



**GROUND TRUTH**  
SOLUTIONS

MIXED MIGRATION PLATFORM

# **REFUGEE PERCEPTIONS IN LEBANON**

SUMMARY OF FOCUS GROUP  
DISCUSSIONS

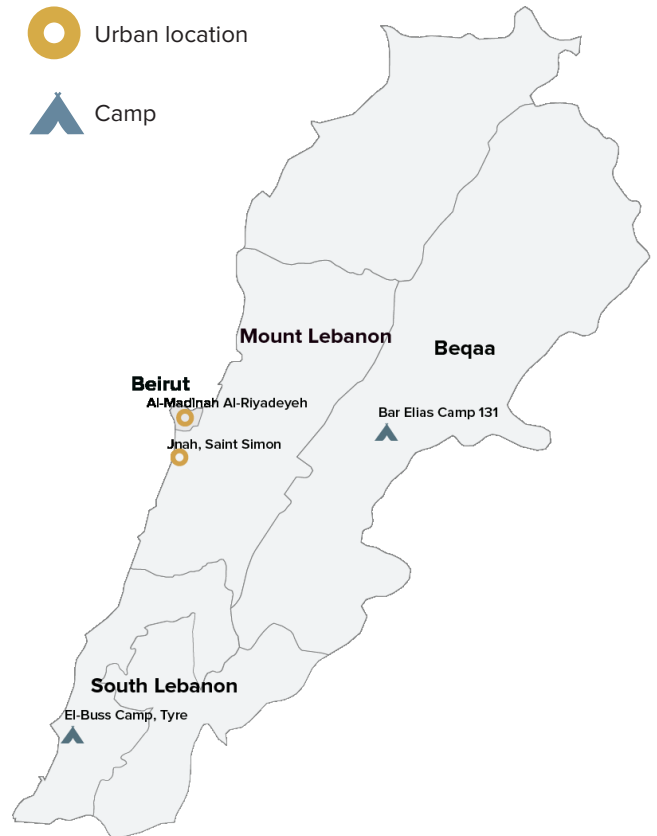
JULY 14, 2017

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# INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the findings of eight focus group discussions conducted with Syrian refugees, Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS), and Palestine refugees from Lebanon (PRL) in four different governorates in Lebanon. This is the second in a series of three data-collection rounds looking at refugee perceptions of humanitarian assistance in Lebanon under the [Mixed Migration Platform](#) (MMP). The discussion topics were designed by Ground Truth Solutions based on the findings of perceptual quantitative surveys conducted in March 2017.<sup>1</sup> The aim is to delve deeper into the issues that surfaced in the survey. More background and information about the methodology can be found on page 8 of this report.

“WE HOPE THAT OUR VOICES WILL BE HEARD.” (SYRIAN WOMAN, 38, IN SOUTH LEBANON)



These four locations were selected for focus group discussions (FGDs) because their scores were particularly low in the quantitative surveys conducted in March 2017.

## READING THIS REPORT

This report presents main findings from the focus group discussions with the main conclusions drawn from each discussion topic. Where relevant, we also include bar charts for several questions from the first round of quantitative data collection with responses quantified on a Likert scale from 1 to 5. The charts show the distribution (in %) of answer options chosen for each question – with colours ranging from dark red for negative answers to

dark green for positive ones. The mean or average score is also shown on a scale of 1 to 5.

This report covers four broad themes – changes over six months and awareness of aid; the relevance and quality of services; fairness and discrimination; and respect and participation. The report also details key concerns or recommendations that surfaced from the discussions.

<sup>1</sup> Ground Truth Solutions, *Refugee Perceptions in Lebanon: Survey Round One* (Ground Truth Solutions, 2017) <http://groundtruthsolutions.org/our-work/by-project/mixed-migration-platform/>





# CHANGES OVER SIX MONTHS & AWARENESS OF AID

Most participants reported no change in the way that aid has been provided over the last six months. An exception is at the Al-Madinah Al-Riyadeyeh (Beirut) where a majority of focus group discussion participants, especially men, pointed to a deterioration in services in recent months. Similar concerns were voiced in El-Buss Camp, Tyre (South Lebanon), where refugees must pay more for health services and UNRWA closed its schools. In Bar Elias camp 131 (Beqaa), the male participants spoke of a decline in aid in 2014, but that it has at least remained constant since November 2016. According to survey results from March 2017, respondents had not seen any changes in their lives over the four months preceding the survey, with over half of respondents in South Lebanon, Beqaa, and Mount Lebanon reporting that there had been no improvement at all in their lives. Not a single positive response was recorded among respondents in Beirut (Figure 1).

## Overall, has your life improved over the past four months?

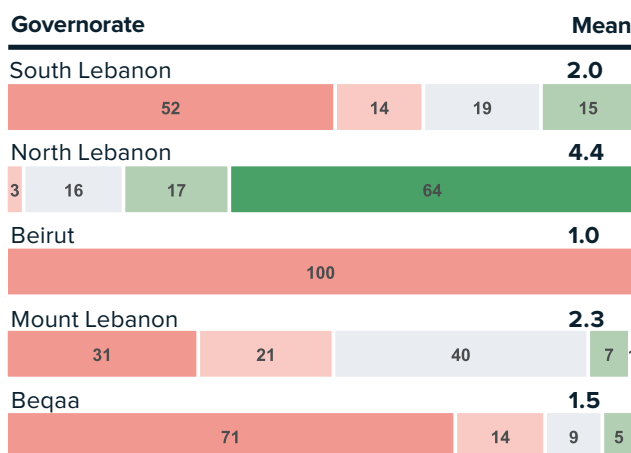


Figure 1: Lack of progress

Participants in all four locations were generally aware of the types of aid available to them. This is supported by the findings from the quantitative data collection where nearly all respondents reported a high level of awareness (Figure 2). Participants in all locations made it clear that most refugees do not receive all forms of aid.

## Do you feel informed about the kind of aid that is available to you?

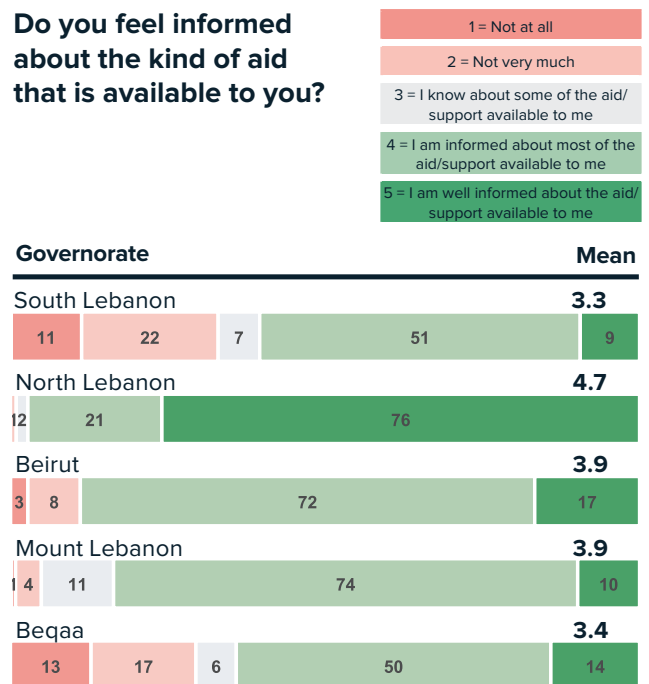


Figure 2: Broad awareness of aid





# RELEVANCE & QUALITY OF SERVICES

Services currently provided do not cover people’s basic needs, according to focus group discussion participants in Al-Madinah Al-Riyadeyeh (Beirut) and Jnah, Saint Simon (Mount Lebanon). Participants interviewed in camps in Bar Elias (South Lebanon) and El-Buss (Beqaa) were slightly more positive, saying that their basic needs are met at a minimum. In the quantitative round, respondents listed food, water, housing, medication, education, and financial support as their primary needs that were not being met (Figure 3).

## What are your most important needs that are not met?<sup>2</sup>

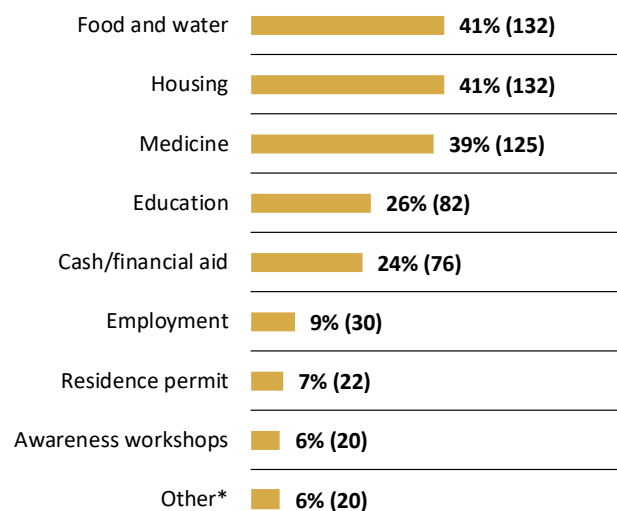


Figure 3: Unmet needs

\* 'Other' includes clothes, psychological help, safety and children needs.

The graph shows the most common responses to this open-ended question. The figures indicate the percentage/number of people who gave this answer. Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could give multiple answers.

These findings were generally supported in the focus group discussions, though needs and priorities varied by governorate.

Women in Bar Elias camp 131 (Beqaa) said that aid agencies supply them with the bare necessities, while men deemed unacceptable the level and quality of assistance provided. Female refugees were particularly dissatisfied with **health services**, explaining that as the UN closes clinics in the area, they must travel farther and pay more for transportation. At the same time, many hospitals either refuse to admit refugees or require large

deposits for admission. Male participants described how many have resorted to attempting to respond to their own needs, such as **tent rental** and **restoration**, but have faced challenges with constrained resources. There was also a concern over access to **food** during the month of Ramadan. Some participants complained that their **monthly food voucher** does not provide enough for them to meet their nutritional needs.

Participants at Jnah, Saint Simon (Mount Lebanon), the governorate that received the most positive feedback in the survey conducted in March 2017 (Figure 4), reported that even their most basic needs are not met.

## Are your most important needs met by the services you receive?

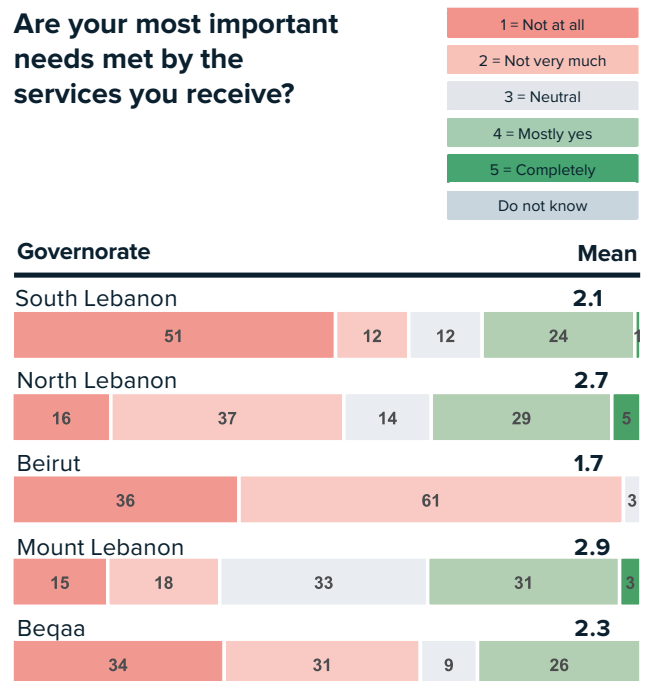


Figure 4: Priority needs are not met consistently

The data collectors have learned that refugees in Jnah, Saint Simon (Mount Lebanon) are forced to **rent** single rooms for US\$300-400 per month, and most purchase food from grocery stores on credit with the promise to repay later. Most men at the site work on a day-by-day basis as porters and cannot afford rising prices. The participants also highlighted a lack of access to **education** and **health services** at this site. Many families cannot afford to send their children to school due to high fees and transportation costs, despite being entitled to education services under UN protection.

<sup>2</sup> This question was asked to the 320 respondents who said that the services do not meet their most important needs. For more information see [Round One report](#).



There are also limited **health facilities** available to refugees, with many reverting to private clinics where they pay US\$30 for a six-month medical card. Male participants were concerned that although the UN pays 75% of the cost for all surgeries, most are unable to pay off the balance. According to the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020, Palestine refugees receive primary healthcare services and support for hospitalisation through UNRWA, while at least 70% of displaced Syrians are vulnerable and may require subsidies to access timely and adequate health care.<sup>3</sup>

Participants from Al-Madinah Al-Riyadeyeh (Beirut) reported similar circumstances to those at Jnah, Saint Simon (Mount Lebanon). In the quantitative round of March 2017, Beirut respondents were the most negative about their needs being met (Figure 4). The data collectors learned that families **rent** out single rooms for US\$300-400 per month, often in terrible conditions with high levels of humidity and contaminated water resulting in allergies and disease. In the female focus group discussion, several women mentioned the strain that **closing UN clinics** has placed on refugee families, who now consult pharmacists directly to avoid high consultation fees, and often buy whatever medicine they can afford regardless of its intended use.

Participants at El-Buss Camp, Tyre (South Lebanon) – exclusively hosting PRS and PRL – seem to be more positive. Women and men, however, are quite divided.

Women reported general feelings of content with services, particularly PRS who receive the US\$100 monthly **cash transfer**. Men, on the other hand, asserted that their basic needs are not being met following cuts to **health care** and **education** services in the last six months. They also explained that the US\$100 cash transfer is not enough to cover their rent.

Another concern among most participants across sites, particularly men, was the issue of **residency papers**. Most refugees cannot work legally because of expired residency papers and face difficulties in paying for document renewals or finding sponsors to support them. The inability to work is both a fiscal and social strain on refugees, and participants requested that aid agencies help with the registration process. The problem of residency papers and work permits is a long-standing, unsolved issue for Palestine and especially Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The same findings were revealed in a survey about the perceptions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon in 2015.<sup>4</sup> This is also in line with conclusions made in the Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR-2016) about a continuing decline of refugees holding legal residency permits since 2014.<sup>5</sup> Valid residence is one of the main factors affecting perceptions of safety among refugees.<sup>6</sup>



## FAIRNESS & DISCRIMINATION

Refugees from all locations agreed that support does not reach the people who need it most. A common frustration among participants was the seemingly random nature of aid distribution; most households did not receive all types of available aid, but the participants were unsure why. They explained that some of the poorest households receive no aid, while some relatively well-off families are regularly supported, suggesting the existence of favouritism or discrimination. Only one type of aid seems

to be perceived as distributed consistently to its intended recipients: the monthly US\$100 cash voucher for PRS. The participants said that all PRS in El-Buss Camp, Tyre South Lebanon receive this kind of aid. In the quantitative round, more than half of respondents in Beirut and Beqaa said that assistance given to refugees was “not at all” or “not very” fair. In South and Mount Lebanon, responses were more mixed in the March 2017 survey (Figure 5).

<sup>3</sup> Government of Lebanon & the United Nations, *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020* (Government of Lebanon & UN, 2017), p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Institut Des Sciences Politiques (USJ), *Survey on Perceptions of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon* (USJ, 2015), p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR, UNICEF & WFP, *Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR-2016)* (UNHCR, UNICEF, & WFP, 2016), p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Keith, Amy & Shawaf, Nour, *Oxfam briefing: Still looking for safety* (Oxfam, 2017), p. 5.



**Is assistance given to refugees [in this camp/urban location] fair and without discrimination?**

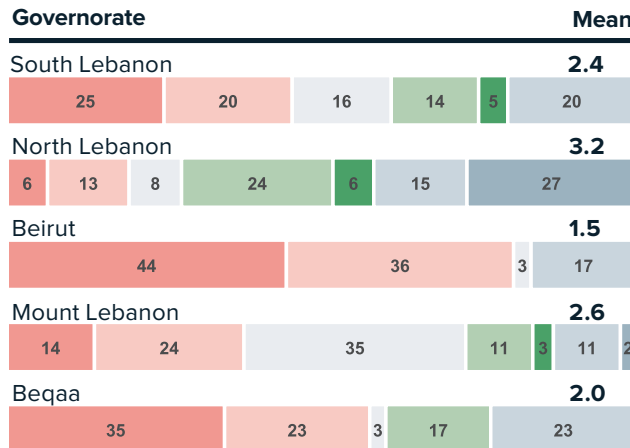


Figure 5: Fairness of aid

Most of the focus group discussions involved some mention of discrimination in aid distribution. During the male focus group discussion in Bar Elias Camp 131 (Beqaa), one participant explained that aid organisations have lost motivation to monitor the camps and have instead appointed a woman living in the camp to report on needs. This individual appears to distribute aid largely based on her personal relationships. A similar occurrence was reported in Al-Madinah Al-Riyadeyeh (Beirut) and by men in El-Buss Camp, Tyre (South Lebanon). Some participants in Bar Elias Camp 131 (Beqaa) also noted disparities between camps, with neighbouring camps appearing to receive more attention from aid organisations.

Participants were unable to provide a definite reason for the disparity, but some suggested favouritism as a major factor. In Jnah, Saint Simon (Mount Lebanon), there was little concern of outright favouritism, but some participants complained about other refugees who abuse the system by registering for aid without living in the camp and by giving away their allowances to family and friends when they travel. Men in El-Buss Camp, Tyre (South Lebanon) reported a similar problem, in which some households

would register twice to receive twice as much aid.

A common perception in all focus group discussions was that cash transfers to refugees are neither fair nor transparent. The one exception was among women in El-Buss Camp, Tyre (South Lebanon), who found the transfers to be fair because all PRS receive them. However, they also mentioned that the cash transfer voucher card for SRS contains US\$173 while PRS receive only US\$100. In all other cases, participants noted that some families receive transfers and others do not, for reasons that are unclear to them. A minority of participants in some locations hypothesised that the inconsistent distribution was the aid agencies' way to allow all households to receive aid at some point despite their finite resources. The general sentiment of unfair cash distribution is supported by the quantitative round, where a majority of respondents in Beirut expressed negative opinions about the fairness and transparency of cash transfers (Figure 6).

**Are cash transfers to refugees fair and transparent?**

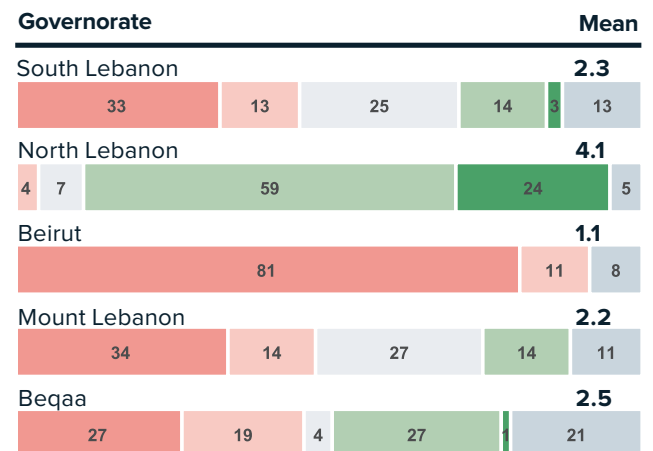


Figure 6: Cash support

In South and Mount Lebanon and Beqaa, perceptions were more mixed with a significant proportion of respondents being unsure if cash transfers are transparent (Figure 6).





# RESPECT & PARTICIPATION

Participants had mixed feelings about being treated with respect by aid agencies. In the women’s session in Bar Elias Camp 131 (Beqaa), some claimed that they feel respected by larger organisations like the UN, but less so by private organisations. The male participants mostly agreed that they are respected, but that the level of respect has declined over time. In Jnah, Saint Simon (Mount Lebanon) and Al-Madinah Al-Riyadeyeh (Beirut) sites, situated in governorates with the lowest scores regarding respect in the quantitative round (Figure 7), participants explained that they seldom interact with aid workers but generally feel respected when they do.

## Do aid providers treat you with respect?

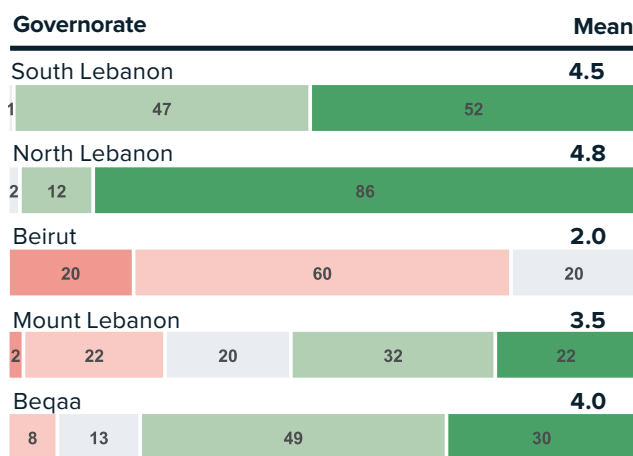


Figure 7: Respect

Women in El-Buss Camp, Tyre (South Lebanon) reported a general feeling of respect, while men said that the level of respect could not be generalised and that it varied by person.

There was a consensus that aid agencies do not elicit feedback from refugees, or consider their opinions when making decisions about the provision of aid. The male discussion group in Bar Elias Camp 131 (Beqaa), for example, was reported to have responded with universal laughter when asked if organisations involve them in decisions. This sentiment is supported in the quantitative round, where an overwhelming majority of respondents

across sites said that organisations do “not at all” or do “not very much” involve refugees in decisions about the support they provide (Figure 8).

## Do organisations involve you in decisions about the support they provide?

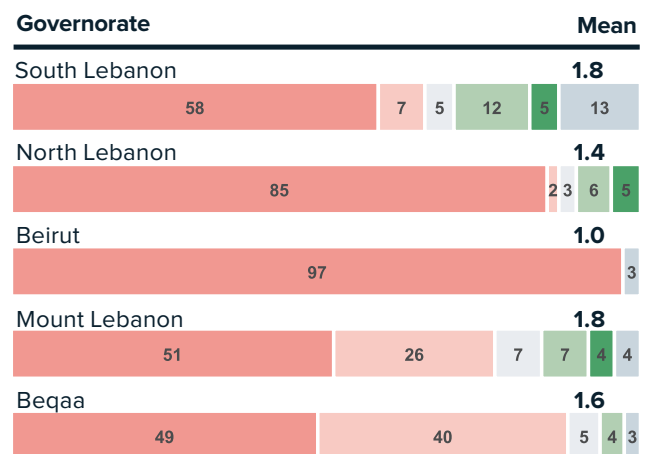


Figure 8: Lack of participation

In El-Buss Camp, Tyre (South Lebanon), the general opinion was similar with organisations described as “arrogant” for not involving people in their decisions. Participants in Jnah, Saint Simon (Mount Lebanon) and Al-Madinah Al-Riyadeyeh (Beirut) complained that the UN seldom, if ever, returns any complaint calls. The poor response by aid organisations was the main reason given in the quantitative round for not trusting existing complaints mechanisms.<sup>7</sup> None of the focus group discussion participants – except women in El-Buss Camp, Tyre (South Lebanon) – were aware of any activities undertaken by aid agencies to involve refugees.

The participants recommended that aid organisations remain engaged with refugees after conducting surveys. They suggested that the best way for them to learn about the results of a survey is via text messaging (SMS), distributing short reports, visiting homes, and organising oral presentations. Some participants expressed concern over the use of text messages (SMS) because not all refugees have access to mobile phones.

<sup>7</sup> Ground Truth Solutions, *Refugee Perceptions in Lebanon* (Ground Truth Solutions, 2017), p. 17.





## OVERALL RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendations for improving aid from focus group discussion participants include:

- ✓ pursuing a more equal distribution of aid and communicating how recipients of aid are identified;
- ✓ support in the procurement of residency papers and employment;
- ✓ closing the feedback loop by following up with refugees after complaints and feedback have been collected;
- ✓ increasing the food voucher allowance to allow households to sustain an acceptable dietary balance;
- ✓ increasing the monthly cash transfer to cover rent and electricity charges, and investing more in health care, secure schooling for children, and projects that create jobs for youth.

## NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

### Background

Ground Truth Solutions is one of seven partners that jointly provide analytical services as part of the [Mixed Migration Platform](#) (MMP). The other partners are [ACAPS](#), [Danish Refugee Council](#), [Internews](#), [INTERSOS](#), [REACH](#), and [Translators without Borders](#). The goal of MMP, which was launched in October 2016, is to provide information related to mixed migration for policy, programming, and advocacy work as well as providing information to people on the move in the Middle East and Europe. Ground Truth Solutions' contribution to the platform involves the collection and analysis of feedback on the perceptions of people in different stages of displacement – in the borderlands, transit countries, and countries of final destination.

### Funding

Funding for the eight focus group discussions in Lebanon was pooled from the budgets for the MMP project and Ground Truth Solutions' OECD field survey and analysis for Lebanon. This made it possible to broaden the geographical scope of the qualitative data collection.

### Survey development

Ground Truth Solutions designed these focus group discussions to gather feedback from refugees on the provision of humanitarian aid in Lebanon. The goal is to help guide international agencies in creating more effective humanitarian aid programmes and policies. Focus group discussions are designed to delve deeper into some of the issues that surfaced in the first perceptual survey conducted in March 2017.

### Sample size

Seventy-seven people participated in the focus group discussions across four governorates of Lebanon: Beqaa, Mount Lebanon, Beirut, and South Lebanon (Tyre) targeting Syrian Refugees, Palestine Refugees from Syria (PRS) and Palestine Refugees from Lebanon (PRL).

### Sampling methodology

Based on the findings from the first perceptual surveys conducted by Ground Truth Solutions, four governorates were chosen for focus group discussions because of their prevailing negative perceptions of humanitarian assistance. The affected population was sampled randomly at the sites and two group discussions were held in each – one for men and one for women. According to the population composition in each governorate, Syrian refugees were interviewed in Beqaa, Mount Lebanon, and Beirut, while Palestine refugees from both Syria and Lebanon were approached in South Lebanon (Tyre).

### Language of the survey

The focus group discussions were conducted in Arabic.

### Data collection

Data was collected from May 23-26, 2017 by Sayara International (Key Development Service S.A.R.L.), an independent data collection company contracted by Ground Truth Solutions.

**For more information about Ground Truth surveys in Lebanon, please contact [info@groundtruthsolutions.org](mailto:info@groundtruthsolutions.org), Michael Sarnitz ([michael@groundtruthsolutions.org](mailto:michael@groundtruthsolutions.org)) or Valentina Shafina ([valentina@groundtruthsolutions.org](mailto:valentina@groundtruthsolutions.org)).**





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