

RESETTLEMENT AND INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION IN LEBANON



CEA(R)

Comisión Española
de Ayuda al Refugiado

This report has been drawn up by the advocacy area at the Spanish Commission for Refugees (CEAR) in the context of the '**Observatory on the right to asylum, forced migrations and frontiers**' project funded by the Extremadura Agency for International Development Cooperation (AEXCID).

During the research and in order to make a diagnosis of the current situation for asylum applicants and refugees in Lebanon, the CEAR team held meetings and interviews with UNHCR-Lebanon; ALEF; Basmeh & Zeitooneh and the community centre in Shatila; Caritas in Lebanon and the community centre in Bourj Hammoud; the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee; the Danish Refugee Council; the Lebanese General Directorate of General Security; the Spanish Embassy in Lebanon; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants in Lebanon; IOM; the Palestinian Human Rights Organization in Lebanon (PHRO); Ein El Helwed (Palestinian) camp; the Human Call Association and the Palestinian activist Salah M. Salah; the Lebanese Red Cross and the Palestine Red Crescent Society.

Front page photo: CEAR (UNHCR registration centre in Beirut, 2019)

All the photos in this report are by CEAR, taken as part of the observation mission.

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The Spanish Commission for Refugees (CEAR) is a non-profit organisation founded in 1979 that is engaged in voluntary, humanitarian, independent and joint action. Our aim is to work together with citizens to defend the right to asylum. Our mission is to champion and promote human rights and comprehensive development for asylum applicants, refugees, stateless people and migrants in a vulnerable situations or at risk of social exclusion. Our work takes a comprehensive based on temporary accommodation; legal, psychological and social assistance; training and employment; and social advocacy and participation.

Index

List of acronyms	4
1. Introduction	5
2. Main statistics	5
3. International protection in Lebanon	6
3.1. Accommodation and inclusion for refugees and international protection applicants	9
4. People in a vulnerable situation	14
5. Durable solutions / safe and legal pathways	16
6. Conclusions	22
References	25

List of acronyms

CEAR: Spanish Commission for Refugees

IOM: International Organisation for Migration

NGO: Non-governmental organisation

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNRWA: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

1. Introduction

Since the outbreak of the conflict in Syria¹, Lebanon has provided shelter within its territory for more refugees per capita than any other country in the world. However, these refugees face a number of different obstacles in their attempts to find a durable solution in the country. Lebanon is one of the main countries from which resettlements to other states, such as Spain, are made. However, the figures are paltry since only around 1,000 people have been resettled from there to Spain over the last four years.

It was in this context that, in July 2019, in accordance with its objectives to defend human rights and the right to asylum, and within the framework of the 'Observatory on the right to asylum, forced migrations and frontiers' project, that CEAR undertook a research mission that sought to analyse the current situation faced by asylum applicants and refugees in Lebanon, focussing in particular on issues related to operation of resettlement programmes and humanitarian admission from the country. The project entailed direct observation in the field, visits to community centres, visits to settlements for people of Palestinian and Syrian origin and interviews with a number of key players in the domain of asylum, as well as asylum applicants and refugees living in the country.

2. Main statistics

Since 2011, over five million people have fled Syria in search of refuge. They have fled mainly to neighbouring countries including Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan². In Lebanon there are large numbers of 'displaced' people who have come from Syria³, Palestinian refugees (present in the country for over 60 years) and people of other nationalities.

However, since early 2015, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) registration of Syrians in the country has been suspended further to a request by the government⁴. As a result, it is impossible to determine the exact number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. On 31st October 2019, 918,974 people continued to be registered⁵. For its part, the government estimates that there are around **1.5 million**⁶ Syrian nationals in Lebanon, a figure to which we might add the 270,000 refugees of Palestinian origin that are in the country (including around 30,000 people from Syria)⁷, under United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) authority, and over 18,000 refugees of other nationalities. They are mainly Iraqis (82%), followed by Sudanese (9%) and Ethiopians (3%)⁸.

1 According to UNHCR, one in every six people in the country is a refugee (UNHCR (2019): *Global Trends, Forced Displacement in 2018*, pp. 3 & 21: <https://bit.ly/3an7bL6>). It is also the country that has been most affected both in terms of politics and in terms of security as a result of the conflict in Syria. It has been attacked and there have been numerous civilian victims.

2 UNHCR Regional Office in Lebanon (2019): <https://www.unhcr.org/lb/>.

3 The Government of Lebanon does not recognise the term 'refugee' when referring to people from Syria and categorises them as 'temporarily displaced persons'. The commonly-accepted opinion that the only official refugees in the region are Palestinians (who have fled from Palestine following the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1948) still prevails. However, Palestinian refugees from Syria are afforded similar treatment to refugees from Syria and are not recognised as refugees. For a number of different political reasons, the 'refugee' category has since expanded to include Iraqi and Sudanese nationals but not Syrians. (JANMYR, M. (2018): "UNHCR and the Syrian refugee response: negotiating status and registration", *The International Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp. 397-398. Available on: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13642987.2017.1371140>).

4 Refer to section 3 of this report: *International protection in Lebanon*.

5 UNHCR (2019): *Operational Portal – Refugee Situations*: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71>.

6 These include the 976,002 people who were on the UNHCR register on 31st July 2018 (UNHCR (2019): *Global focus: Lebanon*: <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2520>). It is estimated that 50.5% are women and 54% are minors (UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP (2019): *Key Findings of the 2018 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon*: <http://cort.as/-JDCC>).

7 UNRWA (2019): *Protection in Lebanon*: <https://www.unrwa.org/activity/protection-lebanon>.

8 UNHCR (2019): *Global focus: Lebanon*: <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/2520>.

These figures mean that Lebanon is the country that **has the largest number of refugees** and people with protection needs for the size of its population in the world. It is the **seventh country in the world in terms of absolute figures**⁹. The demographic increase since the outbreak of the conflict in Syria when the Lebanese population was 4.5 million people has had a significant impact on municipalities (which have insufficient infrastructure networks) and on the fragile system of political equilibrium in the country.

3. International protection in Lebanon

Lebanon, like most countries in the Middle East, is not a signatory country of the Geneva Convention of 1951 on the Status of Refugees, nor the corresponding 1967 Protocol, despite having played an active role in writing the Convention¹⁰. Furthermore, it has **not adopted** any specific **internal regulations** for recognition of the condition of refugee. The notion and option of seeking asylum in the country are provided for in six articles of the 1962 'Law regulating the entry and residence of foreign nationals into Lebanon and their exit from the country',¹¹ but it does not offer any kind of definition for 'refugee'. The law provides for the creation of a governmental committee for decision-making on matters of asylum but this has only been put into effect on one occasion since the civil war ended in 1991¹² and there are no other asylum procedures in the country. Article 31 of the law also provides for the principle of *non-refoulement* with reference to people who have been recognised as political refugees in the country¹³.

In 2003, UNHCR, which had had a presence in the country since 1963, signed a **Memorandum of Understanding** with the Government of Lebanon. It stated that the latter would commit to issuing a temporary three-month residence permit (renewable for up to one year) to people arriving in the country who were in need of international protection and who had registered with UNHCR. For its part, UNHCR would determine their status and search for a durable solution for the person (generally resettlement in a third country) within a period of between six and nine months (the period can be extended under exceptional circumstances)¹⁴. The purpose of the agreement was to regulate asylum applicants' and refugees' situation in the country. Until then, they had been exposed to the possibility of arrest and deprivation of liberty for entering and residing in the country illegally¹⁵. However, even though the UNHCR protection certificate recognises international protection and extends access to humanitarian aid provided by the organisation for a period of two years, this has not always been sustained by the Lebanese government despite the commitment that the country made to the 'no return' principle. As Maja Janmyr, an educator in international law, points out, 'Lebanese authorities have refused to give any significance to UNHCR's refugee status determination decisions, detaining and deporting hundreds of refugees and asylum-seekers'¹⁶.

9 UNHCR (2019): *Global Trends. Forced Displacement in 2018*, p. 17: <https://bit.ly/3an7bL6>.

10 For further information, refer to: JANMYR, M. (2017): "No Country of Asylum: 'Legitimizing' Lebanon's Rejection of the 1951 Refugee Convention", *International Journal of Refugee Law*, Vol. 29, No. 3, pp. 438-465: <https://academic.oup.com/ijrl/article/29/3/438/4345649>.

11 'Liban: 'Loi du 1962 réglementant l'entrée et le séjour des étrangers au Liban ainsi que leur sortie de ce pays': <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b4f30.html>.

12 A case that took place in 2000 when a member of the Japanese Red Army was awarded asylum (BURNS, J.F. (2000): "Lebanon Grants Political Asylum to 1 of 5 Japan Terrorists", *The New York Times*, 18th March 2000: <http://cort.as/-JGmd>).

13 'En cas d'expulsion d'un ancien réfugié politique, celui-ci ne pourra être conduit sur le territoire d'un pays où sa vie ou sa liberté est menacée' ('Liban: 'Loi du 1962 réglementant l'entrée et le séjour des étrangers au Liban ainsi que leur sortie de ce pays': Article 31: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b4f30.html>).

14 UNHCR Regional Office in Lebanon (2004): *Country Operations Plan*: <https://www.unhcr.org/3fd9c6a14.pdf>.

15 Idem.

16 JANMYR, M. (2016): "Precarity in Exile: The Legal Status of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, No. 35, p. 63. Available on: <https://academic.oup.com/rsq/article/35/4/58/2609281>.

Later, in 2011, when thousands of people began fleeing Syria, the Lebanese government adopted an open door policy that opened up the option for over one million people from Syria to take refuge in the country¹⁷. Meanwhile, Lebanon remained politically neutral with regards to the conflict in Syria. However, since there is no defined legal and administrative framework (the Memorandum of Understanding with UNHCR was not applicable in this case) and no clear political stance regarding the conflict in Syria, all these people ended up in an ambiguous legal scenario. Furthermore, the government refused to call them refugees, choosing instead to refer to them as ‘temporarily displaced persons’, and rejected the option of setting up formal refugee camps¹⁸. One of the main reasons for this was to avoid potential integration of Syrians because Lebanon ‘does not consider itself a country of asylum but rather one of transit’¹⁹. In fact, it has not agreed to allow UNHCR to give *prima facie* refugee status to Syrian nationals who have fled²⁰.

In 2014, when the number of people registered as refugees with UNHCR exceeded one million²¹, the Council of Ministers in the new government adopted the country’s first clear policy on ‘displaced Syrians’. It is known as the ‘**October policy**’ and the decision to cooperate with the United Nations through a Lebanon Crisis Response Plan was also taken²². One of the objectives of the ‘October policy’ was to decrease the number of Syrians in the country by restricting access to territory and encouraging returns. To this end, the policy defined two means of obtaining or renewing a legal residence permit in the country: using a UNHCR registration certificate or through sponsorship from a Lebanese employer. It should be pointed out that the people who sought to obtain a Lebanese sponsor (*kafeel*) in order to get or renew a residence permit became economic migrants and were excluded from international protection and humanitarian aid. Furthermore, **in May 2015, the Government of Lebanon demanded that UNHCR suspend registration of Syrians**, including those who were already in the country waiting to register. It claimed that it was going to introduce a new registration mechanism that, in fact, never materialised²³. It also pressured UNHCR into cancelling registration of many of the other people who had arrived and registered after January 2015 and who had been intercepted on the borders when legally entering Syria²⁴. The previous year, UNHCR had already had to revoke a number of statutes for this reason (68,000 between June and October 2014 alone)²⁵.

In this context, UNHCR has an internal register of the people who contact the organisation in search of help and protection. It is also used for managing external resettlement. The difference between the people on the register before May 2015 and those after that date is the UNHCR registration certificate that, as mentioned, is important for people seeking to renew their residence permit. People arriving

17 It is important to point out that, in 1993, Syria and Lebanon signed a bilateral social and economic cooperation agreement (http://www.syrleeb.org/SD08/msf/1507751474_.pdf). It provided for free movement of goods and people in addition to freedom of employment, residence and financial activities for nationals from both countries. This agreement was applied to Syrian nationals who reached Lebanon through official border ports up until 2015. As such, anyone who presented a national ID card or passport at the border was issued a coupon and given an entrance stamp that provided them with legal residence rights for an initial period of six months, renewable for a further six months at no additional cost. After one year, they were required to renew their residence permit under the same conditions as all other foreign nationals in the country. In 2014, the residence permit renewal requirements for Syrian nationals were tightened and, one year later, the Government of Lebanon suspended the agreement and the authorities began demanding entry visas under the same conditions as for all other people travelling from other countries.

18 In order to understand the precarious response given by the Government of Lebanon, it is important to understand that there was a period of almost 30 years of Syrian military presence in the country (between 1975 and 2005) and that the country has accommodated generations of Palestinians for over 70 years in the region’s oldest settlements.

19 JANMYR, M. (2016): “Precarity in Exile: The Legal Status of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon”, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, No. 35, p. 61. Available on: <https://academic.oup.com/rsq/article/35/4/58/2609281>.

20 *Idem*, p. 64.

21 Registration is performed by means of a scan of the iris.

22 The 2017-2020 plan is currently being implemented. Government of Lebanon and United Nations (2019): *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 (2019 update)*; <http://cort.as/-JDTX>. UNHCR and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are in charge of managing it.

23 JANMYR, M. (2018): “UNHCR and the Syrian refugee response: negotiating status and registration”, *The International Journal of Human Rights*, Vol. 22, No. 3, p. 410. Available on: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13642987.2017.1371140>.

24 *Idem*, p. 407.

25 *Idem*, p. 408.

in the country or who requested protection from UNHCR after May 2015 do not have this certificate. It is important to point out that there is no public, free legal assistance available to people arriving in the country who are in need of international protection. Additionally, there are few non-governmental organisations (NGOs), other than UNHCR, offering legal guidance services to asylum applicants and refugees.

The 'October policy' also led to the introduction of **border control measures**²⁶ and closure in 2015 of unofficial entry points with the aim of decreasing Syrian arrivals. Access for them was restricted for the first time in the country's history²⁷. Since then, only people with valid ID who can prove that their presence in the country meets the criteria for one of the visa issuance categories approved by the government (seeking refuge is not one of them except under exceptional circumstances²⁸) have been granted entry²⁹.

These measures have pushed many Syrian nationals into accessing the country using dangerous routes and staying in the country illegally. Despite having lived in the country for years, these people are now facing return under the programme that the Government of Lebanon has been operating since May 2019³⁰ (refer to section 5 of this report). As highlighted by organisations such as Human Rights Watch³¹, deporting Syrians who need protection implies a change in the policy with regards to these people. Up until now, they were not subjected to forcible returns (except in some cases) and this is a clear breach of the *non-refoulement* principle.

It should also be pointed out that there are **twelve Palestinian refugee camps** at which UNRWA provides services. The number of refugees living in these camps and in small informal settlements has increased over the last few years as a result of the presence of Palestinians from Syria and in spite of the restrictions imposed by the Government of Lebanon on entry into the country. It is also the result of the presence of Syrians and people of other nationalities. In mid-2017, the number of Palestinians (both those living as refugees in Lebanon and those from Syria) living in the camps and settlements was approximately 174,500³².

Since October 2019, Lebanon has been immersed in peace protests stemming from the existing political and social crisis. The Lebanese population is protesting against corruption amongst the political classes and the country is on the verge of bankruptcy³³. This situation is having an impact on the living conditions of Syrian refugees who were already faced with incredibly fragile circumstances (as mentioned, there is a lot of pressure to return to Syria despite the fact that conditions in the country are unsuitable for voluntary, dignified and safe return). Prices have gone up significantly and there are no dollars left in the country. This makes paying salaries and correct operation of

26 In June 2014, the Lebanese government announced that it would only grant entry into the country to people of Syrian nationality from regions on the border to Lebanon where battles were ongoing. Restrictions imposed on refugees and Palestinian refugees from Syria began one year earlier. (JANMYR, M. (2016): "Precarity in Exile: The Legal Status of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, No. 35, p. 66. Available on: <https://academic.oup.com/rsq/article/35/4/58/2609281>).

27 Idem, pp. 61-62.

28 Unaccompanied minors or dependent disabled people whose parents or relatives are in Lebanon; people who, in order to survive, require medical treatment that is not available in their country; and people who are due to be resettled or relocated to a third country from Lebanon. Since 2015 and up until September 2018, only 62 people have managed to access the country using these exceptions. (Government of Lebanon and United Nations (2019): *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 (2019 update)*, p. 140: <http://cort.as/-JDTX>

29 Transit, tourism, business, education, family members and sponsorship are some of the categories that have been approved by the Government for granting entry visas (General Directorate of Security (2019): "The terms and conditions to grant a Lebanese visa": <http://www.general-security.gov.lb/en/posts/159>).

30 VOHRA, A. (2019): "Lebanon is Sick and Tired of Syrian Refugees", *Foreign Policy*, 31st July, 2019: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/07/31/lebanon-is-sick-and-tired-of-syrian-refugees/>.

31 Human Rights Watch (2019): "Syrians Deported by Lebanon Arrested at Home", *Human Rights Watch*, 2nd September 2019: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/02/syrians-deported-lebanon-arrested-home>.

32 UNRWA (2019): "Lebanon: Protection at UNRWA in 2018": <http://cort.as/-N9YS>.

33 For further information, consult: Human Rights Watch: "Lebanon Protests": <https://www.hrw.org/blog-feed/lebanon-protests>.



humanitarian aid programmes complicated. Additionally, given the financial crisis in the country, xenophobic sentiment towards Syrian refugees (who are blamed for that crisis) has increased, as has the political pressure for them to return to Syria³⁴.

3.1. Accommodation and inclusion for refugees and international protection applicants

Most of the refugees in the country who are registered with UNHCR are located in three districts: Bekaa, North Lebanon and Mount Lebanon³⁵. However, as a result of the suspension of registration in May 2015 and the multiple barriers to residence permit renewal in the country, the number of Syrians who have been registered internally with the organisation has decreased over the last four years.

Following the 2014 'October policy' that the Government used to introduce Lebanese employer sponsorship as a means of renewing residence permits, people of a number of different origins who were not registered with UNHCR or who faced issues renewing their permit using their certificate, decided to search for a sponsor. Many Lebanese citizens, for their part, took the opportunity to demand large sums of money from Syrian families in exchange for sponsorship³⁶. In fact, an **underground market for the sale of sponsorships**³⁷ has emerged. Sponsorships are also used as a means of exploitation on the job market and extortion of vulnerable people such as women who are

34 SEWELL, A. (2020): "Lebanon's financial crisis hits Syrian refugees hard", *The New Humanitarian*, 9th January 2020: <https://bit.ly/2uEy0e9>.

35 There are six districts in the country: Beirut, North Lebanon, Mount Lebanon, Bekaa, Nabatiye and South Lebanon.

36 Human Rights Watch (2017): "Lebanon: New Refugee Policy a Step Forward", *Human Rights Watch*, 14th February 2017: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/02/14/lebanon-new-refugee-policy-step-forward>.

37 JANMYR, M. (2016): "Precarity in Exile: The Legal Status of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, No. 35, p. 76. Available on: <https://academic.oup.com/rsq/article/35/4/58/2609281>.

heads of families. Many sponsored people describe their situation as one of 'slavery' since they work long hours, often in exchange for no payment or for negligible pay³⁸.

Many other people, on the other hand, are in the country without a residence permit and in a precarious situation. This leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. In 2018, the percentage of people of Syrian origin who had been **residing there illegally** for 15 years or more was **73%**³⁹. The percentage of Syrians residing illegally in North Lebanon, one of the poorest districts in the country, is higher. It is followed by Bekaa. South Lebanon, meanwhile, has the largest percentage of Syrian people with a residence permit since the concentration levels there are lower than in other regions. There are no available statistics on the situation of refugees of other nationalities.

It should be highlighted that in March 2017, under international pressure, the Government announced that **residence permit renewal fees would not apply** if candidates met certain requirements: Syrian nationality and registration with UNHCR prior to 1st June 2015, or a previous case of a renewed residence permit using the UNHCR registration certificate. People who had renewed their residence permit in 2015 or 2016 based on conditions unrelated to refuge (sponsorship, tourism, purchase of property or tenancy) were excluded and were required to pay a \$200 annual renewal fee (from 15 years of age onwards) plus additional administration costs of around \$30⁴⁰.

One year later, in April 2018, a new notification was issued in order to facilitate the residence permit process for Syrian children who had been in Lebanon for 15 years or more. They no longer need to have a Syrian ID card or passport. An individual civil status certificate (from Syria) issued less than two years earlier is sufficient⁴¹. Attempts were made in late 2017 to apply the same residence permit renewal criteria to young Palestinians coming from Syria. However, in addition to the practical barriers, the potential benefactors are given little and diffuse information about these new procedures and they are, furthermore, not homogeneously implemented across the country by the corresponding Lebanese authorities⁴².

As a result, in 2018, the percentage of Syrian families in which none of the members had a residence permit increased six percentage points to 61%⁴³ compared with 18% of families in which all the members had a valid residence permit⁴⁴. Out of all the Syrians who were granted a residence permit, 30% were men and 24% were women⁴⁵, despite the fact that more women of Syrian origin than men have sought refuge in the country. There is no comparable available data on the situation of refugees from other countries.

The lack of permits also has an impact on acquisition of civil status documents and it refrains people from registering births. It also discourages people from reporting cases of exploitation, crimes and abuse due to fear of arrest. In addition to these irregular conditions, which in themselves increase people's vulnerability and sense of insecurity, there are **freedom of movement restrictions** that are imposed in particular on men. As a result, the responsibility for generating income for the family

38 Government of Lebanon and United Nations (2019): *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 (2019 update)*, p. 142: <http://cort.as/-JDTX>. This situation is particularly serious for foreign nationals who are 'employed' as domestic workers (refer to V.A., 2019): "The domestic workers resisting slavery in Lebanon", *New Internationalist*, 16th September 2019: <https://bit.ly/2R1nBm7>).

39 Government of Lebanon and United Nations (2019): *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 (2019 update)*, p. 140: <http://cort.as/-JDTX>.

40 Idem.

41 Idem, p. 141.

42 Idem.

43 UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP (2018): *VASyR 2018: Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon*, p. 2: <http://cort.as/-JeYc>.

44 Government of Lebanon and United Nations (2019): *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 (2019 update)*, p. 141: <http://cort.as/-JDTX>.

45 Idem, p. 142.

is handed over to offspring who are minors since they are less frequently arrested during control checks.

With regards to housing, it should be highlighted that over half of Syrian refugee families in Lebanon live in residential buildings: 19% in non-permanent structures and 15% in non-residential buildings⁴⁶ including poor **quality shelters** such as garages, warehouses, tents, buildings that are under construction and animal huts in poor areas and neighbourhoods where access to healthcare is complicated⁴⁷. Figures show that 34% live in crowded conditions⁴⁸ and all of them have to pay for food, rent, clothing and medicine⁴⁹. It should be pointed out that over half make ends meet by taking out informal credits in shops or with friends and relatives. Almost one third rely on support provided by the United Nations World Food Programme and around 16% rely on help provided by humanitarian organisations⁵⁰ (93%⁵¹ of Palestinian refugees rely on support provided by the UNRWA). Furthermore, people living in informal shelters have no way of improving their housing conditions because permanent settlements for foreigners are not permitted. In many cases, stable dwellings or houses under construction are subjected to evictions and destruction⁵². Once again, it should be highlighted that there are no comparable available statistics on the situation of refugees from other countries.



According to CARE International (NGO), the people who were registered internally by UNHCR between January 2015 and June 2016 were required to sign a **pledge to refrain from working**

46 UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP (2019): *Key Findings of the 2018 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon*: <http://cort.as/-JDCC>.

47 European Commission (2019): "European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations – Lebanon": https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/middle-east/lebanon_en.

48 UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP (2019): "Key Findings of the 2018 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon": <http://cort.as/-JDCC>.

49 European Commission (2019): "European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations – Lebanon": https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/middle-east/lebanon_en.

50 UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP (2018): *VASyR 2018: Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon*, p. 153: <http://cort.as/-JeYc>.

51 UNRWA (2018): "Protection Brief – Palestine refugees living in Lebanon": <http://cort.as/-NCdA>.

52 AFP (2019): "Lebanon demolitions will make Syrian kids homeless: NGOs", Arab News, 4th June 2019: <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1506131/middle-east>. According to some NGOs working in the country, almost 2,000 structures were dismantled by the Lebanese army between April and July 2019 (SANCHA, N. (2019): "Líbano empieza a demoler el refugio de los sirios", *El País*, 19th August 2019: <https://bit.ly/20wVtWs>).

in the country under demands imposed by the Lebanese government. This inevitably left them dependent on humanitarian aid⁵³. This situation encouraged many people to search for unregulated employment in order to provide for their families, or to seek sponsorship from a Lebanese employer and renounce the aid provided by UNHCR⁵⁴.

In some border regions in Akkar (North Lebanon) and the north of Baalbek (Bekaa), **insecurity** and **violence** render distributing humanitarian aid complicated⁵⁵. The increase in violence has led to police controls and raids (even eviction of refugees, most of whom are Syrian⁵⁶) which have themselves exacerbated the tension between refugees and the authorities. Arbitrary practices in municipalities such as curfews⁵⁷, taxes, fines and closing businesses down also occur and these affect Syrian refugees and impede them from exercising their rights.

The people who are able to work because they have a national sponsor can do so in three sectors: agriculture, construction and 'environment' (rubbish collection and cleaning services). They are not permitted to set up their own businesses unless they have a Lebanese business partner. The procedure for accessing the job market is the same as for other foreign nationals in the country although Syrian nationals do have some advantages such as a 25% reduction in the price of a permit and exemption from the €900 bank deposit requirement⁵⁸. However, **only 0.5%** of Syrian refugees who are old enough to work **have a work permit**⁵⁹. Nonetheless, not having one does not equal exploitation. Even so, whether they have a work permit or not, refugees are always paid less than Lebanese nationals and only 32% of refugees who work have a stable job and a regular income⁶⁰. In addition, they are not allowed to open a bank account in the country⁶¹.

On the whole, there has been a **generalised decrease in the financial means and living standards** in Lebanon and elevated unemployment amongst refugees and amongst Lebanese nationals has led to tensions between the two. These circumstances, fostered by an increasingly hostile political discourse with reference to refugees, particularly Syrian refugees, has turned '**anti-refugee**' sentiments into just another part of society in Lebanon and refugees are blamed for all the country's maladies (stealing locals of their jobs and land, more illnesses, etc.)⁶². Syrian refugees are considered a threat to security: 'an existential threat for Christians, a security threat for Shiites, and an economic threat for underprivileged Sunnis living in areas where Syrians have settled in masses'⁶³.

The situation is even more complex in **Palestinian refugee camps**, the only official refugee camps in the country. They are managed by the Lebanese government although internal administration has been handed over to Palestinian groups. Tensions in the camps were already high and

53 CARE International in Lebanon (2018): *Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on: What works and why that matters for the future*, p. 15: <http://cort.as/-JUMm>.

54 Legal guidance and support in the search durable solutions, intermittent financial aid in order to cover basic needs, subsidised access to education and healthcare, interventions in the field of food security and hygiene, water and sanitation, as well as a range of services in support of empowerment, awareness, resilience and decision-making in community centres managed by local NGOs with UNHCR financial support.

55 European Commission (2019): "European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations – Lebanon": https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/middle-east/lebanon_en.

56 Refer to Human Rights Watch (2018): "Our Homes Are Not for Strangers. Mass Evictions of Syrian Refugees by Lebanese Municipalities": <http://cort.as/-JnPY>.

57 Between mid-2014 and mid-2016, at least 45 municipalities in the country imposed curfews which were regulated by the local police force and local surveillance groups (JANMYR, M. (2016): "Precarity in Exile: The Legal Status of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, No. 35, p. 61. Available on: <https://academic.oup.com/rsq/article/35/4/58/2609281>).

58 UNHCR in Lebanon (21st September 2019).

59 CARE International in Lebanon (2018): *Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on: What works and why that matters for the future*, p. 15: <http://cort.as/-JUMm>.

60 Idem, p. 16.

61 Idem, p. 19.

62 GEHA, C. (2019): "Political Complexities of Return: Syrian Refugees in Lebanon", *Middle East Institute*, 14th May 2019: <http://cort.as/-JQXy>.

63 GEHA, C. and TALHOUK, J. (2018): *Politics and the Plight of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon – Political Brief on the Return of Syrian Refugees*, p. 3: <http://cort.as/-JUoP>.

increased significantly following the arrival of more people (Palestinians and Syrians) after the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in 2011, and the precarious nature of limited and already deficient services has been exacerbated⁶⁴. In the camps, which are governed by political factions and armed Palestinian groups, the precarious nature of most of the infrastructures and the unsanitary conditions of common areas, have turned them into **areas of exclusion and marginalisation** in which opportunities for education and employment are incredibly limited. Furthermore, the drastic cutbacks in UNRWA funding further to the withdrawal of US aid led to a decrease in educational and health services provided by the Agency in 2018, in the 65 schools and in the 27 health centres that are available to Palestinians.



Whilst entry and exit is permitted (but controlled by the Lebanese army), in actual fact freedom of movement for the people living in the country is restricted by the fact that permits are a requirement and legal residence in the country is a pre-requisite for obtaining permits. As such, people who do not have a valid residence permit avoid leaving the camps for fear of arrest. In practical terms, this restricts their access to the job market, a market in which Palestinians and Syrians are already subject to discrimination. They are legally excluded from 39 sectors such as medicine, law and engineering, and their salaries are far below those of Lebanese nationals⁶⁵.



The situation for people of Palestinian origin who have arrived in Lebanon since the 1970s and who do not have ID cards and are not registered with UNRWA is even more precarious since displaced Palestinians in Lebanon who arrived from a number of different places during that period do not fall under the organisation's control unless they are officially recognised by the Lebanese Government. Between 3,000 and 5,000 people are believed to be in this situation⁶⁶. Despite not being registered with UNRWA, the agency does provide them with some services such as basic healthcare and education⁶⁷.

64 UNHCR (2016): *The Situation of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*, p. 3: <http://cort.as/-JnRr>.

65 UNRWA (2018): "Protection Brief – Palestine refugees living in Lebanon": <http://cort.as/-NCdA>.

66 Idem.

67 UNHCR (2016): *The Situation of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*, p. 11: <http://cort.as/-JnRr>.

4. People in vulnerable situations

Since the outbreak of the conflict in Syria and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people to Lebanon, the Lebanese economy has struggled⁶⁸. Whilst the United Nations and the European Union have lent themselves to supporting the region, the funds assigned to each country have been insufficient⁶⁹, particularly in terms of seeing to the needs of a huge number of displaced persons who are in a vulnerable situation. Furthermore, some NGOs point out that, on the contrary to other countries in the region⁷⁰, there is a lack of **support networks** for the Syrian community in Lebanon.

The overall deterioration in the situation is manifest in the estimated 37% of Lebanese people who are in a vulnerable situation⁷¹ and in the **71% of Syrian** and **65% of Palestinian** refugees in Lebanon who are **living in poverty** (figures for other nationalities are not available). It is important to point out that extreme poverty is three times higher amongst Palestinian refugees from Syria compared with the population of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.

Women and children are reporting an increasing number of cases of harassment, exploitation and abuse linked to increased dependency on sponsors, property owners and aid organisations. This leads to fear, ongoing psychological anxiety, frustration and isolation within the community⁷². Furthermore, in two thirds of Syrian families, at least one family member has special needs due to chronic or temporary illness, disability or a serious health issue⁷³. There are cases of domestic violence (aimed above all at women and children), child marriage, discontinuation of education, child labour and begging. **Children and young people** (in addition to elders, people suffering from trauma and/or complex mental health issues, survivors of torture, disabled people, marginalised people and stateless people⁷⁴) **are one of the most vulnerable groups in the country.**

Since the outbreak of the conflict in Syria in 2011 and up until September 2018, 167,000 Syrian children have been included on UNHCR files. Of these, only around 21% of them up to five years of age have been included on the Lebanese Foreign Nationals Register⁷⁵. One of the requirements



⁶⁸ The conflict in Syria has exacerbated existing development issues in Lebanon (UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP (2018): *VASyR 2018: Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon*, p. 1: <http://cort.as/-JeYc>).

⁶⁹ Between 2011 and 2019, the European Union donated 580 million euros in humanitarian aid in order to resolve the consequences of the Syrian conflict in Lebanon (European Commission (2019): "European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations – Lebanon": https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/middle-east/lebanon_en).

⁷⁰ CARE International in Lebanon (2018): *Syrian refugees in Lebanon eight years on: What works and why that matters for the future*, p. 18: <http://cort.as/-JUMm>.

⁷¹ Over 200,000 nationals have been living in poverty following the arrival of Syrian refugees since 2011 (Lebanon Partnership Paper, Brussels II Conference (Supporting the future of Syria and the region), from 24th to 25th April 2018, p. 2: https://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/middle-east/lebanon_en).

⁷² Idem.

⁷³ UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP (2018): *VASyR 2018: Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon*, p. 2: <http://cort.as/-JeYc>.

⁷⁴ Government of Lebanon and United Nations (2019): *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 (2019 update)*, p. 148: <http://cort.as/-JDTX>.

⁷⁵ A national register that all arrivals in the country must sign on to (Idem, p. 144). During that same period, UNRWA registered almost 2,900 births of Palestinians from Syria (UNRWA (2018): "Protection Brief – Palestine refugees living in Lebanon": <http://cort.as/-NCdA>).

for registration is a copy of the parents' marriage certificate⁷⁶. Furthermore, there have been cases of hospitals refusing to hand over birth notifications (a requirement for obtaining a birth certificate) when parents are unable to pay the hospital birth fees. This puts a number of minors at risk of statelessness.

There are around 488,800 school age (between 3 and 17 years of age) minors of Syrian origin in the country. Over half do not go to school (66% when referring to minors with some disability), particularly adolescents and young people⁷⁷. 61% of individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 neither work nor study⁷⁸. Out of all the Palestinian children from Syria between 6 and 12 years of age who are in the country, 88% go to school compared with 97% of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon in the same age range⁷⁹. These percentages go down to 36% and 61%, respectively, in the case of secondary education for children over 12 years of age⁸⁰. Similar sociological studies for other nationalities are not available.

It should also be highlighted that, since 2015, an average of **90% of sexual or gender violence** incidents reported to specialist services are **directed against women and girls**, and a third of all victims are minors⁸¹.

Girls are regularly faced with harassment and sexual violence on the street, in addition to arranged marriage. An elevated percentage of them drop out of education as adolescents⁸². In the case of Palestinian camps, access to safety and justice for victims of sexual or gender violence is equally as limited as minors' exposure to situations of violence, exploitation and abuse⁸³.

The prevalence of violence directed against minors in families and in schools; the elevated number of unregistered births; child labour and marriage; and problems in the justice system are the main child protection issues in the country⁸⁴. Furthermore, it should be highlighted that children have been recruited to fight in the Syrian conflict and many of them have been involved in armed violence in Lebanon⁸⁵.

Many of the factors that have been mentioned (the absence of legal protection for refugees, access barriers into the job market, Lebanese nationals sponsorship agreements, abuse inflicted



⁷⁶ It is not currently necessary for both partners to have legal residence in the country in order to register their marriage. It is sufficient if just one of them has it (UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP (2018): VASyR 2018: Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, p. 2: <http://cort.as/-JeYc>).

⁷⁷ UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP (2018): VASyR 2018: Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, p. 3: <http://cort.as/-JeYc>.

⁷⁸ Idem.

⁷⁹ UNRWA (2018): Protection Brief – Palestine refugees living in Lebanon: <http://cort.as/-NCdA>.

⁸⁰ Idem.

⁸¹ Government of Lebanon and United Nations (2019): Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 (2019 update), page 142: <http://cort.as/-JDTX>.

⁸² Al Jazeera (2019): Refugee girls in Beirut 'face sexual violence, forced marriage', Al Jazeera News, 18th June 2019: <http://cort.as/-LOHw>.

⁸³ UNRWA (2019): Lebanon: Protection at UNRWA in 2018: <http://cort.as/-N9YS>.

⁸⁴ Government of Lebanon and United Nations (2019): Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 (2019 update), page 143: <http://cort.as/-JDTX>.

⁸⁵ Idem, page 148.

by Lebanese security forces, precarious living conditions and an end to support and food aid programmes) in conjunction with others such as an absence of laws against child marriage and failures to implement legislation to fight against trafficking in persons, have contributed towards an increase in **vulnerability** amongst refugees **with regards to exploitation and trafficking**⁸⁶.

5. Durable solutions / safe and legal pathways

In the 2015-2016 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan that was drawn up by the Lebanese government and the United Nations, the Lebanese government states that 'Lebanon is neither a country of asylum, nor a final destination for refugees, let alone a country of resettlement'⁸⁷. Declarations such as these are an indication of the authorities' lack of interest in receiving refugees who have been recognised as such. Furthermore, **local integration is not an option** according to Lebanese authorities⁸⁸ who periodically demand that informal settlements be dismantled or demolished⁸⁹. As a result, a durable solution to the situation faced by refugees in the country, particularly those of Syrian origin, must be sought out beyond the country's borders.

One of the durable solutions for refugees is **voluntary return** in safe and dignified conditions. In the case of Syrians, this has not been a plausible option for a long time despite that fact that, since 2013, some members of the Government have been demanding it and many Syrians and Palestinians are returning to Syria because of the precarious living conditions in Lebanon⁹⁰. However, this decision to return does not mean that the country is perceived to be safe. Many interviewees expressed their fear of arbitrary arrest or of being recruited by the Syrian army for enforced military service, by their allies or by opposition groups on return to Syria⁹¹. However, the situation for them in Lebanon is no better.

Whilst the Lebanese government argues that, in accordance with the *non-refoulement* principle, when Syrians are arrested they are generally released within 24 to 48 hours and the police do not enforce the deportation order⁹², it should be highlighted that the deportation order itself (which is handed over when they are released) condemns people to illegal residence in the country since it refrains them from obtaining a residence permit. As a result, and since they are exposed to exploitation and persecution because they are unable to formalise their presence in Lebanon, many are pushed into returning to their country voluntarily⁹³. Once in Syria, many recount that they have been victims of arrest, torture and extortion both in the areas that are controlled by the Syrian government and those that are controlled by the opposition⁹⁴.

86 The Freedom Fund (2016): *Struggling to survive: Slavery and exploitation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon*, p. 16: <http://cort.as/-JemT>.

87 Government of Lebanon and United Nations (2014): *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2015-2016*: <http://cort.as/-JGkC>.

88 Rejection of local integration has its roots in the 1926 Constitution that prohibits permanent settlement of foreigners in the country.

89 AFP (2019): "Lebanon demolitions will make Syrian kids homeless: NGOs", Arab News, 4th June 2019: <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1506131/middle-east>; SANCHÁ, N. (2019): "Libano empieza a demoler el refugio de los sirios", *El País*, 19th August, 2019: <https://bit.ly/2OwVtWs>.

90 HODALI, D. (2019): "Syrian refugees risk journey home amid dire situation in Lebanon", *Deutsche Welle*, 29th April 2019: <http://cort.as/-JJjQ>; Human Rights Watch (2019): "Lebanon: Syrian Summarily Deported from Airport", *Human Rights Watch*, 24th May 2019: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/24/lebanon-syrians-summarily-deported-airport>; KHODER, P. (2019): "Nous rentrons en Syrie parce que nous ne voulons pas mendier au Liban", *L'Orient-Le Jour*, 1st March 2019: <http://cort.as/-JJor>; KHODR, Z. (2019): "New Lebanon minister makes Syrian refugees' return his priority", *Al Jazeera News*, 3rd March 2019: <http://cort.as/-JJot>.

91 CHEHAYEB, K. (2018): "The Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon", *Executive*, 17th December 2018: <https://www.executive-magazine.com/economics-policy/the-syrian-refugee-crisis-in-lebanon>. Indeed, the repressive security measures taken by the Syrian regime and its anti-terrorist laws and laws on housing, land and property make returning to Syria impossible for many refugees (EL-GAMAL, J. (2019): "The displacement dilemma: Should Europe help Syrian refugees return home?", *European Council on Foreign Relations*: <http://cort.as/-JmrG>.

92 Government of Lebanon and United Nations (2019): *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 (2019 update)*, p. 142: <http://cort.as/-JDTX>.

93 Amnesty International states that people are being pushed into returning to Syria using a combination of restrictive government policies, extreme humanitarian conditions and generalised discrimination (Amnesty International (2019): "Libano: Oleada de hostilidad pone en evidencia que los retornos de personas refugiadas sirias no son voluntarios", *Amnesty International Spain*, 12th June 2019: <http://cort.as/-JxzP>.

94 ECRE (2019): "Lebanon Continues Pressure on Refugees to Return to a Syria Still Unsafe", *European Council on Refugees and Exiles*, 7th June 2019: <https://www.ecre.org/lebanon-continue-pressure-on-refugees-to-return-to-a-syria-still-unsafe/>.

However, since 2017, Lebanese authorities have been encouraging 'safe return'⁹⁵ of Syrians, arguing that there are safe zones in Syria and that waiting for the political situation to be entirely pacific would be to wait in vain⁹⁶. This stance was reinforced following the 2018 Brussels Conference about the future of Syria and the region⁹⁷ when the resulting Lebanon partnership paper affirmed that 'the main durable solution for Syrian refugees in Lebanon is their safe, dignified and non-coercive return to their country of origin'⁹⁸ (an opinion that was transmitted to the team from CEAR by a number of different Government authorities who were interviewed within the framework of this report). Since then, the Lebanese General Directorate of General Security has been facilitating returns to Syria in organised bus journeys to the border, journeys that people have to sign up to in advance and for which they must undergo a 'security exam' performed by Syrian authorities⁹⁹. The exact number of people who have been returned is not clear since the Lebanese government, UNHCR and other players all have different figures¹⁰⁰.

However, despite cooperation between Syrian and Lebanese authorities aimed at facilitating returns¹⁰¹, in May 2019 the Lebanese General Directorate of General Security was accused by Human Rights Watch and a further four NGOs of having summarily deported people (some of whom were registered as refugees with UNHCR) and having forced them to sign a 'voluntary return' form¹⁰². Three months later, Amnesty International demanded that Lebanese authorities adhere to the *non-refoulement* principle and put an end to forced deportation. It referred to the deportations carried out since May in accordance with the decision taken that same month by the Lebanese Supreme Council of Defense to return anyone entering the country illegally after 24th April 2019 to the Syrian authorities¹⁰³. Between May and late August, around 2,731 people were returned to Lebanon on the basis of this decision¹⁰⁴. However, there are also some undocumented Syrians amongst them who, for this reason itself, are unable to give proof of the date on which they arrived in the country¹⁰⁵. In response to all of this, the head of research at Amnesty International in the Middle East has asked the international community to make an effort in support of shared responsibility and reactivation of resettlement programmes¹⁰⁶.

As manifested by UNHCR and Amnesty International, the main barrier to understanding voluntary return as a durable solution for Syrians, and for Palestinians from Syrian, is inherent in these

95 Confusion in terminology and politicization of concepts related to refuge in the country are also reflected in rejection of the expression 'voluntary return' where the word voluntary could leave the door open to settlement of Syrian nationals in Lebanon which, according to political players, must be avoided. Uncomfortable with the voluntary aspect of returns, they prefer to talk about 'safe return'. (JANMYR, M. (2017): "No Country of Asylum: 'Legitimizing' Lebanon's Rejection of the 1951 Refugee Convention", *International Journal of Refugee Law*, Vol. 29, No. 3, p. 455: <https://academic.oup.com/ijrl/article/29/3/438/4345649>.)

96 JANMYR, M. (2018): "The fragile legal order facing Syrian refugees in Lebanon", *EU Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy*: <http://cort.as/-JJit>.

97 *Supporting the future of Syria and the region* - Brussels Conference, 24-25/04/2018: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-ministerial-meetings/2018/04/24-25/>.

98 Lebanon Partnership Paper, Brussels II Conference (*Supporting the future of Syria and the region*), 24th to 25th April 2018, p. 6: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/34145/lebanon-partnership-paper.pdf> However, the Foreign Minister rejected the result of the conference due to the emphasis placed on the voluntary facet of return (ELBADAWI, H. (2018): "Syrian refugees in Lebanon: Potential Forced Return?", *Atlantic Council*, 6th July 2018: <http://cort.as/-JQbv>.)

99 Basmeh & Zeitooneh (2019): *Drivers of Premature Return: Syrians' Reflections on Displacement in Lebanon*, pp. 30-31: <http://cort.as/-L08d>.

100 Refer to EL-GAMAL, J. (2019): "The displacement dilemma: Should Europe help Syrian refugees return home?", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 13th March 2019: <http://cort.as/-JmrG>.

101 Although UNHCR has taken a direct or indirect role in some of the operations, the organisation has no control whatsoever over the returns that are taking place (Basmeh & Zeitooneh (2019): *Drivers of Premature Return: Syrians' Reflections on Displacement in Lebanon*, p. 31: <http://cort.as/-L08d>.)

102 Human Rights Watch (2019): "Lebanon: Syrian Summarily Deported from Airport", *Human Rights Watch*, 24th May 2019: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/24/lebanon-syrians-summarily-deported-airport>; Al Jazeera (2019): "Lebanon denies forcing Syrian refugees back home", *Al Jazeera News*, 25th May 2019: <http://cort.as/-JJmV>.

103 Amnesty International (2019): Lebanon: "Authorities must immediately halt deportation of Syrian refugees", *Amnesty International*, 27th August 2019: http://cort.as/-O_dz.

104 Human Rights Watch (2019): "Syrians Deported by Lebanon Arrested at Home", *Human Rights Watch*, 2nd September 2019: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/02/syrians-deported-lebanon-arrested-home>.

105 Idem.

106 Amnesty International (2019): "Lebanon: Authorities must immediately halt deportation of Syrian refugees", *Amnesty International*, 27th August 2019: http://cort.as/-O_dz.

organisations' and other organisations' inability to monitor it because of limited access to different areas of the country¹⁰⁷. There is insufficient information about the security conditions following return although, as Human Rights Watch states, arbitrary arrest, torture and death are still prevalent in the country¹⁰⁸. UNHCR's resulting stance with regards to the articulated returns policy led the Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs to accuse the organisation in mid-2018 of using 'intimidation tactics' to dissuade refugees from returning to Syria. Renewal of residence permits for the organisation's employees was temporarily put on hold¹⁰⁹. This increased tensions between UNHCR and the Lebanese government, and exacerbated tensions within the Government itself¹¹⁰.

Within this context, the main legal and safe option that offers a durable solution for refugees in Lebanon is **resettlement to third countries**. More resettlements to other countries are made from Lebanon than from any other country in the world. Most of the people who are resettled from there are Syrian but people of Iraqi, Sudanese, Ethiopian and Eritrean origin are also resettled¹¹¹.

Since the outbreak of the conflict in Syria and up until December 2018, resettlement and other humanitarian admission programme options in 27 countries have been entertained for over 84,700 people (74,600 Syrians)¹¹². On 30th September 2019, around 123,360 people had been effectively resettled from Lebanon to a reception country¹¹³.

Despite the difficulties arising over the last four years as a result of suspending formal registration with UNHCR (only a small number of countries accept people who are not registered with the organisation),¹¹⁴ up to September 2018 approximately **61,000 Syrians had been resettled**¹¹⁵. This is **almost 50% of all** the resettlements of Syrians during that period in the entire world¹¹⁶ (although it is not even 0.5% of all the refugees in the country¹¹⁷). Since 2015, Canada has been the main destination for Syrian people who have been removed from Lebanon for resettlement purposes¹¹⁸, mainly through the Syrian Refugee Resettlement Initiative¹¹⁹.

Whilst selection for resettlement and refugee status determination are two separate processes, since 2014, UNHCR has combined the interviews for the two in what it calls a 'merged procedure' as a result of the huge number of people who have been registered by the organisation in Lebanon¹²⁰.

The starting point for rolling out this 'merged procedure' is the vulnerability of the person in question (previously identified by UNHCR or other social organisations who work directly with it).

107 Idem; Interview with UNHCR in Lebanon (Beirut: 18th July, 2019).

108 Human Rights Watch (2019): "Syrians Deported by Lebanon Arrested at Home", *Human Rights Watch*, 2nd September 2019: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/02/syrians-deported-lebanon-arrested-home>.

109 HOUSSARI, N. (2018): "Lebanese FM 'punishes' UNHCR for ensuring Syrians' safe return", *Arab News*, 8th June 2018: <http://www.arabnews.com/node/1318111/middle-east>.

110 Idem.

111 Interview with IOM in Lebanon (Beirut: 16th July 2019).

112 UNHCR (2019): "Global focus: Lebanon – Resettlement": <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/22140>; Government of Lebanon and United Nations (2019): *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 (2019 update)*, p. 149: <http://cort.as/-JDTX>.

113 UNHCR Resettlement Data Finder: <https://rsq.unhcr.org/en/#1Vjy>.

114 UNHCR (2019): "Global focus: Lebanon – Resettlement": <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/22140>; Government of Lebanon and United Nations (2019): *Lebanon Crisis Response Plan 2017-2020 (2019 update)*, p. 140: <http://cort.as/-JDTX>.

115 UNHCR (2019): "Global focus: Lebanon – Resettlement": <http://reporting.unhcr.org/node/22140>.

116 UNHCR Resettlement Data Finder: <https://rsq.unhcr.org/en/#1Vjy>.

117 Interview with UNHCR in Lebanon (Beirut: 15th July 2019).

118 KADI, S. (2019): "Lebanon's refugees given priority for resettlement in Europe, Canada", *The Arab Weekly*, 3rd February 2019: <https://the arabweekly.com/lebanons-refugees-given-priority-resettlement-europe-canada>.

119 Refer to CEAR report *A glance at the asylum system in Canada*, published within the framework of the Observatory in 2019: <http://entierradenadie.org/canada/>.

120 Similar operating standards are used in other countries in the region such as Jordan, Turkey, Iraq and Egypt.

Survivors of violence and torture, people who are at risk of violence and exploitation (particularly children), the LGTBIQ+¹²¹ collective and people with medical needs or disabilities are deemed vulnerable and, therefore, eligible for resettlement. UNHCR protocol dictates that priority is not given to people who have been soldiers or who have been part of paramilitary groups, informants (except people who provided information under torture or threat) and people who have worked in detention centres or security facilities¹²². However, people with these profiles can also be declared 'strictly priority' based on matters of health or protection. In these cases, the classic procedure for refugee status determination is applied. If and when any doubts are cleared up, the case returns to the Resettlement Unit and the resettlement procedure continues. Whatever the case, each referred person or family is documented for the process and registered on a database that is later assessed by the Protection Unit. Three quarters of cases correspond to survivors of violence and torture and minors who are at risk (generally minors who are victims of child labour)¹²³.

In order to make a final selection, UNHCR also assesses the person or family's interest in and suitability for resettlement. Last of all, it holds an in-depth interview to verify that the person is a refugee and, as provided for by the 1951 Convention, there are no exclusion elements. The interview includes preparation of the Resettlement Registration Form, which is then sent to the authorities in the country that the UNHCR has determined is the most suitable one for resettlement based on the criteria in each country¹²⁴. The duration of the process varies between cases and depends mainly on the time that the country in question takes to assess matters of health and security relating to the person or family. The assessment procedure also varies from country to country. Some carry out selection missions that can include interviews with candidates. Others, meanwhile, assess cases using the written documentation in the file sent by UNHCR or through the embassy in the country. The Spanish government alternates the first two formulae which, according to UNHCR, is optimum.

If a candidate (person or family) is not accepted by a country, UNHCR can choose an alternative destination for resettlement except when the person or family rejects the country that has been selected for them. When this happens, the person or family is excluded from the resettlement process. There can also be extended assessment periods for certain cases based on questions of internal policy that are unrelated to resettlement itself. Some can be delayed for months and even years and this keeps many families waiting and in a state of uncertainty since UNHCR cannot reassign them to another country until the first one has given an answer.

Once the assigned country has accepted the case, the exit process, with support from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), begins. The process takes an average of six months¹²⁵. First of all, the Lebanese government investigates the person (legal status, pending debts, etc.) before an 'exit permit' is issued. This takes around four weeks. Visa issuance and security checks in the destination country also have to be added to this procedure. These can sometimes be delayed. Additionally, in some countries, a search for accommodation for the person or family who will be resettled in the country begins before they arrive.

¹²¹ Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, intersexual and other forms of sexual and emotional diversity.

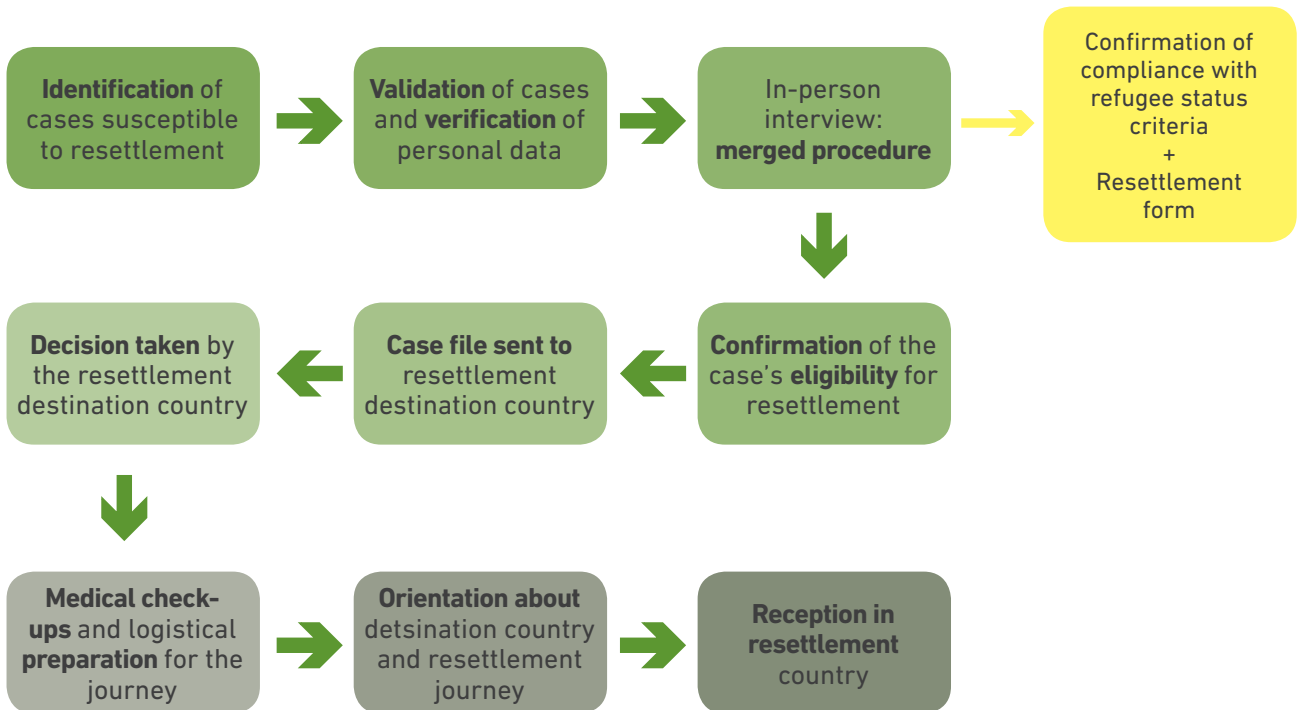
¹²² Interview with UNHCR in Lebanon (Beirut: 15th July 2019).

¹²³ Idem.

¹²⁴ In the European context, there are requirements that considerably reduce chances of resettlement for many families. For example, limitations placed on the number of family members. Furthermore, the presence of relatives in other Member States is also a significant obstacle in candidate eligibility since this excludes them from the programme in countries other than the one where those family members are resident.

¹²⁵ Interview with the IOM Operations Office in Lebanon (Beirut: 16th July 2019).

Graph. 1. Resettlement process from Lebanon



Source: the authors.

IOM arranges the journey and provides initiation classes on the destination country before it takes place. It is based on information provided by governments and delivered during information sessions that last between one and five days. Both UNHCR and IOM profess the need for general improvements to the information and orientation packages such that refugees can clear up any doubts before they travel to the country. These doubts are generally about access to education, work and housing; existing guidance and support; options for applying for the nationality; the type of protection provided by the country; and options for family reunification. Furthermore, as pointed out by IOM, the guidance sessions prior to resettlement 'extend far beyond simply sharing information about the receiving country. They prepare refugees by helping them to develop the skills and aptitudes (...)'¹²⁶ they need for successful inclusion. However, in many cases, the fear generated by a lack of information (or inexact information received from fellow citizens in the destination country) leads many families to reject the resettlement option because of uncertainty about the future of their family and children. A Syrian family selected for resettlement to Spain with whom the team from CEAR had the chance to speak in Beirut confirmed this and spoke of their fears (shared by other refugees) about schooling for their children, learning the Spanish language, the job market for women and options for continuing to study in the future. These were based on (negative) comments that had reached them from other Syrian refugee families in Spain.

So, and in the words of IOM, we insist that 'orientation must address the real concerns of participants, and emphasize cultural adaptation, inter-generational communication, gender roles, changing family dynamics and other challenges'¹²⁷.

¹²⁶ IOM (2018): *IOM Resettlement 2018*, p. 36: <http://cort.as/-/NbPs>.

¹²⁷ Idem.

Since mid-2015 and up to September 2019, **Spain has resettled 998 Syrian nationals from Lebanon** (231 in 2016, 704 in 2017 and 63 in 2018)¹²⁸.

Other legal and safe alternative pathways to resettlement and human admission programmes that exist thanks to the support given by certain governments and civil society of some countries include private and community sponsorship, labour mobility programmes and study grants in third countries, in addition to humanitarian visas¹²⁹. In late 2015, Sant'Egidio¹³⁰ in Italy used the latter to begin a humanitarian corridor project with Lebanon. It involved Italian and Lebanese authorities as well as other religious organisations¹³¹. Based on the success of the project, which facilitated arrival in Italy of over 1,000 people from Lebanon who were in need of protection, a further two humanitarian corridors were set up in 2017 linking Lebanon to France and Belgium¹³². Over 2,600 people in need of protection arrived in Italy, France, Belgium and Andorra from a range of countries (most of them from Lebanon) between February 2016 and October 2019 through humanitarian corridor projects¹³³. These people were given immense support from religious communities during the reception and integration processes and during the international protection procedure.

On the other side of the Atlantic, one of the main countries committed to supporting and setting up several of these complementary routes is Canada. This country is a pioneer in private and community sponsorship programmes, as well as in exploring alternative pathways such as mobility programmes for training and education, amongst others¹³⁴. With reference to this, the US project Talent Beyond Boundaries is worth highlighting. It is a labour mobility initiative through which refugees, both in Lebanon and in Jordan, who are on the 'talent catalogue' are put in touch with employees in Canada and Australia. The platform has around 10,000 registered refugees and around 200 job offers across different industries.

Such diversity in programmes could serve as a reference for the Spanish government and other European governments when analysing complementary legal and safe ways of exercising their responsibility to the huge number of refugees who are trapped in transit countries close to the European Union, such as Lebanon. After eight years of intense reception work in Lebanon, there is no more available capacity and no interest in continuing.

128 UNHCR Resettlement Data Finder: <https://rsq.unhcr.org/en/#1Vjy>.

129 Interview with UNHCR in Lebanon (Beirut: 15th July 2019).

130 Sant'Egidio: <https://www.santegidio.org/>.

131 Humanitarian Corridors: <https://www.humanitariancorridor.org/en/humanitarian-corridors/>.

132 Idem.

133 Sant'Egidio (2019): "The project of the humanitarian corridors continues with the arrival in Paris of a new group of Syrian and Iraqi refugees from Lebanon on Tuesday 15 October", *Sant'Egidio*, 14th October 2019: <http://cort.as/-Swxj>.

134 Refer to CEAR report *A glance at the asylum system in Canada*, published within the framework of the Observatory in 2019: <http://entierradenadie.org/canada/>.

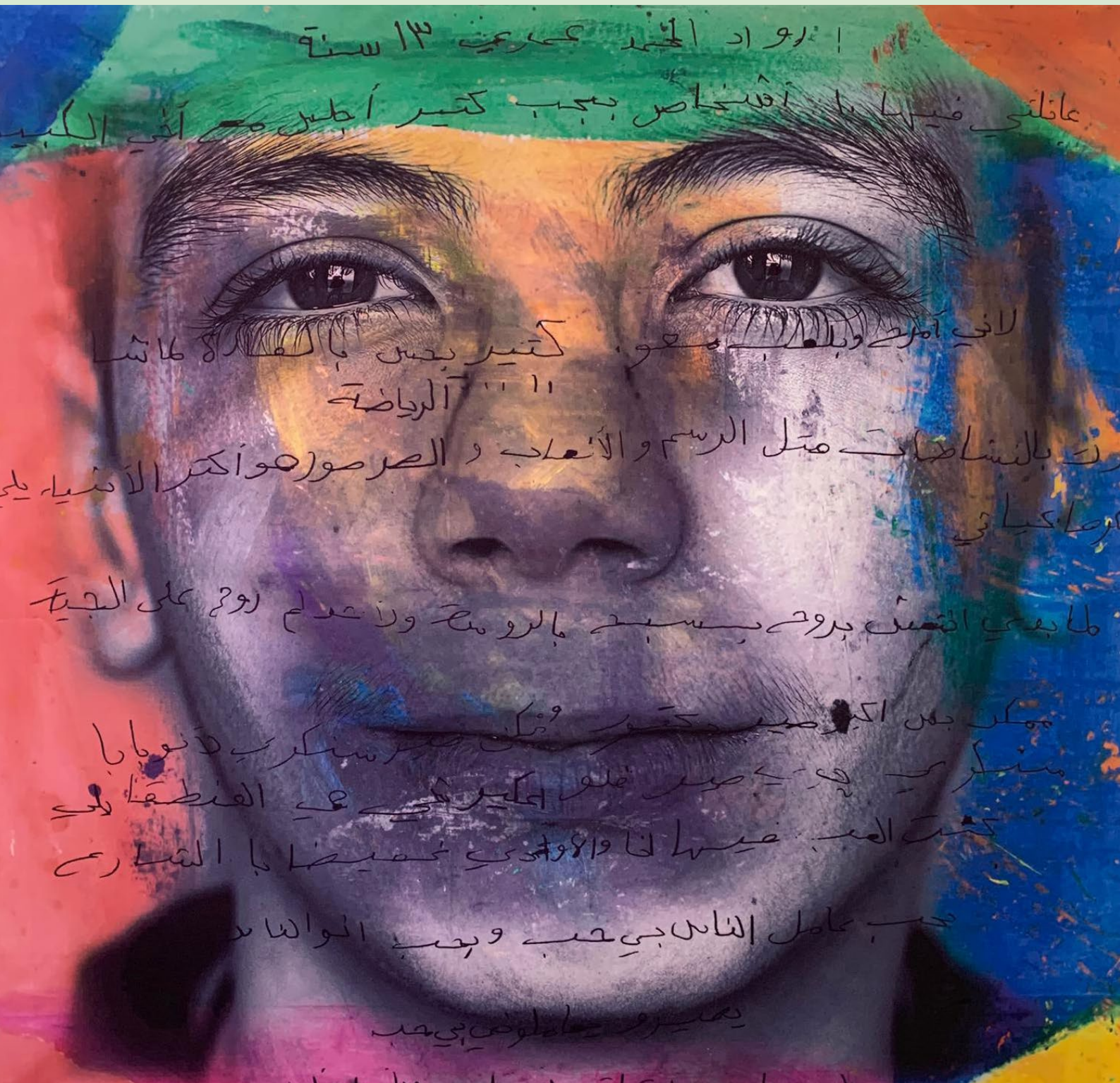
6. Conclusions

- Lebanon has the largest number of refugees for the size of its population out of all the countries in the world. Most of them are Syrian nationals who have been displaced since 2011 when the conflict began. However, since registration of Syrians with UNHCR was cancelled further to instructions received from the Lebanese government in May 2015, it is impossible to determine the exact number of Syrian refugees currently in the country. The Government estimates that there are around one and a half million. Furthermore, there are around 18,000 people of other nationalities who have registered with UNHCR. Most are from Iraq.
- The number of people in the country without documents is still high (both Syrians who do not have a valid permit because they have not renewed it or because they have not registered with UNHCR, and Palestinians who have arrived over the last fifty years and who are neither recognised by the Government nor registered with UNRWA). This absence of documents complicates (and can even impede) access to basic services such as education, healthcare and employment.
- Lebanon is not a 1951 Geneva Convention signatory country and it does not have a national asylum system. The applicable legal framework for people seeking refuge in the country is provided for in the Memorandum of Understanding that was signed with UNHCR in 2003. However, since the conflict in Syria began, the Government of Lebanon has refused to recognise Syrians as refugees and it has not authorised the creation of refugee camps in the country. Furthermore, in 2015, it began a policy of border control with the aim of keeping the number of arrivals under control and it has positioned so-called 'safe return' at the very heart of its policy as the solution for the displacement caused by the conflict.
- Refugees in Lebanon live in precarious conditions in a context in which unemployment is very high, there is a lack of affordable housing and they rely on humanitarian aid. An elevated percentage of Syrians (73%) do not have a legal residence permit and have limited access to education and healthcare. They also face freedom of movement restrictions and potential arrest. Those who do have a valid residence permit face significant discretion in terms of enforcing the law and have many issues accessing the job market. They end up opting for informal jobs. In addition, the vulnerable situation that they are in, means they are more exposed to exploitation, harassment and abuse. This is particularly true for women (the main victims of sexual and gender violence), minors and disabled people, for whom there are hardly any specific resources in the country.
- Given that improvements are not to be expected, the situation for Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (including Palestinian refugees from Syria) is particularly worrying. Most of them are trapped in twelve overcrowded official refugee camps and others are in informal settlements supported by UNRWA on a limited budget. The insecurity and unhygienic conditions in both are alarming and they fall very short of what could be considered minimum living standards. Since 2011, many Palestinians coming from Syria and other people of Syrian origin have settled in these camps and settlements even though only Palestinians have access to the support provided by UNRWA.

- Local integration is not an option that is accepted by the country. On the contrary, it rejects the idea of becoming a country of asylum. The Lebanese authorities do everything they can to avoid refugees settling permanently. This includes dismantling and demolishing homes and supporting people who wish to (or need to) return to Syria. The national and international campaign that the Government has set up in order to return Syrian refugees pays little heed to the warnings and recommendations made by international organisations such as UNHCR. These organisations highlight the absence of available information about security in the country and the fact that it is impossible to monitor security and dignity conditions there.
- Furthermore, deportation (run by the Government of Lebanon since May 2019) of Syrian people who are accused of entering the country illegally (some of whom, according to testimonials gathered by other organisations, have later been arrested in Syria) is a violation of the non-refoulement principle.
- Resettlement to third countries is one of the legal and safe pathways that has enabled a small number of Syrians and people of other nationalities (such as Iraqis) to find safe refuge and a place to rebuild their lives. Out of almost 123,400 people who were resettled from Lebanon between 2011 and September 2019, Spain received under 1,000.
- Some of the main reasons for which many of the people who are candidates for resettlement in our country abandon the process include the type of subsidiary protection, rather than refugee status, that Spain offers individuals from Syria. In addition, the process for obtaining a passport in order to visit relatives in other countries takes up to ten years to complete. The absence of precise information about certain legal aspects in our country (such as the content of the protection that is received, access to Spanish nationality and the right to family reunification programmes), in addition to a fear of having to reside in collective reception centres with strangers and having to use shared spaces such as bathrooms, are serious obstacles. There is a preference for individual homes due to issues with home sharing based on cultural differences. This resistance is explained mainly by matters of gender such as the understanding that women should work in order to support the family.
- With regards to Palestinians, it should be highlighted that there are almost no resettlement options for them since it is not contemplated under the UNRWA mandate. Whilst there are humanitarian corridors with some European countries and other countries, such as Canada and the United States of America (before Donald Trump was elected President) do issue humanitarian visas, only people in situations of extreme vulnerability can benefit from them and only if they have registered with UNRWA. However, out of all the people of Palestinian origin in Lebanon, those without documents are the most vulnerable. It is important to highlight the fact that there are no legal means for these individuals and make an appeal for their right to asylum.
- In this context, an increase in the number of resettlement places; a commitment to a mandatory quota and a progressive programme; and improvements to information on reception, services and inclusion in Spain are essential. With regards to the last point, CEAR proposes that NGOs involved in reception of refugees once they are in Spain be included in the selection missions carried out by the Government of Spain in order to

improve the information that is given to refugees who are resettlement candidates in all stages of the process.

- However, in addition to resettlement, there are other complementary pathways that the Spanish government can initiate in order to meet its responsibility to refugees who are in need of protection and who are trapped in transit countries. For example, humanitarian visas, as provided for by the legislative initiative that was approved by the European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs in December 2018, and activation of the option provided for in article 38 of our law on asylum so that people in need of international protection can apply for it in our embassies and consulates abroad.



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