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# Legal Limbo: Who is a Refugee in Lebanon?

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## Executive Summary

Lebanon hosts the largest number of refugees per capita in the world. With approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees, alongside the nearly 200,000 Palestinian refugees and additional others from various nationalities,<sup>1</sup> Lebanon has a long history of hosting people seeking refuge from conflict. Yet, despite this, the country's authorities have been unwilling to recognize their refugee status or carry out their responsibilities in providing them with key rights, such as the right to seek asylum, human rights, freedom of movement, employment, education, healthcare, social security, and adequate standards of living, among others. Although Lebanon is not a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Convention and its 1967 protocols, the country is bound by other international and domestic legal frameworks which protect human rights. However, in practice, restrictive policies have pushed refugees away from attaining these rights. This policy brief examines the Lebanese government's evasion of responsibility in granting refugees essential rights in Lebanon by reviewing relevant multilateral treaties that define refugees and their internationally-recognized rights, as well as relevant national laws that Lebanon should abide by. This brief argues that, in practice, Syrian refugees are treated as migrant workers or as a security threat. It also advocates for the development of a legal framework for refugees in Lebanon and the enforcement of policies that are in line with international and national laws and agreements.

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There are around 16,000 Ethiopian, Iraqi, and Sudanese refugees, as well as refugees of other origins. See UNHCR. 2020. '2021 Planning Summary'.

<sup>2</sup> Frangieh, G. 2016. 'Relations between UNHCR and Arab Governments: Memoranda of Understanding in Lebanon and Jordan.' In *The Long-Term Challenges of Forced Migration, LSE Middle East Center Collected Papers*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> UNHCR and the Government of Lebanon. 2019. 'Global Compact on Refugees Lebanon's Good Practices.'

<sup>4</sup> UNHCR. 2020. 'Syria Refugee Response Lebanon Syrian Refugees Registered - 30 September 2020.'

## **Lebanon is not a signatory of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocols. However, the country is bound by other multilateral and domestic legal frameworks that protect human rights**

<sup>5</sup> This figure was presented in the 'Global Compact on Refugees Lebanon's Good Practices' report. A recent census on Palestinians in Lebanon shows that the number of Palestinians in Lebanon is 174,422. Moreover, 470,000 refugees are registered with UNRWA in Lebanon, around 180,000 of which are estimated to reside in Lebanon. In addition, there are around 35,000 Palestinians who are not registered with UNRWA, and between 3,000 and 5,000 neither registered with UNRWA nor the Lebanese authorities. See Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee, Central Administration of Statistics, and Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics. 2018. *The Population and Housing Census in Palestinian Camps and Gatherings - 2017, Key Findings Report*; UNRWA. 2020. *Where We Work - Lebanon*; and UNHCR. 2016. *The Situation of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> According to the ministry of labor's ministerial decision No. 218/1 of 2015, Palestinian refugees remain prohibited from exercising 22 healthcare professions, five transport and fishing professions, three services and day-care professions, three engineering professions, two public sector and legal professions, and four other professions including public accountant and tourist guide. See UNRWA. 2017. *Employment of Palestine Refugees in Lebanon: An Overview*.

## **Introduction**

The Middle East is a region that includes some of the world's largest refugee-hosting countries, while also lacking both a legal framework for asylum and mechanisms for refugee protection.<sup>2</sup> Given its close proximity to the ongoing conflict in Syria, Lebanon hosts the highest rate of refugees per capita in the world.<sup>3</sup> The Lebanese government estimates that the country currently hosts 1.5 million Syrian refugees, including the 879,529 Syrian refugees registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as of September 2020.<sup>4</sup> Alongside these demographics, Lebanon is also host to 27,700 Palestinian refugees from Syria and around 180,000 Palestinian refugees<sup>5</sup> already in Lebanon under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).<sup>6</sup>

Like most Middle Eastern states, Lebanon is not a signatory of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 protocols. However, the country is bound by other multilateral and domestic legal frameworks that protect human rights. In light of this, the Lebanese government insists that Lebanon is not a country of asylum, and provides refugees with limited protection space and rights. Historically, the Palestinian refugee community is one of the world's most longstanding refugee populations. They are among the most deprived communities in Lebanon: They face poor living and housing conditions, high unemployment, restrictions from exercising 39 liberal and syndicated professions,<sup>7</sup> restrictions on property ownership,<sup>8</sup> and limited access to public services. Hence, they are highly dependent on UNRWA for access to basic social services.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Palestinian refugees from Syria face double displacement and have limited access to protection as they are considered refugees in their country of registration with UNRWA.<sup>10</sup> Palestinian refugees from Syria live in particularly precarious conditions with limitations on legally crossing the Lebanese border, and are excluded from access to asylum procedures in Lebanon.<sup>11</sup> With the arrival of Syrian refugees since the outbreak of the conflict in their country, around 1.5 million Syrian refugees reside in Lebanon today in precarious conditions. The lack of a national legal framework addressing Syrian refugees has made way for the adoption of policies by various actors including ministries, security agencies, and municipalities.

This policy brief examines how displaced Syrians are treated in Lebanon, in a context where authorities consider them as migrant workers or a security

threat rather than refugees. The first section presents an overview of the international definition of a refugee and refugee rights. The second section reviews multilateral treaties and regional agreements to which Lebanon is a party, and domestic legislation pertaining to refugees in the country. In light of the absence of a legal framework governing the presence of Syrian refugees, the third section assesses the Lebanese government's evasion of the responsibility to recognize Syrians as refugees, treating them as migrants or a security threat. As such, ad hoc decisions by various public actors have limited Syrian refugees' access to protection and human rights. The fourth section recommends the adoption of a legal framework for refugees in Lebanon, taking into account the human rights that should be provided to foreigners in the country.

## Refugee Law: Definition and Internationally Acknowledged Rights

The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees is the basis of international refugee law, as it defines refugees and their rights, and is ratified by 148 states.<sup>12</sup> However, the scope of the convention was expanded to address displacement around the world, as the 1951 Convention was limited to the protection of European refugees in the aftermath of the Second World War.<sup>13</sup>

According to the 1951 Convention (Article 1A (2)),<sup>14</sup> the definition of a refugee entails any person who meets the following criteria:<sup>15</sup> 'owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.'<sup>16</sup> In reference to the 'well-founded fear,' although the term 'well-founded' takes into account the conditions in the country of origin as well as the applicant's personal and familial conditions or experiences, the presence of fear remains subjective.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, persecution insinuates that there is 'a threat to life or physical freedom' or other violations of human rights, such as 'the right to life, the right to freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, the right to freedom from slavery or servitude, the right to recognition as a person before the law, [and] the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.'<sup>18</sup> There are cases of individuals who meet the aforementioned criteria but are excluded from being recognized as refugees because they have 'committed a crime against peace, a war crime, or a crime against humanity,' 'committed a serious non-political crime outside the country of refuge prior to his admission to

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According to the 2001 parliamentary amendment law (Law No. 296) on the Right to Real Estate Acquisition for Foreigners, an amendment to the 1969 presidential decree, prohibits non-Lebanese, specifically 'a person who does not carry citizenship issued by a recognized state' from acquiring real estate property rights by relating such rights to the prohibition of permanent settlement. See: Norwegian Refugee Council. 2016. 'Palestinian Refugees' Right to Inherit Under the 2001 Amendment Law - Beirut Test Case.'

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UN General Assembly. 2017. 'Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East,' Seventy Second Session Supplement No. 13.

10

Dorai, K. 2018. 'Conflict and Migration in the Middle East: Syrian Refugees in Jordan and Lebanon.' E-International Relations.

11

Ibid.

12

UNHCR. 2011. 'The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1961 Protocol.'

13

Ibid.

14

Other regional instruments have sought to expand the definition of the term refugee, such as the 1969 Organization of African Unity convention binding to members of the African Union that included persons fleeing widespread violence and war, and the non-binding 1984 Cartagena Declaration in Latin America that recommended incorporating people whose 'lives, safety or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order,' as well as the 1999 common European asylum system that is based on four legislative instruments and concern temporary protection, reception of asylum seekers, refugee status qualifications and entitlement to rights and status, and standards for asylum procedures. See UNHCR. 2017. 'A Guide to International Refugee Protection and Building State Asylum Systems.'

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This definition excludes persons already receiving protection or assistance from other UN organs or agencies (Article 1D). It excludes for instance Palestinian refugees who have been receiving protection or assistance from UNRWA.

16  
UNHCR. 1951. 'Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.'

17  
UNHCR. 2011. 'UNHCR Protection Training Manual for European Border and Entry Officials - 3. Who is a Refugee?'

18  
Ibid.

19  
UNHCR. 'Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.'

20  
Ibid.

21  
Ibid.

22  
Long, K. 2014. 'Rethinking 'Durable' Solutions.' In E. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, G. Loescher, K. Long, and N. Sigona (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*. Oxford University Press.

23  
UNHCR. 'Convention and Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees.'

24  
Ibid.

25  
UNHCR. 'Glossary - Voluntary Repatriation.'

that country as a refugee,' or 'been guilty of acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations' (Article 1F).<sup>19</sup> Refugee status determination procedures that verify asylum-seekers' claim of fear of persecution are either conducted by state parties or the UNHCR in certain cases.

The convention states that refugees have an obligation to conform to host country laws and regulations (Article 2). Refugees have the right to engage in wage-earning employment, the right to be self-employed 'in agriculture, industry, handicrafts and commerce and to establish commercial and industrial companies,' and the right to practice liberal professions (Articles 17-19). In terms of employment, housing, and education (excluding primary education), refugees should be treated with 'the most favorable treatment accorded to nationals of a foreign country in the same circumstances' (Articles 21-24). Moreover, refugees should be treated the same as nationals when it comes to primary public education, public relief, labor legislation, and social security. The convention also refers to the freedom of movement within the territory of the host country and the host country's responsibility to issue identity documents to refugees who do not possess valid travel documentation (Articles 26 and 27).<sup>20</sup>

In reference to entry and expulsion, refugees 'coming directly from a territory where their life or freedom was threatened,' who have entered the host state illegally and have presented themselves to the authorities, shall not be imposed with penalties, and shall be provided 'a reasonable period and all the necessary facilities to obtain admission into another country' (Articles 31). In addition, 'states shall not expel a refugee lawfully in their territory save on grounds of national security or public order,' and refugees should be provided a due process and a reasonable period to clear themselves (Article 32). Furthermore, the convention prohibits the refoulement of a refugee 'in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion' (Article 33).<sup>21</sup>

The convention lays the legal basis for solutions from seeking international protection and shifting to national protection.<sup>22</sup> As such, the convention refers to voluntarily re-availing oneself of the protection of the country of nationality or voluntarily re-establishing oneself in the country of origin, re-acquiring one's original nationality after losing it (Article 1C), or the naturalization of refugees (Article 34).<sup>23</sup> Moreover, in terms of treatment in the host country, the convention states that refugees should be granted access to national services and systems without discrimination.<sup>24</sup>

There are three main durable solutions for refugees: Voluntary repatriation, resettlement, and local integration. Voluntary repatriation entails returning 'to the country of origin based on the refugees' free and informed decision.'<sup>25</sup>

Resettlement refers to ‘the transfer of refugees from the country in which they have sought asylum to another State that has agreed to admit them,’<sup>26</sup> where they are granted long-term protection and are integrated. Local integration involves a durable legal status for refugees in the country of asylum, which ‘ensures national protection for rights without discrimination,’<sup>27</sup> and the legal framework for integration is included in the 1951 Convention. Building on the 1951 Convention, the 2003 Agenda for Protection<sup>28</sup>—an outcome of the Global Consultations on International Protection launched by UNHCR in 2002—placed an agenda emphasizing the need for international protection of refugees and asylum seekers, including redoubling the search for comprehensive durable solutions through international cooperative efforts and further responsibility sharing.<sup>29</sup> This was followed by the Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern.<sup>30</sup> The promotion of the three durable solutions serves as the UNHCR’s core mandate to their refugee response.<sup>31</sup>

More recently, 193 UN member states adopted the New York Declaration for Refugees in 2016, reiterating ‘the importance of strengthening the response to large movements of refugees and migrants’<sup>32</sup> and ‘reaffirming the fundamental principle of refugee protection.’<sup>33</sup> In addition, the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework, spelled out by the New York Declaration, ‘presents a comprehensive response designed to ensure: a) rapid and well-supported reception and admission measures; b) support for immediate and ongoing needs (e.g. protection, health, education); c) assistance to national/local institutions and communities receiving refugees; and, d) expanded opportunities for durable solutions.’<sup>34</sup> The resulting, non-binding Global Refugee Compact was affirmed by the UN General Assembly in 2018 with the objectives of alleviating pressure on host-countries, strengthening the self-reliance of refugees, increasing refugees’ access to third country solutions, and supporting the conditions for safe and dignified returns to the country of origin. In 2019, the Global Refugee Forum was held in Geneva, Switzerland with the attendance of heads of state or government and ministerial-level officials, during which around 840 pledges were made, including 100 pledges to support inclusive national policies, 140 to expand quality of education, and 100 to jobs and livelihoods.<sup>35</sup>

## Lebanon and Refugee Rights: The Evasion of the Responsibility to Protect Refugees

Lebanon is not a signatory of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, which outlines refugee protection and defines state responsibilities toward refugees.<sup>36</sup> Research examining the Lebanese government’s decision not to ratify this convention shows that the government’s

**26**  
UNHCR. ‘Glossary - Resettlement.’

**27**  
UNHCR. ‘Glossary - Local Integration.’

**28**  
UNHCR. 2003. ‘Agenda for Protection.’

**29**  
UNHCR. 2006. ‘Global Appeal - Finding Durable Solutions.’

**30**  
UNHCR. 2003. ‘Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern.’

**31**  
UNHCR. 2011. ‘Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration: The 10-Point Plan in Action - Chapter 7: Solutions for Refugees.’

**32**  
UNHCR. 2018. ‘The Global Compact on Refugees.’

**33**  
UNHCR. ‘A Guide to International Refugee Protection and Building State Asylum Systems.’

**34**  
UNHCR. 2018. ‘The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants Answers to Frequently Asked Questions.’

**35**  
UNHCR. 2020. ‘Summary of Participation and Pledges at the Global Refugee Forum.’

**36**  
Lebanon is also not signatory to other international covenants that address statelessness, such as the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

**37**  
Janmyr, M. 2017. 'No Country of Asylum: 'Legitimizing' Lebanon's Rejection of the 1951 Refugee Convention.' *International Journal of Refugee Law* 29(3): pp. 438-465.

**38**  
Ibid.

**39**  
UNHCR. 'The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1961 Protocol.'

**40**  
Other conventions that Lebanon has also ratified include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1997), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1971), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991). See UN OHCHR. 'Ratification Status for Lebanon.'

## The Lebanese constitution's preamble states: 'There shall be no segregation of the people on the basis of any type of belonging, and no fragmentation, partition, or settlement of non-Lebanese in Lebanon'

**41**  
Lebanese Parliament 2004. 'الدستور اللبناني.' 'Constitution of Lebanon.'

**42**  
The Legal Agenda, Frontiers Rights, Alef, Lebanese Center for Human Rights, Umam for Documentation and Research, Lebanon Support, Social Media Exchange, and Lebanese Labor Watch. 2019. 'Position Paper on the Decision to Summarily Deport Syrian Nationals Who Entered Lebanon Irregularly.'

**43**  
United Nations. 1948. 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.'

**44**  
Lebanese Parliament. 2004. See also 'الدستور اللبناني'; translation: World International Property Organization. 1990. 'Constitution of Lebanon'

**45**  
El Khazen, F. 1997. 'Permanent Settlement of Palestinians in Lebanon: A Recipe for Conflict.' American University of Beirut.

reluctance is tied to its opposition to the permanent settlement of refugees and their eventual naturalization, although the convention does not oblige parties to grant permanent residence to refugees.<sup>37</sup> The government's decision is also based on its unwillingness to solely manage refugees on its territories, including financial burdens, and to avoid having to accuse other Arab states of persecution.<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that the principle of non-refoulement is considered as 'a rule of customary international law' and accordingly is binding to 'all states, regardless of whether they have acceded to the 1951 Convention or 1967 Protocol.'<sup>39</sup>

However, Lebanon is a signatory of a number of other international conventions and resolutions that harness human rights and protection, such as the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration for Human Rights, the 1966 United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the 1966 United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the 1984 United Nations Convention Against Torture, among others.<sup>40</sup>

The Lebanese constitution states the country's confirmation to abide by the covenants of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Preamble B), as

well as the 'settlement of non-Lebanese in Lebanon' (Preamble I),<sup>41</sup> and therefore the rights guaranteed by the declaration have constitutional value.<sup>42</sup> This obliges the government to abide by Article 14 of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights that reads: '(1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution. (2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.'<sup>43</sup> As such, the right to seek asylum in Lebanon is a constitutional right. The Lebanese constitution's preamble also states: 'There shall be no segregation of the people on the basis of any type of belonging, and no fragmentation, partition, or settlement of non-Lebanese in Lebanon.'<sup>44</sup> The latter part of the statement was introduced as an amendment after the civil war ended in September 1990, referring to the political consensus concerning 'the rejection of the permanent settlement of Palestinians in Lebanon.'<sup>45</sup> As such, the permanent settlement of Palestinian refugees, and more recently Syrian refugees, in Lebanon would violate the constitution.

Moreover, the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes fundamental elements of human rights, including freedom, equality, dignity, and worth, as well as everyone's right to recognition

everywhere before the law (Article 6).<sup>46</sup> In addition, the declaration of human rights also states the right to freedom of movement (Article 13), the right to work (Article 23), to education (Article 26), and participation in cultural life (Article 27).

Similarly, the 1966 United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes human dignity and human rights.<sup>47</sup> The covenant emphasizes everyone's right to work (Article 7), to social security (Article 9), to adequate standards of living (Article 11), to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health (Article 12), and to education (Article 13). Moreover, the 1984 United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment protects refugees against torture and refoulement (Article 3).<sup>48</sup>

In addition, the 1966 United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights applies to 'all individuals within its territory' (Article 2).<sup>49</sup> It includes the right to self-determination (Article 1), to life (Article 6), to not be 'subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment' (Article 7), to not be held in slavery (Article 8), to liberty and security of person (Article 9), to liberty of movement and freedom (Article 12), to equality before the courts and tribunals (Article 14), to recognition everywhere as a person before the law (Article 16), to freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 18), to hold opinions without interference (Article 19), and protection from expulsion (Article 13).<sup>50</sup>

Binding regional instruments that address refugee law in the Middle East are absent. The 1965 Casablanca Protocol, also known as the Protocol for the Treatment of Palestinians in Arab States, specifically addresses Palestinians, and was signed by Lebanon with reservations pertaining to employment, the right to leave and return in accordance with existing laws and regulations, the provision of travel documents, and visa application procedures.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, even though regional conventions addressing refugees in the Arab world have been developed, they have not been implemented. The 1992 Cairo Declaration on the Protection of Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Arab World<sup>52</sup> was solely endorsed by Egypt, and the 1994 Arab Convention on Regulating the Status of Refugees in the Arab Countries<sup>53</sup> was adopted by the Arab League but not ratified.<sup>54</sup> The 1994 Arab Charter on Human Rights also reaffirms fundamental human rights.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the Arab League adopted a new Arab Convention on Belonging and Legal Identity in 2018 addressing refugees and the displaced by urging member states to improve protection of refugee children, to ensure birth registrations and nationality, children's right to a legal identity, and to abolish discrimination pertaining to nationality, including women's right in conferring nationality.<sup>56</sup>

**46** United Nations. 'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights.'

**47** United Nations. 1966. 'International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.'

**48** United Nations. 1984. 'Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.'

**49** United Nations. 1966. 'International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.'

**50** Ibid.

**51** League of Arab States. 1965. 'Protocol for the Treatment of Palestinians in Arab States.'

**52** Arabic-Islamic States. 1992. 'Declaration on the Protection of Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Arab World.'

**53** League of Arab States. 1994. 'Arab Convention on Regulating Status of Refugees in the Arab Countries.'

**54** Elmadmad, K. 1992. 'An Arab Declaration on the Protection of Refugees and Displaced Persons in the Arab World: Report on the Cairo Seminar, 19 November 1992.' *Journal for Refugee Studies*.; and Barnes, A. E. 2009. 'Realizing Protection Space for Iraqi Refugees: UNHCR in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon.' UNHCR.

**55** League of Arab States. 1994. 'Arab Charter on Human Rights.'

**56** League of Arab States. 2018. 'Arab Declaration on Belonging and Legal Identity.'

57 Law Regulating the Entry of Foreign Nationals into Their Residence in and Their Departure from Lebanon; See Official Gazette, 1962. 'الدخول إلى لبنان والاقامة فيه والخروج منه.' and National Authorities, of 319 Lebanon: 'Order No. regulating the status of 1962 foreign nationals in Lebanon,' 2 August 1962.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

63 UNHCR, 2004. 'Country Operations Plan.'

As for domestic laws, the 1962 Law Regulating the Entry and Stay of Foreigners in Lebanon and their Exit from the Country lays out a number of articles that address foreign nationals, namely those who are not of Lebanese nationality (Article 1).<sup>57</sup> Based on this law, foreign nationals may request political asylum in Lebanon, specifically 'any foreign national who is the subject of a prosecution or a conviction by an authority that is not Lebanese for a political crime or whose life or freedom is threatened, also for political reasons' (Article 26).<sup>58</sup> Moreover, asylum shall be granted by a committee chaired by the Interior Minister and the membership of relevant justice, foreign affairs, and the General Security authorities (Article 27). This 'committee may refuse to grant asylum or may cancel it at any time or limit it by requiring the person, for example, to remain in a specific place' (Article 29),<sup>59</sup> which goes against the 1951 Geneva Convention by revoking the asylum already granted. This law also states that political refugees shall be given a special card presenting their identity and 'the conditions to which the refugee shall be subject' by the Directorate of General Security (Article 28), and they may not participate in political activity in Lebanon (Article 30).<sup>60</sup> This law is partially in line with the principle of non-refoulement, as it states that 'in the event that a former political refugee is deported, he or she may not be removed to the territory of a country where his or her life or freedom is threatened' (Article 31).<sup>61</sup> However, this law also provides leeway permitting authorities to deport 'if the presence of a foreign national is considered to be a threat to public security'—without elaborating what a threat entails—by the General Security director (Article 17), and with the approval of the public prosecutor, the General Security director may detain any person who is to be deported (Article 18).<sup>62</sup>

In spite of the aforementioned multilateral treaties that Lebanon has ratified, and the country's domestic laws pertaining to the right to seek asylum, Lebanon is not party to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocols. It also does not have a national refugee law, hence the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the director of General Security, rather than government, and the Regional Office UNHCR in 2003 'offers unprecedented legal assurances to refugees and clearly spells out the respective obligations of UNHCR and its government counterparts.'<sup>63</sup> UNHCR 'is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to seek international protection and permanent solutions for refugees.' UNHCR's role entails 'promoting accession to, and implementation of, refugee conventions and laws; ensuring that refugees are treated in accordance with internationally recognized legal standards; ensuring that refugees are granted asylum and are not forcibly returned to the countries from which they have fled; promoting appropriate procedures to determine whether or not a person is a refugee according to the 1951 Con-



vention definition and/or to other definitions found in regional conventions; and seeking durable solutions for refugees.<sup>64</sup> Prior to signing the MoU, UNHCR's operation in Lebanon was based on a 'gentlemen's agreement with the Lebanese authorities and struggled to find ad hoc solutions for refugees in the country.<sup>65</sup>

The MoU is a first step for refugee protection in Lebanon as it formally recognizes the right of people who fear returning to their country of origin to remain in Lebanon.<sup>66</sup> It formalizes the responsibility shift of refugees to UNHCR,<sup>67</sup> specifically in the context of Iraqi and Sudanese refugees, and the systematic detentions and deportations that took place for several years.<sup>68</sup> The MoU is perceived as an alternative to the 1951 Convention, and was adopted in similar situations in other Arab states, such as Egypt and Jordan.<sup>69</sup> It reiterated that Lebanon is not a signatory of the 1951 Convention, not 'an asylum country due to several social, economic and demographic considerations, in addition to the problem posed by the presence of the Palestinian refugee population on its territory,' and 'the only viable durable solution for refugees recognized under the mandate of UNHCR is resettlement in a third country.<sup>70</sup> The MoU defined 'asylum-seeker' as 'a person seeking asylum in a country other than Lebanon.'<sup>71</sup> It lays out temporary cooperation and working procedures between the two agencies, including the provision of temporary circulation permits for asylum seekers by the General Security office, the submission of asylum applications and list of names of those granted refugee status by UNHCR, and informing UNHCR of detained asylum seekers. The MoU has not been amended since 2003.<sup>72</sup>

More recently, Lebanon became a member of the Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration and Refugees Affairs that was developed in 2015 and is associated with the Arab League, with the objectives of addressing migration-related issues, strengthening regional cooperation, and promoting common understanding and a unified vision.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, Lebanon is one of the 193 UN member states that adopted the non-binding New York Declaration for Refugees in 2016<sup>74</sup> and participated in the Global Refugee Forum where international responsibility sharing is emphasized.<sup>75</sup>

## Governance of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon: As Migrant Workers or a Security Threat

Since the beginning of Syrian displacement in Lebanon in 2011, the Lebanese authorities have failed to recognize their refugee status and have officially referred to them as 'displaced persons,' in order to avoid the responsibility of extending legal and political rights as well as a deviation from the possibility of permanent residence in the country.<sup>76</sup> The decision to not provide refugees with protection is common in the Middle East and is tied to

**64**  
UNHCR. 'The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1961 Protocol.'

**65**  
Frangieh, G. 'Relations Between UNHCR and Arab Governments: Memoranda of Understanding in Lebanon and Jordan.'

**66**  
Ibid.

**67**  
Decree No. 11262/2003; See Official Gazette. 2003.  
مذكرة تفاهم بين المديرية العامة للامن العام والمكتب الاقليمي لمفوضية الامم المتحدة لشؤون اللاجئين حول التعامل مع المتقدمين بطلبات اللجوء لدى مكتب المفوضية في لبنان.

**68**  
Kagan, M. 2011. 'We Live in a Country of UNHCR': The UN Surrogate State and Refugee Policy in the Middle East.' UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service.

**69**  
Ibid.

**70**  
Decree No. 11262/2003.

**71**  
Ibid.

**72**  
Janmyr, M. 2017. 'UNHCR and the Syrian Refugee Response: Negotiating Status and Registration in Lebanon.' *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 22(3).

**73**  
International Organization for Migration (IOM). 2015. 'Arab Regional Consultative Process on Migration and Refugees Affairs.'

**74**  
UNHCR. 'The Global Compact on Refugees.'

**75**  
UNHCR. 2019. 'The Global Refugee Forum.'

**76**  
Medjad, K. and A. M. Chaar. 2017. 'Lebanon with a View: The Scenario Factory ESA Business School.; and Al-Saadi, Y. 2015. 'Restrictions, Perceptions, and Possibilities of Syrian Refugees' Self Agency in Lebanon.' Civil Society Knowledge Center - Lebanon Support.

**77**  
Kagan, M. 'We Live in a Country of UNHCR': The UN Surrogate State and Refugee Policy in the Middle East.'

**78**  
El Mufti, K. 2014. 'Official Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon, the Disastrous Policy of No-Policy.' *Civil Society Knowledge Center, Lebanon Support*.

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UN General Assembly Security Council. 2012. 'Baabda Declaration Issued by the National Dialogue Committee'; and El Mufti. 'Official Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon, the Disastrous Policy of No-Policy.'

**82**  
Ibid.

the transfer of responsibility to UN agencies, leaving lines of accountability and responsibilities unclear.<sup>77</sup> The Lebanese government has evaded its responsibility toward Syrian refugees by failing to provide them with their right to seek asylum, freedom of movement, right to work, right to adequate standards of living, and their protection from expulsion and refoulement. Furthermore, political will and accurate data on Syrians are prerequisites to the authorities adopting a national framework toward Syrian refugees, both of which are absent.<sup>78</sup> The Lebanese government's duality is evident, as it clearly states that Lebanon is not a country of asylum, while it simultaneously reiterates policy commitments that increase protection space for Syrian refugees to international donors that it does not intend on delivering.<sup>79</sup> The government has shown little progress in implementing redundant commitments made at the Supporting Syria and the Region 2016 conference in London, the three following Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region Brussels conferences in 2017, 2018, and 2019, and the Global Refugee Forum.<sup>80</sup>

Since the displacement of Syrian refugees into Lebanon in 2011, the Lebanese government's approach shifted from a laissez-faire approach early on to imposing restrictive policies in 2014, when the number of UNHCR registered Syrians surpassed one million (figure 1). The laissez-faire approach

**Since the beginning of Syrian displacement in Lebanon in 2011, the Lebanese authorities have failed to recognize their refugee status and have officially referred to them as 'displaced persons'**

was driven by the perception that the Syrian conflict and displacement of Syrians was a short-term matter. In 2012, two important policies that the government adopted were the policy of dissociation toward the conflict—i.e.,

political neutrality—and a policy of non-encampment of Syrian refugees, a lesson learned from the Palestinian case, although by then some Syrians had already settled in informal settlements.<sup>81</sup> In the absence of a national-level comprehensive humanitarian policy addressing Syrian refugees' status, rights, and governance, the Lebanese authorities have been dealing with the presence of Syrian refugees in a no-policy context.<sup>82</sup> The government's failure to deal with the arrival of Syrian refugees in the context of a national framework has enabled other actors to take the lead in adopting policies.

A shift in the Lebanese authorities' stance became apparent in 2014 with the formation of a new government and a crisis cell led by the ministry of social affairs. Consequently, the government at the time issued a new policy in October 2014 with three objectives: (1) Reducing the numbers of refugees in Lebanon by limiting entry to the country and promoting returns; (2) adopting security measures via municipal census of Syrian refugees and

municipal policing; and (3) averting Syrians from working illegally and equally distributing humanitarian assistance between Syrian refugees and vulnerable host communities.<sup>83</sup> This was enforced through a series of harsh measures issued by various actors. As of December 2014, the General Security office introduced visa categories at the border (such as medical, tourism, education, and business visas, with some exceptions on humanitarian grounds), requesting proof of the visit, which raised risks of refoulement at the border.<sup>84</sup> The General Security office enforced stricter residency procedures on UNHCR-registered Syrians, such as a \$200 fee for residency renewal, in addition to the submission of a pledge not to work and a housing agreement signed by the landlord and mukhtar [a local official].<sup>85</sup> The fee was waived for UNHCR-registered Syrians in 2017.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, in February 2015, the submission of the pledge of responsibility signed by a Lebanese sponsor in order to renew residency permits was announced.<sup>87</sup> This is applicable to Syrian refugees who have not registered with UNHCR and therefore acquire a residency permit within the scope of the sponsorship system, whereby the sponsor is often the employer, which provides them with control over the refugee's legal status, work permission, healthcare and accommodation.<sup>88</sup> The sponsor is also responsible for ensuring that the sponsored Syrian refugee obtains a work permit.<sup>89</sup> Syrians without a residency permit risk detention, and once a residency permit is acquired via sponsorship, the Syrian refugee is unable to seek a residency permit by registering with UNHCR.<sup>90</sup> Although the council of ministers is the competent authority to amend conditions of entry and residence of Syrian nationals, the General Security office was entrusted with the previously-mentioned decisions, which is illegal and unjustifiable.<sup>91</sup>

Based on the council of ministers resolution no. 1/19 on February 2013, some professions were opened up for Syrian employment, namely 'technical professions in the construction sector, commercial representative, marketing representative, warehouse supervisor, mechanics and maintenance personnel, gatekeeper and guard, tailor, works supervisor, and metal work and upholstery.'<sup>92</sup> These exceptions were annulled in December 2014 under resolution no. 1/197 with a longer list of professions permitted exclusively for Lebanese, consequently limiting the employment of Syrians to the construction, agriculture, and cleaning sectors.<sup>93</sup> These restrictions fail to ensure labor rights and working conditions for Syrians working in permitted sectors with work permits.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, the difficulties tied to acquiring residency and work permits have exacerbated risks of exploitation in the workplace.<sup>95</sup> Those registered with UNHCR were required to sign a 'pledge not to work' until mid-2016.<sup>96</sup> Prior to this, the residency of Syrians was based on the 1993 bilateral agreement for Economic and Social Cooperation and Coordination between Lebanon and

**83**  
UNHCR. 2015. 'Refugee Response in Lebanon Briefing Documents.'

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Amnesty International. 2015. 'Lebanon: New Entry Requirements for Syrians Likely to Block Would-Be Refugees.'

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Khawaja, B. 2017. 'The Gaps in Lebanon's New Refugee Policy.' Human Rights Watch.

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Leaders for Sustainable Livelihoods. 2019. 'Dignity at Stake: Challenges to Accessing Decent Work in Lebanon.'

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Ibid.

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Geagea, N. 2015. 'Asylum Crisis or Migrant Labor Crisis?,' Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.

**93**  
Ibid.; and El-Helou, Z., M. Khechen, and D. Mahdi. 2020. 'Addressing Protracted Displacement in Lebanon: A Medium Term Outlook for Syrian Refugees and Lebanese Host Communities.' Durable Solutions Platform and Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.

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Dionigi, F. 2016. 'The Syrian Refugee Crisis in Lebanon: State Fragility and Social Resilience.' LSE Middle East Center Paper Series 15.

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Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon. 2021. 'Key Findings of the 2020 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.'

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Janmyr, M. 2017. 'Precarity in Exile: The Legal Status of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon.'

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UNHCR. 2012. 'UNHCR Registration Trends for Syrians'; UNHCR. 2013. 'UNHCR Registration Trends for Syrians'; UNHCR. 2015. 'Syria Refugee Response Lebanon Syrian Refugees Registered - 31 December 2014'; UNHCR. 2016. 'Syria Refugee Response Lebanon Syrian Refugees Registered - 31 December 2015'; UNHCR. 2017. 'Syria Refugee Response Lebanon Syrian Refugees Registered - 31 December 2016'; UNHCR. 2017. '3RP Regional Refugee Resilience Plan 2017-2018 in the Response to the Syria Crisis: 2017 Annual Report'; UNHCR. 2019. 'Syria Refugee Response Lebanon Syrian Refugees Registered - 31 December 2018'; UNHCR. 2020. 'Syria Refugee Response Lebanon Syrian Refugees Registered - 31 December 2019'; and UNHCR. 'Syria Refugee Response Lebanon Syrian Refugees Registered - 30 September 2020.'

Syria, which permitted the movement of people and goods between the two countries, including economic activity and residence.<sup>97</sup> In addition, 'any amendment to the conditions of Syrians' entry and residence in Lebanon must respect the international agreements signed with Syria, which guarantee freedom of movement of people between the two countries and freedom of residence and work.'<sup>98</sup>

Moreover, in 2015, UNHCR suspended the registration of Syrian refugees as per the Lebanese government's request, which reflects the gradual decrease in the number of UNHCR-registered Syrian refugees (figure 1).<sup>99</sup> This has led to a gap in accurate data on the number of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and has limited UNHCR's ability to assist Syrians entering Lebanon after 2015. Furthermore, this has meant that Syrian refugees are no longer able to seek

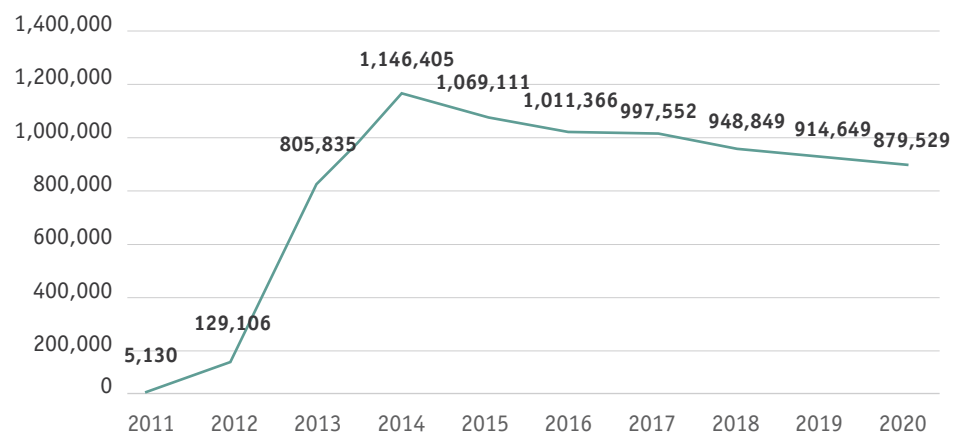
### The difficulties tied to acquiring residency and work permits have exacerbated risks of exploitation in the workplace. Those registered with UNHCR were required to sign a 'pledge not to work' until mid-2016

acquiring residency permits by registering with UNHCR, and sponsorship remains the only way they can legalize their presence in the country.<sup>100</sup> In light of the difficulties pertaining to acquiring legal residency, 80% of Syrian refugees

above the age of 15 are estimated to not have legal residency in 2020, an increase from 78% in 2019 and 73% in 2018.<sup>101</sup> Those without residency permits are subject to arrest, prosecution, and deportation orders that are generally not implemented.<sup>102</sup>

Figure 1

#### Number of Syrian refugees registered with UNHCR in Lebanon since 2011



Source UNHCR Figures of Registered Syrian Refugees.<sup>103</sup>

Note The number of UNHCR-registered refugees presented in this figure was recorded in the month of December of each year, except for 2020, which was recorded in September

In the absence of guidance from the central government, municipalities were placed at the forefront of refugee governance without the technical and financial support required to address the increase of refugees in light of funding shortages, weak infrastructure, and limited capacities that pre-date the humanitarian crisis.<sup>104</sup> As such, municipalities have adopted policies targeting refugees based on the political affiliation of municipal councils and the socio-political dynamics in their localities.<sup>105</sup> Such policies include curfews and evictions. Curfews are imposed illegally by municipalities, as they are legally declared by the high military command within the context of a state emergency passed as a decree by the council of ministers,<sup>106</sup> and their purpose is reported to be either as a precaution to conflict or as a result of hostile attitudes and discrimination.<sup>107</sup> In practice, evictions have been implemented by municipalities as well as other actors. In 2019, 84 evictions were implemented affecting 4,409 individuals, mainly by the Litani River Authority, the Internal Security Forces, municipal officials, and landlords.<sup>108</sup> Evictions have taken place for different reasons, such as environmental reasons—this includes evictions around the Litani River area, Lebanon’s longest river and an important water resource that is polluted for several reasons, including the dumping of sewage from informal tented settlements—<sup>109</sup> landowner’s appropriation of the property for other use or the inability of Syrian tenants to cover the rent, tension with the host community, or due to the presence of hard structures that are illegal in informal tented settlements.<sup>110</sup> Municipal evictions began in 2014-2015, affecting more than 20,000 at the time.<sup>111</sup> In 2017, the Lebanese army enforced evictions of around 40 Syrian refugee families around the Riyak airbase for security reasons—requesting a particular radius around the airbase to be cleared—although security areas should, in fact, be announced by the ministry of defense.<sup>112</sup>

With calls for the return of Syrian refugees expressed by Lebanon’s main political parties,<sup>113</sup> and although the government was officially recommitting to the principle of non-refoulement during international conferences, ‘voluntary’ returns were organized by the Director General of the General Security Major General Abbas Ibrahim in 2018, after a number of Hezbollah-organized refugee returns were conducted prior to the General Security office’s organized returns<sup>114</sup> Ibrahim reported that a total of 110,000 Syrians had returned in 2018, while UNHCR numbers state that around 11,100 returned through returns organized by the General Security office in 2018,

**In 2019, 84 evictions were implemented affecting 4,409 individuals, mainly by the Litani River Authority, the Internal Security Forces, municipal officials, and landlords**

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Atallah, S. and D. Mahdi. 2017. ‘Law and Politics of ‘Safe Zones’ and Forced Return to Syria: Refugee Politics in Lebanon.’ Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.

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Yahya, M. and M. Muasher. 2018. ‘Arab Horizons Refugee Crises in the Arab World.’

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Articles 2 and 4 of Decree No.52/1967; See Official Gazette. 1967.

إعلان حالة الطوارئ أو المنطقة العسكرية. 2014. Saadi, Y. 2014. ‘Examining Curfews Against Syrians in Lebanon.’

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Atallah and Mahdi. ‘Law and Politics of ‘Safe Zones’ and Forced Return to Syria: Refugee Politics in Lebanon.’

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Holtmeier, L. 2019. ‘Despite New Efforts to Tackle Pollution in the Litani River, Challenges Remain.’ Executive Magazine.

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Ibid.

113

Ibid.

114

Organized refugee returns have been ongoing since mid-2017. Hezbollah first negotiated and carried out two phases of returns of 50 Syrian households and 300 Syrian individuals from Aarsal to the Damascus countryside and Qalamoun. The Lebanese government and UNHCR were not involved in the negotiations of these returns according to media reports. In addition to the ceasefire agreements between the Lebanese side and fighters from the Islamic State and Al-Nusra in Aarsal that led to the return of fighters and their

families to different areas in Syria by the end of the summer of 2017, General Security, in coordination with the Syrian authorities, organized the return of 500 Syrian refugees from the southern Lebanese town of Shebaa to Ghouta in Syria in April, prior to the 2018 parliament elections.

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Mahdi, D. 'Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region: The Lebanese Government's Redundant Commitments and Slow Progress.'

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Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region Brussels V Conference. 2021. 'H.E. Mr. Hassan Diab - President of the Council of Ministers of the Lebanese Republic.'

**120**  
Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region Brussels V Conference. 2021. 'H.E. Ms Zeina Akar - Deputy Prime Minister of the Lebanese Republic.'

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The Higher Defense Council is chaired by the president with the prime minister serving as a vice chair. It also includes the ministers of defense, interior and municipalities, foreign affairs and emigration, economy and trade, as well as finance. The council adopted decision No. 50/ع.د.ا/ع.س/م.ج.ا addressing the illegal entry of Syrians to Lebanon across the border.; See The Legal Agenda et al. 'Position Paper on the Decision to Summarily Deport Syrian Nationals Who Entered Lebanon Irregularly.'

**122**  
General Director of the General Security Decision No. 43830/ع.ق.م. of 13/5/2019; See The Legal Agenda et al. 'Position Paper on the Decision to Summarily Deport Syrian Nationals Who Entered Lebanon Irregularly.'

**123**  
The Legal Agenda et al. 'Position Paper on the Decision to Summarily Deport Syrian Nationals Who Entered Lebanon Irregularly.'

while around 5,600 Syrians returned on their own.<sup>115</sup> Although the recent General Security-organized returns of Syrian refugees have been referred to as 'voluntary,' the extent to which returnees believe they have a choice in the matter remains questionable, particularly when one takes unfavorable local dynamics into consideration.

Returns to Syria as a main durable solution have been reiterated during Brussels Conferences alongside the terms 'safe, dignified, non-coercive,' as well as 'in accordance with international law and the treaty of non-refoulement.'<sup>116</sup> The Lebanese caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab called for separating the prerequisite of having a political settlement to the Syrian conflict from returns during his statements in the fourth and fifth Brussels conferences.<sup>117</sup> Diab referred to the government's refugee return plan, which lacks transparency and remains unclear:<sup>118</sup> 'We believe that the Lebanese government plan for the gradual return of the displaced Syrians adopted on July 22, 2020, should be given the opportunity to reach its goal with the assistance of the international community. [...] It is based on a set of principles: (1) delinking the return from a political solution, (2) respect of human rights and the principle of non-refoulement, and (3) ensuring the dignified, secure and non-coercive returns of the displaced Syrians to safe destinations in Syria.'<sup>119</sup> During the same conference, the government also requested humanitarian assistance, as caretaker Deputy Prime Minister Zeina Akar's statement called for additional immediate assistance to Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees.<sup>120</sup>

Moreover, in 2019, a series of harsh decisions were taken toward Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The first decision was issued by the Higher Defense Council calling for security agencies to tackle the illegal entry of Syrians to Lebanon.<sup>121</sup> Consequently, a decision<sup>122</sup> was issued by the General Director of the General Security to deport Syrians who entered the country illegally after 24 April, 2019.<sup>123</sup> It is reported that between 21 May and 28 August, 2019, 2,731 Syrians were deported.<sup>124</sup> These were conducted in the absence of a due process and are not in line with the principle of non-refoulement.<sup>125</sup> In addition, another decision was taken by the Higher Defense Council pertaining to existing housing-related laws on the demolition of concrete walls and ceilings of informal tented settlements, ultimately ensuring Syrian refugees live in less sustainable shelters.<sup>126</sup> Furthermore, the internal security forces' Major General Imad Osman also demanded that the ministries of labor and interior, as well as security forces, to address the informal employment of migrant laborers.<sup>127</sup>

Throughout the displacement of Syrians in Lebanon, various actors have imposed policies with the undeclared consensus of the political elite. As such, policies have been adopted by the Higher Defense Council, line ministries, General Security office, and municipalities. The objective of the approach

adopted by the Lebanese authorities toward Syrian displacement in Lebanon ‘is aimed at making the refugees’ stay as administratively difficult as possible, and as discriminatory as possible.’<sup>128</sup> Rather than being treated as refugees, Syrian refugees have been dealt with as economic migrants or a security threat. This treatment entails that they are perceived by the authorities as not fleeing persecution, and that they are able to return at any time, and are residing in Lebanon for economic gain. And by treating them as a security threat, harsh security measures are adopted at the national and local levels, including checkpoints, detentions, deportations, raids, and curfews.

### Moving Forward: Adopting a Legal Framework for Refugees

The absence of a comprehensive humanitarian policy on a national level is a key gap in the governance of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. Without a rights-based national legal framework for refugees, there has been administrative disarray—a failure to recognize Syrians fleeing conflict or persecution as refugees, and providing them with their rights so they can endure their displacement in dignity. Under the current governance structure, Syrians are prevented from accessing basic human rights in Lebanon, making them vulnerable to exploitation. The legislative framework of action for Syrian refugees should emphasize that their legal, economic, social, and security status is required to protect their rights, as well as formalize the Lebanese government’s position and responsibilities toward Syrian refugees.<sup>129</sup> In line with multilateral treaties and national legislation pertaining to refugee and human rights, this recommendation calls for clear lines of responsibility and accountability within the framework of refugee governance by competent actors via a rights-based approach.

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Human Rights Watch. 2019. ‘Syrians Deported by Lebanon Arrested at Home.’

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El-Helou, Khechen, and Mahdi. ‘Addressing Protracted Displacement in Lebanon: A Medium Term Outlook for Syrian Refugees and Lebanese Host Communities.’

**126**  
Human Rights Watch. 2019. ‘Lebanon: Syrian Refugee Shelters Demolished.’

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No. 50884 on 9/7/2019.

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Atallah and Mahdi. ‘Law and Politics of ‘Safe Zones’ and Forced Return to Syria: Refugee Politics in Lebanon.’

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## LCPS

### About the Policy Brief

A Policy Brief is a short piece regularly published by LCPS that analyzes key political, economic, and social issues and provides policy recommendations to a wide audience of decision makers and the public at large.

### About LCPS

Founded in 1989, the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies is a Beirut-based independent, non-partisan think-tank whose mission is to produce and advocate policies that improve good governance in fields such as oil and gas, economic development, public finance, and decentralization.

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Dima Mahdi is a researcher at the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies whose work focuses on socio-political issues concerning Lebanese, as well as refugees residing in Lebanon. She has conducted and contributed to research covering the lessons learned and ways forward for Syrian refugees' protracted displacement in Lebanon; the political environment regarding the presence of Syrian refugees in Lebanon and the increased calls for their return to Syria; coping mechanisms of Syrian refugees and local communities; perceptions of corruption in the Lebanese public sector; and the development of lagging regions by examining institutional, economic, and social stability factors. She is currently enrolled in a master's program in Conflict Resolution and Governance at the University of Amsterdam and holds a BA in Political Science and International Affairs from the Lebanese American University.