AN OVERVIEW OF KNOWLEDGE ECOSYSTEMS ON FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

EXAMPLES FROM LEBANON AND JORDAN
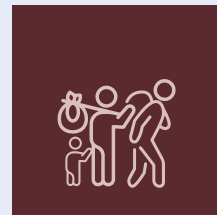
As part of an initiative funded by the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in collaboration with the Local Engagement Refugee Research Network (LERRN) at Carleton University and the African Migration and Development Policy Centre (AMADPOC) in Kenya, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) conducted this research project seeking to generate a more nuanced understanding of how localized knowledge ecosystems on forced displacement can be effective, policy impactful and sustainable. This project builds on earlier research undertaken in 2019 and 2020 which aimed to support an evidence-based understanding on how to localize research on refugee and forced migration issues in key regions of the Global South. The aim of this phase is to transition from anecdotal to evidence-based insights on how localized "ecosystems" of research, civil society, and refugee-led initiatives produce new forms of knowledge on displacement issues that have an impact on policy and practice.

Project researchers set out to understand how localized knowledge ecosystems in Kenya and Ethiopia in East Africa and Jordan and Lebanon in the Middle East produce, translate, and use knowledge to effect change. This was achieved through in-depth case studies of knowledge ecosystems, sub-ecosystems, and entities that make up knowledge ecosystems in each of the four included countries. For the purpose of this study, and in the context of forced migration, the study adopted the following definition of knowledge ecosystem:

> *Localized knowledge ecosystems include actors with lived experience, research actors, practitioners who produce and use knowledge on forced migration (including, but not limited to, NGOs/INGOs, research centers, institutes, networks and universities and academics) who coordinate with each other to advance new knowledge production within this system and translate and mobilize this knowledge to influence policy, practice, action and discourses, and narratives to advance the well-being of refugees.*

This regional report presents an overview of the research on knowledge ecosystems in the context of forced migration that was conducted in the Middle East, building on the in-depth cases studies conducted in Jordan *(Refugee, Displaced Persons, and Forced Migrations Studies Center at Yarmouk University* and *the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation)* and Lebanon *(Basmeh & Zeitooneh – Relief and Development* and the *Lebanon Policy and Research Network on Displacement)*.

For the definitions used in this project and an overview of the research conducted in East Africa and the Middle East, read our working paper *here.*

ABOUT ISSAM FARES INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Inaugurated in 2006, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut is an independent, research-based, policy-oriented institute. It aims to initiate and develop policy-relevant research in and about the Arab world. The Institute aims at bridging the gap between academia and policymaking by conducting high quality research on the complex issues and challenges faced by Lebanese and Arab societies within shifting international and global contexts, by generating evidence- based policy recommendations and solutions for Lebanon and the Arab world, and by creating an intellectual space for an interdisciplinary exchange of ideas among researchers, scholars, civil society actors, media, and policymakers.

ABOUT LERRN

LERRN is the Local Engagement Refugee Response Network bringing together global researcher and practitioners committed to promoting protection and solutions with and for refugees. The aim is to reshape the discourse and politics of the global refugee regime by enhancing the role of civil society in all stages of the development and functioning of the regime. This is done through partnered and collaborative research, various capacity building activities, knowledge mobilization tools, and promoting the value of refugee participation.

RESEARCH TEAM

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Content

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ACRONYMS

3RP	The Regional Refugee Resilience Plan
AUB	American University of Beirut
B&Z	Basmeh & Zeitooneh
CSOs	Civil Society Organization
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
EU	European Union
GoJ	Government of Jordan
GoL	Government of Lebanon
IFI	Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs
IRC	International Rescue Committee
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organizations
JRP	Jordanian Response Plan
JRPSC	Jordan Response Platform for the Syrian Crisis
MENA	Middle East & North Africa
MENA CSND	Middle East & North Africa Civil Society Network for Displacement
MoPIC	Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
LEA	Lebanese Economic Association
LCRP	Lebanese Crisis Response Plan
LCPS	Lebanese Center for Policy Studies
LMICs	Low-Middle Income Countries
LPRND	Lebanon Policy and Research Network on Displacement
RDFMSC	The Refugee, Displaced Persons, and Forced Migration Center
RLOs	Refugee-Led Organizations
RPW	Refugee Protection Watch
R&D	Research & Development
SCPR	Syrian Center for Policy Research
SRAD	Syrian Refugee Affairs Directorate
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USD	United States Dollar
WASH	Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

This regional report aims to shed light on how and whether localized knowledge ecosystems on forced displacement in the Middle East enhance research and its application to the benefit of refugees and displaced persons, particularly in Lebanon and Jordan. The report draws on the findings of a two-year study conducted in the Middle East and East Africa, which looked at "how localized 'ecosystems' of research, civil society, and refugee-led initiatives produce new forms of knowledge that have an impact on policy and practice."

Actors involved in knowledge ecosystems

Based on the mapping exercises conducted for this study, the different actors that comprise the knowledge ecosystems in Lebanon and Jordan include, but are not limited to: (1) local non-governmental organization and refugee-led organizations, (2) research centers and think tanks, (3) academia, (4) initiatives and networks, and (5) international organizations. The different actors produce knowledge (in its multiple forms) and then mobilize it to influence policy and practice to improve the well-being and protection of displaced populations. The actors may also coordinate with one another to produce and mobilize this knowledge beyond the ecosystem at a regional or international level.

Reach and impact of the knowledge ecosystems

Across the four case studies, there are examples of how the influence and reach of the knowledge produced within the ecosystem extend to the local, national, and international levels. At the local level, refugees benefit from programs and projects being implemented, which aim to enhance their living situation. At the national level, the knowledge being produced reaches other organizations, as well as decision-makers and policy-makers in the country, influencing the way they work. The reach of the knowledge ecosystem is also felt outside of Lebanon and Jordan, whereby the international community is driven towards responding to the issues at stake, and aid and other support is provided to address refugees' issues. Factors explaining the influence and impact of knowledge ecosystems include the type of knowledge products, equitable partnerships with international actors, collaboration among members with diverse profiles, the mechanisms by which knowledge is shared, and the dynamic nature of the ecosystem. In contrast, a major constraint includes lack of funding.

Lessons learnt

For local CSOs, NGOs, academia, research centers, think thanks, networks and initiatives

Foster and strengthen partnerships among local NGOs and RLOs since local actors are the key actors working directly with the local community and vulnerable population. Strengthening partnerships among local NGOs and RLOs can contribute to enhancing knowledge. Working together will strengthen advocacy efforts and may enhance local NGOs and RLOS negotiation power with policy-makers at the national level.

» Acknowledge the value of refugee participation and partner with those with lived experiences in the knowledge production process. Partnering with individuals with lived experience in the different stages of the research project helps ensure that a project meets their needs and priorities from the start.

» Encourage local leadership within research centers and think tanks. Local researchers with expertise and knowledge have a deeper understanding of the local context and dynamics, which can contribute to localization.

» Ensure that knowledge is translated and published in various forms, to make sure that it is accessible to all relevant stakeholders.

» Advocate for the needs and priorities of vulnerable populations through inclusive dialogues. This can be achieved through providing local actors with a common platform for knowledge sharing, national dialogue and action through the establishment of partnerships, coalitions, initiatives, and networks.

For governmental actors

» Strengthen public research institutions. These centers are key knowledge producers of national data to inform public policy. There is a need to provide capacity building for human resources, strengthen the infrastructure of public research centers, and to invest in research and development.

» Encourage inclusive dialogues. It is crucial to formulate impactful policies that are based on evidence-based research and inclusive dialogue. Invite refugee led organizations to policy dialogues alongside other actors to ensure a bottom-up approach.

For international organizations and donors

» Encourage agenda setting and priority setting at the local level, which is key to enhancing the localization of a knowledge ecosystem. International organizations should perceive their role as assisting rather than initiating and leading. This requires new models and structures of working dynamics between them and the local community.

» Provide more flexible funding opportunities to local actors to set their agenda, decide on their own programming, and conduct research on issues which they deem important based on their experience and knowledge of pertinent issues on the ground.

BACKGROUND

Conducting research in the field of forced displacement is fundamental for researchers and policy-makers to understand the underlying factors, arrangements, and implications of the problem. Around 86% of refugees are hosted in Low-Middle Income Countries (LMICs) (Shivakoti & Milner, 2021), with the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region alone hosting an estimated 16.1 million displaced persons (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2022). The latter demonstrates the dire need to strengthen regional scholarly research and use localized resources (Shivakoti & Milner, 2021). This presents an opportunity to co-create, bridge, and mobilize knowledge on forced displacement through partnerships and networks between the Global North and the Global South (Rizk et al., 2019; Shivakoti & Milner, 2021). Indeed, research partnerships and collaborations in the field of migration and forced displacement studies have been the highlight of recent discussions and have provoked conflicting perspectives regarding the role of external actors and donors, particularly those from the Global North, in producing, accessing, and transferring knowledge (Bradley, 2007; Cooper et al., 1996; Goetschel, 2013; McGarth, 2019; Rizk et al., 2019). In part, it uncovered a power imbalance between the Global North and Global South regarding setting research agendas, allocation of funding, and general domination of research by the Global North (Alexander et al., 2022). Indeed, power is a crucial factor that shapes the outcome and localization of knowledge ecosystems — localization is also influenced by the type of governance, the local policy process, and access to resources (Sova et al., 2015). Long- standing dynamics between the Global North and Global South have shaped the Global North to be the dominant source of research and knowledge outputs on forced displacement. In this relationship, Global North actors are the "givers," while countries in the Global South are the "receivers" (Binka, 2005, p. 207). When it comes to the relations between the Global North and Global South, there is an unequal power distribution where the Global North dominates the research setting and agenda implemented in the Global South (Binka, 2005; Shivakoti & Milner, 2021). First, the research agenda on forced displacement tends to be set forth by international aid agencies and donor governments (Alexander et al., 2022; Landau, 2022). Furthermore, the flow of money and financial resources takes a linear trajectory from donor agencies in the Global North to research institutes in the Global South (Alexander *et al.,* 2022). Shivakoti and Milner (2021) highlight that research in the Global South relies heavily on United Nations (UN) and donor agencies, be it international, governmental, or European Union (EU) donor agencies. The latter upholds dominance on the research paradigm by Global North actors, minimizing the role of local actors (Alexander *et al.*, 2022).

For instance, in 2019, the majority of research in the Migration Studies Journal was produced in high-income countries and published by researchers in the Global North (Neag et al., 2022). Similarly, a 2020 analysis of authorship geography in the Journal of Refugee Studies revealed that 92% of the 167 articles published between 2015 and 2019 were submitted by authors in the Global North (McNally & Rahim, 2020). This highlights the discrepancies and disparities within the field of migration and forced displacement research, particularly regarding its origin and authorship geography (Vargaras-Silva, 2019). Nevertheless, research partnerships and collaborations between the Global North and Global South are crucial to equitable, accessible, and participatory knowledge production in the field of migration and forced displacement studies (McGarth, 2019). In turn, facilitating and empowering localized knowledge ecosystems is one way of transferring power to local actors (Alexander *et al.*, 2022).

The concept of knowledge ecosystems has been reported extensively in the literature (Clarysse *et al.,* 2014; Järvi *et al.*, 2018; Moore, 1996; Valkokari, 2015). It bridges technological and strategic management studies to fill the gap between research on complex adaptive systems and theories of organizational management (Bray, 2007). Such ecosystems are characterized by space, time, and the type of knowledge shared (Järvi *et al.*, 2018). Within this ecosystem, different actors constitute a network that supports similar research and creates knowledge (Clarysse *et al.,* 2014). Here, the co-creation of knowledge is defined as "a joint collaborative activity by parties involved in direct interactions, aiming to contribute to the value that emerges for one or both parties" (Grönroos, 2012, p. 1523). This concept is beneficial in highlighting the collaborative activities between different actors within a network. The key players within a knowledge ecosystem are the users and producers of

knowledge (Järvi *et al.,* 2018). Knowledge ecosystems have been reported to be capable of generating new knowledge and are constructed around the interactions between global research networks, public research centers, higher education, and private firms (Valkokari, 2015). Other local actors also have a role to play within these knowledge ecosystems, including government institutions, think tanks, civil society organizations, local and international organizations, grassroots and refugee-led organizations, (host) communities, and refugees and displaced persons themselves, as they have lived experience (Shivakoti & Milner, 2021).

KNOWLEDGE ECOSYSTEMS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In Lebanon and Jordan, the response to the refugee crisis has been a joint effort by multiple stakeholders, both local and international, who all produce knowledge on the crisis in one of its multiple forms. As such, Lebanon and Jordan provide ideal settings to study the potential impact of localized knowledge ecosystems on policy and practice. Understanding the context in Lebanon and Jordan is essential for providing insight into how knowledge ecosystems on forced displacement operate in the Middle East region. Given that both countries are not signatories to the 1961 Refugee Convention and that both initially adopted an informal open-door policy allowing the influx of hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees, the knowledge ecosystems within Lebanon and Jordan are composed of similar actors who operate differently. Notably, within both countries, there are sub-ecosystems (networks and initiatives) formed by collaborations among actors with a common goal, intending to produce new knowledge, mobilize it and influence policy, research, and practice.

Lebanon's consecutive crises, the sectarian and political culture, the governmental corruption, and the lack of accountability and transparency have restricted the production of social and public policy knowledge by policy research institutions in the country; the financial and economic crisis has also had an impact on research funding in general (Swiss Peace, 2021). Furthermore, the country's political nature has affected governmental research institutes through the presence of political influence within these institutions, as governing political parties compete with one another, blocking effective policy-making (Swiss Peace, 2021). Despite the country having several reputable higher education institutions, several obstacles hinder knowledge production. Firstly, in 2007, only 0.2% of government expenditure went to Research and Development (R&D) (Swiss Peace, 2021). In addition, the Lebanese government does not share data with the public (Swiss Peace, 2021).

Still, Lebanon's knowledge ecosystem presents an opportunity to understand the interactions between the government, civil society organizations, research centers, think tanks, private or public centers, and international organizations. Local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) stepped up to fill in the gaps in the national level response to the crisis, both providing humanitarian aid as needed and facilitating the communication between the international community and government as well as their communication with the target communities (Saade, 2020). The strength of local civil society lies in its ability to reach out to the refugee population and communicate their situation, needs, and challenges at the national and international levels (Saade, 2020). CSOs are core members of knowledge ecosystems on forced displacement in Lebanon, who gather and share knowledge to secure financial resources (Saade, 2020).

Like Lebanon, Jordan's knowledge ecosystem also provides interesting insights into the different actors that comprise the ecosystem. The refugee response in Jordan emerges as more centralized with the government, led by the King alongside the Chief of Staff, Prime Minister, and Interior Minister, who deals with security and border-related issues as well as donors and the international community (Ali, 2021). The King oversees and manages the refugee response in Jordan and decides on regulatory measures to utilize funding (Ali, 2021). Knowledge production is also in some ways centralized, as

much of the knowledge produced on the Syrian refugee crisis goes through the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) and the sector lead, depending on the topic of the research or assessment, whether knowledge, attitudes, and practice surveys, needs assessments, research conducted by individuals, organizations or institutions, or evaluations (Jordan Refugee Response Inter-Sector Working Group, 2017).

Governmental expenditure on R&D in Jordan is limited, for example, comprising only 0.7% in 2016 (World Bank, 2016). Furthermore, funding for R&D has been inconsistent in the last three years, in turn, disrupting research growth (Barakat et al., 2022). While public universities in Jordan play a critical role in producing knowledge and in development, knowledge production has not always been a priority for the Ministry of Higher Education (Sardy, 2015). As such, the role of Jordanian public universities in knowledge production is restricted, and the quality poor (Larzillière, 2010; Sardy, 2015).

OBJECTIVES

This regional report aims to shed light on how and whether localized knowledge ecosystems on forced displacement in the Middle East enhance research and its application regarding refugees and displaced persons, particularly in Lebanon and Jordan. The report draws on the findings of a two-year study conducted in the Middle East and East Africa, which looked at "how localized 'ecosystems' of research, civil society, and refugee-led initiatives produce new forms of knowledge that have an impact on policy and practice." This report further aims to unpack the production and use of knowledge on forced displacement by local actors in both countries, with a focus on the dynamics and strategies they rely on to impact policy and practice. By doing so, the report attempts to demonstrate how localized knowledge ecosystems on forced displacement issues function and why they are important in policy-making. To this end, case studies on localized knowledge ecosystems were conducted in Lebanon and Jordan.

In summary, this report sets out to answer the following key research questions:

» How do national and local actors produce new forms of knowledge that impact policy and practice in the Middle East?

   – What role do these different actors play in the knowledge ecosystem on forced displacement?

   – What types of knowledge are they producing, and to what end?

   – How is this knowledge being shared between actors within this ecosystem?

» What is the value of localized knowledge ecosystems in promoting a more nuanced and localized understanding of forced displacement issues?

This project adopted the following definition of localized knowledge ecosystems to understand the impact that these ecosystems may have on policy and practice in the contexts of the Middle East and East Africa regions:

A knowledge ecosystem in the context of forced displacement incorporates actors with lived experience, research actors, and practitioners who produce and use knowledge on forced migration (including, but not limited to, NGOs/INGOs, research centers, institutes, networks, and universities and academics) who coordinate with each other to advance new knowledge production within this system and translate and mobilize this knowledge to influence policy, practice, action and discourse/narrative to advance the well-being of refugees (Alexander et al., 2022).

For the purpose of this study, we adopt a broad definition of knowledge as "oral history, artwork, media articles and radio shows, NGO reports, government statistics, works of art, and academic publications" (Alexander et al., 2022, p. 9), in line with the definition proposed by Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (2020), and expand it to include knowledge produced by local and international organizations to inform their programming to the benefit of refugee populations.

FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The reality of the MENA region is complex, as it has been marked by turmoil, political instability, continuous conflicts, economic crises, and climate-related disasters resulting in multiple waves of displacement. For the most part, borders across the region have remained open, allowing easy entry of refugees to neighboring countries (Hanafi, 2014; Lynch & Brand, 2017; Nugent, 2021). Today, the MENA region hosts an estimated 16.1 million displaced persons, the majority of which have been displaced either internally or to neighboring countries, each fraught with its crises (UNHCR, 2022). Among the regional crises, the Syrian conflict has resulted in the largest displacement crisis in history (Grandi, 2021), with millions of refugees fleeing to neighboring countries, including Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, and Turkey. Consequently, the global economic burden associated with the displacement of Syrian refugees has been estimated to be 1.2 trillion United States Dollars (USD) by 2021 and is expected to surge to an additional 1.7 trillion USD by 2035 (Matei, 2021). Countries close to Syria have carried the most tremendous social and economic burden of this displacement.

Despite their generosity, hosting countries have been drained economically and socially and constantly struggle to meet the needs of refugee populations and provide them with the necessary services (Nugent, 2021). As a response to the ongoing challenges since the beginning of the Syrian refugee crisis, the international community stepped up with a comprehensive plan known as the "Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan in response to Syria crisis" (3RP), in which a total of 14 billion USD were dedicated to assisting host countries in providing education services, primary health care services, cash assistance, food assistance, protection, sanitation, and employment opportunities to Syrian refugees (UNHCR, 2021). Local governments and relevant actors adapted this comprehensive strategic plan to meet the local context (UNHCR, 2021).

Both Lebanon and Jordan have witnessed similar social impacts of the refugee crisis reported as changes in demographic structure and identity, with the potential to trigger social tension between the refugees and their hosting communities (Khawaldah & Alzboun, 2022). Moreover, the economic impact of the crisis has been challenging for both hosting countries. For instance, it is estimated that the Jordanian government requires 2.5 billion USD yearly to cover humanitarian aid, different services, and the indirect costs related to the crisis (OCHA, 2021; Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation [MoPIC], 2020). On top of that, COVID-19 further escalated the situation leaving host countries confronting an economic recession, high unemployment rates, and elevated poverty (UNHCR, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the protection and security needs of refugees and host communities in Lebanon and Jordan (UNHCR, 2021). For example, in Lebanon, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, compounded by the country's financial and economic crisis, decreased working opportunities for both host community members and displaced persons (UNHCR, 2021). Unable to secure the basic needs and resources for their daily life, the overall debt of Syrian households increased (UNHCR, 2021).

Focus on Lebanon

Lebanon's status as a host country dates back to 1948, with the influx of 192,000 refugees from Palestine (Minorities at Risk Project, 2004). Lebanon also hosts 1.5 million Syrian refugees, while thousands of Palestinian refugees from Syria also fled to Lebanon (Human Rights Watch, 2022; UNHCR, 2022; UNICEF, 2017). Moreover, Lebanon is host to an estimated 8,983 Iraqi refugees, 2,252 Sudanese refugees, and 2,426 refugees from other nationalities (UNHCR, 2022), making it the country with the highest number of refugees per capita (UNHCR, 2022).

Historically, Lebanon faced significant crises long before the Syrian refugee influx in 2011. The civil war (1975-1990), the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri (2005), the 2006 July War, and the global financial crisis (2008/2009) have all contributed in one way or another to a vulnerable Lebanese economy. Today, Lebanon is in a critical financial and economic situation that peaked in 2019 when Lebanon's economy collapsed, resulting in a financial meltdown that significantly affected the entire population, particularly the most vulnerable individuals (The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies [LCPS], 2021). Consequently, the poverty rate increased significantly from 42% in 2019 to 82% in 2021 (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia [ESCWA], 2021). The dire socio-economic situation in Lebanon has influenced the accessibility and availability of public services: electricity, water supply, sanitation, and education, depriving households across the country of their daily basic needs (Al-Saeed & El Khalil, 2021).

The absence of an initial response plan to the crisis by the Government of Lebanon (GoL) triggered the UN agencies to take the lead in responding to the crisis (Boustani et al., 2016). This resulted in the development of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) in 2015, a collaboration between the Lebanese authorities, international and local aid organizations, and UN agencies (Boustani et al., 2016). Lebanon's response plan has been revisited and reflected upon yearly since being initially adopted (with updates published), leading up to the development of the LCRP 2022-2023 plan (LCRP, 2022). The LCRP promotes strategic objectives of protecting vulnerable communities, including refugees and host communities, providing immediate assistance, strengthening national and local capacities, and reinforcing Lebanese economic, social, and environmental stability (LCRP, 2022).

Focus on Jordan

Jordan's geographic location has attracted different waves of migrants seeking refuge over the years. This displacement to Jordan was drastically increased due to existing and continuous geopolitical conflicts and a primarily open border policy. Syrian refugees are the largest displaced population in Jordan, comprising nearly 1.3 million refugees (World Bank, 2022). Jordan is also host to other displaced communities, including 130,911 Iraqi, 31,163 Yemeni, 22,700 Libyan, and 634,182 registered Palestinian refugees currently residing in the country.

Jordan has faced severe financial and economic challenges during the Syrian refugee crisis. Between 2016 and 2019, Jordan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) averaged about 2% annually, reflecting the increase in unemployment, which was 25% among youth in early 2021 (Karasapan, 2022; World Bank, 2022). To respond to the crisis and to minimize its effects, the Government of Jordan (GoJ) adopted a national response plan, the Jordan Response Plan (JRP), led by the MoPIC through a collective and participatory approach among governmental ministries, donors, UN agencies, and national and international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) (GoJ, 2020). The response plan aimed to protect the welfare of Syrian refugees, by providing them with humanitarian assistance across different sectors.

The response plan also includes the Jordan Response Platform for the Syria Crisis (JRPSC), which brings together government representatives, the donor community, UN agencies, and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) as a strategic partnership approach (GoJ, 2020). The platform ensures effective coordination, a participatory approach, and a smooth information flow to develop an integrated refugee, resilience-strengthening, and development response (GoJ, 2020). However, the response of the GoJ relied heavily on the security agenda to (1) secure Hashemite rule and (2) prevent the integration of the Syrian refugees within host communities (Ali, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

The study relied on perceptions and perspectives of different actors that produce, mobilize, and transfer knowledge on forced displacement issues in each country to understand the nature and actors within the knowledge ecosystems in Lebanon and Jordan.

Phase I: Mapping of knowledge ecosystems in the context of forced displacement

The project's first phase consisted of scoping and mapping exercises to identify entities that make up knowledge ecosystems on forced migration or refugee studies in each country under study. Scoping studies are essential to understand key concepts in the context of policy and research. The scoping exercise started with the team identifying other studies examining knowledge ecosystems on forced displacement. The findings of the scoping exercise were then utilized to establish a definition for knowledge ecosystems, define the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and guide the mapping phase of the project and the selection of case studies. In turn, the mapping exercise aimed to understand the complex network of actors involved in knowledge production in the Middle East region. It was conducted based on a thorough desk review to identify the different actors with lived experiences, research actors, and practitioners that produce and use knowledge on forced migration (including but not limited to NGOs/INGOs, research centers, institutes, networks, universities, and academia). These actors coordinate with each other to advance new knowledge production within the ecosystem and translate and mobilize this knowledge to influence policy, practice, and discourse/narrative to promote the well-being of refugees (Alexander et al., 2022; Shivakoti & Milner, 2021).

The mapping exercise resulted in the identification of 58 entities in Lebanon and 39 entities in Jordan. Table 1 summarizes the types of entities identified per country. The identified entities were validated through a phone survey to ensure they fit the inclusion criteria. An entity was included if it was found to:

» Work on forced displacement issues or with refugee communities;

» Produce knowledge on forced displacement that is localized, identify solutions around sectors and relevant themes, and contribute to identifying a solid multidisciplinary and multisectoral research agenda on refugee and forced displacement (fitting the broad definition of knowledge that we adopted for this study);

» Mobilize knowledge to influence research, policy, practice, and discourse on forced displacement;

» Function in an inclusive and multidisciplinary manner, bringing in the voices of refugees and host governments;

» Influence or work to influence global discourses and solutions on forced displacement.

The validation survey included questions divided into four different sections: (1) background information on the entity, such as website, entity establishment, and key partners, (2) overall approach to knowledge production and mobilization, (3) funding mechanisms and (4) impact of knowledge products. Due to time constraints, a few identified entities were purposively selected for further validation. To the best of our ability, an effort was made to ensure that the entities selected for validation represented the various organizations identified through the mapping exercise.

Table 1: Types and number of identified entities per country

Entity	Jordan	Lebanon
Research centers and think tanks	6	9
International organizations	8	8
Non-governmental organizations	9	27
Networks and initiativesw	9	9
Governmental research centers	4	1
Academia	3	4
Total	39	58

Phase II: Case studies

Based on the mapping exercise, two entities were purposively selected for each country to conduct an in-depth case study for the second phase of the project, ensuring that various types of entities were represented, including a refugee-led organization, to understand their role in knowledge production and mobilization in the greater knowledge ecosystem on forced displacement in each of the selected countries. A case study approach was selected, as this would help to deepen the understanding of knowledge ecosystems on forced displacement (Crowe et al., 2011). Semi-structured interview guides were developed to understand and identify the type of knowledge that is being produced and how and to what end it is being mobilized, the localization of knowledge production (to what extent is power and decision-making made by local researchers), the influence or reach of the knowledge, and the factors that explain the achieved reach or influence of the knowledge produced by the organization, program, network or actor. Noting that the fieldwork was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, interviews with the different actors involved in the chosen case studies were conducted online through a secure video conference platform.

Data was collected between December 2021 – February 2022 with the relevant key informants for each of the selected case studies. The interviews were recorded and transcribed to capture the information needed from the participants. Each interview transcript was analyzed to identify emerging themes using a thematic approach.

Ethical considerations

The American University of Beirut's Institutional Review Board approved the protocol for this research (Protocol number: SBS-2021-0296). No major ethical issues were anticipated. All interviewees gave their consent prior to participating in the study.

OVERVIEW OF THE CASE STUDIES SELECTED

Basmeh & Zeitooneh, Lebanon

Basmeh & Zeitooneh (B&Z) is a refugee-led organization that has been active in Lebanon since 2012 and was officially registered as a non-governmental organization in 2014. Although B&Z primarily works with Syrian refugees, the organization also supports other refugee communities such as Palestinian refugees, and provides support to host community members. Indeed, their community-centered approach has helped them build a close and strong connection to the communities they serve. B&Z provide direct aid and relief to vulnerable populations and support them through four main programs: (1) Peacebuilding & Social Cohesion, (2) Food Security & Livelihoods, (3) Education, and (4) Protection. Through these programs and its Advocacy & Research Unit, B&Z produces several types of knowledge products, including research reports, policy documents, awareness products, annual reports, and advocacy-related content. Furthermore, B&Z engage in multiple steps of the knowledge production process: they collect data, produce knowledge, and disseminate it in different events be it stakeholder dialogues or local or international conferences. B&Z rely on multiple funding sources; they either apply for grants or work with partners that provide them with core funding.

Lebanon Policy and Research Network on Displacement, Lebanon

The Lebanon Policy and Research Network on Displacement (LPRND) is a local civil society network housed at the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB). It was created in 2016 in response to the growing anti-refugee sentiment in Lebanon and the region to counter rising misperceptions around the refugee crisis and its impact. The Secretariat, based at IFI, coordinates the network and its activities. Like other local networks within the Middle East and North Africa Civil Society Network for Displacement (MENA CSND), the UNHCR plays the role of facilitator and advisor to the network. In addition, UNHCR provides core funding to the network. The network comprises local civil society organizations, including NGOs, academic or research institutes, and experts in the field of forced displacement issues.

Though not all of the network's members produce knowledge as a primary output, they are all, to some extent, knowledge producers, translators, consumers, and mobilizers of knowledge on forced displacement (Alexander et al., 2022). Together, they produce joint statements and host events in response to key events, such as the "Supporting the future of Syria and the region" Brussels Conference. Members also produce their own knowledge outputs, either individually, or in collaboration with other network members. Indeed, the network's strength lies in its loose nature and the diversity of its members since they work in different sectors, providing direct services and aid to refugees and host communities, working towards promoting the rule of law and protecting human rights, and conducting research on displacement issues for academic and policy purposes.

Refugee, Displaced Persons and Forced Migrations Studies Center at Yarmouk University, Jordan

The Refugee, Displaced Persons, and Forced Migrations Studies Center (RDFMSC) is a university-based research center based at Yarmouk University in Jordan, that is among the pioneering centers in the Arab region and the Middle East to tackle the issue of refugees, displacement, and forced migration. The university established the center to promote research and training services in the field of displacement issues as part of its mission to support its local community. The center operates through two departments, the (1) Department of Studies and Research and the (2) Department of Media and Organization. The Department of Studies and Research aims to conduct multidisciplinary, independent, and critical research to strengthen the relationship between academia, local and international universities. The department of Media and Organization aims to mobilize the knowledge that the center produces to establish communication channels with local and international organizations. Decision-making, be it related to the center or its knowledge outputs, lies strictly in the hands of board members, who are local members of the community. International partners who provide resources, inputs, and investments for the center also contribute to decision-making. Outputs by the center include but are not limited to research reports, book chapters, conference presentations, and training. Both refugees and host community members can participate in the training services offered by the center, including technical diplomas in various fields funded by international organizations.

Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC), Jordan

The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) is a governmental entity in Jordan that strives to face national challenges, such as the Syrian refugee crisis through its strategic planning approach. To address these challenges, the MoPIC works under three pillars: (1) improving the business and investing environment, (2) enhancing competition, and (3) supporting priority sectors. Knowledge production within MoPIC occurs across the three pillars mentioned previously. Since its introduction in 2015, the Jordan Response Plan remains the main knowledge output related to forced displacement produced by the MoPIC. MoPIC's work contributes to improving vulnerable communities' quality of life in Jordan, including refugee communities. Based on the three mentioned pillars, the MoPIC established the Host Community Support Platform (HCSP) as a consultative body that brings together government ministries of Jordan, donors, UN agencies, and international and national NGOs to design a refugee, resilience strengthening and development response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis. The work done by the HCSP to address the impact of the Syrian Refugee Crisis informed the MoPIC's preparation of the Jordanian Response Plan, as described previously, in close coordination with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The ministry's activities cover seven sectors, including public services, education, health, economic empowerment, social protection, shelter, and Water Supply, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) that address the needs of vulnerable populations and refugees as identified through various assessments.

ACTORS INVOLVED IN THE KNOWLEDGE ECOSYSTEMS IN LEBANON AND JORDAN

Based on the mapping exercise conducted in phase one of the study, the following actors were identified as comprising these knowledge ecosystems in Lebanon and Jordan: (1) local NGOs and Refugee-Led Organizations (RLO), (2) research centers and think tanks, (3) academia, (4) initiatives and networks, (5) governmental entities, and (6) international organizations. The different actors all produce knowledge (in its multiple forms) within the system and then mobilize it to influence policy and practice to improve displaced populations' well-being and protection. They may also coordinate with one another to produce and mobilize this knowledge beyond the ecosystem. In both Lebanon and Jordan, the mapping exercise served to clarify the various entities involved in the knowledge ecosystems on forced displacement and how they interact with one another to produce and mobilize localized knowledge on forced displacement. Beyond the actors identified through the mapping exercise, other actors play varying roles in the knowledge ecosystem of each country, including other governmental entities, grassroots organizations, and the media. All these actors interact with one another to translate and mobilize knowledge to influence policy, research, and practice on forced displacement.

In line with the definition of localization adopted for this project, we define localized knowledge ecosystems as those "that are not only located in the global South but are centered, run, funded, or empowered there" (Alexander *et al.*, 2022, p. 7). Beyond this, the process of localization "is generally understood to be the process of transferring power from transnational actors, including international NGOs and agencies of the UN, to local actors (Shivakoti & Milner, 2021, p. 806). At the level of individual actors comprising the knowledge ecosystem, localization is influenced by several factors, including their funding sources, their ability to set their priorities and research agendas, develop research plans and methodologies, implement and disseminate the research findings, their ability to access local and international policy arenas as well as other relevant stakeholders or to use their research in advocacy or policy work (Alexander *et al.*, 2022).

Local non-governmental organizations & refugee-led organizations

Local non-governmental organizations are often at the frontline of crisis response, providing aid and services to vulnerable communities, including refugees, and supporting local development. Among local organizations, refugee-led organizations play a vital role in the knowledge ecosystem. Their primary functions are humanitarian aid and development based on the needs of the refugee communities they serve. Their programs are often also extended to host community members. These organizations gather knowledge through needs assessments, community consultations, for monitoring and evaluation purposes, or through their various projects and programs. The knowledge they gather is often used for advocacy purposes. Some of their knowledge outputs include annual reports, research reports, policy documents, and infographics.

An example is B&Z, a refugee-led organization in Lebanon that serves refugee and host community members through community centers across the country. It also has a research and advocacy unit that gathers knowledge produced by the organization and packages it in formats usable for advocacy purposes. Through its international partners, Basmeh & Zeitooneh can access the international policy arena, where they amplify the voices of the refugee communities they serve.

Research centers and think tanks

Whether in Lebanon or Jordan, research centers and think tanks play an essential role in generating data on forced displacement. Research is among their primary outputs for these actors, as are policy-related documents or infographics that aim to change public opinions and current discourse. These actors produce knowledge on forced displacement and mobilize this knowledge to influence policy, practice, and discourse on forced displacement across multiple sectors such as education, employment, livelihood, social tension, housing, legal issues, protection, and other sectors. They work in partnership with other actors within the ecosystem and incorporate knowledge from other actors in their work.

For example, the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies in Lebanon (LCPS) is an independent think tank that produces policy-oriented research within the field of forced displacement and uses this knowledge to influence policy or advocacy work. An example from Jordan is the West Africa-North Africa Institute, which works towards more informed development strategies and programming on displacement issues in the region through policy-oriented research. In both countries, most centers are led by local researchers or work with local researchers. However, their key partners remain organizations from the Global North, including international organizations, the World Bank, World Health Organization, UN agencies, and embassies, who act as their primary funding sources. Based on the local organizations' reputation, institutional capacities, power, and resources, they may also be able to coordinate with the government to influence policy-making at the local level.

Academia

Among the think tanks and research centers mapped in this study, only some of those in Lebanon are located within a university, unlike Jordan, where the majority of research centers identified were affiliated with a university. Within the knowledge ecosystem, the role of academia and entities based within academic institutes is primarily the production of knowledge, including about forced displacement, for academic research purposes or to influence policy. Being housed within academic institutes, these actors can bring together multiple stakeholders, including faculty members, students, representatives from the government, civil society, NGOs, INGOs, and those with lived experience to exchange knowledge and enhance research opportunities and knowledge production. These entities are funded primarily by international organizations, though they may also receive funding from their university or the government. Types of research products include peer-reviewed journal articles, research reports, edited volumes, book chapters, policy-related documents, infographics, and organization of or participation in conferences, panels, seminars, and webinars.

An example from Jordan is the Refugee, Displaced Persons, and Forced Migration Studies Center established at Yarmouk University, which aims to address refugees and displacement issues. The center promotes research and training services in the field of displacement issues as a means to support the local community. Several examples are mapped in Lebanon like the Institute of Migration affiliated with the Lebanese American University, the Lebanese Emigration Research Center affiliated with Notre Dame University, the Institute of Political Science affiliated with Saint Joseph University, and the Lebanese Institute for Social Justice and Conflict Resolution at the Lebanese American University. Each of these academic research centers tackles issues of forced displacement from different perspectives, be it governance, historical and contemporary emigration, and policy debates and dialogues, and produces knowledge outputs on forced migration.

Initiatives and networks

Among the initiatives and networks mapped for this project, networks constitute a sub-ecosystem within the larger ecosystem of forced displacement. Initiatives and networks bring together various actors to work towards a common goal and may include local and, in some cases, international (non-governmental) actors. For example, among its multiple objectives, the Lebanon Policy & Research Network on Displacement (LPRND) brings together a group of around 30 local civil-society organizations who work together to influence policy discussions around the refugee crisis, integrate an evidence-based approach to policy, and dispel rumors and false information about the refugee crisis in the country. The strength of networks is in their joint efforts. For example, members of the LPRND publish joint statements as outputs, reflecting their unified voice and recommendations related to pertinent issues affecting refugees. Furthermore, as in the case of the LPRND, networks and initiatives serve as a common platform for knowledge sharing, national dialogue, and action among members. An example of an initiative is Refugee=Partners in Lebanon, a research-based initiative launched by the Lebanese Economic Association (LEA) and the Syrian Center for Policy Research (SCPR) to promote an inclusive socio-economic environment for refugees and host community members.

Government entities

Government entities play a significant role in knowledge ecosystems, as they produce official data and statistics based on their ongoing mapping and national scale projects, are involved in policy-making, can influence public opinion, and control resources related to the crisis. Their main knowledge outputs are national campaigns, statistics, conferences, and reports. In Jordan, the government has centralized the production and sharing of knowledge related to the Syrian refugee crisis through the MoPIC. MoPIC presents a unique example of a government entity that works as a liaison between various UN Agencies, donor organizations, other ministries, local NGOs and civil society organizations, and the local community to coordinate the national response to the Syrian crisis. It is an essential contributor to the policy-making process and policy implementor that has access to various resources, such as international aid, public sector budget, and the needed experts in the related field. Its main knowledge outputs are national policies such as the JRP, Jordan 2025, Social Protection Strategy, and Employment Strategy. Another significant knowledge output is the Jordan Response Platform for the Syria Crisis at MoPIC which is an inclusive plan to unify knowledge and information flow between the various entities in Jordan. The JRPSC mobilizes information and knowledge to generate the JRP, through which knowledge is transformed into practice on the ground to benefit Syrian refugees and vulnerable host community members.

International organizations

When it comes to international actors, this refers to organizations such as the UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Danish Refugee Council, OXFAM, and others. Most of these organizations have headquarters in the Global North, with regional offices in Lebanon or Jordan. They directly provide humanitarian aid and services to vulnerable populations, including refugees and host community members, or work in partnership with local actors to implement their projects. Projects cover various sectors that directly address issues faced by refugees in host countries. International organizations fund local entities to produce knowledge on forced displacement but also produce knowledge themselves. For example, the UNHCR and its partners publish the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees. This assessment provides multi-sectoral data on the current conditions of Syrian refugees in each country. International organizations may also provide platforms for sharing knowledge among local, regional, and international actors, in some instances even facilitating the entry of local organizations into the international policy arena.

INFLUENCE AND REACH OF THE KNOWLEDGE ECOSYSTEMS IN LEBANON AND JORDAN

The case studies showcase varying degrees of the influence and reach that knowledge ecosystems on forced displacement and the actors within them can have at both the policy and practice levels. This impact can be felt at the local, national, and international levels.

Local

Local actors produce knowledge on forced displacement and can often influence the (research) agenda. For example, LPRND members, who include a diverse group of over 30 organizations and experts, report beneficiary and community needs as key factors they consider when setting their agenda. Other factors that influence their agenda-setting include feedback from participants (including refugees), input from field officers, the input of staff, particularly staff from Syria in Syrian-led organizations, the regional and local context, government policies, and relevance to their strategy, programming, or research priorities. Network members undertake knowledge production activities related to the Syrian refugee crisis to inform their strategy and programming, for monitoring and evaluation purposes, or academic and advocacy purposes. This knowledge is produced in various formats, including research reports and policy briefs, and also includes creative forms of knowledge, such as artwork and stories, and is mobilized both locally and internationally through conferences, workshops, dissemination events, or bilateral meetings, aiming to influence policy- and decision-makers.

The RDFMSC Refugee Support and Service Unit (R-SOS) supports Syrian refugees in continuing their education. The R-SOS unit provides introductory language courses and vocational training to enable refugees to actively participate in building their future. The unit offers studies in various disciplines and provides diplomas for Syrian refugees, such as psychosocial support. Students also gain knowledge in refugee studies, empowering them to address issues that affect their own lives and providing them with opportunities to support their community. Similarly, B&Z's Peace Building Program works with refugees and host community members to improve social relations and empower them to advocate for change through skills building. Participants conduct context and conflict analyses to increase awareness among them about their community and participate in dialogue sessions for peaceful communication. Community members are supported to advocate for themselves at the local governance level, for example, with local municipalities to bring about change and improve their circumstances regarding small community projects. Through these capacity-building projects, B&Z support refugee and host community members to produce and use knowledge to their benefit.

National

Partnerships among local and international actors play a critical role in enhancing the impact of the knowledge ecosystem at the national level. This facilitates a bottom-up approach to knowledge sharing and production within the ecosystem, where local organizations who are the repository of local knowledge, can share this knowledge with other actors. Among the case studies conducted for this project, the Jordan Response Plan, led by MoPIC, showcases national-level cooperation among the various actors in response to the Syrian refugee crisis. The MoPIC, through the Jordan Response Platform for the Syria Crisis, brings together other ministries, donors, UN agencies, and international and national NGOs to coordinate and advise the GoJ regarding the refugee crisis. The platform centralizes all knowledge on the refugee crisis, ensuring that it feeds right into the national-level response. This knowledge is a continuous closed circle of local information sharing to update the response plan accordingly and ensures that the response benefits both refugee and host communities.

International

Several factors contribute to an actor's influence and reach at the international level. These include an actor's reputation and legitimacy, built based on years of experience working on the ground, the type of work undertaken, and the projects implemented. The influence of local actors at the international level can also be facilitated through international partners who value localization. For example, through its position in the Refugee Protection Watch (RPW) coalition, B&Z advocates for protection issues facing Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Knowledge collected by the coalition is published in an annual report which is then used in joint advocacy efforts to enhance the protection space for refugees in Lebanon, including in bilateral discussions with, for example, EU policymakers, the European Commission, individual EU member states, the UNHCR, the Regional Durable Solutions Working Group, and the UN Human Rights Council, or around critical moments, such as at the annual Brussels Conference on the Future of Syria in the Region. Similarly, members of the LPRND share their knowledge of the local context that they have gained through their work on forced displacement issues and advocate to improve the protection space for Syrian refugees at the annual Brussels Conference on "Supporting the Future of Syria''; the network and its members also produce or endorse joint statements in this regard. At the level of academia, the RDFMSC disseminates the knowledge they produce on forced migration through their participation in international conferences to promote knowledge sharing.

FACTORS EXPLAINING THE INFLUENCE AND IMPACT OF KNOWLEDGE ECOSYSTEMS

Based on the findings of the four case studies conducted, the ability to set their agendas, the types of knowledge products, equitable partnerships, collaboration and diversity, data from the ground, and sustainable funding emerge as important factors that explain the influence and impact of actors within a knowledge ecosystem, and thus, the ecosystem itself.

Agenda setting

When discussing the impact of the knowledge ecosystem on forced displacement, it is important to differentiate between the priorities set by the donor agencies and those set by the actors within the localized knowledge ecosystem. For example, the LPRND network uses a bottom-up approach to set the network's yearly agenda covering topics pertinent to addressing misinformation around the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. The network members, the majority of whom are knowledge producers, translators, consumers, and mobilizers of knowledge on forced displacement (Alexander et al., 2022), set the network's priorities for the year through a democratic voting process based on their own experience, context, and advocacy agendas. Although the members decide on the final priorities, the UNHCR suggests topics for them to consider. The network also considers current events and significant changes in the context to ensure that their work remains relevant. In this way, the members' knowledge of the local context is the primary basis upon which the network's yearly agenda is set. The selected priorities also guide the different members' activities at the organizational level.

Knowledge products

The type of knowledge products, including but not limited to research reports, working papers, academic publications, conferences, joint statements, stakeholder dialogues, and workshops, are crucial to ensuring that knowledge is mobilized and reaches the right audience to effect change. These different outputs provide strong evidence and highlight local priorities to relevant stakeholders, including donors, partners, and international organizations.

For example, the LPRND, through one of its members, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs at the American University of Beirut, published three volumes of a Fact Book which presented facts to inform and counter false information about the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. The Fact Book garnered much popularity as it was shared widely through different communication channels and platforms, both online and in hard copy, contributing positively to the ongoing discussion on refugees in Lebanon and raising awareness of the crisis based on evidence. In Jordan, the Jordan Response Plan, produced through the MoPIC, is a crucial knowledge output produced from data collected by the multiple stakeholders working directly with refugees in Jordan. The plan addresses Syrian refugees' and vulnerable Jordanians' needs and vulnerabilities. It sets out the coordination efforts of key stakeholders based on data gathered from the ground and informs policy-making. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of knowledge products, such as the JRP, updated yearly by the MoPIC based on data collected and knowledge gained during the previous year, can ensure that these products respond to issues on the ground as they are emerging.

Equitable partnerships

Equitable partnerships strengthen the knowledge ecosystem and support localized knowledge production and mobilization. These partnerships go both ways, whether with the communities that organizations work for or with international partners. In the former case, these partnerships ensure that data and knowledge gathered come directly from the refugee communities served and address their needs. Employing staff from refugee communities, conducting community consultations, and needs assessments further ensure that data and knowledge address refugee needs.

For example, the community-based approach used by B&Z ensures that community needs are prioritized. B&Z have community centers in all areas where they work, facilitating the gathering of on-the-ground knowledge of refugees' needs and priorities. This community center approach has been vital to ensuring their local influence as it supports communities with lived experiences to participate in decision-making on issues that impact their lives. Specifically, B&Z conduct brainstorming sessions among staff at their community centers and conduct community consultations to identify relevant and important issues and priorities based on actual need stemming from the ground. In the latter case, international partners and donors who value equitable partnerships with local organizations also tend to value the knowledge and expertise of local actors and advocate for localization, as they acknowledge that local organizations are in a better position to know what the key issues and priorities are on the ground. These partners provide organizations with core funding, that is, funding with few restrictions regarding budget distribution, allowing the local partner to use this funding as they see fit and prioritize local partners' knowledge and expertise to determine priorities or to plan for projects.

Diverse membership

Collaboration among members with diverse profiles is also a factor that can contribute to the influence of a knowledge ecosystem, as it facilitates interaction and exchange of knowledge, expertise, and events among them all. The LPRND includes NGOs, faith-based organizations, academic or research institutes, think tanks, and experts (academics and policy advisors) working on forced displacement issues or with refugee communities. Each member contributes their knowledge and viewpoints on the refugee crisis in Lebanon to enrich the knowledge and information produced and shared within the sub-ecosystem. Indeed, the members work together and share knowledge to address the negative rhetoric around the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon through joint statements, joint projects, and at the level of the media and policy-makers. Members also share this knowledge with their networks, ensuring a further reach of knowledge products.

Data from the ground

Sharing knowledge should be a multi-way process between all the different entities and actors involved, especially between communities with lived experience and organizations with access to the international community and policy-makers. It is crucial for the knowledge produced to be based on local facts and figures coming from the ground. This form of data can be gathered through community consultations, needs assessments, and the engagement of those with lived experience through participatory approaches, as described above, thus contributing interventions that are targeted and based on the actual needs of vulnerable populations. This information can then be communicated with local and international policy-makers and decision-makers to influence agenda-setting.

Sustainable funding

Across all case studies, funding emerges as a major constraint to the potential influence or impact of actors within the knowledge ecosystem and their sustainability as an organization. Without funding, local actors cannot maintain their programs and projects nor produce knowledge. For example, limited funding to the RDFMSC has resulted in staffing issues, affecting the center's ability to upload and share publications on its website. In Lebanon, funding was cited as a significant challenge to the sustainability of organization members of the LPRND and the sustainability of other CSOs and NGOs in the country.

CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNT

This regional report provides an overview of four case studies from the Middle East that produce knowledge on forced displacement aiming to impact policy and practice and to enhance the protection and well-being of refugees. It demonstrates how these entities are able to negotiate moments of localization (Alexander et al., 2022), and summarizes what the factors are that influence their localization, including funding sources, ability to set their priorities and research agendas, develop research projects, and disseminate their own research findings. Moreover, the report highlights the different levels of influence and reach that localized knowledge ecosystems on forced displacement can have at the local, national, or international level through the entities that comprise them. Several factors affect the influence and reach of the entities covered in this report, including the entity's ability to set its own agenda, the types of knowledge products it produces, its ability to establish equitable partnerships with Global North actors, collaboration and diversity, relying on data from the ground, and sustainable funding. The case studies featured in this report present various lessons to enhance the localization of knowledge ecosystems:

For local CSOs, NGOs, academia, research centers, think thanks, networks and initiatives

» Foster and strengthen partnerships among local NGOs and RLOs since local actors are the key actors working directly with the local community and vulnerable population. Strengthening partnerships among local NGOs and RLOs can contribute to enhancing knowledge. Working together will strengthen advocacy efforts and may enhance local NGOs and RLOS negotiation power with policy-makers at the national level.

» Acknowledge the value of refugee participation and partner with those with lived experiences in the knowledge production process. Partnering with individuals with lived experience in the different stages of the research project helps ensure that a project meets their needs and priorities from the start.

» Encourage local leadership within research centers and think tanks. Local researchers with expertise and knowledge have a deeper understanding of the local context and dynamics, which can contribute to localization.

» Ensure that knowledge is translated and published in various forms, to make sure that it is accessible to all relevant stakeholders.

» Advocate for the needs and priorities of vulnerable populations through inclusive dialogues. This can be achieved through providing local actors with a common platform for knowledge sharing, national dialogue and action through the establishment of partnerships, coalitions, initiatives, and networks.

For governmental actors

» Strengthen public research institutions. These centers are key knowledge producers of national data to inform public policy. There is a need to provide capacity building for human resources, strengthen the infrastructure of public research centers, and to invest in research and development.

» Encourage inclusive dialogues. It is crucial to formulate impactful policies that are based on evidence-based research and inclusive dialogue. Invite refugee led organizations to policy dialogues alongside other actors to ensure a bottom-up approach.

For international organizations and donors

» Encourage agenda setting and priority setting at the local level, which is key to enhancing the localization of a knowledge ecosystem. International organizations should perceive their role as assisting rather than initiating and leading. This requires new models and structures of working dynamics between them and the local community.

» Provide more flexible funding opportunities to local actors to set their agenda, decide on their own programming, and conduct research on issues which they deem important based on their experience and knowledge of pertinent issues on the ground. `

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About the Refugee Research and Policy Program

Lebanon and the Arab region are facing one of the largest refugee crises spawning serious public policy challenges. Given this context, the Refugee Research and Policy program generates refugee related/policy-oriented research that addresses an existing knowledge gap in the field of refugee studies. Moreover, the program seeks to enrich the quality of debate among scholars, officials, international organizations, and civil society actors, with the aim to inform policymaking relating to refugees in the Middle East and beyond.

About the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs

Inaugurated in 2006, the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy & International Affairs (IFI) at the American University of Beirut is an independent, research-based, policy-oriented institute. It aims to initiate and develop policy-relevant research in and about the Arab world. The Institute aims at bridging the gap between academia and policymaking by conducting high quality research on the complex issues and challenges faced by Lebanese and Arab societies within shifting international and global contexts, by generating evidence- based policy recommendations and solutions for Lebanon and the Arab world, and by creating an intellectual space for an interdisciplinary exchange of ideas among researchers, scholars, civil society actors, media, and policymakers.

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