e. Sphere Standards [23]). These standards, provide general guidelines for what is needed to achieve minimum levels for “preserving the right to a life of dignity” [23, p. 6]. However the technical standards are not always applicable for urban contexts and qualitative standards leave room for interpretation, challenging consistency in implementation of shelter activities [24]. In 2012, the Inter-Agency Shelter Working Group put together a technical committee to develop a

guidance document for shelter rehabilitation projects. These guidelines have been updated over time and provide a reference tool for partner organizations looking to participate in shelter rehabilitation activities in Lebanon. Definitions are provided to clarify types of housing, the purpose of the shelter activity and guidance for implementation. The document also includes standards for area selection, building selection, and specific types of rehabilitation during projects (e.g. what extent of improvements should be made for categories such as roof, water supply, sanitation, etc.). Selection of participants is based on vulnerability, legal issues associated with shelter rehabilitation (e.g. confirming ownership, drafting rental agreements, etc.), and categories for the level of rehabilitation depending on the type of building (e.g. finished, unfinished, residential, non-residential). Structures selected for rehabilitation need to meet national construction standards and formal approval from local authorities is required when water and sanitation hygiene (WASH) activities include connecting to the existing network. The main contractual agreement in the standards are with the landlord/building owner and the tenant, however, partner organizations are encouraged to engage with municipalities for confirming ownership and in general to “foster local relations”, which was being done by one third of the shelter organizations [8, pp. 15, 26]. In the 2015 revision, the allowable types of buildings were expanded to include more types of buildings. Partner organizations set a minimum standard for buildings eligible for rehabilitation, but it was found that many of the most vulnerable population of concern were well below this standard. This was due to building owners creating informal housing (e.g. allowing people to live on rooftops or in extra storage space within the residential building). The purpose of expanding the standards was to encompass these additional housing structures that had emerged in the housing supply.

## **MAJOR FINDINGS**

### **Guidance Needed for Urban Contexts**

A fundamental shift is occurring in how international and national organizations address shelter solutions for displacement. Displaced persons are consistently looking for shelter in urban areas for economic and social benefits. The case of Lebanon paints an even clearer picture, where partner organizations are not allowed to establish formal housing and have begun to target vulnerability through shelter rehabilitation. Partner organizations have already developed minimum standards for this specific context, demonstrating the regulatory gap in shelter activities and the subsequent need for developing minimum standards for such interventions in other contexts [8]. When asked about the development of the shelter rehabilitation guidance document, one partner organization employee explained the need:

*“[The] Sphere Standard doesn't give you what is a new standard to bring up to the new condition in an urban context. For example, in a concrete block shelter. You can find what is the prefab reportable standard used around. You will have this, it is a lot of standard, but ask inside an apartment or inside a slum or inside their collective shelters, you will not find it. We have worked through our shelter coordination to increase this awareness to this field in the last vision of the year.” (Interview, NGO Employee, 14 Aug 2018)*

The fourth edition of the Sphere Standards has been revised to reference urban contexts and the need to coordinate with local authorities, having a strong understanding of housing and regulatory frameworks, and various interventions [23]. However, these standards serve as a reference tool and context-specific standards are intended to supplement these general recommendations. The condition of shelters being rehabilitated is so far below acceptable levels that stricter standards would have been too cost-intensive for implementation. Creating minimum standards reduced competition between partner organizations and beneficiaries through general terms that created consistency, but at the same time allowed flexibility in interpretation [20]:

*“We need to have the minimum standard, at least, to try to have some level of standardization, harmonization of this work we do ... If we don't try to have a certain harmonization in the ways we work, they start putting us into competition ... We need still to avoid these kinds of situations where basically landlords are taking advantage of a situation, and just using humanitarian aid for their own purpose without really caring for the refugees in this situation anyway.” (Interview, NGO Employee, 16 Oct 2018)*

The minimum standards developed by the Shelter Working Group are specific to Lebanon's housing situation. It is important to understand local housing issues, but the shelter intervention was still well below the need for formal permits. Partner organizations knew the threshold for needing permits:

*“With the municipality one, given that it's kind of informal, there is no enforcement of abiding rules and regulations of construction, but at the end not to exceed from the 120 meters. This is very important.” (Interview, NGO Employee, 14 August 2018)*

This same sentiment was expressed by municipalities when they described their involvement in the shelter rehabilitation activities:

*“The building is permitted, but the apartment-- He can rent it out to whoever he wants. We can't get involved in what going on inside, unless we have warrant, which requires a long procedure.” (Interview, Municipality President, 19 October 2018)*

The fact that partner organizations were operating in specific households rather than entire buildings shifted the need for engaging with formal governance mechanisms to coordinate shelter activities. Yet, minimum standards were still needed to inform a cohesive shelter intervention across members of the Shelter Working Group. Thus, these minimum standards were developed to reduce competition across organizations and better structure the projects in a way that were consistent in cost, outcomes (i.e. rental agreements between building owners and beneficiaries), and level of rehabilitation. An example was described by a nonprofit employee where building owners refused to house refugees unless they were able to participate in the shelter rehabilitation program with specific partner organizations due to the amount of funds given for upgrades. Partner organizations acknowledged that rehabilitation is site specific but supported consistent levels of funding provided for each household, minimum time for rent-reduction or rent-free living after the

upgrades were made. Shelter rehabilitation emerged from the dismissal of durable solutions which are conventionally used in humanitarian response. Minimum standards or guidance documents for shelter rehabilitation should also be framed within the temporal context of the shelter response. Minimum standards for shelter activities in initial humanitarian response will look differently than in a protracted crisis.

### **Contributing to Informal Governance**

In a protracted crisis, activities progressively transition from humanitarian/emergency relief to development projects. Using minimum standards in humanitarian response creates a baseline for delivery of service. However, dependent on the area of response and extent of response time, standards that are below national levels may have negative long-term impacts on housing supplies in urban areas. This is much more for countries with established governance systems. For example, informal housing was added to the Beirut housing supply through exceptions, creating inconsistent urban spatial planning which had to be integrated into the formal system [25]. This has also been observed in other contexts as well, including the United States and the recent migration influx in Sweden [26], [27]. In countries with greater opportunity for developing regulatory systems, minimum standards in humanitarian response help provide a basis for the growth of governance systems, but more studies are needed to confirm or challenge these observations. In the context of Lebanon, the partner organizations are contributing to informal governance systems in attempts to satisfy the central government's stance on not implementing durable solutions. Minimum standards used for urban shelter rehabilitation create a baseline for quality in a semi-permanent structure, which has the potential for long-term impacts. Although it is acknowledged that these minimum standards enabled partner organizations to rehabilitate more buildings with the available funds, these standards are far below the acceptable standard for Lebanese communities and other displaced populations, such as Palestinian refugees:

*“Palestinians, you know what the story is. How can you have the same approach for both [types of shelter activities], you know? It's really totally unfair because at the end of the day, the Syrian refugees who are here right now, they have very nice places back home to go back to. They are citizens of a country. Certainly, we need to help them to get the absolute minimum, to reach a certain perfection level, minimal standards and all that because all that is going to go down, really, at one point. For Palestinians, there's no place to go back to. Their shelter is really their home.” (Interview, Chief Infrastructure Officer, Partner Organization, 12 October 2018)*

During interviews, representatives from the municipality were asked about the present housing situation in their community, impacts that occurred due to the increase in population, any actions that the municipality had taken to offset impacts, preferred types of housing for refugees, and what types of minimum standards that should be used in such facilities. When asked about minimum standards and regulations for refugee housing within municipalities, major themes included security and impact to infrastructures, such as electricity, water, and solid waste. Every

interview emphasized the additional pressure added to infrastructure systems from renting housing in their municipality:

*“However, the existence of the refugees is stopping us from regulating our situation in the long term. Stealing electricity is happening because of the reality of the situation, stealing water-- When we used to have resources, we used them to build a reservoir to provide water for people, as I've told you before. That artesian well that we've dug has costed us money.” (Interview, Municipality President, 13 September 2018)*

Shelter interventions include WASH improvements, improving the quality within specific households. Area-based approaches with communal projects also improved public spaces in communities. These projects were mostly done in coordination with the municipality and have served as a viable shelter approach in the transition between humanitarian response and long-term development [17], [28]. This is in light of the identified need for the establishment of a more cohesive urban planning framework to create comprehensive improvements to public spaces and housing supply [4], [14], [25], [29], [30]. Another part of this informal governance system was navigating rules put in place by municipalities for refugees. For example, certain regulations were put into place by municipalities to regulate the distribution of refugees in their municipality:

*“What we did we didn't allow any house to rent by only guys. When someone come and want to rent a small house, two rooms or three rooms, etc. the owner is happy because he rented his property, but then this man comes alone then around 10 men or 12 or 15 will be in this house, so [there is] big conflict.” (Interview, Municipality President, 5 September 2018)*

Expectations of municipalities by partner organizations were inconsistent due to the decentralized nature of the government (i.e. involvement of municipalities are contingent on the individual sentiment of the local leadership), yet they hold power in regulating day-to-day activities and motivating individuals in the municipality. This required a degree of coordination and acceptance by the local authorities in implementing shelter interventions:

*“That's why it's even important because you can get into-- It's so easy for someone to facilitate your work and equally easy for them to disrupt your work. It's very important that we coordinate with the authorities ... I'm just saying that you do not need a permit for every single thing you do that's why we coordinate with municipalities from the start. We tell them what type of repairs we do. They would have an idea and decide-- We figure out an agreement them so that they would help us out.” (Interview, Shelter Coordinator, 21 September 2018)*

These implications also include the housing, land, and property (HLP) issues in the community. To arrange a rental agreement, partner organizations need to confirm ownership, sometimes requiring confirmation by the municipality. These interactions are contingent on how municipalities regulate the situation and willingness to engage with partner organizations on behalf



of beneficiaries. In some cases, partner organizations were limited in areas of work based on municipality stance on receiving displaced persons [17].

### **Not Required, but Municipal Coordination Still Needed**

Shelter rehabilitation projects are below the threshold for permitting and yet have been facilitated through local authorities not formally responsible for regulating these projects. During interviews, a need to communicate with local authorities to build trust and increase the efficiency of projects was expressed by partner organizations. This finding was inconsistent, most likely due to the decentralized governmental system and small sample size of partner organizations coordinating shelter intervention. Involving the municipality is a recommendation rather than a formal step in coordination, as indicated by one respondent:

*“When you have no ways to regulate [shelter activities], then the organization can just come in and say, ‘I’m just going to talk to the mayor once and then, go and do my work.’ Some would coordinate more regularly but you had no mechanism to regulate that.” (Interview, Research Analyst, 17 August 2018)*

Although not regulated, multiple partner organizations and municipalities emphasized the need to have better communication for local projects. When asked about coordination with partner organizations, all municipalities had contact with partner organizations doing a variety of assessments and evaluations, but this was disproportionate to the activity in the municipality. A majority of the projects were related to social services rather than shelter or infrastructure. While the respondents expressed appreciation for these projects, they identified a desire for partner organizations to better align their projects with needs identified by the municipality. For example, in one interview, a president expressed the need for social integration and improved use of the municipality’s infrastructure but were provided with a playground instead:

*“When dealing with the organizations they should approach the municipalities, not the government because the municipalities know more about the improvements that can be done, for example, if we said we needed one project to be done they’ll do a completely different project. Let’s say workshops about electricity and following the rules, they come and say that they want to build a playground. They should ask the host community for their needs.” (Interview, Municipality President, 1 Oct 2018)*

In every interview with municipalities, the researcher was told that the municipality had received numerous requests for meetings by various partner organizations to identify needs but typically without any further action. Most partner organizations emphasized the role of municipal leadership in the efficacy of project delivery, but this sentiment was not held by all organizations, as expressed by one shelter coordinator:

*“[We contacted the municipalities] for the first two, three years and then, we stopped. This was not requested by them. It was not requested by the owner. It was also more complex to*

*have this [communication] with them. It's very time consuming and not very efficient.” (Interview, Shelter Coordinator, 2 October 2018)*

This is similar to the idea that was previously mentioned by the municipality in that shelter interventions are at a household, not building level, which supersedes the need to involve municipal leadership. The majority of partner organizations still emphasized the importance of local coordination and noted that this process was improved by mapping key points of contact. Vulnerability mapping was the most resource intensive and mentioned in previously published case studies [17]. Partner organizations that took the time to map gatekeepers for the community also expressed overall satisfaction for the activities. One major catalyst to vulnerability mapping was initial contact with local authorities and diversifying the level of rehabilitation projects (e.g. communal vs. household) to establish trust with the community as mapping was completed. One respondent expressed this during an interview:

*“As soon as you can have something happening on the ground, even if it's one, even if it's small, you need to do it so that then trust comes then it's easier. Then you don't spend hours waiting outside an office of the municipality. You need to get things done first.” (Interview, NGO Employee, 26 October 2018)*

Municipalities are responsible for the day-to-day activities in their respective areas without necessarily being given the economic or human capacity to maintain such roles [4], [14]. As previously stated, they are the informal gatekeepers for community engagement.

## **THE PATH FORWARD**

Regulations provide a consistent level of service delivery [21] and are associated with legitimacy in a project and help navigate implementation across a diverse set of stakeholders [31], [32]. As seen in this report, partner organizations have been working to navigate formal governance systems and in doing so inadvertently have participated in informal regulatory systems by engaging local authorities during shelter rehabilitation projects. New minimum standards have been developed by the Lebanon Inter-Agency Shelter Cluster, represented by both the GoL and partner organizations to provide consistent engagement for levels of shelter rehabilitation across partner organizations engaging with this shelter activity. The urban nature of this response, in addition to the distribution of vulnerability across the host and displaced communities, has resulted in upgrading permanent structures to this minimum standard, which is below the acceptable standard of living in conventional Lebanese households. While necessary for addressing the short-term housing needs, there are long-term implications for these standards which warrants additional coordination with development agencies and the central government as it works to enhance long-term planning for the country in the coming years. Below are a few recommendations that have been gleaned from interviews with municipalities and partner organizations.

## Recommendations

- 1. Clarify guidance documents for shelter rehabilitation projects in urban contexts.** Urban contexts bridge the transitional space between humanitarian response and development activities in that immediate need exists in buildings that are part of the existing housing supply. Humanitarian standards, such as Sphere Standards, have discussed general guidelines for engaging within urban contexts, but additional guidance is needed to identify whether shelter rehabilitation is feasible in specific contexts and how to consistently implement shelter activities.
- 2. Identify and map local authority networks.** Partner organizations highlighted the necessity of being knowledgeable about key points of contact within the community and establishing a relationship of trust with the local authority during the shelter rehabilitation project. The approval process was expedited when partner organizations were able to have common understanding with key leaders in the community- both for what needs exist as well as helping gain trust of other authority, such as municipal leadership.
- 3. Conduct vulnerability mapping.** Partner organizations such as UN Habitat have initiated extensive vulnerability mapping for cities to assist with selecting areas to implement shelter activities [33]. These city profiles contain spatialized data and analysis of cross-sectoral data gathered participatively through field and household surveys, key informant interviews and focus group discussions [33]. This information is critical for understanding the needs of the community and for site selection, but practically it requires a significant amount of resources and time for full completion. Connected with the previous recommendation, connecting with local actors assists with this process, as some municipalities have begun their own mapping for other purposes, such as security. A comprehensive needs assessment with geospatial data not only improves efficiency for area-based approaches, but also benefits relations with municipalities by building trust through cross-sectoral response rather than relying on specific sectors to respond in each community. During interviews with local authorities, assessments by partner organizations were perceived as unnecessary spending to assess the situation without following through on implementation.
- 4. Shelter response in an urban context may need to shift from sectoral to cross-sectoral, or area-based, when a crisis becomes protracted.** Seven years into the situation in Lebanon, funding had decreased, yet need remained, forcing partner organizations to employ creative shelter solutions. Something that might be included with guidance documents is the point at which shelter organizations should consider shifting their approach to an area- or settlement-based approach to providing shelter solutions. This was done by partner organizations in this study, for example, updated guidance documents for shelter rehabilitation framed the intervention from a protection activity, not primarily shelter. One organization began coordinating with protection

organizations for vulnerability assessment and referrals for shelter upgrades to use funding more efficiently.

5. ***Prioritize immediate outcomes to build trust during area-based approaches for shelter rehabilitation.*** Building trust and establishing relationship with communities is essential for area-based approaches. One way to do this is identifying a quick impact project in a community/public space to complete while conducting vulnerability mapping for household-level projects. Doing this helps relieve skepticism and builds trust that the organization can produce results. Social cohesion is also critical in these community-level projects. Upgrading public spaces reduces tension between populations of concern in the displaced and host community and encourages community participation in projects.

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