





BACKGROUND

In Lebanon, there is approximately 1 million registered Syrian refugees, an unknown number of recorded individuals, and an unidentified number of unregistered refugees estimated at 300,000-500,000. It is difficult to distinguish how many unregistered refugees lack access to basic services, and are in need of assistance and protection.

AIM

The aim of this study was to explore access to services and informal coping mechanisms of displaced Syrians and their effect on health, based on registration status and accompanying assistance.

METHODS

A qualitative research design was adopted (Nov 2018-Sept 2019) by conducting focus group discussions in the Beqaa with registered and unregistered refugees. Results were triangulated via in-depth interviews with key informants.

RESULTS

Coping Mechanisms and Health Impact

Food & Nutrition Security	Food variety was lacking among all groups, but registered without assistance and unregistered refugees significantly lacked diversity and experienced food insecurity. Sharing of assistance was common among registered and unregistered family members.
Shelter and Infrastructure	Sharing housing and overcrowding were common among all groups. However, it was a permanent living arrangement for the unregistered, and temporary for the registered.
Healthcare	Financial constraints were the major barrier to accessing healthcare. As such, regardless of registration status, participants prioritized medical services based on perceived severity and opted to seek cheaper alternative sources of healthcare.
Protection	Fear of detainment and deportation were constant stressors based on legal status among registered and unregistered men, highly impacting their psychosocial well-being.
Social exchange	Debt was adopted by all regardless of registration status, but with difference in severity. Sharing of resources and assistance was also common among both groups.
Work adaptability	Informal employment and child labor present among both registered and unregistered.

CONCLUSION

Legal status and registration have an impact on the vulnerability of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Food security and access to services, including healthcare, are greatly impacted by lack of assistance and mobility challenges. The informal coping mechanisms adopted by Syrian refugees were similar across registration status in most cases. However, the severity and extent of these mechanisms differ, with more dire consequences on the well-being and health of unregistered refugees.