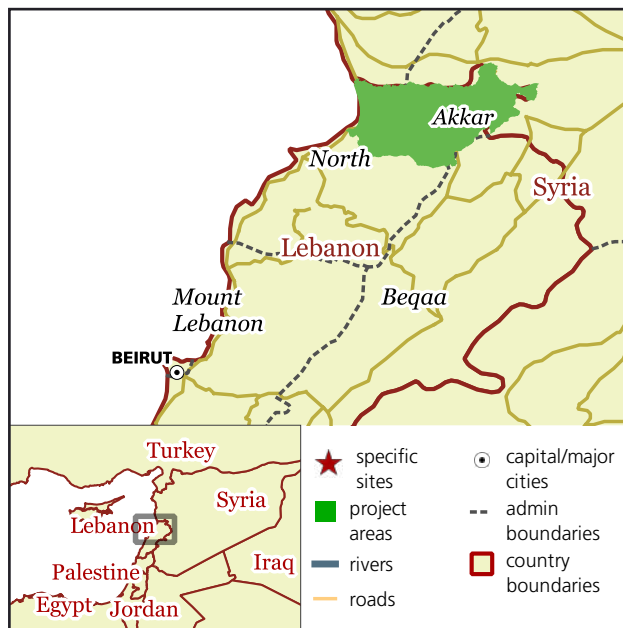


A.15 Lebanon – 2013 – Syria conflict

Case study

Keywords: Emergency shelter; Housing repair and retrofitting.

- Emergency:** Syria crisis, refugees in Lebanon.
- Date:** Conflict begins: March 2011 (ongoing). December 2012: over 100,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon.
- People affected:** Total: over 3.1 million refugees. Lebanon: over 1.1 million (Oct. 2014)
- Project location:** Kherbet Daoud and Machha in Akkar Governorate.
- Beneficiaries:** 1,987 individuals (398 units).
- Outputs:** 10 collective centres.
- Occupancy rate:** Each centre is fully occupied.
- Shelter size:** Buildings are 1-3 storeys high and the average partitioned room varies from 20m² to 25m². The average number of rooms per floor is 20.
- Cost:** Conversion costs between US\$ 1,500-3,000 per unit. Running costs (utilities) approx. US\$ 70 per unit/month, plus 7% organisational overheads.



Project description:

The main organisation aimed to increase overall shelter capacity by paying for the conversion of large buildings into collective centres, some of which were already being squatted by refugee families.

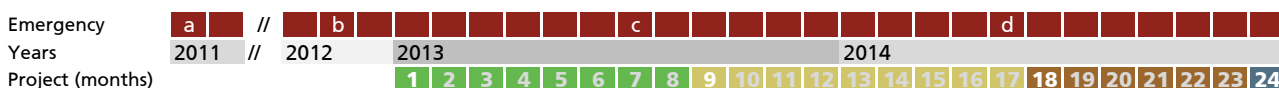
Since the buildings had been used previously as chicken farms, they had to be disinfected and re-developed to meet minimum shelter standards. Landlords waived rent to the value of the conversion costs, and contracts will be renegotiated once the period of free rent comes to an end.

Emergency timeline:

[a] March 2011: Syria conflict begins. **[b]** 100,000 refugees. **[c]** 500,000 refugees. **[d]** 1 million refugees.

Project timeline (number of months):

[1] January 2013: Project planning begins.
[9] Phase 1 - buildings identified and disinfected, beginning of conversion.
[18] Phase 2 - continued conversion.
[24] December 2014: Planned project end.



Strengths

- ✓ An innovative approach to increasing emergency capacity when camps not an option.
- ✓ Management of rental contracts by the implementing partner ensured refugees were protected and local authorities were involved in the process.
- ✓ The project worked in parallel with an organisation developing agricultural livelihoods to benefit both host and refugee communities.
- ✓ The living conditions of families already squatting in the farm buildings were greatly improved.
- ✓ The project injected funds into the local economy.

Weaknesses

- ✗ Beneficiaries expressed initial reluctance to live in converted chicken farm buildings, stating a preference for cash-for-rent solutions.
- ✗ There was a low risk that disinfection was not always

completely effective, though no traces of post-rehabilitation infections have been found to date.

- ✗ Rehabilitation is relatively expensive and, due to high maintenance costs, these types of collective centres are only cost-effective if they last for at least three years.
- ✗ A high-density living arrangement has potential to give rise to conflicts or disputes. The project will require strong ongoing management to deal with emerging issues.
- ✗ There have been limited livelihoods opportunities in the project locations.

Observations

- In Kherbet Daoud, the local village population was concerned about the impact of large numbers of refugees on public services and jobs.



A building before rehabilitation.
The project demonstrated that small settlements can be developed, as one of several shelter alternatives to camps.
Photo: Nicholas Winn/Concern Worldwide Lebanon

Situation before the crisis

Public housing in Lebanon is limited, and there have been few significant housing policies to support affordable housing for low-income groups.

Many low-income families live in the peri-urban areas of large cities, where housing quality is low and construction often involves circumventing building regulations. Buy-to-let is common, and real estate speculation is a major market.

Scarcity of land approved for building has led developers to select unregulated areas. The rental market in these areas offers little protection for tenants. Wealthy families buy supplementary water and electricity services from private operators; those relying on state services often face blackouts or shortages.

Situation after the crisis began

By October 2014, registered Syrian refugees made up 25% of Lebanon's population. This has had a dramatic impact on the overall demand for housing in the country.

While around 80% of refugees continue to rent, the pressure on the rental market, coupled with refugees' diminishing resources, means that increasing numbers of refugees are resorting to insecure dwellings; for instance, the number of refugees living in unfinished houses and

garages increased from 29% to 40% between August 2013 and March 2014. Furthermore, the majority of Syrian refugees lack security of tenure in their housing arrangements and are facing an increased risk of forced-evictions as the crisis wears on.

Shelter strategy

The Government of Lebanon has not normally sanctioned the development of refugee camps, partly due to the experience of refugee camps established in Lebanon following the 1948 Arab-Israeli war becoming permanent settlements.

Consequently, the rehabilitation of houses and collective shelters remains a priority intervention in the absence of other solutions.

Priority is given to shelter interventions categorized as life-saving (around 55% of the Syrian refugee population meet this criteria). Types of interventions include:

- Rehabilitating apartments and houses to raise shelter standards.
- Cash-for-rent and cash for host families to offset financial burdens on refugees.
- Weather-proofing of informal settlements and unfinished houses.

- Site improvements in informal settlements, mainly to improve drainage in flood-prone areas.

- Pending support from government and local municipalities, establishment of formal settlements of approximately 20 families.

The strategy for collective centres includes:

- Continued rehabilitation of public and private buildings. With limited availability of public buildings, greater emphasis is placed on rehabilitating privately-owned buildings.
- Collective centre management to address problems such as solid waste management and electric power consumption, as well as to intervene when conflicts or disputes arise.

Shelter interventions have been designed in consultation with beneficiaries, especially women (a quarter of refugee families are female-headed households) and should contribute to the development of the local economy.

Project implementation

In assessing the potential for the conversion of buildings into collective centres, the agency found a number of refugees living in disused chicken farms paying around US\$ 67 per month per household.

In total, 10 empty or disused chicken farms were identified for rehabilitation. The cost of rehabilitation plus paying rent for each family for three-to-five years was found to be significantly cheaper than the current market rate offered by many landlords for normal rental accommodation.

There were several advantages to rehabilitating the farms, including:

- Accessibility from key border crossings, facilitating any influx of refugees.
- The potential for associating several buildings together to be used as a transit centre.



Rehabilitation included the provision of infrastructure such as external solar-powered lighting. Photo: Nicholas Winn / Concern Worldwide Lebanon

- Structures which allowed for an easy partitioning process.
- A good mix of private and communal space.
- Ground-floor access for the disabled.

The main organisation covered the costs of the rehabilitation. A contract was drawn up with the landlord, who agreed to waive the rent for refugees at a rate of US\$ 150 per household per month for a defined period, usually 12 months. The total value of the waived rent was equivalent to the rehabilitation costs.

For example, if the rehabilitation of a 40-unit building cost US\$ 72,000 then the landlord would agree to waive the rent for 40 families for 12 months at US\$ 150 per month ($40 \times 12 \times 150 = 72,000$).

The disinfection process was executed by a Lebanese company with international experience in industrial cleaning.

Rehabilitation, including partitioning into family-sized apartments, was then executed by local entrepreneurs or the landlords themselves, under the supervision and monitoring of the implementing partners and the agency.

The project budget included the management and running costs of the collective centres for one year. After the main agency had managed the conversion process,

the implementing partners took over the day-to-day management of the centres.

Shelter management committees were formed in each of the collective centres and their membership ensured representation of women and minority groups.

Once the period of waived rent is over, a new contract can be negotiated, with several possible scenarios:

- The building is returned to the landlord and refugees are relocated.
- The landlord agrees to further improvement of the building. The agency covers the additional costs and a new period of waived-rent, equivalent to the value of the works is agreed to.
- The landlord rents directly to the refugees, and the implementing partners are no longer responsible for management or maintenance.
- A new contract is agreed between the landlord and the implementing partner. The main agency and implementing partner remain responsible for maintenance, management and subsidising rent.

Beneficiary selection

Beneficiary selection criteria were developed by shelter organisations involved in the response. Priority was given to the most vulnerable families. A socioeconomic vulnerability assessment included assessment of living conditions, protection risks and other specific needs.

Coordination

The main agency and the Ministry of Social Affairs (MoSA) regularly coordinated regarding shelter strategy in Lebanon and served as co-leads of the Shelter Sector Working Group.

The conversion of the chicken farm buildings required additional coordination with the Ministry of Public Health, due to the potential health risk, and this approval process took some time.

Technical solutions

The structures of all of the chicken farms were similar, and ranged from one- to three-storeys. They were built from reinforced concrete (columns and beams) with floors of concrete blocks covered by screed. There were equal distances between the columns, and walls were made of concrete blocks without plaster, with large windows to facilitate ventilation and natural lighting. This meant that each floor could be easily partitioned into shelter units.

The disinfection required technical expertise to ensure that the buildings would meet national regulatory requirements and a specialist company with worldwide experience was identified to carry out the work. The disinfection process involves several stages:

- Dry-cleaning stage, where all organic material such as feed and manure was removed.
- Wet-cleaning stage, where pressure washers were used.
- Drying stage, where the building had to be dried quickly to prevent the growth of bacteria.
- Disinfection stage using chemicals.

Finally, for waste-water management, the project will, in the future, introduce biogas digesters in place of septic tanks.

Materials

Materials for conversion of the buildings were sourced locally. Partition walls are made of concrete blocks plastered with cement plaster with the option of prefabricated wall panels. Each living apartment was equipped with a fuel stove.

Wider project impacts

The project is being evaluated and there is potential for its duplication in other regions in Lebanon.