

Older Syrian refugees in Lebanon and the Covid-19 vaccine

The first study in Lebanon to examine the status of COVID-19 vaccination in a large sample of 3838 older Syrian refugees (aged 50 years and above) using five waves of data collection between September 2020 and March 2022.

Cultural and social barriers play a role in older refugees' vaccination status

This study found that 85% and above of older refugee respondents adhered to COVID-19 preventive measures. Refusal and hesitancy were leading causes for not registering for vaccination; though a decrease is noted in wave 5 as compared to other waves. With that, nearly half of the older refugees in the study received the vaccine. Among these, almost two-thirds took two doses.

Results will inform future humanitarian actions in Lebanon to reduce the impact of a long-term pandemic on older refugees, by addressing barriers to vaccine registration, vaccine acceptance and uptake. Humanitarian actors focused on health, protection, livelihoods and shelter could use findings to address barriers and improve access to services for elderly refugees.



COVID-19 exacerbated the needs of older Syrian refugees in Lebanon.
Photo: Charbel Kousseifi/NRC

Background

Lebanon has one of the largest concentrations of refugees in the world living in extreme humanitarian conditions. The country is also at the intersection of political, economic, and social crises, compounded by the pandemic. This study focused on a doubly vulnerable population – Syrian refugees and older adults – who are at increased risk of developing severe illness if infected by COVID-19. It investigated the experiences of this marginalised group, with a focus on vaccination. The study was conducted in a changing social and healthcare situation of a pandemic with a complex humanitarian context.

How the research was conducted

The study looked at older Syrian refugees using a cross-sectional longitudinal design. Vaccine acceptance was measured in wave 3, vaccine registration data was collected in wave 4 and vaccine uptake was the focus in wave 5.

Key findings

- On average, 85% of participants adhered to COVID-19 preventive measures, and more than 95% agreed that COVID-19 is a serious infection that is spreading around the world. Over two-thirds also agreed that they are intended to receive COVID-19 vaccine if it is safe and effective.
- However, a high proportion of respondents did not register on the national platform for vaccination: although this dropped from 92% to 42% unregistered over time. Only 42% of respondents took their first vaccine dose, and two-thirds of this group had a second dose. The main reported reason for no vaccination, is not wanting the vaccine or being afraid of side effects.
- A significant proportion of respondents has not received their second or third shot as they are still waiting for the Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) to confirm the appointment they booked on the national 'Impact' platform.
- Other factors affecting vaccine acceptance: older age, higher education, living outside informal tented settlements, female gender, not perceiving COVID-19 as a serious infection, using social media as a source of information on COVID-19, and perceiving vaccines as unsafe.

Implications for humanitarian practitioners and policymakers

- Humanitarian actors can use these findings to address barriers and improve access to services for elderly refugees. Vaccination programs that are culturally sensitive, meeting the needs of older Syrian refugees are required, taking into consideration the following different factors: level of education, gender and residence type.
- Additionally, enhancing COVID-19 national surveillance systems, including vaccine registration and uptake, is key to develop targeted interventions and control the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Diffusion of timely, correct, culturally sensitive information related to Covid-19, vaccine safety and effectiveness through diverse channels is also needed for refugees.
- Community-based interventions, through engagement of local and religious leaders, play a major role in building trust, and spreading accurate messages about COVID-19 and vaccination.
- Additional findings and recommendations, related to information sharing and barriers to registration on Lebanon's IMPACT platform, are available and in outputs linked in the 'Articles and further reading' section.

Recommendations for future research

Further studies are needed to better understand the factors related to vaccine refusal. This will guide resource allocation and better readiness in case of future pandemics.

About the study team

This work was the result of multi-disciplinary partnerships between *The American University of Beirut, Faculty of Health Sciences, Center for Research on Population and Health (CRPH)* and The Norwegian Refugees Council (NRC). Team members who contributed to the successful completion of this project are:

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Keywords

Older Syrian refugees, Lebanon, COVID-19 pandemic, vaccine hesitancy, acceptance, registration and uptake.

Articles and further reading

[Changing vulnerabilities and COVID-19 adherence: Older refugees in Lebanon - Elrha](#)

[Adapting to the changing dynamics of COVID-19 in a protracted refugee context - Elrha](#)

[Predictors and barriers for the management of non-communicable diseases among older Syrian refugees amidst the COVID-19 pandemic in Lebanon: A cross-sectional analysis of a multi-wave survey](#)



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