

GLOBAL PRIORITISATION EXERCISE (GPE) FOR
HUMANITARIAN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
NATIONAL CONSULTATION:

Lebanon

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAP	Accountability to Affected Populations
CNRS	National Council for Scientific Research
CVA	Cash and Voucher Assistance
ERP	Emergency Response Plan
GPE	Global Prioritisation Exercise
IFI	International Financial Institution
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
HRI	Humanitarian Research and Innovation
KII	Key Informant Interview
LCRP	Lebanon Crisis Response Plan
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PRL	Palestine Refugees in Lebanon
R&I	Research and Innovation
SRRP	Syria Regional Response Plan
STIP	Science, Technology and Innovation Policy
UN	United Nations
VASyR	Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees

FOREWORD

In a world with mounting and complex humanitarian challenges, research and innovation (R&I) can play a pivotal role in identifying, prioritising, and addressing humanitarian needs.

The role of R&I at multiple – global, regional, national, and local – levels is crucial to developing culturally and contextually appropriate responses to humanitarian crises.

Lebanon is grappling with numerous humanitarian crises against a background of broader longstanding development challenges. Lebanon demonstrates capacities and coordination mechanisms between government, civil society, and the international system that are unique, and from which invaluable learning can be gathered that should drive action in Lebanon, but that can also shape the global conversation on how our global humanitarian research and innovation (HRI) ecosystem can evolve.

Elrha's Global Prioritisation Exercise (GPE) is a global research and consultation effort that seeks to improve outcomes for people affected by crises by amplifying the impact of investments into R&I. The process aims to build an improved understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the global HRI system and deepen our understanding of priorities at all levels.

As part of the GPE, we have gained invaluable insights through a series of stakeholder interviews conducted across six geographic regions and three national settings. These consultations share the perceptions of regional and national humanitarian actors, and shed light on priority topics and areas that need HRI attention. This exercise extends further, delving into how the HRI system functions (and occasionally dysfunctions) in complex environments. It also explores how the system can be improved.

Humanitarian crises are varied and so are the landscapes they unfold in. The scale, type, magnitude, drivers, and impacts of these crises vary within and between geographic regions, and as such, so do the associated areas requiring HRI attention. The views of regional and national actors are, therefore, important to improve the way the humanitarian ecosystem functions and how the system in turn responds. This consultation examines the differing perspectives of those international and national actors engaged within the Lebanese HRI context.

This work is also fundamental to informing priority-setting processes to optimally guide R&I investment, improving coordination and donor funding allocations. Key recommendations, based on the challenges and learning reported, to improve the regional R&I ecosystem are proposed at national, regional, global, and donor levels. By valuing regional voices, these consultations aim to ensure that regional perspectives inform and influence the global HRI agenda.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Global Prioritisation Exercise (GPE) Regional and National Consultations Consortium

The GPE Regional and National Consultations Consortium is a multi-institutional collaboration led by the Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University and Marian Abouzeid is the Project Director.

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GPE Lebanon National Consultation

This Lebanon consultation was undertaken by the Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University, and was led by Marian Abouzeid and Chaza Akik. Data collection was undertaken by Chaza Akik, data transcription and translation were undertaken by Yasmen Baroudi, and all authors analysed data and wrote the report.

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Ministry of Foreign Affairs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

Lebanon is currently experiencing a dire humanitarian crisis, with approximately 82% of the population now living in multidimensional poverty. The country is in the midst of one of the world's most severe economic and financial crises in history, with currency devaluation approaching 98% and inflation soaring. Lebanon is also host to the largest number of refugees per capita in the world, with approximately one in six residents a refugee. Compounded by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the August 2020 Beirut Port explosion, the current crises have devastated livelihoods and wellbeing, severely impacting already vulnerable groups and generating new vulnerabilities and needs, with a large proportion of the Lebanese host population now also requiring humanitarian aid.

Recent estimates indicate that around 53% of the Lebanese population¹ and 90% of Syrian refugees are in need of assistance² and 93% of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon live below the poverty line.³

Research and innovation (R&I) can help forecast and characterise humanitarian crises, understand the scale, distribution and types of needs arising, develop and scale potential solutions, inform humanitarian action, and monitor progress. The ultimate objective of humanitarian R&I (HRI) is to help improve the ways in which the humanitarian sector mitigates and responds to crises and serves populations in need. Lebanon is home to some of the oldest research institutions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and has a comparatively well-developed research infrastructure, including a track record of research productivity in the humanitarian space over the course of the Lebanese civil war, 2006 Lebanon war with Israel and the Syrian conflict. Lebanon also has both formal structures to support innovation and informal innovation capacity.

This Lebanon consultation, one of a series for Elrha's landmark Global Prioritisation Exercise (GPE) for HRI, examines perspectives of actors engaged within the HRI space. It aims to understand R&I topics and priority topics perceived as requiring attention in Lebanon, how the HRI ecosystem functions, how decisions are made, and who has a seat at the priority-setting table, and to glean participant perspectives on topics requiring additional R&I attention.

METHODS

Key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted with seven stakeholders (six based in Lebanon), the majority of whom had over ten years of experience in the sector. Participants were based at a range of organisation types, including academic institutions, networks / partnerships / consortia, national / local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international financial institutions (IFIs), UN agencies, and the private sector. Two participants identified as having donor / funding functions. All participants indicated that their organisations were involved in both humanitarian research and innovation.

Interviews were conducted remotely in English or Arabic, transcribed, translated into English when required, and analysed thematically using NVivo software.

KEY FINDINGS

This consultation highlighted a number of topics that participants believe require additional R&I attention in the Lebanese context and provided a detailed overview of the strengths and barriers within the R&I ecosystem and ways of working. Whilst all participants indicated that **there is a role for R&I during humanitarian crises** and that R&I serves many important functions, there was also a clear reminder that stakeholders must bear in mind that the ultimate objective of R&I is to inform action and better serve populations in need. Research is inappropriate when conducted purely for the sake of engaging in research and producing new knowledge, with no consideration of value-add and pathways to impact.

Overall, the findings of this consultation suggest that Lebanon has a vibrant and active academic and civil society community which has responded to the evolving humanitarian crises as best as possible within the many constraints of both the broader local context and the R&I ecosystem.

Whilst there has been considerable R&I activity, a number of specific topics were identified as **key gaps and priority issues warranting attention**, and large data gaps were reported. In particular, more work to understand humanitarian needs across Lebanon was flagged, including how needs have evolved over time and within and between population subgroups. There was also a loud and clear call for more work specifically examining the impact of the crises on the Lebanese host population, including calls for a vulnerability assessment amongst the Lebanese host population, similar to the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) assessment, which is conducted annually. Other topics reported as requiring additional attention included a range of issues regarding how to better inform the humanitarian response in Lebanon; cash and voucher assistance (CVA); the water-energy-food nexus; what societies require to become more functional; and how to address the structural determinants of Lebanon's current crises.

Participants had differing views on the **role and feasibility of innovation** in Lebanon. Some considered that the obstructive policy and political environment both precludes innovation, but also necessitates it, with policy innovation identified as a key R&I need. Participants also indicated that more work is needed on innovations to help populations cope with the rapidly deteriorating economic situation, innovations to develop novel ways to collect data and identify populations in need, and innovations to improve return on investment and better use of funds.

Reported **barriers to the production of R&I** in Lebanon include funding and access constraints, while reported **barriers to the utilisation and uptake of R&I** include protracted timeframes for R&I production and limited collaboration. Numerous **factors required for the R&I system to function properly** were identified, including more research funding, more collaboration, capacity building of non-traditional actors and promoting production of practically focused rather than heavily academic knowledge products. Participants also suggested a number of **factors that may specifically support innovation** in the Lebanese context, including collaboration and engagement, and ensuring sufficient funding.

Many participants indicated a **misalignment between R&I investments and HRI topics** requiring attention, and this misalignment was largely attributed to factors such as investments in R&I being perceived as a distraction, insufficient funding, limited focus on R&I during global crises, the politics of foreign aid, competing operational needs, and no political engagement.

Moreover, while many participants reported that Lebanon has a strong and thriving civil society, a vibrant academic community, with local stakeholders engaged in R&I, this engagement is not always equitable and meaningful.

Findings of this consultation suggest that the implementation of the localisation agenda in Lebanon is suboptimal. Perceived barriers to the engagement of local stakeholders include high staff turnover; the dominance of some stakeholder groups; and the local humanitarian architecture and dynamics being poorly understood by grassroots-level institutions.

A range of approaches and factors were reported to be used to **identify and prioritise R&I topics**. These include consideration of the relevance and need for R&I; stakeholder consultations; interests of donors or international researchers; alignment of R&I with local needs; alignment of R&I with organisational objectives; and through multipronged review board assessment. Stakeholder groups identified by participants as missing from the priority-setting process include smaller NGOs, populations affected by crises, and academics. A range of stakeholders participate in organisational priority-setting processes, and those involved vary depending on institution type and setting.

Several **barriers and enablers to investing in R&I** were reported by participants that have a donor / funding function. While the importance of a multisectoral approach and topics such as the humanitarian-development nexus are well recognised, investing in such R&I was reported as being challenging as there is little such work. Additionally, donor organisational mandates can constrain the ability to invest.

Conversely, flexible funding allows donors to better invest in R&I, and investment is also enabled when the context allows for innovation and there are sufficient human resources to undertake the work. A range of **donor coordination mechanisms** were described. These include engagement with partners and grantees; informal donor networks and discussions; use of partnership officers; and scoping the landscape to identify similar work and avoid duplication. Donor coordination is, sometimes, also driven by partners and grantees, who convene donor roundtables to facilitate information exchange.

A number of issues were reported as **precluding the timely responsiveness of the HRI system** in Lebanon to emerging issues and crises. These included funding-related issues (including lack of flexible funding, being project based rather than core funding based, and the need for donors to navigate lengthy bureaucratic processes before they can assign funds), as well as limited capacity or willingness of organisations to change established ways of working. Factors reported as **enabling timely R&I responsiveness** to emerging crises include the level of expertise and capacity of local civil society organisations; donor flexibility and sustainable funding mechanisms; collaboration; and fostering an organisational culture that promotes learning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the key findings from this consultation with a small but diverse group of R&I stakeholders operating in Lebanon, the following recommendations are proposed:



Research and innovation

- A number of thematic areas require additional R&I attention, including more work to understand humanitarian needs overall and amongst the Lebanese host population in particular, and how humanitarian needs have evolved over time. Consideration of broader needs beyond immediate and lifesaving requirements is also warranted, including needs such as dignity, which may be explored through more qualitative research approaches that adopt a holistic approach to wellbeing and needs.
- Participants in this study reported a number of thematic areas as requiring additional R&I attention, however these were not ranked and do not constitute a priority list. Further research to identify priority topics requiring R&I attention is required and must engage a large number of participants and include representation from diverse disciplinary and sectoral backgrounds. This is important to inform a formal research priority-setting exercise and development of an agreed humanitarian research agenda for Lebanon.
- Innovation should be recognised, encouraged, and funded, particularly as Lebanon's crisis deepens and the need for novel solutions to pressing problems rises.
- R&I priorities must be based on local needs and must also be locally determined, with meaningful, equitable and inclusive representation of a range of local and national bodies at decision-making tables.



Dissemination, uptake, and utilisation of R&I

- A national HRI repository and associated data-sharing platform should be established for voluntary uploading of outputs, in order to support information dissemination, learning, and improved collaboration. This should be bilingual (Arabic and English), include both academic and operational R&I outputs, and should have an active outreach and engagement function. To ensure data integrity and transparency, and that resources critical of government or other authorities are still uploaded and shared, this proposed new repository should sit independent of government and ideally be hosted by a local academic or civil society organisation. Funding is required to establish, staff and maintain such a platform.
- Noting that it is a broader issue relevant to the global R&I ecosystem, the issue of protracted review and publication timelines must be addressed. Convening of journal editors is warranted to consider rapid review processes that will allow expedited publication so that R&I is timely and can actually be used, whilst not detracting from procedural and methodological rigour.
- Donors should actively support work that fills Lebanon's data gaps and measures are required to ensure that information end-users, including operational agencies and policy bodies, base their work on accurate and updated data.



Funding

- Funding mechanisms need to cover core funding, so that institutions can build and maintain capacity, and work on R&I initiatives that address both acute needs and anticipated issues; and in parallel, flexible funding streams are also required, to allow teams to pivot as new R&I needs arise.
- Sufficient funding should be earmarked for innovation and for initiatives that straddle the humanitarian-development nexus.



Measuring return on investment

- Innovative ways of measuring return on investment are required and should incorporate a holistic lens, examining impact using both readily quantifiable indicators and outcomes, but also less easily measurable while equally important social parameters, for example, dignity or the alleviation of social tensions.
- R&I is required to identify ways to ensure best use of funds and improve return on investment in the Lebanese context, given the volume of humanitarian funding and the rapidly growing number of people requiring assistance.



Ways of working

- Capacity-strengthening initiatives, supported with appropriate funding, can bolster Lebanon's existing workforce and strong R&I performance.
- Improved collaboration across sectors and disciplinary divides and amongst local / national / international actors is important across all phases of R&I. Efforts to strengthen existing collaborative platforms, and where required, develop new ones, should be encouraged. New actors should also be engaged and invited to these spaces – Lebanon's dire humanitarian context has resulted in many non-traditional stakeholder groups engaging in HRI and operational activities, and such groups should be appropriately represented.
- Meaningfully train and engage community researchers so that they are able to both contribute to R&I and build careers whilst also maintaining their community identities and bringing this community role and insights to their work.
- Promote localisation through the empowerment of national stakeholders, implementing measures to retain national staff and prevent 'brain drain', and work with new partners to ensure greater regional and national stakeholder engagement.



SECTION 1

BACKGROUND

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND

WHY A GLOBAL PRIORITISATION EXERCISE (GPE) FOR HUMANITARIAN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (HRI)?

Over recent years, globally the number of people affected by humanitarian crises and in need of humanitarian assistance and protection reached unprecedented levels. According to the Global Humanitarian Overview⁴, almost 300 million people globally will require humanitarian aid in 2024, driven largely by increasing conflicts, impacts of the climate crisis and economic issues. Displacement is at the highest level since the beginning of the century, with 1 in 73 people worldwide being forcibly displaced and this ratio has almost doubled in the last decade. Additionally, around one in five children is living in or fleeing from a conflict-affected setting.

Research can help forecast and characterise humanitarian crises, understand the scale, distribution, and types of needs arising, inform humanitarian response and monitor progress. Research has a crucial role to play in helping improve the ways in which the humanitarian sector mitigates and responds to crises and serves populations in need.

Innovation can play a critical role in humanitarian crises by providing new and more effective solutions to the complex problems that arise during such emergencies. Strategic investments in research and innovation (R&I) and the appropriate utilisation and uptake of R&I findings can help improve the way the humanitarian sector uses evidence and identifies and scales solutions and, in turn, contribute to improving the efficiency of the humanitarian response.

Despite the importance of R&I in the humanitarian space, the allocation of resources and the focus of humanitarian R&I (HRI) are not equitable. Preliminary results from the 2021/22 Global Prioritisation Exercise Mapping Report,⁵ which captured humanitarian literature published during the period January 2017 to June 2021, indicate that there has been a steady increase in the number of HRI publications over the five-year period, but there are considerable issues of inequities of attention, with some crises, population subgroups, and geographic areas receiving disproportionately more R&I attention than others. Additionally, R&I actors and institutions remain heavily Global North-based, and institutions in the Global North continue to receive the largest share of R&I funding.⁶

Differential attention matters: what gets researched gets discussed, and what gets discussed gets addressed. Therefore, it is imperative to understand how the HRI ecosystem is structured and functions, including understanding where and to whom R&I funding is directed, how R&I priorities are set, who is involved in these decision-making processes and how, if at all, coordination mechanisms operate. Reflecting the variable nature and impact of crises across the globe, understanding how HRI priorities and topics requiring attention vary by geographic region is also crucial to better inform investment decisions and, ultimately, help improve evidence-driven and efficient humanitarian action.

ABOUT THE GPE

The GPE for HRI is a landmark, multi-pronged initiative that seeks to improve outcomes for people affected by humanitarian crises by characterising the existing HRI landscape (including thematic and crisis focus areas, funding, actor engagement, and impact of investments), and identifying priorities for future investment. Commissioned by Elrha, the GPE comprises two distinct research phases:

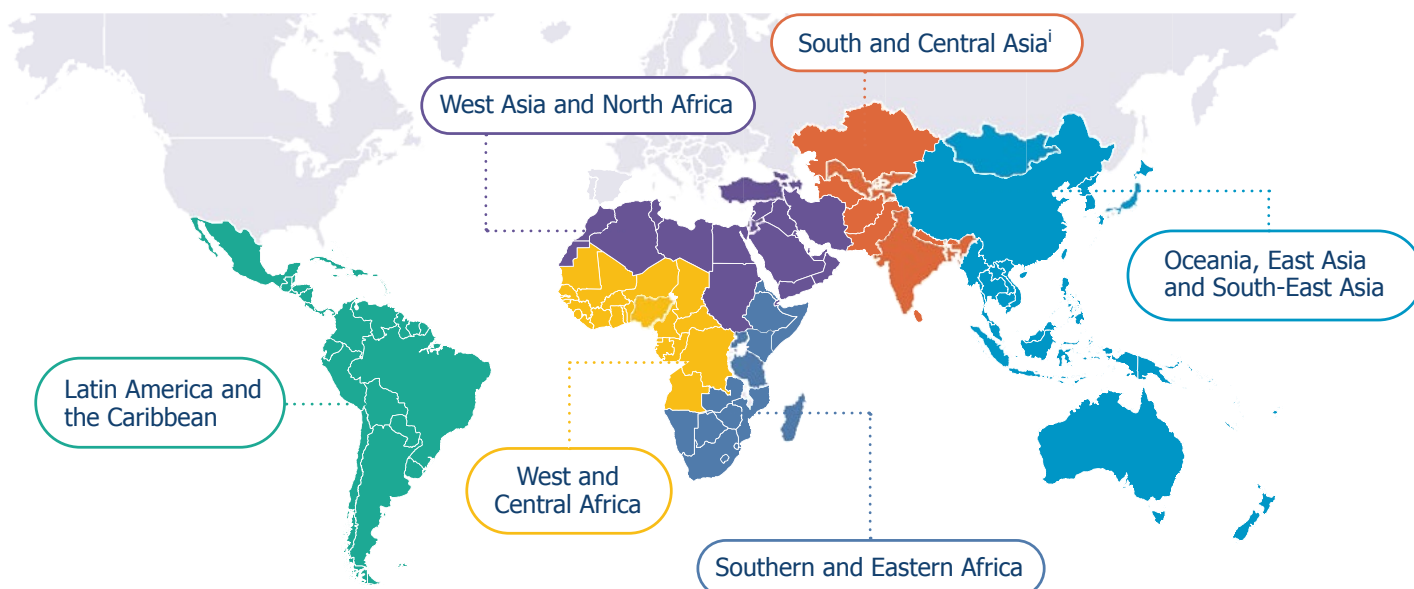


Global mapping of HRI outputs and investments: Detailed mapping of HRI actors, investments, and thematic and crisis focus areas over the period January 2017 to June 2021,⁷ and financial flow analysis tracking HRI funding allocations from a range of donor types over this period.⁸ This builds upon the previous mapping of research, innovation, and outputs undertaken in 2017 for the period January 2016 to April 2017.⁹



Stakeholder consultations: A series of consultations with diverse stakeholder groups operating at each of the global, regional, national, and community levels and exploring a range of issues regarding R&I investments, needs, and priority-setting and decision-making processes.

This report is one of a series for the regional and national consultations. Led by Deakin University (Australia) in collaboration with partners in each region, the regional consultations have explored stakeholder perspectives on the HRI ecosystem in six geographic regions, demarcated according to the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) Regional Classifications:¹⁰



Three national consultations have also been conducted:

Indonesia

Kenya

Lebanon

The overarching aim of the regional and national consultations is to understand how the HRI ecosystem functions, how decisions are made, and who has a seat at the priority-setting table, and to gauge perceptions of topics requiring R&I attention for the region or national setting.

i. The UN Statistics Division classification includes Iran under South Asia, but for the purposes of the GPE consultations Iran was included in the West Asia and North Africa region.

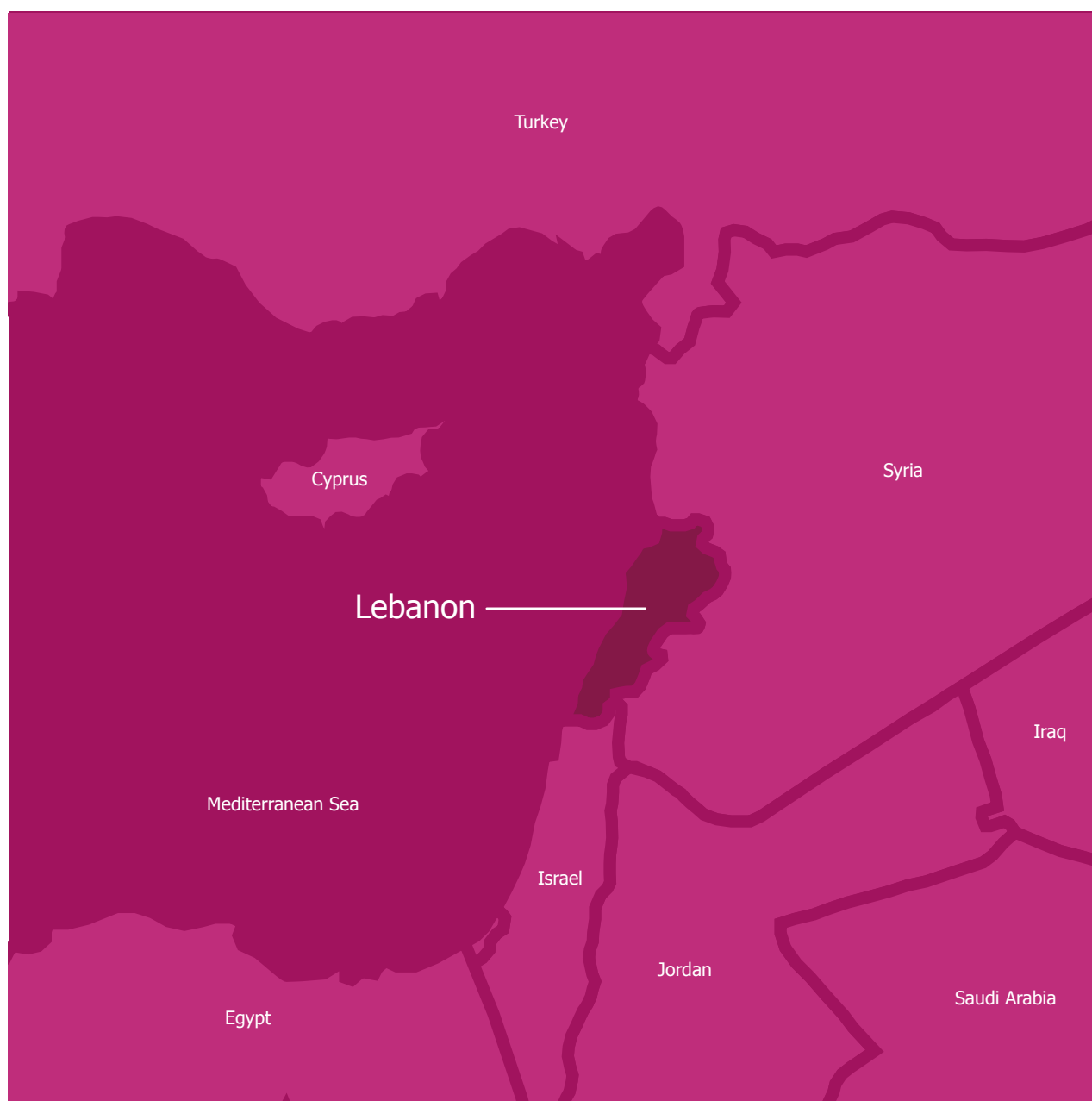
ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report presents key findings for the Lebanon national consultation. This consultation was undertaken by Deakin University.

THE HUMANITARIAN LANDSCAPE IN LEBANON

Lebanon is experiencing a severe humanitarian crisis due to the effects of massive socio-economic collapse and ongoing impacts of the August 2020 Beirut blast, occurring with the background of a longstanding refugee influx due to Palestinian and Syrian displacement to Lebanon. The compounding effects of these shocks have generated a dire humanitarian situation, with most recent estimates indicating that approximately 82% of Lebanon's population are now experiencing multidimensional poverty.¹¹

Figure 1: Map showing Lebanon and surrounding countries



Lebanon's economic collapse has been described by the World Bank as a deliberate depression and among the worst economic crises globally since the mid-nineteenth century.¹² The crisis is so severe that Lebanon has lost its upper-middle income country status, a classification it held for 25 years, and is now considered a lower-middle-income country.¹³ The economy has been in freefall since late 2019, with currency devaluation approaching 98% and inflation skyrocketing. Severe capital control measures have been imposed by banks. Businesses, industries, and infrastructures have approached collapse, including the oil and gas sector, with fuel shortages and state electricity cuts resulting in widespread power blackouts of up to 22 hours per day.¹⁴ With a reliance on power from private generators, the average electricity bill for a family now costs more than the monthly minimum wage, currently estimated to be USD17.¹⁵ Lebanon's water infrastructure is also failing, with an estimated 1.9 million people believed to lack access to safe water.¹⁶

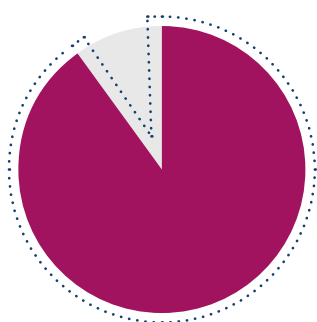
Additionally, from late 2022 to mid-2023, Lebanon also experienced its first cholera outbreak in decades, mainly but not exclusively concentrated in areas inhabited by refugees, with significant implications on the already stretched health system.¹⁷ Lebanon's health system has long been on the brink, struggling under the weight of COVID-19, massive 'brain drain', and widespread medication and equipment shortages. Access to healthcare is increasingly difficult, with 34% of children in 2021 reportedly unable to access healthcare when they needed it.¹⁸ The country now also has amongst the highest rates of food inflation globally, third only to Zimbabwe and Venezuela.¹⁹ According to the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Acute Food Insecurity analysis conducted in May 2023, a total of 1.4 million Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and Palestinian refugees from Syria (displaced to Lebanon) are in the 'crisis' phase or worse and need urgent assistance.²⁰



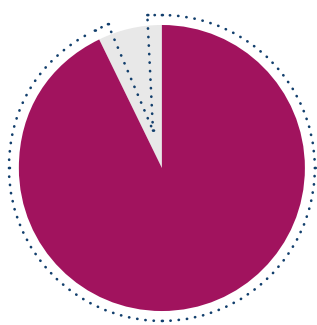
The August 2020 Beirut blast, the strongest non-nuclear explosion in history,²¹ killed 218 people, wounded 7,000, and led to widespread destruction in Beirut. Much critical infrastructure was damaged or destroyed,²² compounding humanitarian needs and worsening the economic situation, with the economic meltdown following the explosion described as 'cataclysmic'.²³

Lebanon is also host to the largest number of refugees per capita and per square kilometre in the world,²⁴ with an estimated 1.5 million Syrian refugees and 13,715 refugees of other nationalities.²⁵ With a population of 5.5 million, almost one in four people in Lebanon is a refugee. Large numbers of refugees live in, or close to, host communities that are either vulnerable or impoverished themselves.

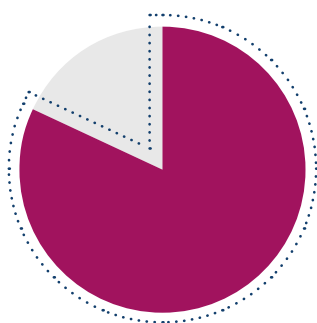
These crises have generated profound humanitarian needs, many of which remain unmet despite the large humanitarian response. While refugees have been extremely vulnerable and disadvantaged, with over 90% of Syrian refugee households not having the economic capacity to meet survival needs²⁶ and 93% of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (PRL) living below the poverty line,²⁷ there is now also widespread vulnerability among the Lebanese host population. Multidimensional poverty has soared within two years, from 25% in 2019 to approximately 82% in 2021.²⁸ In 2022, it was estimated that around 53% of the Lebanese population needed assistance.²⁹ Currently, a total of 2.2 million vulnerable Lebanese are in need of humanitarian assistance.³⁰ A representative survey of Lebanese, PRL, and migrants conducted in late 2022 found that 91% of households across these population groups in Lebanon had unmet needs, with 20% having extreme or very extreme needs and considerable variation by population subgroup, governorate, and type of need.³¹



Over 90% of Syrian refugee households do not have the economic capacity to meet survival needs.²⁶



93% of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (PRL) live below the poverty line.²⁷



82% of the total population in Lebanon are experiencing multidimensional poverty.

The humanitarian response in Lebanon

Lebanon's formal international humanitarian response comprises several frameworks, through which UN organisations develop and implement humanitarian programming, either directly or indirectly through partners. National and international NGOs and civil society play critical roles in their implementation.

Between 2012 and 2014, the *Syria Regional Response Plan (SRRP)* supported countries such as Lebanon to respond to the refugees fleeing Syria to nearby countries. In December 2014, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) launched the more expansive *Regional Refugee & Resilience Plan in response to the Syria Crisis (3RP)* as, “a strategic, coordination, planning, advocacy, fundraising, and programming platform for humanitarian and development partners to respond to the Syria crisis.”³² 3RP comprises both a regional plan and five stand-alone country chapter plans, including the *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP)*,³³ which addresses the impact of the Syrian crisis in Lebanon and targets both Syrian refugees and host communities. The *Emergency Response Plan (ERP)* for Lebanon was launched in 2021 under the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Lebanon to respond to increasing humanitarian needs among the most vulnerable Lebanese, migrants, and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon,³⁴ and was intended to complement the LCRP which focuses primarily on Syrian refugees and host communities.

Notably, although not captured in formal frameworks and metrics, Lebanon’s humanitarian activity is also characterised by a large informal response by communities. Lebanon’s large diaspora also supports the humanitarian response, both informally such as through remittances and through structured channels including diaspora service provision, humanitarian assistance, and funding.³⁵

R&I in Lebanon

Lebanon has some of the oldest and strongest modern academic institutions in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with strong research capacity and a track record of research production, including humanitarian research conducted during the Lebanese civil war, 2006 Lebanon war with Israel and over the course of the Syrian conflict. Lebanon also has several non-academic research institutions and think tanks that conduct quality research. The National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS) has existed since 1962, with a focus that expanded in 2004 beyond the basic and applied sciences to include human and social sciences.³⁶ Despite many strengths, there are still considerable limitations in Lebanon’s research infrastructure. For example, in the health and conflict research space, Lebanon is highly productive, with a strong workforce and research capacity at many higher education institutions, but ongoing challenges exist including due to lack of a national research culture, funding constraints, access to data and a need for more research translation to policy and practice.³⁷ Additionally, Lebanon is a setting in which politics and sectarianism influence the data environment and research: there has not been a national census since 1932, given political sensitivities around population demography and identity.

Lebanon also has both formal structures to support innovation, albeit of limited productivity and impact, and informal innovation capacity. In 2006, Lebanon’s CNRS launched a five-year Science, Technology and Innovation Policy (STIP) in order to increase national efforts in these three fields as well as to strengthen the country’s participation in regional and international networks in relation to science, technology, and innovation. However, implementation has been limited, in part due to broader disruptions from the 2006 Lebanon war with Israel a year after its launch, which severely hampered efforts to implement the policy.^{38,39} Lebanon is also a setting in which humanitarian innovation occurs informally, often unrecognised, and out of necessity. For example, the absence of state support in the aftermath of the Beirut blast necessitated new ways of working and the immediate engagement of new players to support humanitarian response, including the mobilisation of community members and civil society organisations whose remit previously did not include the humanitarian space.



SECTION 2

METHODS

SECTION 2: METHODS

STUDY OVERVIEW

Detailed methodological information is available online. Briefly, this study sought to include between six to ten national actors engaged with the humanitarian research and innovation (HRI) space in any of the following capacities:

- Researcher, innovator
- Donor
- End user of R&I findings and outputs (eg, humanitarian operational practitioner, policy-maker)
- R&I commissioner / administrator.

National actors were defined as those with a portfolio, mandate, or focus within Lebanon.

A standardised key informant interview (KII) guide, modified as required to ensure cultural sensitivity and local relevance, comprised seven modules covering:

- demographics
- the role of R&I in humanitarian crises
- HRI topics requiring attention in the Lebanese context, and priority topics
- alignment of investments with HRI topics requiring attention
- regional and national stakeholder engagement with HRI
- donor decision-making and coordination processes
- responsiveness of the HRI system.

The interview guide used in this Lebanon consultation is [available online](#) in English and in Arabic.

Interviews were conducted in English or Arabic, transcribed (and translated into English where required), and analysed thematically. All analysis was undertaken in English, using a coding framework that was developed both inductively and deductively. Where participants had referred to issues outside Lebanon, issues not relevant to the humanitarian space or referring predominantly to the humanitarian operational sector and not HRI, or where the question was not addressed as intended, these excerpts were not used in the current analysis.

Ethics approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (ref 2022-163).

LIMITATIONS OF THIS WORK

This report presents the perspectives of a purposively sampled cohort of actors engaged with the humanitarian research and innovation space. Every attempt was made to ensure broad sectoral and disciplinary engagement and representation from diverse organisation types. Demographics, humanitarian needs, and the humanitarian response vary across the country – therefore, attempts were made to include participants who either had a national scope to their work, or were focused / based in parts of the country with a heavy and active humanitarian response.

The participants provided diverse perspectives and rich insights, which provide an important baseline. Future work should seek to validate the findings of this initial exercise.

This study is also subject to the limitations inherent in all qualitative analysis, including that coding is subject to interpretation. This was minimised through an iterative coding process, including an initial validation exercise between the primary data analyst and the qualitative research lead and followed by discussion, re-analysis, and recoding by the full team to resolve any disagreements or review specific excerpts or transcripts.

This study explored participant perspectives regarding how the HRI ecosystem functions and humanitarian topics requiring additional R&I attention in Lebanon, and this report presents summaries of key points raised by participants. Not all humanitarian issues or R&I needs impacting Lebanon are necessarily covered in this report if they were not mentioned by participants.

The topics reported as requiring additional R&I attention are informative but not necessarily exhaustive and were not ranked. Further work (including gauging the views of a large and diverse number of stakeholders) is required to validate the findings from this initial work and inform development of an agreed national R&I agenda.

CONSULTATION PARTICIPANTS

In total, seven interviews were conducted, six in English and one in Arabic. All but one participant were based in Lebanon and interviews were conducted remotely using a secure Teams platform between December 2022 and February 2023.

Summary characteristics of participant and organisational details are presented in Table 1. Two participants identified as having donor / funding functions. All participants indicated that their organisation works across both humanitarian research and innovation.

Table 1: Summary of participant and organisational characteristics

Participant and organisational characteristics	Number of participants
Organisational type:	
International financial institution	1
Academic	2
UN agency	1
National / local NGO	1
Private sector	1
Network / partnership / consortia	1
Participant years of experience in the sector:	
Less than five years	1
Between five and ten years	2
More than ten years	4
Participant years of experience in current role:	
Less than five years	3
Between five and ten years	2
More than ten years	2
Organisational involvement with R&I:	
Humanitarian research only	0
Humanitarian innovation only	0
Both humanitarian R&I	7



SECTION 3

THE ROLE OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (R&I) IN HUMANITARIAN CRISES

SECTION 3: THE ROLE OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (R&I) IN HUMANITARIAN CRISES



KEY MESSAGES

All participants acknowledged the important role of R&I during humanitarian crises, but there was also a cautionary note that researchers sometimes forget that the main objective is to solve problems and instead they conduct research as an end in, and of, itself. Research is not appropriate during humanitarian crises when conducted for the purpose of producing new knowledge only.

A number of **roles for R&I during humanitarian crises** were noted, including helping inform and tailor the humanitarian response, identifying needs and vulnerable population subgroups, informing policymaking, providing a deeper understanding of the crisis context, and serving as an early warning system to identify indicators of an imminent crisis.

While several participants reflected that R&I generally enables better outcomes, most indicated that **R&I does not always enable better outcomes**. This is reportedly due to factors such as limited knowledge translation, contextual constraints, and poor policy engagement, failure to adequately capture a range of less readily quantifiable metrics, not gleaning lessons learnt from past experiences and past crises, and mismatched objectives amongst stakeholders.

Reported **barriers to the production of R&I** include funding and access constraints.

Reported **barriers to the utilisation and uptake of R&I** include protracted timeframes for R&I production, including lengthy peer review and publication times, and limited collaboration.

Factors identified by participants that may **improve the use and usefulness of R&I** include improved collaboration, ensuring local relevance, improved data sharing and dissemination, strengthening outreach including through innovative approaches, adopting lessons learnt, keeping a 'big picture' approach, and using the results of R&I to advocate for change.

R&I undertaken during acute crises should be collaborative, with all stakeholders being sensitive to each other's operational needs and priorities, and anticipatory rather than just reactive.

Numerous **factors required for the R&I system to function properly** were identified, including more research funding, more collaboration, a policy environment that supports innovation, capacity building of non-traditional actors and promoting production of practically focused rather than heavily academic knowledge products.

Participants had different views on what constitutes **innovation**, and whether or not the Lebanese context allows for innovation. While the rapidly evolving situation in the country was viewed by some as a context that demands innovation, it was highlighted that Lebanon's political and policy environment hinders innovation development, adoption, and implementation.

IS THERE A ROLE FOR R&I DURING HUMANITARIAN CRISES?

All seven participants acknowledged that R&I is critical and plays an important role during humanitarian crises. A number of key functions reported by participants are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Reported roles of R&I

Role	Explanation / examples
Inform / strengthen the humanitarian response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To inform programme design including when learnings are adopted and feed into programme development. • To inform development of an accountable and transparent response, especially with the adoption / use of inclusive and participatory approaches. • To restructure responses to be fit for purpose. • To identify effective and flexible solutions and inform action. • To identify localised types of approaches and solutions as well as build capacity of local actors. • To support organisations in better development and implementation of programmes. • To ensure that responses are development-centred, durable and sustainable rather than aid-centred.

Identify needs and populations in need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify population needs correctly. • To identify vulnerable population subgroups.
Inform policy-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To inform development of actionable policies that are contextually relevant and evidence-based.
Understand the context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To inform understanding of the crisis context including actors involved in the humanitarian setting, what works and what does not in a given context, and best practices.
Identify indicators of an imminent crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To identify social and political indicators that may reflect an imminent event before crisis onset.
Glean lessons learnt and inform preparedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To learn from past crises in order to learn lessons and prepare for new emerging crises.

One participant also commented on when research might not be appropriate, noting that some researchers tend to forget that the ultimate objective of HRI is finding solutions to problems, and instead some tend to engage with R&I just for the purpose of conducting research. It was emphasised that research should be used as a means for solving pressing problems and not merely as an end in itself. Another participant reported that in times of crisis, innovation becomes increasingly important, but a balance and judgement regarding appropriateness and types of innovation are required, as noted that,



"You don't want to test out a new modality that may or may not work when people's lives are being ...tested."

IS HRI ENABLING BETTER OUTCOMES, AND IF SO, HOW?

Participants had different views on whether or not R&I enables better outcomes, with some providing examples of R&I both enabling and not enabling better outcomes.

R&I was reported to support the humanitarian response when it ***informs evidence-based policymaking and practice, it helps identify and support people who need assistance the most, and when they help identify appropriate interventions***. R&I enabling better outcomes is facilitated when there are communication and collaboration platforms involving multiple stakeholders including implementing agencies (eg, NGOs or UN agencies) and R&I producers (e.g., academic institutions or think tanks).

On the other hand, most participants indicated that R&I is not always enabling better outcomes in the Lebanese context. For example, Lebanon has long supported a massive refugee response with strong mechanisms implemented, but with the compounding crises now impacting a large number of Lebanese in addition to existing vulnerable population subgroups such as Syrian and Palestinian refugees, the R&I system has reportedly struggled to *"understand who are the Lebanese that are actually in need? [...] So as a system to try and come up with an innovative or creative way to meet prioritised needs ...we haven't succeeded, I don't think"*.

A number of reasons why R&I is not enabling improved outcomes were suggested, including:

- **Limited knowledge translation:** Although much R&I is reportedly being funded and undertaken, often there is limited knowledge translation, resulting in no tangible change. This could be due to a range of factors, including high staff turnover that impacts the process of ensuring that R&I learnings feed into programming and action, operational actors not looking at R&I findings, difficulties for operational actors to utilise research that is considered abstract or not presented in an actionable way, and obstructions at the point of translating innovations and policy recommendations into action. It was reported that limited knowledge translation is also visible to beneficiaries who engage as research participants. Not seeing research translate into improved programming or response that meets their immediate needs then also generates research fatigue and reluctance to participate.
- **Contextual constraints including limited policy and political interest:** Knowledge translation of some promising initiatives has been limited in some contexts such as Lebanon because of poor policy engagement, lack of governance capacity, and increased resilience of authoritarianism.
- **Not sufficiently capturing required parameters or correct metrics:** Insufficient focus on identifying the less visible and less easily measured needs of communities, such as the need for dignity and the need for societal happiness and wellbeing, due to such parameters being difficult to quantify compared with quantitative indicators such as measures of the need for healthcare access. It was also reported that programme evaluation has not been done sufficiently or captured the correct metrics; rather, most of the research conducted is directed toward the evaluation of rapid outputs and not toward the effects or impacts of interventions, including negative impacts. It was reported that if evaluations had been done correctly, some may have demonstrated some harm and so programmes would have been modified or stopped and ways of working adjusted.
- **Not gleaning lessons learnt:** Failure to learn lessons and modify approaches accordingly to do things better and more efficiently and effectively.
- **Mismatched objectives of R&I between stakeholders:** Stakeholders each have their own objectives, key performance indicators and ways of working, and these are not necessarily primarily focused on improving humanitarian action. For example, the primary objective of academic institutions may focus on research metrics and the volume of research outputs as measures of performance rather than on impact of research, and so their priority may be to publish, regardless of whether the research has tangible real-world impacts. Similarly, it was reported that donor objectives may be focused on allocating funds using a

given framework or in a particular way, and so the focus is on identifying R&I actors who can conduct the research in a way that aligns with their needs and facilitates donor processes for allocating and spending funds.

- **Potential for R&I to enable better outcomes is yet to be seen in the Lebanese context:** The difference in timeframes between immediate, reactive operational action and more prolonged, reflective academic processes of humanitarian actors versus researchers means that whether or not R&I actually enables improved humanitarian action is yet to be seen in Lebanon.

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO THE PRODUCTION, UPTAKE, AND UTILISATION OF R&I?

Many participants highlighted the following barriers to **producing R&I** in the humanitarian sector:

- **Funding:** Limited funding, including core funding; short and reactive funding cycles which do not allow for sustained and ongoing R&I programmes in the absence of an acute emergency; dependence on external funding and funding opportunities from international donors.
- **Access constraints:** Limited access to some geographic locations due to factors such as physical access issues, security, and political concerns.

Most participants highlighted the following barriers to the **uptake and utilisation of R&I**:

- **Protracted timeframes for knowledge production** including the time required to develop and validate methodology and lengthy peer review, and revision processes that mean that results are often outdated by the time they are published, and the response has already taken place.
- **Limited collaboration** between different entities involved in the HRI sector such as those producing R&I and implementing agencies, and limited dissemination to communities.

HOW CAN R&I BE BETTER USED?

All participants provided recommendations on how R&I can be better used to inform the humanitarian sector and humanitarian action. Suggestions included:

- **Improved collaboration** across all phases of R&I.
 - ◇ At the *conceptualisation and design stage*, collaboration can help improve data quality and relevance of the work, draw on the different skills, perspectives, and insights that each group brings to the table, and facilitate more efficient administrative and R&I operational processes. As one such example, it was reported that operational agencies undertook rapid surveys following the Beirut blast to identify needs, and that engagement of researchers could have allowed for improved documentation and processes and collection of additional relevant information.
 - ◇ At the *dissemination and advocacy stages*, improved collaboration through, for example, networks and partnerships, is essential to facilitate R&I uptake and utilisation. This includes ensuring that knowledge producers such as universities engage with civil society, policymakers, experts, and other communities of practice.
- **Improved data sharing and dissemination processes**, which may require the development of a policy of open data access so that existing work can be accessed and gaps can be identified. In the Lebanese context, it was also reported that despite a large number of programme evaluations being regularly undertaken, these are not readily available online and so learnings and contextually relevant information are not widely available.
- **Reflect and adopt lessons learnt** from previous crises and other similar contexts. This includes gleaning lessons learnt to improve research tools so that they can be rapidly deployed in subsequent crises, and facilitating channels particularly for South-South engagement and learning so that lessons can be gleaned from other similar contexts.
- Establish **advocacy and research networks** and use the results of R&I to advocate for change and to serve as a reminder to the international community of the need for action.
- **Ensure local input and contextual relevance**: Working with people possessing relevant lived experience and contextual knowledge in order to know what works and what does not, and use such insights to be able to generate localised knowledge.
- **Use innovative ways of working and innovative technologies** to strengthen outreach and improve communication with vulnerable population subgroups and better identify their needs and connect them with required services and support. For example, in Lebanon, it was reported that innovation and technology could help improve engagement with marginalised and at-risk groups such as the LGBTQIA+ community and improve ways of supporting their priority needs.
- Have courage to **advocate** on politically sensitive issues.
- Integrate a **focus on social research and social impacts** into humanitarian research.
- Zoom out of the details and **do not lose sight of the 'big picture' objective of HRI**, which is to solve problems and ultimately help better serve populations in need.

HOW SHOULD RESEARCH BE CONDUCTED DURING ACUTE CRISES?

One participant suggested the following regarding how research should be conducted during acute crises:

- Research should be collaborative and stakeholders should be sensitive to each other's priorities and roles. For example, humanitarian organisations should engage and collaborate with researchers, and researchers should be sensitive to the operational priorities of humanitarian organisations.
- R&I should have a long-term perspective and anticipatory approach rather than just being reactive. For example, with the onset of the Syrian crisis and influx of refugees into Lebanon, the multifaceted impact, including the relationship with host communities, should have been recognised early on and received early R&I attention. Instead, there were R&I lags and R&I is reactive. When it does begin, R&I addresses the initial priorities of the crisis, but by this time, other issues have emerged and again there is a lag before they receive R&I attention.

WHAT ELSE DOES THE HRI ECOSYSTEM IN LEBANON REQUIRE TO FUNCTION PROPERLY?

Several participants highlighted other requirements for the HRI ecosystem to function properly. These include:

- More research funding, especially for research that can help inform policymaking, improve humanitarian response, and lead to the development of innovative solutions that promote participation, diversity, and equity.
- Flexible / core funding that allows local actors to define the agenda.
- More collaborations and cooperation between the different entities involved in the HRI and operational sector, including aid organisations, academic institutions, and affected communities.
- Capacity building of non-traditional actors and promotion of practically oriented rather than heavily academic, knowledge products.
- Policy to drive innovation: A policy environment that supports innovation.



SPOTLIGHT ON: INNOVATION

The concept of innovation was viewed differently among participants, reflecting the broad umbrella definition of the term. Participants referred to the same issue of cash transfers in the Lebanese context, with one describing this as an important innovation whilst the other did not perceive the change in the modality of assistance to be an example of innovation.



"I was thinking that, of course, you need innovation in terms of how to respond to, like, new modalities and using different cash or technology to reach people, that's critical. So, I think...the sort of the data collection analysis initial phase is maybe where more of the innovation is perhaps required because it's so fundamental to all of the next steps in the humanitarian response."



"On the innovation side, I think, innovation in the way that you approach the situation, I mean moving from vouchers to plastic cards and cash transfers, that's not innovation, that's using available long-standing technology."

Several participants considered the place of innovation in the Lebanese context, with differing perspectives.

THE LEBANESE CONTEXT ALLOWS FOR INNOVATION

Lebanon is going through a multi-level crisis and some participants indicated that this requires a major rethink of humanitarian work. This view was expressed succinctly by one participant:



"It's just that the Lebanon example...that's like if you're not showing innovation to how we respond in Lebanon, it doesn't work because the textbook doesn't work for Lebanon, right? There's no[thing] like it. It's too complicated. It's too complex, and we can't rely on the normal systems to respond here. So, we have to show innovation in how we do it otherwise."

How has innovation been used in the Lebanese context?

Reported examples of innovation included:

- Innovation in crisis response planning to support the growing number of vulnerable Lebanese (eg, the development of the ERP to complement the LCRP).
- Innovation to circumvent restrictive government policies in order to allow appropriate humanitarian action. For example, the Lebanese government refused to allow housing made of concrete for Syrian refugees as these would constitute long-term, permanent structures. An innovative construction approach was developed and used, whereby concrete slabs were used, but these were lifted off the ground so that technically they are not classified as 'permanent structures'.
- Innovation in funding and supporting activities traditionally considered 'development' but rendered 'humanitarian' given Lebanon's complex context. For example, although traditionally a development-type activity, the installation of solar panels has been supported by humanitarian actors in Lebanon out of necessity, as humanitarian activities such as pumping water from a well or ensuring a safe water supply require electricity.
- Innovative ways of working have helped identify and support vulnerable populations such as people living with disabilities, by building the capacity of local and international organisations to identify and engage with such groups.
- Adaptive innovation has been used in the humanitarian health context due to shortages of some essential medicines.

THE LEBANESE CONTEXT DOES NOT ALLOW FOR INNOVATION

As stated by one participant,



"In terms of innovation, what innovation can you do in a situation where the whole country is crumbled?"

Why is innovation not prioritised or applied in the Lebanese context?

- Funding mechanisms are emergency driven and focus on operational activity and do not support R&I, despite recognition of their importance.
- National organisations exist in survival mode and the primary function of responding to immediate needs on the ground means that there is no capacity to consider how to be more innovative.
- Policy and political constraints as well as lobbying issues preclude the development of new innovations.

HOW CAN INNOVATION BE FACILITATED IN THE LEBANESE CONTEXT?

- **Through collaboration and engagement:** For innovation to be realistic and applicable in the country, there must be engagement from local organisations and communities themselves, rather than distant academic institutions. Otherwise, innovation will remain theoretical.
- **By addressing the underlying structural issues:** The policy environment and power structures in Lebanon prevent R&I from fixing problems and enabling improved responses, and innovation in, and of, itself cannot solve problems without considering the broader political context and addressing the underlying structural causes. The policy and political environment in Lebanon was described as simultaneously precluding innovation and necessitating it.
- **By providing funding:** One donor participant reflected that they (donors) can help promote innovation in Lebanon by allocating a small amount of money specifically for innovation



SECTION 4

HUMANITARIAN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (HRI) TOPICS REQUIRING ATTENTION

SECTION 4: HUMANITARIAN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (HRI) TOPICS AND PRIORITY ISSUES REQUIRING ATTENTION



KEY MESSAGES

Key topics identified as requiring additional R&I attention included examination of humanitarian ***needs at the national level and amongst specific population subgroups***, and how these are evolving over time. In particular, specifically examining humanitarian needs amongst the Lebanese host population was identified as a priority issue.

Several participants reported topics relevant to ***how the humanitarian sector functions***. Other topics included ***funding during humanitarian crises; cash and voucher assistance (CVA)***; the ***water-energy-food nexus***; ***what societies require*** to become more functional; and how to address the ***structural determinants of Lebanon's current crises***.

Research on innovation was also identified as a need, including innovations to help populations cope with the rapidly deteriorating economic situation, how to ensure improved return on investment, and policy innovation.

WHAT ARE THE HUMANITARIAN TOPICS AND PRIORITY TOPICS REQUIRING R&I ATTENTION IN LEBANON?

A range of HRI topics and priority issues requiring attention were identified (see Table 3). Several participants noted reasons why these topics have not received sufficient attention to date, and these were generally due to limited resources, limited interest amongst key stakeholder groups, structural issues, and political factors. It was also reported that attention to some HRI topics has not been insufficient, but rather the needs and issues requiring attention are evolving over time. For example, there has been a focus on public water supply to informal settlements, but the nature of the issues requiring attention has evolved over time, for example, following the cholera outbreak.

Table 3: Topics and Priority Topics reported as requiring additional R&I attention

R&I TOPICS AND PRIORITY TOPICS	REASONS THESE ARE NEEDS	WHY THESE TOPICS HAVE NOT RECEIVED SUFFICIENT ATTENTION TO DATE
<i>Humanitarian needs including among population subgroups</i>		
Humanitarian needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand humanitarian needs and how they evolve over time. A nationwide study on how humanitarian needs are compounded by intersectional crises in the humanitarian space has not yet been conducted. 	
* Humanitarian needs of various population groups in Lebanon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of data and support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No demand for data, as established ways of working are not adjusted. Political factors (eg, government interests). Bureaucratic processes within the humanitarian response system.
Humanitarian needs amongst Lebanese populations - * vulnerability assessment amongst host communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No vulnerability assessment for the Lebanese population. Lack of data and information on host populations as compared to other population groups. Myth that the Lebanese are resilient and not impacted by crises. 	
<i>How the humanitarian sector functions</i>		
How to respond to the humanitarian situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems put in place are no longer fit for purpose. 	
How to implement a multisectoral approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little evaluation has been done on the administrative structures responsible for programme implementation. 	

* How to adopt a participatory approach in humanitarian response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accountability to Affected Populations (AAPs) and participatory methods, key under the Grand Bargain commitments, have been largely unmet and globally under researched. Sometimes, affected populations are consulted, but their feedback is not considered and not used to inform programme design. Important to understand the negative effects on populations of the use of technologies to leverage or enable large scale programmes. For example, targeting is now based on a Proxy Means Test approach (tools use an algorithmic formula to calculate the vulnerability of refugee households). This is less costly than household visits but generates frustration in refugees who do not perceive differences amongst their vulnerabilities, yet are assessed as being different through this tool. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participatory approaches are often challenging to implement; challenges of balancing being efficient with the limited resources at hand vs. being accountable to affected populations.
* Impact evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Little research / evaluation is directed towards the impact of interventions. 	
Funding during humanitarian crises		
Donor engagement		
How to mobilise funding during crises		
Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA)		
Targeting		
* How coordination of cash assistance in Lebanon can be facilitated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R&I into cash coordination is needed as multipurpose cash response is cross-sectoral and does not fit within a cluster approach. 	

*The water-energy-food nexus		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The relationships between those elements pose an extreme risk for the humanitarian situation. 	
*What societies need to become more functional		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs are always identified as individual humanitarian needs or human rights (no needs assessment being developed or conducted at the level of the community). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outside the interests of relevant stakeholders. Many of these parameters are not easily quantifiable.
The humanitarian-development nexus		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify ways to resolve the humanitarian crisis by resolving structural issues. 		
Innovative research		
To identify new ways for populations to cope with the deteriorating economic situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The rapidly-evolving crisis in Lebanon necessitates new and innovative solutions. 	
To develop new ways to better identify vulnerable groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for innovative research and data collection methods to help identify vulnerable groups. 	
* To address the political and policy determinants (need for policy R&I)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The political and policy environment is contributing to the humanitarian crisis. 	
To ensure better use of funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large sums of money are being spent on the humanitarian response and need to gauge return on investment and optimise funding use. 	

* Participants were asked to identify topics requiring additional R&I attention for Lebanon, and then to name the top three R&I priorities. Topics marked with an *asterisk denote that they were identified as priorities by at least one participant.

Humanitarian needs including those amongst population subgroups

Several participants noted that R&I examining humanitarian needs in Lebanon is required, including how these needs have evolved over time. Understanding the compounding effects of the multiple intersectional crises on all population subgroups, including Syrian and Palestinian refugees, was also highlighted.

Several participants described the need for research and data to correctly **identify the size and needs of vulnerable population subgroups in Lebanon**, rather than working in the same 'safety bubble' and consistently reaching out to, and supporting, the same people. Identifying vulnerable population subgroups is essential but challenging, as *"By the nature of their situation [vulnerable populations], they try to hide, they don't go out, they don't interact because their means are very limited,"* as noted by one participant.

Participants specifically highlighted the need for nationwide studies on **Lebanese host communities** calling for:

- A need to understand **the impact of Lebanon's concurrent humanitarian crises on host populations**.
- A **vulnerability assessment for Lebanese host communities**, similar to the VASyR that is conducted annually in Lebanon, was flagged as a priority topic. It was reported that this is required due to the lack of data on vulnerable host populations.
- Specifically examining the true situation of Lebanese populations and debunking the myth of Lebanese resilience was also reported.

How the humanitarian sector functions

Several participants identified topics and priorities related to how the humanitarian sector functions. These included:

- **How to respond to the current multiple crises in Lebanon**, given that the humanitarian systems and approaches put in place were originally designed and implemented under different circumstances, when the response was primarily towards Syrian refugees and before the onset of the multipronged crisis in Lebanon which has left a large proportion of the Lebanese population also in need.
- Assessing how to implement a **multisectoral / intersectoral approach**. The humanitarian cluster approach in Lebanon is perceived to be siloed and fragmented, which impedes the implementation of effective responses that take into consideration all the contextual determinants affecting population wellbeing.
- **How to adopt a participatory approach in humanitarian action**, given the importance of AAPs and the need for populations to have a role in the design of interventions. This was considered a key topic given that, in some instances, ensuring a participatory approach is challenging (for example, the use of technology in large-scale programmes removes face-to-face interactions and reportedly limits the participation of individuals).

- The need for programme evaluation, mainly through **impact evaluations**, was also highlighted, and this was considered essential in order to also identify any potential harms, whether on the psychological level or the societal / community level.

Funding during humanitarian crises

Several participants suggested R&I topics examining funding during humanitarian crises. This includes the need to understand **how donors engage**, how this can be better done during humanitarian crises, and the need to understand **how to mobilise funding** for a crisis given competing crises elsewhere.

Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA)

The need for research related to CVA was highlighted. Topics identified covered **targeting**, including the extent to which targeting processes are understood and perceived as equitable by communities, and the extent to which targeting supports social cohesion. Furthermore, **cash coordination**, specifically a multi-purpose cash response, which is under the basic assistance response in Lebanon, should be a cross-sectoral modality.

The water-energy-food nexus

The need for R&I in relation to the natural resources' crisis and, specifically, the energy side perspective was highlighted. **The water-energy-food nexus**, how they relate to each other and how they evolve over time, was specified as an R&I priority topic.

What societies need to become more functional

A need for research to understand what societies need to become more functional was reported. Specifically, research that is able to identify less visible societal needs such as dignity, community participation at the political level, and freedom of expression.

The humanitarian-development nexus

The need to identify potential solutions for resolving the crises in Lebanon by addressing the structural determinants was reported.

Innovative research

Several participants highlighted the need for research on innovation, covering topics such as:

- **new ways to support** the population to cope with the severe and rapidly evolving economic collapse.
- innovative **research and data collection methods** to identify neglected vulnerable populations and respond to / support their needs effectively.

- **political reform and policy innovation** to address the underlying political determinants of the crisis.
- **R&I to improve return on investment** and ensure better use of funds.

WHAT PROBLEMS CAN R&I INTO THESE ISSUES SOLVE?

- **Improved humanitarian action**

It was emphasised that data providing a clear and comprehensive picture of who is vulnerable in the Lebanese context will inform aid-funding decisions and allow improved and more equitable distribution of aid. In particular, recognising that Lebanese populations are also vulnerable and reassessing the distribution of resources across population subgroups accordingly can help alleviate social tensions. It was also highlighted that innovation could improve data collection speed and data quality, which could be used to inform a better humanitarian response.

- **Holistic evaluation of the effectiveness of funding**

It was suggested that R&I examining qualitative parameters such as dignity would allow a more holistic evaluation of funding effectiveness and consideration of return on investment in a more qualitative and societal-level way rather than a reliance on traditional, readily measurable and quantifiable metrics.



SPOTLIGHT ON: NEED FOR DATA TO DRIVE ACTION IN LEBANON

There are major data deficits in Lebanon which need to be filled. This includes a need to accurately understand population demographics and size, and the distribution of vulnerable populations in need.

THE VALUE OF MIXED METHODS AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Lebanon has a strong and productive academic community, but the need for more qualitative data was reported to complement the existing predominantly quantitative focus, as some topics and concepts cannot be meaningfully explored without an in-depth qualitative approach.

FILLING SPECIFIC DATA GAPS

The need to fill data gaps for specific population subgroups was also reported, and the absence of such information suggests that programming and action is not data driven.

- **Up-to-date demographic data on Syrian refugees:** Understanding the size, distribution, and attributes of the Syrian population in Lebanon is essential to inform policies and programming. This includes an understanding of the number of registered vs. unregistered refugees and economic migrants. It was also reported that the estimate of 1.5 million Syrian refugees has been used for almost a decade, with the failure to update this figure and account for population movement and attrition suggesting that programming is not data driven.
- **Data on Lebanese host communities** (size, vulnerability assessment): Over recent years, the number of Lebanese in need has soared and the gap between refugees, displaced populations, and host communities has closed, yet there is insufficient information at the moment about the size and needs of this vulnerable Lebanese group.

Why do these data gaps exist and persist?

It was reported that limited data on the Lebanese community could reflect donor sentiments that the Lebanese should be supported by the government of Lebanon, and so donors are less willing to support them, but there is more momentum and available funding to support Syrian refugees, as the Syrian crisis is considered a more crucial crisis globally and there is funding for refugee support.

Data gaps may also reflect vested interests. For example, it was suggested that the government of Lebanon benefits from the presence of Syrian refugees in the country and does not want to shift the attention to Lebanese host communities.

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Over recent years, the number of Lebanese in need has soared and the gap between refugees, displaced populations and host communities has closed, yet it was reported that there is insufficient information at the moment about the size and needs of the vulnerable Lebanese group.

.....



SECTION 5

(MIS)ALIGNMENT OF RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (R&I) INVESTMENTS WITH NEEDS

SECTION 5: (MIS)ALIGNMENT OF R&I INVESTMENTS WITH NEEDS



KEY MESSAGES

While several participants indicated that R&I investments match the topics requiring attention, many others indicated a misalignment. **Reasons for this perceived mismatch** included investments in R&I being considered a distraction; insufficient funding and focus on R&I during global crises; the politics of foreign aid and donor funding trends; competing operational priorities; and limited political engagement and appetite for data.

There were conflicting views amongst participants regarding whether R&I investments are aligned with priority topics.

Investments match HRI topics requiring attention

It was reported that donors fund priority topics and the most relevant issues, and that this has included directing funding towards research on the Lebanese host population in response to emerging humanitarian needs impacting the Lebanese. Whilst investments were felt to match the R&I topics needing attention, this does not necessarily mean that the research is providing the answers and the findings are being operationalised and have an impact.

Investments do not match HRI topics requiring attention

There were also reports of a mismatch between investments and R&I needs, with one participant reflecting that if R&I covered the needs of societies properly, such work would have been conducted and the findings applied to programmatic and operational activities. However, applications of research are not being seen on the ground.

Reported reasons for a perceived mismatch between investments and R&I needs in the Lebanese context included:

- **Investing in R&I is perceived as a distraction from humanitarian operational activity** and so there is limited appetite to invest in research. During an emergency and facing competing operational needs, innovations may be developed or applied but innovation itself is never the priority.

- There is ***an insufficient level of investment in evidence-based solutions as well as reduced focus on R&I*** during times of global crisis. Due to the politics of foreign aid, donors become reluctant to do new things with their funding, and humanitarian innovation becomes less of a priority.
- ***Limited understanding of how research can impact policy***, which is required in order for there to be sufficient demand for, and investment into, research. Lebanon has a failed governance model and absence of a political authority that encourages the production of data and new knowledge, such that there is no political engagement and policy decisions are not data driven.
- ***No awareness of misalignment*** between R&I investments and priority topics requiring attention.



It was suggested that regular reflection on what works, processes, collaborations, and how to improve efficiency and return on investment are required to improve alignment of investments with priority topics.



SECTION 6

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



SECTION 6: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



KEY MESSAGES

Many participants generally acknowledged that Lebanon has a strong and thriving civil society and a vibrant academic community, and that national and local stakeholders are actively engaged in research and innovation (R&I). However, this engagement is not always equitable and meaningful.

Barriers to engagement of regional and national actors in R&I include high staff turnover; dominance of some stakeholder groups; and the local humanitarian architecture and dynamics being poorly understood by grassroots-level institutions.

Existing strategies used to promote greater regional and national engagement were primarily related to supporting civil society-led initiatives and ensuring equitable and inclusive platforms for engagement. **Suggested strategies to promote engagement** included measures to promote localisation, including avoiding 'brain drain' and working with new partners, and ensuring meaningful engagement of community researchers as well as populations affected by crises.

HOW WELL ARE REGIONAL AND NATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGED?

Many participants generally acknowledged that Lebanon has a **strong and thriving civil society**, a **vibrant academic community** with a large humanitarian research sector, and that local engagement is burgeoning, with new and non-traditional players (including, for example, business institutions, marketing agencies, and other private companies) engaging in the humanitarian R&I (HRI) space out of necessity given the escalating crises. This engagement has reportedly allowed some local actors to **push back against donor agendas**, although smaller and younger entities often take whatever funding is available to survive and expand.

However, engagement is not always equitable or meaningful, and implementation of the **localisation agenda** appears suboptimal in Lebanon.

- Engagement of community members or local / national colleagues is often tokenistic and done so that organisations can state that they are implementing a localisation agenda and engaging with local communities. One example provided was of community leaders being present at the table, but essentially excluded due to either the use of complicated language and technical jargon or meetings being conducted in French when the community leaders may only speak Arabic.

In contrast, a range of active efforts to meaningfully engage populations affected by crises in R&I were also described, for example, the piloting of data collection tools with Syrian refugees prior to survey launch and adding new questions and tweaking the tool in response to feedback received.

- Approach to the engagement of community researchers does not build capacity but rather is done in such a way as to benefit the institution, including through lower salaries, and training the community researcher in their own image. There are perceptions that this sometimes also results in community researchers becoming interested solely in publications and conference presentations, rather than focusing on being the voice of affected populations.
- Unequal partnerships between national and international researchers, and Global North and Lebanese academic institutions. Funding, connections, and control reportedly still sit heavily with Global North institutions and international researchers, rather than with their national counterparts, and parachute research still occurs.

BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT OF REGIONAL AND NATIONAL ACTORS IN R&I

Reported barriers to engagement of regional and national actors in R&I included:

- **High staff turnover**, resulting in loss of institutional memory.
- **Dominance of some stakeholder groups** and large international organisations, leaving little space for others.
- **Poor understanding of the humanitarian system architecture and ways of working by grassroots-level institutions**, for instance, how UN agencies interconnect with INGOs and implementing partners. This limited understanding of ways of working and perceptions of different institutions means that oftentimes, there is limited understanding of organisational roles, responsibilities, and who is in charge, and this generates expectations that certain groups will engage and do something when it is not necessarily within their remit.

EXISTING STRATEGIES USED TO PROMOTE GREATER REGIONAL AND NATIONAL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Participants noted existing strategies used to promote greater regional and national engagement, and these were primarily related to:

- **Supporting civil society-led initiatives** and encouraging participation in regional platforms and forums.
- Facilitating the handover of systems and networks to **local organisations to lead**.
- **Recruiting national actors** and nationalising team positions.
- Ensuring **equitable and inclusive platforms for engagement** such as networks, working groups, and consortia. This is reportedly working well in Lebanon and serves to ensure complementary functions and minimise overlap.

SUGGESTED STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE REGIONAL AND NATIONAL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Many participants recommended strategies to promote regional and national stakeholder engagement in R&I. These included:



Promote localisation through the empowerment of national stakeholders, implementing measures to retain national staff and prevent 'brain drain'.



Work with new partners to ensure greater regional and national stakeholder engagement.



Build the capacity of community researchers in such a way that they are both able to effectively engage with the system, but also draw on their lived experience, community ties and insights.



Encourage meaningful engagement of community through mechanisms that bridge the gap between community and academic institutions.



SECTION 7

PRIORITY-SETTING AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

SECTION 7: PRIORITY-SETTING AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES



KEY MESSAGES

Participants reported a range of formal and informal **processes used to identify and prioritise research and innovation (R&I) topics**. These include consideration of the relevance, need, and value-add; stakeholder consultations; interests of donor groups or international researchers; alignment of R&I topics with local needs; alignment of R&I with organisational objectives; and through multipronged review board assessment.

Types of evidence taken into account when prioritising R&I topics include mapping evidence of who is doing what; qualitative and quantitative data; anecdotal evidence specific to the context; and the monitoring of media to undertake discourse analysis of media outputs.

A range of stakeholders participate in organisational priority-setting processes, and those involved vary depending on institution type and setting. **Groups identified as missing from the priority-setting process** include smaller NGOs, affected populations, and academics.

HOW DO ORGANISATIONS IDENTIFY AND PRIORITISE R&I TOPICS?

Participants were asked to reflect on priority-setting processes within their organisations. A range of approaches and factors taken into account when identifying and prioritising R&I topics were described (see Table 4 below).

Table 4: Reported approaches to identify and prioritise R&I topics

APPROACHES AND CONSIDERATIONS USED TO IDENTIFY AND PRIORITISE R&I TOPICS	Explanation / examples
Consideration of the relevance and need for R&I and avoiding duplication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisations adopt an intersectional lens and consider R&I topics that are required to fill a gap, can produce actionable recommendations and that can drive dialogue, both nationally and on a global scale. When some duplication is considered necessary (eg, to go deeper into an issue that has already been researched), the innovative elements of the research are emphasised so that the need is clear. Analysis based on local knowledge of the field is conducted in order to identify similar work being undertaken and avoid duplication.
Stakeholder consultations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultations with multiple actors such as donors, implementing agencies, networks, national and international NGOs; regional meetings with local stakeholders to canvass perspectives on needs; meetings and discussions with partners, grantees, and collaborators to consider current issues. The importance of inclusivity and representation was recognised and highlighted, but this is also complicated in Lebanon due to, for example, identity politics which make it difficult to truly know who represents whom and ensure legitimate representation of all groups.

Donor or international researcher interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R&I topics and priorities are often based on the interests of donors who issue funding calls, or international researchers who come with ideas or available funding. • Priorities are determined by trying to strike a balance between local stakeholder priorities and strategies, and donor agendas. • Understanding local needs is critical to negotiate with international researchers and minimise the control by donors.
Alignment with local needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R&I topics that are driven by local research and meet the needs of local communities are prioritised.
Alignment with organisational objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R&I that will help achieve organisational goals and is aligned with organisational focus areas is prioritised.
Review board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • R&I needs are identified and prioritised through a multi-stage collaborative process and criteria-based scoring, conducted by a review board consisting of diverse actors including representatives of UN agencies, donors, and NGOs.

WHAT EVIDENCE IS TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT?

Most participants identified particular types of evidence used when prioritising R&I needs, including:



Mapping exercises of who is doing what.



Documenting discussions in coordination meetings about what work is being undertaken and what topics need to be addressed.



Views of informal groups of key scholars and experts who periodically discuss topical issues to be aware of.



Conducting qualitative and quantitative research to identify emerging themes.



Anecdotal evidence that is circumstantial and relevant to the context.



Monitoring and discourse analysis of media outputs.

WHO IS INVOLVED IN DETERMINING PRIORITIES AND WHO IS MISSING FROM THE PRIORITY-SETTING TABLE?

At the organisational level, those involved in determining organisational R&I priorities vary depending on institution type and setting. These may include:

- In an academic organisation, **senior academics and visiting personnel** discuss and determine an initial set of priorities, and these are then negotiated with the full team.
- **Visitors** to an organisation (who are funded through their home institution) set their own priorities. When they are aligned with the host organisational focus, there is collaboration, otherwise they do their own thing.
- For an organisation that provides funding, funding priority decisions are made by **an advisory board** consisting of UN representatives, donors, NGOs, and INGOs. Processes are inclusive and participatory by engaging with traditionally under-represented groups such as women-led organisations and disability focal points when determining priorities.
- An organisation has a **unit responsible for programme development** and this team scours funding calls, conducts fundraising, and scans the landscape to identify issues.

Stakeholder groups identified by several participants as missing from the priority-setting process include:

- Smaller NGOs.
- Affected populations.
- Academics.



SECTION 8

RESPONSIVENESS OF THE HUMANITARIAN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (HRI) SYSTEM TO EMERGING ISSUES

SECTION 8: RESPONSIVENESS OF THE HUMANITARIAN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (HRI) SYSTEM TO EMERGING ISSUES



KEY MESSAGES

Factors reported as **enabling timely R&I responsiveness** to emerging crises include the level of expertise and capacity of local civil society organisations; donor flexibility and sustainable funding mechanisms; collaboration; and fostering an organisational culture that promotes learning.

Factors reported as **impeding timely R&I responsiveness** include funding constraints and limited willingness to adapt existing ways of working.

Participants were asked to consider factors that may support and those that may impede the timely responsiveness of the R&I system to emerging humanitarian issues.ⁱⁱ

FACTORS THAT ENABLE R&I RESPONSIVENESS TO NEW ISSUES

Most participants provided examples of factors that enable timely responsiveness to new and emerging priorities, while highlighting that Lebanon is a good case study in terms of this issue given the emergence of multiple compounding crises in Lebanon over recent years including the socioeconomic collapse, Beirut blast, and COVID-19, all occurring in the context of the longstanding Syrian conflict and refugee influx.

Reported factors that enable timely responsiveness included:

- **Funding mechanisms:**

- ◇ Donor flexibility to provide funding early and with the flexibility to allow actors to respond and use this funding as they see fit.
- ◇ Emergency response funds / crisis response research funds to support research outside of annual funding calls, similar to operational crisis response funds that are flexible and allow rapid mobilisation.
- ◇ Sustainable, longer-term funding that allows organisations to rapidly respond.

ii. Notably, the question stem provided some examples in order to clearly illustrate what was meant by the question. Many factors may impact the ability of the research and innovation sector to respond to priorities as they emerge (for example, these may include national capacity, funding availability, short project cycles etc.). What factors support and what factors impede the timely responsiveness to emerging priorities in the region?

- ***Strong civil society and local actors in Lebanon***
 - ◇ High levels of engagement from local stakeholders and Lebanon's strong civil society sector, and dedication to strengthen the response supports responsiveness of the system because of local contextual knowledge and expertise, among other reasons.
- ***Collaboration***
 - ◇ Multi-stakeholder networks and consortia as well as participatory processes would enable research members to be part of the immediate response.
 - ◇ Multi-disciplinary engagement.
 - ◇ Would support research prioritisation and recognition of the importance of research in informing a response.
- ***Organisational culture***
 - ◇ Fostering a culture that promotes organisational learning so that there is less fear of change and an improved ability to adapt in a timely manner.
- ***Local partner engagement and input about local priorities***

FACTORS THAT IMPEDE R&I RESPONSIVENESS TO NEW ISSUES

Factors that impede timely responsiveness included:

- ***Funding***
 - ◇ Lack of flexible funding which results in a need to wait until the next financial year to build in a budget line or the next call for funding, by which time the need for the research is outdated.
 - ◇ Donor priorities: Funding calls may not be focused on the emerging issue or donors may not have caught up with or prioritised funding for the emerging issue; donors not allocating funding for R&I in the acute phase of an emergency.
 - ◇ Project based rather than core funding, which means that there is a need to go through lengthy application processes to mobilise funds and by the time funding is secured, the issue / crisis / response has progressed.
 - ◇ Lengthy donor organisational processes and red tape, particularly for large value funding, which must be navigated before donors can allocate funds.
- ***Organisational culture and ways of working***
 - ◇ Resistance to change the established or 'tried and tested' ways of working which yield predictable outcomes, particularly when it comes to funding new research.
- ***Lack of solid partnerships with local actors and lack of knowledge of contemporary local needs***



SECTION 9

DONORS AND DECISION- MAKING: PERSPECTIVES ON HUMANITARIAN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (HRI) INVESTMENTS & COORDINATION

SECTION 9: DONORS AND DECISION-MAKING: PERSPECTIVES ON HUMANITARIAN RESEARCH AND INNOVATION (HRI) INVESTMENTS & COORDINATION



KEY MESSAGES

Several **barriers and enablers to investing in R&I** were reported by participants who had a donor function. Whilst the importance of a multisectoral approach was well recognised and donors strive to fund such work, actually investing in multisectoral R&I is reportedly challenging because it is not done enough. Similarly, investing in R&I topics that straddle the humanitarian-development nexus is sought, but such work is not yet widely applied and so investing is difficult.

Donor organisational mandates can constrain the ability to invest and, conversely, flexible funding mechanisms allow donors to fund new ideas and empower partners. Investment is also enabled when the context allows for innovation and there is sufficient human resourcing to undertake the work.

A range of **formal and informal coordination mechanisms** among donors was described. These include engagement with partners and grantees; informal donor networks and discussions; partnership officers who liaise with other donors; and scoping the landscape to identify similar work and avoid duplication. Donor coordination is sometimes driven not by the donors themselves, but instead by partners and grantees, who convene donor roundtables to facilitate information exchange.

Whilst coordination is important, it is not always effective. Limitations arise including time and resourcing constraints.

Two participants who identified as having a funding role answered this module of questions. Notably, any organisation providing any type or volume of funding could identify as a donor / funder, from those providing high value funding to those issuing subawards or small seed grants.

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS AND ENABLERS TO INVESTMENT IN HRI?

The challenges of funding **multisectoral R&I** were highlighted: The importance of a multisectoral approach was well recognised, and donors reportedly strive to support comprehensive, multisectoral, and intersectional work in order to really understand a humanitarian crisis, but funding such R&I is challenging because it is not undertaken frequently enough because of, among other reasons, limited capacity to conduct such work.

The sustainability and durability of interventions and **the humanitarian-development nexus** is also an important consideration for funding and one which donors seek to support, but it is not yet widely applied, making funding difficult. It was also highlighted that **donor accountability as well as organisational mandates**, including operational priorities, can constrain R&I funding. For example, in order to fund innovation, it must be innovation to support lifesaving work.

Investing is enabled when donors have **flexibility of funding**. As one example, flexible funding can also empower local partners to identify gaps and propose innovative ways to approach issues and be supported to do so.

Investment into R&I is also enabled when **the context allows for innovation**. This includes both the environment being conducive to rolling out a given initiative or developing a given innovation and having **sufficient human resources** to undertake the work and develop and promote innovation.

IS THERE COORDINATION AMONGST DONORS, AND IF SO, HOW IS IT DONE? HOW DO DONORS AVOID OR ADDRESS GAPS AND DUPLICATION?

Coordination among funders was discussed in both the regional and national context. A range of formal and informal coordination mechanisms and avenues to avoid duplication was described. These included:

- Engagement with partners and grantees to identify who else they are working with and what work is being undertaken, and to discuss together how to integrate innovative elements into responses.
- Partnership officers based in donor organisations who liaise with other donors to gauge their activities and priorities.
- Convening informal donor networks and discussions, as well as donor roundtable discussions which could be coordinated / organised at the regional level.

Coordination amongst donors is not always driven by donors themselves. For example, project partners and grant recipients reportedly often convene roundtables with donors to support coordination.

The strengths of coordination mechanisms are that they help donors understand their value-add; they help identify gaps and issues to address; they drive localised initiatives where partners and recipients inform the research agenda; and they make donors aware and knowledgeable of what others are doing and how other donors prioritise.

However, **donor coordination is not always effective or done well**, and siloes exist. Limitations include time and resourcing constraints. In some cases, coordination amongst donors might be restricted due to organisational mandates and structural constraints.

It was acknowledged that good coordination is integral to avoiding duplication. If there is a coordinated response and functioning system, needs are known, and funding tracking mechanisms should identify if a given need or issue is already being funded by other donors. A functioning system should avert a scenario of several donors being interested in funding the same issue or crisis.

Notably, it was reported that, sometimes, duplication is a good thing and having multiple groups working on the same area can help build capacity across multiple organisations, provided that this approach is part of a deliberate strategy and vision.



SECTION 10

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

SECTION 10: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This consultation has highlighted a number of topics that participants believe require additional R&I attention in the Lebanese context and provided a detailed overview of the strengths and barriers within the R&I ecosystem and ways of working.

Whilst all participants indicated that there is a role for R&I during humanitarian crises and that R&I serves many important functions, there was also a clear reminder that the objective of R&I is to inform action and better serve populations in need. Research is inappropriate when conducted purely for the sake of engaging in research and producing new knowledge, with no consideration of value-add and pathways to impact.

Based on the issues explored in this consultation, there are several key areas for improvement and the following recommendations are proposed:



A number of thematic areas require research attention, including more work to understand humanitarian needs overall and amongst the Lebanese host population in particular

Overall, the findings of this consultation suggest that Lebanon has a vibrant active academic and civil society community which has responded to the evolving humanitarian crisis as best as possible within the many constraints of both the broader local context and the R&I ecosystem.

Whilst there has been considerable R&I activity, a number of specific topics were identified as key gaps and priority issues warranting attention. In particular, more work to understand humanitarian needs across Lebanon was flagged, including how these needs have evolved over time and within and between population subgroups. There was also a loud and clear call for more work specifically examining the impacts of the crises on the Lebanese host population, including calls for a vulnerability assessment, similar to the Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees (VASyR) assessment which is conducted annually. Other topics reported as requiring additional attention included a range of issues regarding how to better inform the humanitarian response in Lebanon; cash and voucher assistance (CVA); the water-energy-food nexus; what societies require to become more functional; and how to address the structural determinants of Lebanon's current crises.

It is important to note that the topics reported as requiring additional R&I attention reflect the views of participants in this study, and as such, not all key issues impacting Lebanon are necessarily captured in this report if they were not mentioned by participants. Whilst several participants reported on the need for more work examining humanitarian needs, there was much less focus on R&I to address the impact of the crises on systems and infrastructure, disruption of which is exacerbating suffering and increasing humanitarian needs (for example, the multi-faceted impacts on already strained water and electricity supplies or healthcare and education systems).

Whilst the topics identified as research needs by participants in this study provide an important starting point and reflect identified research gaps, the sample size in this consultation was necessarily small. Further research engaging a much larger number of participants and including representation from diverse disciplinary and sectoral backgrounds is required. This is important to inform a formal research priority-setting exercise and development of an agreed humanitarian research agenda for Lebanon.



Innovation should be recognised, encouraged, and funded, as the need for novel solutions to pressing problems is rising

Participants had differing views on the role and feasibility of innovation in Lebanon, with some considering that the obstructive policy and political environment both preclude innovation but also simultaneously necessitates it, with policy innovation identified as a key R&I need. Participants also indicated that more work is also needed on innovations to help populations cope with the rapidly deteriorating economic situation, innovations to develop novel ways to collect data and identify populations in need, and innovations to improve return on investment and the better use of funds. Additionally, the need for a policy environment that supports innovation was noted.

Interestingly, the interpretation of the concept of innovation itself differed amongst participants, with two participants describing the same intervention differently, one considering it to be an innovation and the other not. Clarity around what constitutes innovation is important – because this may influence the funding buckets that can be accessed to support such activities, among other reasons.



Key data gaps need to be filled and data must drive action

A number of other key data gaps were identified, including basic demographic information, with some participants suggesting that the absence of such data is politically motivated. Absent or outdated data preclude an effective, efficient, and equitable humanitarian response. Data gaps must be filled and maintained as the crisis continues to evolve, including information about the size, distribution, and needs of vulnerable populations and population subgroups. Consideration of broader needs beyond immediate and lifesaving requirements is also warranted – a holistic conceptual approach to 'needs' and wellbeing, encompassing issues such as dignity and rights,

is imperative. Donors should actively support work that fills Lebanon's data gaps and measures are required to ensure that information end-users, including operational agencies and policy bodies base their work on accurate and updated data.

Consideration and promotion of the broader societal benefits of updated data are also important and may generate appetite for, and utilisation of, such information. Filling data gaps regarding the size and composition of vulnerable populations can help inform improved targeting of humanitarian action, which, in turn, may help alleviate the deep social tensions in Lebanon which have become increasingly profound with the deteriorating situation and soaring number of Lebanese in need, in the context of a humanitarian response originally geared to respond to the Syrian refugee influx.



Thinking outside the box when considering return on investment

The broader benefits of data and R&I should also be considered when measuring return on investment measures. R&I to support best use of funds and improve return on investment were identified as important topics to address in the Lebanese context, given the volume of humanitarian funding and the rapidly growing number of people requiring assistance. The development of innovative ways to measure return on investment is also important and should incorporate a holistic lens, examining impact using both readily quantifiable indicators and outcomes, but also less easily measurable yet equally important social parameters.



An anticipatory approach is required

A number of participants in this consultation indicated that R&I capacity is constrained by funding and priority-setting processes that are reactive, with one highlighting that it is very difficult to maintain R&I functions in the absence of an acute crisis that attracts funds. R&I focus areas are based on the issues of the day and fail to consider potential emergent issues until they become widespread problems. An anticipatory approach is essential to prepare for, and build resilience to, future shocks. This includes availing core R&I funding so that institutions can build and maintain capacity, and work on R&I initiatives that address both acute needs and anticipated issues. In parallel, flexible funding streams are also required so that teams can pivot as new R&I needs arise.



A national R&I repository and data sharing platform may support information dissemination and learning

Limited information dissemination and data sharing were identified as key barriers to many aspects of system function, with the absence of readily available published local works creating inefficiencies through duplication, limiting learning, and generating a reliance on materials developed in other contexts. In particular, limited dissemination of monitoring and evaluation of programmes conducted in Lebanon were reported, despite an abundance of such work being undertaken. The establishment of a national humanitarian R&I (HRI) repository and associated data-sharing platform for voluntary uploading of outputs may support information dissemination, learning, and improved collaboration.

There are several existing observatories in Lebanon (for example, the Beirut Urban Observatory,⁴⁰ the Beirut Blast Recovery and Reconstruction Monitor,⁴¹ and the Lebanon Crisis Observatory), some of which are focused on a specific geographic area, issue or crisis, and there are also government agencies such as the Central Administration of Statistics⁴² that compile selected economic and social data.

A new HRI repository is proposed as a dedicated 'one-stop shop' for up-to-date humanitarian resources spanning all issues impacting Lebanon. This should be bilingual, availing resources in both Arabic and English, include both academic and operational R&I outputs, and have an active outreach and engagement function.

To ensure data integrity and transparency, and that resources critical of government or other authorities are still uploaded and shared, this proposed new repository should sit independent of government and ideally be hosted by a local academic or civil society organisation.

Sufficient and sustainable funding to establish and maintain such a national HRI repository is required, including funding for dedicated personnel to run the platform.



Capacity development initiatives and appropriate funding can bolster Lebanon's existing workforce and strong R&I performance

Several participants commented on Lebanon's solid R&I workforce, including strong academic and civil society circles. However, there are several key threats to the system, namely 'brain drain' in the context of mass exodus and migration of skilled professionals as Lebanon's socioeconomic crisis worsens; suboptimal engagement of community researchers who are reportedly frequently groomed in the image of the academic or research institution and so lose touch with the communities they are meant to represent; and inequitable national and Global North partnerships. Building on the many existing strengths, capacity-strengthening initiatives at all levels may help address such issues. This includes efforts to meaningfully train and engage community researchers so that they are able to both contribute to R&I and build careers whilst maintaining their community identities and bringing this community role and insight to their work.

Additionally, ensuring sufficient funding that adequately covers operational R&I costs and capacity-development initiatives is important not only to directly allow R&I to be undertaken but also to allow the workforce to engage meaningfully and live in dignity, and so avert 'brain drain'.



Improved collaboration, and inclusive and meaningful representation are key

Whilst a range of formal and informal collaboration mechanisms were reported, several siloed functions also exist. Improved collaboration across sectors and disciplinary divides is important across all phases of R&I and can help improve data quality and relevance of the work, facilitate more efficient administrative and R&I operational processes, minimise duplication of effort, and facilitate R&I uptake and utilisation. Efforts to strengthen existing collaborative platforms, and where required, develop new ones, should be encouraged. New actors should also be engaged and invited to these spaces – Lebanon's dire humanitarian context has resulted in many non-traditional stakeholder groups engaging in HRI and operational activities, and such groups should be meaningfully represented.

Breaking down siloes and new, equitable ways of working, including between national and international actors as well as between research and operational stakeholders, are needed.



Operationalising the humanitarian-development nexus in Lebanon

Some donor participants noted that the ability to fund humanitarian innovation is constrained by funding buckets assigned for development initiatives. It was also reported that in Lebanon's complex setting, activities and interventions traditionally considered 'development' have become 'humanitarian' in nature. Additionally, Lebanon's humanitarian crisis emerges against the background of longstanding development challenges, with failed governance together with political and policy issues underpinning the current crisis. The R&I sector must also straddle the humanitarian-development nexus, enabled by appropriate and sufficient funding support. Amongst other needs, R&I to identify ways to resolve the humanitarian crisis by addressing developmental and structural challenges is required.



R&I must be localised and R&I priorities locally determined

Whilst several participants reported that R&I priority setting includes consideration of local needs and relevance, other factors including donor and international researcher interests also influence what topics and issues organisations invest their time, resources, and efforts into. R&I priorities must be based on local needs and must also be locally determined, with meaningful, equitable, and inclusive representation of a range of local and national bodies at decision-making tables. Similarly, R&I itself must be locally led in order to be relevant, have buy-in, and have impact. When the R&I is localised and led by local actors, the work is informed by local knowledge and the uptake of locally generated and locally relevant recommendations and solutions is facilitated rather than adopting solutions and approaches from other contexts.



The issue of protracted review and publication timelines must be addressed

In order to usefully inform action, R&I must be timely. Several participants emphasised that protracted review processes and publication timelines mean that by the time R&I is published, it is outdated and no longer relevant. This is an issue for Lebanon, which has a rapidly deteriorating socioeconomic situation that "requires a magician" to keep up and understand how best to respond, and this is also a broader issue that clearly is relevant to many other settings and must be addressed at the global level. The convening of journal editors is warranted to consider rapid review processes that will allow expedited publication so that R&I can actually be used, whilst not detracting from procedural and methodological rigour.



This Lebanon national consultation has highlighted a number of challenges in the R&I system and priority issues that the system should focus on, and also revealed a number of strengths and adaptive mechanisms that have been implemented. Like all infrastructures and industries, Lebanon's HRI ecosystem has itself also been challenged by the current situation, with the recent economic crisis having profound effects on institutional funding and triggering emigration and 'brain drain'. As with any system, the people are its greatest asset. Donors and international collaborators should recognise the current contextual constraints faced by R&I actors in Lebanon: civil society, researchers, innovators, local and national responders are all part of the R&I system working to address the crisis but are also living the crisis themselves. All local, national, and international actors engaged with the system should strive to ensure that funding and efforts are directed to the areas of greatest need and potential impact. Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the R&I ecosystem and identifying these priorities are paramount. The Global Prioritisation Exercise (GPE) is one step in this direction.

As with any system, the people are its greatest asset. Donors and international collaborators should recognise the current contextual constraints faced by R&I actors in Lebanon: civil society, researchers, innovators, local and national responders are all part of the R&I system working to address the crisis but are also living the crisis themselves.



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ABOUT ELRHA

We are Elrha. A global organisation that finds solutions to complex humanitarian problems through research and innovation. We are an established actor in the humanitarian community, working in partnership with humanitarian organisations, researchers, innovators, and the private sector to tackle some of the most difficult challenges facing people all over the world.

Through our globally recognised programmes, we have supported more than 200 world-class research studies and innovation projects, championing new ideas and different approaches to evidence what works in humanitarian response.

ABOUT THE GLOBAL PRIORITISATION EXERCISE (GPE)

The GPE for humanitarian research and innovation aims to improve outcomes for people affected by crisis by amplifying the impact of investments in research and innovation through understanding the priorities at all levels. It will provide an overview of the progress and performance of the humanitarian research and innovation ecosystem with a clear set of priorities for research and innovation funding and attention.

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