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Fact-Finding Mission Report

**SYRIAN AND PALESTINIAN (IN LEBANON AND EXITING SYRIA) REFUGEES IN
LEBANON**

Helsinki, 29 September, 2016

Public Report



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This report, written by the Country Information Service of the Finnish Immigration Service was written according to the EU Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information. The report draws on carefully selected sources that are referenced in the report. Information has been researched, analyzed, and edited according to best practices. However, the authors make no claim to be exhaustive. No conclusions should be drawn from this report regarding the merits of a request for refugee status or asylum. The fact that some occurrence, person, or organization is not mentioned in the report does not imply that such occurrence never happened or that a person or organization does not exist. This report is the result of independent research and editing. The views and statements expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the authority and makes no political statement whatsoever.



1. Introduction

This report deals with Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Both Palestinians living in Lebanon (PRL) and Palestinians exiting Syria (PRS) are included in the report.

It is estimated that there are approximately 270,000 PRL, one million Syrian refugees and 42,000 PRS in Lebanon.¹ UNHCR has stopped registering new refugees arriving from Syria since May 2015 because of the request by the Lebanese government. Humanitarian cases that were approved by the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs can still be registered.²

The situation of PRL has not changed dramatically over the past few years. Their situation has become more difficult, however, because of the large amount of refugees that have entered Lebanon. Resources such as water and electricity are becoming scarcer and people compete for the same, low-paid jobs. UNRWA, the organization responsible for Palestinian refugees in the region and which both PRL and PRS are dependent on, faces increased difficulties in providing services for everyone due to financial constraints.

Due to their lack of legal residency, both Syrian refugees and PRS are prone to forced labor and marriage and other kinds of abuse. Legal access to work is hard for people fleeing from Syria and they have to resort to other methods in order to earn a living. Poverty also hinders children's ability to access education.

This report begins with an explanation of the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (PRL) today. The second part describes the situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. After each chapter, the conditions of Palestinian refugees exiting Syria (PRS) are described if their situation differs from that of the Syrian refugees. A lot of the information concerning PRL also applies to PRS, though, according to UNRWA, the latter are in a more vulnerable position. They are also often in a more precarious situation than Syrian refugees. In the chapters, themes such as residence permits, housing, health care and education are discussed. The security situation in Lebanon in general and in the Palestinian refugee camps is described briefly at the end of the report.

The terms of reference were drawn up by Finnish Immigration Service based on the needs of different units at the Immigration Service, including resettlement issues. The report also seeks to give updated information on issues such as PRL and PRS access to health care and legal travel. Health care for Palestinians is subsidized by UNRWA and their coverage has been altered recently. There are also new travel restrictions in place concerning the travel of Syrians to Turkey.

This report is based on a fact-finding mission to Beirut from 25 to 29 April, 2016. There, the Finnish Immigration Service had meetings with six organizations and individuals. One interview (Carnegie) was conducted via Skype on 13 May, 2016, as a meeting was not possible to arrange due to scheduling. One interview (Suomi Syyria Yhteisö) was done in Finland on 17 August, 2016. All interviews were conducted in English, except for one (Suomi Syyria Yhteisö) that was conducted in Finnish. Notes were sent to all interlocutors for approval. They were also asked how they wanted to be referenced and informed that the information provided by them

¹ UNRWA; UNHCR 30 June, 2016 (A)

² Amnesty International June 2015, p. 11



would be used in a public report. Some interlocutors did not want to be quoted by name because of the sensitivity of the issues or because they have contacts in Syria.

In addition to the information gathered from the interlocutors, the report includes information from public sources as well. The interviews focused mainly on current issues in order to have more time to focus on them. The purpose of the additional information is to give the reader more in-depth and background information.

As a result of the fact-finding mission, the Finnish Immigration Service has published also another public report, namely on Military Service in the Syrian Arab Army, National Defence Forces and armed groups supporting Syrian regime and fighting against it.

As the war in Syria does not show any signs of ending, the refugee crisis in Lebanon and the movement of people to third countries will continue. UNHCR conducted a survey in June 2016 among Syrian refugees in Lebanon about their intentions to travel onwards. 39 per cent of the refugees interviewed wanted to travel to a third country even if they would have to resort to irregular means and routes.³ As policies towards refugees and the number of people fleeing Syria can change rapidly, it is recommended that the information provided in this report be updated. The research and editing of this report was finished in September 2016.

³ UNHCR 10 August, 2016



2. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

UNRWA estimates that the number of Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon (PRL) is between 260,000 and 280,000. This number is derived from the number of people who receive services from UNRWA. The official number of registered PRL is approximately 500,000. The number of Palestinians exiting Syria (PRS) in Lebanon who receive the UNRWA's services is about 42,000.⁴

There are 12 official and six unofficial refugee camps in Lebanon, in which part of the Palestinians live.⁵ Palestinians have arrived to Lebanon after the creation of the state of Israel, known as *Nakba*, catastrophe, for Palestinians, and after the 1967 war. Some Palestinians also arrived into Lebanon after Black September in Jordan in 1970. The people in the latest group of Palestinians are largely the Non-ID Palestinians.⁶

In general, the situation of Palestinians living in Lebanon (PRL) has not changed due to the war in Syria.⁷ However, they face the same restrictions as PRS, for example with regard to work, and also suffer from the same lack of resources.

Socio-economic problems are the biggest ones for all Palestinians. UNRWA has to use its budget also for Palestinians from Syria and Iraq.⁸ Also, cuts in foreign aid have decreased the ability of local NGOs to provide services.⁹

There was a large migration movement of PRL out of Lebanon in the summer of 2015. According to press reports, initially the number of PRS was higher, but the number of PRL exiting soon surpassed it. Even the UNRWA was surprised by the migration out of the country. According to the UNRWA, the PRL wanted to try to get out of Lebanon while others were leaving as well. The social pressure in the Palestinian refugee camps has increased and the living conditions have decreased at the same time.¹⁰

The political situation in Lebanon affects Palestinians as well. It is hard for UNRWA to proceed with discussions about, for example, the lack of Palestinian right to own or inherit property as there has not been a president in Lebanon since May 2014.¹¹

2.1. Registration

Palestinians in Lebanon (PRL) are registered under the Department of Political and Refugees Affairs (DPRA). It works under the Ministry of Interior. DPRA registers births, marriages, deaths and changes of address for PRL.¹²

The PRL have to register their children within a year from birth in order to get a birth certificate. If it is done later, it might be more difficult. In any case, it is a long and

⁴ UNRWA; Aina

⁵ Badil 2015, p. 41

⁶ Badil 2015, pp. 20–21

⁷ KAS

⁸ KAS

⁹ Aina

¹⁰ UNRWA

¹¹ UNRWA

¹² Danish Immigration Service October 2014, p. 40



expensive process.¹³ Children are registered in the same place of registration as the rest of the family.¹⁴

All Palestinians that are registered with DPRA are given ID cards. A person must apply for the card personally. It will only be renewed if there is a change in the person's situation, he or she gets married, divorced or dies, for example. A lost ID can be renewed after the loss has been reported to a court.¹⁵

Those refugees who have registered with DPRA and UNRWA are called registered Palestine refugees. Those that have registered only with DPRA are called Non-Registered refugees. Their number is estimated to be around 35,000 and they have limited access to UNRWA's services.¹⁶

In addition to registered and Non-Registered refugees there are 3,000 to 5,000 so called Non-ID Palestinians living in Lebanon. Their exact number is not known, it could also be below 3,000. They arrived to Lebanon after the 1960s and they do not have valid IDs. They are not registered to the UNRWA or recognized by the Lebanese authorities. Hence, they lack valid legal status in Lebanon. Non-ID Palestinians can move restrictedly inside Lebanon and they cannot travel abroad. They also face higher risk of arrest or detention. They have difficulties in civil registration procedures. They have access to almost all UNRWA services but not, for example, to rehabilitation services or university scholarships.¹⁷

2.2. Palestinian travel document

Palestinians receive their travel documents from the Lebanese General Security (GS) if they have an ID card issued by the DPRA and an UNRWA card. The travel document costs 250,000 Lebanese Lira, which is approximately 170 USD.¹⁸ Registered PRL can apply for a travel document that is valid for three years, Non-Registered Palestinians for one that is valid for one year.¹⁹

Palestinians can use their Palestinian travel document for travel in and out of Lebanon if it is for multiple uses despite the Lebanese passport renewal.²⁰ According to UNRWA there was an announcement in April 2016 that the travel document would be accepted again at airports while the Lebanese authorities adapt their system. UNRWA has not encountered cases where a Palestinian would have faced problems concerning this.²¹

The website of the GS stated in early 2016 that updated versions of the Palestinian travel documents are in use and that new biometric travel documents will be adopt-

¹³ UNRWA

¹⁴ Danish Immigration Service October 2014, p. 40

¹⁵ Danish Immigration Service October 2014, p. 41

¹⁶ UNRWA 2016, p. 23

¹⁷ UNRWA April 2016, p. 4; UNRWA 2016, p. 23

¹⁸ Aina

¹⁹ General Security (undated) (A)

²⁰ IOM; KAS. The International Civil Aviation Organization announced in November 2015 that it would accept only machine-readable passports on flights from Lebanon. Palestinian travel documents are not machine-readable, hence there was fear among Palestinians that they would not be able to travel out or into Lebanon. Daily Star 25 November, 2015.

²¹ UNRWA



ed. In the meanwhile, “[t]here will be no more renewals when it comes to the Palestinian travel documents.”²²

If a Palestinian is abroad and does not have the travel document, they have to go to the Lebanese embassy. It is a complex and time consuming process. When entering Lebanon, the person will be questioned for hours.²³ One cannot enter Lebanon without the travel document.²⁴

2.3. Lebanese nationality

In general, no Palestinian, or a foreigner, is entitled to Lebanese nationality.²⁵ Lebanese nationality can only be derived from one’s father. Women can only transfer nationality to a child if he or she is born out of wedlock and recognized by the Lebanese state while still a minor.²⁶ Therefore, children born to a Palestinian, i.e. stateless, father are not eligible for the Lebanese citizenship.

Article 1 of the Nationality Law also states that “[e]very person born in the Greater Lebanon territory and did not acquire a foreign nationality, upon birth, by affiliation” and “[e]very person born in the Greater Lebanon territory of unknown parents or parents of unknown nationality” is considered Lebanese.²⁷

Article 5 of the Nationality law states that a foreign woman could have Lebanese nationality one year after the registration of her marriage to a Lebanese man.²⁸

Two interlocutors interviewed give additional conditions that have to be met. According to Aina, wealthy people may be able to pay for citizenship. Women can get citizenship if they marry a Lebanese man and they have two children.²⁹ According to the UNRWA, if a Lebanese man marries a Palestinian woman, she can apply for citizenship after they have had a child. There might be a time limit for having a child, though the source did not indicate how long this would be. UNRWA emphasizes that this is one aspect of the law and that there are also other elements present.³⁰

2.4. Access to work

There are altogether 36 professions which are allowed only for Lebanese citizens or are allowed to foreigners only based on reciprocity of treatment or local need. Reciprocity treatment is not a possible category for Palestinians as the state of Palestine cannot take workers into it. The prohibited professions for foreigners, including all Palestinians, include for example nursing, the profession of law, engineering, fishing, tourist guide and professions that require public transport driving license.³¹ Pal-

²² General Security (undated) (B)

²³ IOM; Aina

²⁴ Aina

²⁵ Aina

²⁶ UNHCR March 8, 2014, p. 3

²⁷ Law No. 15 of 19 January, 1925, amended by Law 11 January, 1960

²⁸ Law No. 15 of 19 January, 1925, amended by Law 11 January, 1960

²⁹ Aina

³⁰ UNRWA

³¹ UNRWA



estinians cannot work in any public profession or serve in the Lebanese army.³² According to UNRWA, there have been exceptional cases where a person has been able to practice some prohibited professions.³³

If a Palestinian wants to work in Lebanon, he or she needs a work permit. UNRWA has explained the process of obtaining the permit. The following documents are required for the employee:

“[a] work contract signed by him/her and his/her employer, a Palestine refugee registration card, employer’s documents (identity card, commercial registration and notification), and evidence of declaration to the Lebanese National Social Security Fund.”³⁴

For the employer, the following documents are required:

“[a] Palestinian refugee registration card, articles of incorporation, commercial registration and notification, evidence showing that he/she employs at least three Lebanese with his/her share of the capital being at least LBP 100 million (USD 6 700).”³⁵

The application is sent to the Minister of Labor if the permit falls under category one, “employers and employees whose salaries are three times the minimum wage and above”, or to the Director General of the Ministry of Labor if it falls under category two, “a salary that is between double and three times the minimum wage”, or three, “a salary ranging between the minimum wage and its double”.³⁶ The work permit is valid for one year at a time. Work permits under categories two and three are renewed by the head of the department in the Ministry.³⁷

Work permits became free of charge in 2010 (Law No. 129 of 2010).

“As for work permits for employers, they remained at 25% of the usual fees i.e. around LBP 450 thousand (US\$ 300). Additionally, Palestine refugees were exempted from the Reciprocity of Treatment condition stipulated by article 59 of the labor law with regards to obtaining compensation in-lieu of dismissal and for arbitrary dismissal.”³⁸

According to a study by UNRWA published in 2016, the changes have not significantly improved the working conditions for PRL. Still, only 6% of PRL have a work permit.³⁹

According to Konrad-Adenauer Foundation (KAS), Lebanese Ministry of Labor restricted the refugees’ access to work force in 2015. Since then employers have had to make sure that a task cannot be done by a Lebanese citizen before offering it to refugees. This applies to Palestinian refugees too.⁴⁰

³² Aina

³³ UNRWA 2015 (B)

³⁴ UNRWA 2015 (B)

³⁵ UNRWA 2015 (B)

³⁶ UNRWA 2015 (B)

³⁷ UNRWA 2015 (B); UNRWA April 2016, p. 2

³⁸ UNRWA 2015 (B)

³⁹ UNRWA 2016, p. 24, 83

⁴⁰ KAS



Palestinian workers have partial access to National Social Security Fund. In 2010 (Law No. 128 of 2010) those Palestinians that hold work permits were entitled to benefits paid to a worker at termination of contract (8.5% of the wage), but not to the sickness and maternity fund (9% of which 2% are covered by the employee) nor to the family allowances fund (6%).⁴¹

In reality the access to the work force is more difficult. According to Statistics from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 42.5% of PRL work in Lebanon. For women the percentage is 15.2%.⁴² Discrimination against Palestinians is widespread and the real number of professions that Palestinians can practice is a lot smaller than what is officially announced.⁴³

Palestinians can face discrimination in hiring but also in workplace: it can be harder for them to access higher ranking positions and they can be paid less than Lebanese colleagues. All Palestinians do not have written contracts (only 14%) or employment benefits, which makes them more vulnerable. Women have more limited access to work than men.⁴⁴ Lack of right to work affects many spheres of life and makes life very hard for Palestinians.⁴⁵

Those young and educated Palestinians who stay in Lebanon do not often work in the professions they have the training for, but for example as fruit sellers, in agriculture or in construction sites. With the influx of Syrian refugees, everyone is fighting for the same jobs. Syrians might work for lower wages; their daily wage could be for example four USD instead of seven USD that was paid before.⁴⁶

2.5. Housing and living expenses

The exact number of Palestinians living in official Palestinian refugee camps is not known. According to Aina over 50% of PRL live outside the Palestinian refugee camps, though living expenses are higher there,⁴⁷ whereas according to UNRWA 63% of PRL live inside the camps.⁴⁸ The biggest camp, which houses both PRL and PRS, is in Saida area, Ain al-Hilwa camp.⁴⁹ The camps are overcrowded, for example in Ain al-Hilwa there are an estimated 50,000 to 80,000 people living inside one square kilometer.⁵⁰

65% of PRL live below the national poverty line (208 USD/person/month). The number of people living in extreme poverty has halved since 2010 and is now 3%. Poor people are not able to get enough food and non-food items. Poverty is higher in the refugee camps, where 73% of the people are poor. Monthly average expenditure among PRL is 195 USD/month, whereas the average for the whole country is 429 USD.⁵¹ The main reason for poverty is that PRL work in low-paid jobs. In addition, Syrian refugees and PRS compete increasingly for the same jobs and they

⁴¹ UNRWA 2015 (B)

⁴² Badil 2015, p. 46

⁴³ UNRWA

⁴⁴ UNRWA April 2016, p. 2, 4; UNRWA 2016, p. 89

⁴⁵ KAS

⁴⁶ Aina

⁴⁷ Aina

⁴⁸ UNRWA April 2016, p. 2; UNRWA 2016, p. 42

⁴⁹ UNRWA

⁵⁰ UNRWA April 2016, p. 2

⁵¹ UNRWA 2016, p. 52, 54



might be willing to work for less pay.⁵² Over a third of PRL report loans as a source of income.⁵³

In the Palestinian refugee camps the Lebanese state offers only a limited amount of services. Palestinian refugees rely mainly on UNRWA as a service provider. There are no INGOs that would offer services in the long run. The camps suffer from water and sanitation problems.⁵⁴ Unofficial and self-installed electric cables are a regular cause of death in the camps. The camps have never had sustainable infrastructure built in them. The Lebanese authorities have placed restrictions on building materials. One needs permissions for the materials and for construction work and they are hard to get.⁵⁵

According to UNRWA, Palestinians' right to acquire, transfer and inherit property was limited in 2001 (Law No. 296). As a consequence, informal rental arrangements have increased.⁵⁶ According to Aina, before 2005 owning property was possible for Palestinians but now it is not allowed anymore. Palestinians can only own property inside the Palestinian refugee camps.⁵⁷ Some Palestinians make arrangements with Lebanese nationals who buy property on their behalf.⁵⁸

PRL can move outside the camps if they can afford it, often meaning if they receive more salary. Due to limitations regarding work this is not usually the case. If people move outside of the camps, the distance to UNRWA's services might be too long. Camps also offer social networks for PRL which are absent outside of the camps.⁵⁹

2.6. Access to health care

Palestinian refugees can use private health care or health care services provided by UNRWA and NGOs. Private health care is very expensive in Lebanon.⁶⁰ Only 5.5% of PRL have a private health insurance that they have paid for themselves, the rest are dependent on health care provided by different organizations.⁶¹ Payment of health care costs is difficult for many Palestinians.⁶² According to UNRWA tertiary health care is often too expensive for Palestinians.⁶³

In the Palestinian refugee camps only primary health care is available, secondary and tertiary health care are available outside the camps.⁶⁴ Secondary and tertiary health care is provided by UNRWA through the Palestine Red Crescent Society and public and private hospitals.⁶⁵

There are five hospitals, altogether 27 health care facilities, in Lebanon that are meant for Palestinians, but these do not have all treatment, such as kidney treat-

⁵² UNRWA 2016, p. 57, 62

⁵³ UNRWA 2016, p. 32

⁵⁴ UNRWA

⁵⁵ Irin News 1 June, 2015; UNRWA April 2016, p. 2; UNRWA 2016, p. 24

⁵⁶ UNRWA April 2016, p. 2

⁵⁷ Aina

⁵⁸ UNRWA April 2016, p. 2

⁵⁹ UNRWA

⁶⁰ UNRWA (undated)

⁶¹ UNRWA 2016, p. 104

⁶² Aina

⁶³ UNRWA 2016, p. 96

⁶⁴ UNRWA

⁶⁵ UNRWA 2016, p. 96



ment or heart operations, available.⁶⁶ Because of shortage in funding, not all medical services, such as dental care or laboratory tests, that are part of UNRWA's Primary Health Care are available in all camps.⁶⁷ Health care and social benefits provided by DPRA have also been cut.⁶⁸

UNRWA had to adjust support for health care for Palestinians in 2015 but it was re-adjusted again in June 2016.⁶⁹ According to Aina, some Palestinians have not been able to go to hospital for treatment because of the adjustment first done by UNRWA in 2015. Aina reports about a man suffering from thalassemia. He did not get support so in response he lit himself in fire and was subsequently taken to hospital.⁷⁰

After UNRWA made the adjustment in 2015 there were a lot of demonstrations against it and UNRWA had to close its office for some time. Despite of the adjustment UNRWA has not seen a decrease in Palestinian's access to health care. Though the adjustment has probably had some effect, UNRWA has not heard of a case where a person would not have gone to see a doctor because of the new situation.⁷¹

UNRWA does not provide for all the equipment that patients need to buy, for example for pace makers.⁷² According to Aina, lack of adequate maternal health is a problem for Palestinians.⁷³

Over 90% of children in Palestinian refugee camps have dental problems because of the bad quality of the drinking water and because their diet includes too much sugar.⁷⁴ In general tap water is not potable but on average almost a third of PRL use it for drinking.⁷⁵

According to Aina, UNRWA does not provide mental health care for Palestinians.⁷⁶ The organization started a mental health workshop in Lebanon in 2014 in order to train its staff on mental health issues.⁷⁷ It has also cooperated with the National Institution of Social Care and Vocational Training/Beit Atfal Assumoud, organization represented by Aina, in providing mental health services in the refugee camps.⁷⁸

There are no services available for the elderly other than the ones provided by NGOs. Especially elderly people without children can be segregated from the society and left without a caretaker.⁷⁹

NGOs can assist people with health care costs. For example, the National Institution of Social Care and Vocational Training/Beit Atfal Assumoud cooperates with Health care society and can pay for example 10 to 15 per cent of the costs of an

⁶⁶ Aina; UNRWA 2016, p. 96

⁶⁷ UNRWA 2016, p. 96

⁶⁸ KAS

⁶⁹ KAS

⁷⁰ Aina

⁷¹ UNRWA

⁷² KAS

⁷³ Aina

⁷⁴ Aina

⁷⁵ UNRWA 2016, p. 131

⁷⁶ Aina

⁷⁷ UNRWA 11 April, 2014

⁷⁸ UNRWA 20 November, 2015

⁷⁹ Aina



operation. This is given in addition to the amount that UNRWA pays. The percentage is offered all Palestinians whose operation costs exceed 1,000 USD.⁸⁰

Many Palestinian women face gender based violence from which there is limited safety. Child protection incidents are also common in the Palestinian community. These issues are not challenged by the communities and there is limited access to legal aid.⁸¹

According to the UNRWA, there is at least one family member with a disability in 10 per cent of Palestinian households. In Lebanon there is limited access and availability of specialized rehabilitation services. Awareness of the needs of people with disabilities is not adequate, nor are their rights sufficiently protected. Palestinians do not fall under Law 20/2000 which recognizes the rights of Lebanese nationals with a disability.⁸²

2.7. Access to education

UNRWA provides schools for free for both PRL and PRS. There are 67 UNRWA schools and two vocational education centers in Lebanon. Some schools have two shifts in a day, because of the large number of PRS children. UNRWA does not provide kindergartens for Palestinians. There are private organizations that have some kindergartens.⁸³

Despite Palestinians theoretical access to higher education, in real life it might be hard for them to get a higher education. 97 per cent of school-aged children were in elementary schools and 61 per cent of PRL children were enrolled to secondary schools. 12 per cent of PRL above 25 years have a baccalaureate and 6 per cent have university degrees.⁸⁴ PRL can enroll to Lebanese universities, but there are quotas for Palestinians. "In scientific Faculties (Medicine, engineering, pharmacy) 10 per cent quota is reserved for Foreigners (which include Palestinians), while entrance to other faculties is based on entrance exam results."⁸⁵

UNRWA has been improving the education sector and schools.⁸⁶ Still, the schools do not have enough facilities for the large number of children; some classes can have 45 to 50 children. According to Aina, the schools do not encourage people to continue their schooling and the results are not very good. In the past, in the 1960s and 1970s UNRWA's schools used to be the best ones, but the level has gone down.⁸⁷

The number of children dropping out of school is rising; even 12 year old children can drop out of school. Boys drop out more often out of school than girls. In the end more girls receive education but the problem is that there are not enough jobs available for girls. Some parents take their children out of school and put them to

⁸⁰ Aina

⁸¹ UNRWA April 2016, p. 4

⁸² UNRWA April 2016, p. 4

⁸³ Aina; UNRWA 2016, p. 70

⁸⁴ UNRWA 2016, pp. 68–69

⁸⁵ UNRWA 2016, p. 70

⁸⁶ UNRWA 2016, p. 70

⁸⁷ Aina



work if they are in need of money. Beit Atfal Assumoud tries to do awareness raising among the parents about the negative causes of this.⁸⁸

Many educated Palestinians leave for abroad as they are not allowed to work in many highly skilled professions in Lebanon. Those who stay in Lebanon do not often work in the professions they have the training for, but in lower wage professions.⁸⁹

3. Syrian refugees in Lebanon and Palestinians exiting Syria (PRS)

Since the start of the Syrian uprising in 2011 and the subsequent war over a million refugees have arrived to Lebanon. In June 2016 the number of registered refugees was 1,033,513, in addition there can be unregistered refugees. The number of Syrian refugees has decreased slightly in 2015 and 2016 because UNHCR stopped registering them in May 2015 after the request of the Lebanese government. Many refugees from Syria, over a third of them, live in the Baalbek (Baalbek-El Hermel governorate) and Zahle (Beqaa) areas and Akkar governorate close to the Syrian border.⁹⁰

Many Syrian refugees and PRS live in such conditions in Lebanon that they were not used to in Syria. The PRS community is divided with regard to the war in Syria, a lot of Palestinians support the regime because it had supported them in the past.⁹¹

3.1. Access to Lebanon

Legal travel from Syria to Lebanon has become more difficult. In the past the border was crossed often, for example when people sought medical treatment in Syria because it is cheaper there.⁹²

Syrians can access Lebanon legally if they meet certain requirements. According to IOM, one has to either have a one-way ticket out of Lebanon, a hotel booking, a certificate for medical treatment in a hospital and a booked appointment, an appointment at an embassy for family reunification or a person can access the country on humanitarian grounds, although IOM is not certain what the situation with access on humanitarian grounds is and if it is possible. A person seeking to enter Lebanon has to be at the border seven hours in advance.⁹³

According to IOM Lebanon 90% of people seeking access with an appointment for family reunification receive it.⁹⁴

Amnesty International refers to a circular issued by the GS in February 2015 and states that there are seven categories, under which Syrians can at least in theory enter Lebanon.

⁸⁸ Aina

⁸⁹ Aina

⁹⁰ UNHCR 30 June, 2016 (B); Amnesty International June 2015, p. 11

⁹¹ HBS

⁹² IOM

⁹³ IOM

⁹⁴ IOM



“Category one is for tourism, shopping, business, landlords, and tenants; category two is for studying, category three is for transiting to a third country, category four is for those displaced; category five for medical treatment; category six for an embassy appointment; and category seven for those entering with a pledge of responsibility (a Lebanese sponsor).”⁹⁵

If one is allowed to enter Lebanon, one would receive a permit valid from 24 hours to one month. The permit could also be extended for example in case of an appointment at an embassy or for medical cases.⁹⁶

Syrian refugees do not fall under the category of displaced persons, except for some humanitarian cases. The criteria for these have been drawn up by the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs and it applies to

“[u]naccompanied and/or separated children with a parent already registered in Lebanon; persons living with disabilities with a relative already registered in Lebanon; persons with urgent medical needs for whom treatment in Syria is unavailable; persons who will be resettled to third countries.”⁹⁷

Even though a person would have a permit to enter Lebanon, there could be a ban on the person if he or she has for example entered the country illegally before. The Lebanese GS can also deny the validity of an airline ticket or it can check the validity of the ticket with the airline. IOM has heard from GS that people have used fake tickets.⁹⁸

According to Amnesty International, in June 2014 the Lebanese government restricted the entry of Syrian refugees to Lebanon. Since then, entry is restricted to the people fleeing from the areas near the Lebanese border where there is fighting.⁹⁹ People who go back to Syria will also lose their refugee status.¹⁰⁰ UNHCR reported in July 2014 that it had not noticed significant changes at the border because of the announcement by the Lebanese government.¹⁰¹ UNHCR announced in August 2014 that it is negotiating with the Lebanese government that the refugees who go back to Syria would continue to have access to Lebanon.¹⁰²

Despite of the restrictions there is still a lot of traffic across the border, mainly on the al-Masnaa border crossing, which is on the road linking Damascus and Beirut.¹⁰³ There are many buses that operate between Syria and Lebanon, there are buses for example to North Syria and Aleppo.¹⁰⁴

There are various reasons for people to travel back to Syria. Medical treatment is a reason to cross the border to Syria, as well as to see family members or to check

⁹⁵ General Security 23 February, 2015, referred to in Amnesty International June 2015, p. 10

⁹⁶ Amnesty International June 2015, pp. 10–11

⁹⁷ Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon April 2015

⁹⁸ IOM

⁹⁹ Amnesty International July 2014, p. 7

¹⁰⁰ Reuters 1 June 2014

¹⁰¹ UNHCR 18 July, 2014

¹⁰² UNHCR 13 August, 2014

¹⁰³ HBS

¹⁰⁴ HBS; KAS



on their property. Some Syrians decide to return to Syria because living expenses are too high in Lebanon. According to KAS most Syrians would want to go back to Syria and not, for example, to Europe.¹⁰⁵ People can also go back to Syria to get documents, for example for resettlement or for foreign visa and for family documents. KAS believes that these would not be available to the refugees at the Syrian embassy in Beirut but that the refugees would need to go back to their home town. KAS has not heard of cases where people would go back to Syria to do exams.¹⁰⁶

Illegal movement across the border to Syria has also become more difficult; it can be hard even for local people who know the area. Illegal movement across the border was hindered after the Qalamoun area was captured from the armed opposition in 2015. It has affected the transportation of goods as well.¹⁰⁷

If a person enters Lebanon illegally and is caught, he or she has to pay a fee of 633 USD, leave Lebanon within five days and may re-enter the country if he or she meets the entry requirements. If he or she is not able to pay the fine, the person is barred permanently from entering Lebanon.¹⁰⁸

If a Syrian refugee is resettled to a third country, he or she receives a five year ban of entry into Lebanon. IOM has knowledge of one person who returned to Lebanon and was subsequently taken to Damascus. The ban has not been in force throughout the war.¹⁰⁹

3.2. Access to Lebanon for PRS

In general, the process to enter Lebanon is the same for PRS as it is for Syrian nationals. However, it can be harder for PRS¹¹⁰. According to UNRWA, one of the biggest problems concerning PRS in Lebanon is access to the country.¹¹¹ Also, regulations concerning PRS are not publicly communicated by the GS. In the beginning of the Syrian conflict PRS could enter Lebanon easily, though this was not formally announced by the GS.¹¹²

According to Amnesty International, prior to August 2013 PRS had to obtain a permission to exit Syria. This document had to be collected from Syrian authorities, the Department for Immigration and Passports in Damascus, and PRS had to pay for it. The entry card received at the border would cost about 17 USD and could be changed into a residency visa. It was valid for three months and could be renewed four times without charge and after that for about 200 USD for one year's visa.¹¹³

The Lebanese authorities started to screen people in August 2013 and entry of hundreds of PRS was denied. Family reunification was still possible.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁵ IOM; KAS

¹⁰⁶ KAS

¹⁰⁷ HBS

¹⁰⁸ Amnesty International June 2015, p. 20

¹⁰⁹ IOM

¹¹⁰ Lebanon has imposed restrictions to PRSs before it imposed them on Syrian nationals. Lebanon already holds a large Palestinian refugee population.

¹¹¹ UNRWA

¹¹² UNRWA April 2016, p. 2

¹¹³ Amnesty International July 2014, p. 10

¹¹⁴ UNRWA April 2016, p. 2



According to Amnesty International, there were several restrictions in place of which one had to be met. These restrictions were enforced arbitrarily to some extent. A PRS had to have

“a valid pre-approved visa which required an application made by a guarantor in Lebanon; a valid visa and ticket to a third country – meaning they were only transiting through Lebanon; a scheduled medical or embassy appointment; or if they were able to prove they had family already legally in Lebanon (a family member had to send a valid copy of their residency permit to the authorities as proof)”.¹¹⁵

The entry of PRS to Lebanon was further restricted in May 2014. Now there are only three categories for Palestinians under which they can seek to enter Lebanon¹¹⁶ compared to the seven categories that the Syrian refugees have.¹¹⁷ If a PRS is allowed to enter Lebanon, he or she receives a 24 hour transit visa.¹¹⁸

The first category for Palestinians is people with a confirmed appointment in an embassy for example for resettlement or visa application. The Schengen visa process is not handled in the respective embassies but it has been outsourced to an external company, which processes the application first. Their list goes to the GS at the border. The GS can still deny access to Lebanon for a person on security grounds.¹¹⁹

Security reasons can be, for example, if one used to have problems in Lebanon, during or before the Syrian war, or if one was illegally in the country in the past and has received a notice to leave the country. A person can clear his or her record through the GS or through a contact. There have been only few cases of clearances that the UNRWA is aware of.¹²⁰

The second category is people with a valid visa to a third country or a plane ticket. Even then, however, entry to Lebanon can be denied on security grounds.¹²¹

A third category, a very rare one, for entry is for a PRS to get a PRL as a sponsor in Lebanon. PRS cannot ask another PRS to be a sponsor.¹²² UNRWA is only aware of very few cases where a PRS has got a sponsor, though the organization has limited knowledge of them.¹²³ The visa has to be applied for in advance and not at the border control.¹²⁴

UNRWA is working in order to get humanitarian access for PRS to be included in the list.¹²⁵

Amnesty International reported in July that also PRS with an entry permit from the GS, PRS with a one-year or three-year residency visa or PRS with an exit and re-

¹¹⁵ Amnesty International July 2014, p. 11

¹¹⁶ UNRWA

¹¹⁷ Amnesty International June 2015, p. 11

¹¹⁸ UNRWA April 2016, p. 2

¹¹⁹ UNRWA

¹²⁰ UNRWA

¹²¹ UNRWA

¹²² UNRWA; Aina

¹²³ UNRWA

¹²⁴ UNRWA April 2016, p. 2

¹²⁵ UNRWA



turn permit would be allowed in since May 2014. Still, fulfilling these requirements would be very hard.¹²⁶

Whereas the entry is more likely for Syrian refugees with an embassy appointment, not all PRS with the permit are allowed in. People might try to enter several times. If people are refused entry, they might not be informed of the reason. According to IOM, 98% of the Palestinians who have a valid airline ticket are allowed to enter the country.¹²⁷ Amnesty International published a report in July 2014, according to which PRS might be barred from entry into Lebanon despite of having a valid airline ticket.¹²⁸

According to Aina, the Lebanese border has been closed for PRS since 2014. PRS could cross the border as well if they would have an appointment at an embassy. The Palestinian embassy in Beirut and the GS are working together for humanitarian cases to cross but the border is not often open to them.¹²⁹

Also according to UNRWA, the number of PRS entering Lebanon since May 2014 has been very low. Most PRS entered Lebanon in 2012 and 2013. As a consequence, some people seek to enter the country illegally. It exposes the person to the risk of exploitation and abuse and can be an obstacle to regularization of the person's legal status later on.¹³⁰ Some PRS have been able to enter Lebanon after paying bribes at the border.¹³¹

3.3. Travel onwards from Lebanon

Lebanon has been used as a transit, either legal or illegal, country by Syrian refugees and PRS. For example, before the visa restriction by Turkey for Syrian nationals, people often used to travel there through Lebanon.¹³² A Western embassy refers to the information by an international organization, according to which there were tens of thousands of Syrians travelling via sea from Lebanon to Turkey every month. Same numbers of people travelled from Beirut via air, there were charter flights for Syrians to Turkey. This was before the new visa regulation¹³³ according to which Syrians who travel by air or sea need a visa for Turkey.¹³⁴ Now, these routes are blocked and no smuggling routes can replace them.¹³⁵

Several sources indicate that at the moment it is impossible or at least very hard for Syrians to get a visa to Turkey.

According to Kheder Khaddour from Carnegie Middle East Center, Syrian refugees are not able to get a visa to Turkey. In order to get a visa, Syrians need to have a passport and a stamp in it from the Lebanese GS. Then they need to go to the Turkish embassy in Beirut and pay 500 to 1,000 USD. They also need a hotel reservation in Turkey. For refugees, it is hard to get these because most of them do

¹²⁶ Amnesty International July 2014, p. 14

¹²⁷ IOM

¹²⁸ Amnesty International July 2014, p. 6

¹²⁹ Aina

¹³⁰ UNRWA April 2016, p. 2; UNRWA 2016, p. 145

¹³¹ Badil 2015, p. 120

¹³² IOM

¹³³ Republic of Turkey (undated)

¹³⁴ Western embassy

¹³⁵ Western embassy



not have enough money. Organizing visas has become a business and wealthier Syrians might be able to afford the process. Syrian refugees in Lebanon have three choices: stay in Lebanon, return to Syria, or seek resettlement in a third country.¹³⁶

According to a Western embassy it is also very hard for Syrians to get a visa to Turkey. The embassy has not heard of such cases. The queues for visa application are long, times have been appointed for six months onwards.¹³⁷ IOM has heard of cases where Syrians have been denied of visa to Turkey. It can be easier for a person to get a visa if he or she has been there legally before.¹³⁸

According to Heinrich-Böll Foundation (HBS), most Syrians cannot get Turkish visa. It might be possible if a person has a certificate for a family reunification meeting, a residence permit to a third country or a company's invitation to Turkey.¹³⁹

Also according to Rami Adham, chair of Suomi Syyria Yhteisö, a NGO working in Finland and Syria, Syrians are not able to get the Turkish visa. In early 2016, after the Turkish law regarding the requirement for the visa was changed, some individuals were able to get the visa. A business to arrange "invitations" for Syrians started inside Turkey. Having an invitation is way of receiving the visa. An invitation could be worth of hundreds of US dollars. After the business started the granting of visas was restricted. The difficulty of accessing Turkey does not concern Syrians in Lebanon only, but also Syrians in third countries.¹⁴⁰

There were hundreds of Syrians stranded in the Beirut airport in January 2016. Their flight to Turkey was postponed because of the new Turkish visa regulations for Syrians. Approximately a hundred of them were returned to Syria.¹⁴¹

Syrians need a visa in order to enter Iran. According to IOM, they can probably receive a visa, the organization has not heard of bans on Syrians.¹⁴²

3.4. Travel onwards from Lebanon for PRS

Palestinians need a visa to travel to Turkey by sea or air, but they are not able to get the visa. It is possible that illegal travel by boat to Turkey increases because the new visa regulation for Syrians.¹⁴³ IOM refers to information by UNRWA, according to which it is hard for both PRS and PRL to get a visa to Turkey.¹⁴⁴ Palestinians in general have limited access to many countries as these do not accept the Palestinian travel documents or do not grant visas for Palestinians. Hence, people resort to human smuggling. If they are caught by the Lebanese authorities they face detention.¹⁴⁵

UNRWA does not know how many people leave Lebanon. In 2015, the number of PRS who stopped receiving UNRWA's benefits decreased by 6,000 people. Some

¹³⁶ Khaddour

¹³⁷ Western embassy

¹³⁸ IOM

¹³⁹ HBS

¹⁴⁰ Adham

¹⁴¹ HBS; Aljazeera 9 January 2016

¹⁴² IOM

¹⁴³ UNRWA

¹⁴⁴ IOM

¹⁴⁵ UNRWA April 2016, p. 3



of them returned to Syria. There are networks in the Palestinian refugee camps that facilitate leaving.¹⁴⁶

3.5. Palestinian travel documents

According to IOM, the Lebanese authorities do not grant Palestinian travel documents to PRS. A person might be able to renew the travel document at the Syrian embassy in Beirut.¹⁴⁷ Also according to Aina, PRS are not able to get an ID or a Palestinian travel card from the Lebanese officials.¹⁴⁸

According to UNRWA, PRS can get the Palestinian travel document at the Syrian embassy in Beirut. UNRWA has advised people to do so and they have succeeded. However, the organization does not know how often this is done.¹⁴⁹

3.6. Residence permit

According to IOM, Syrian refugees can get a residence permit in Lebanon if they fall into one of the following categories: they have a Lebanese sponsor, they are a student in Lebanon, they work in a certain profession, or they have a Lebanese spouse. In order to receive the permit, one has to go to the GS with for example the sponsor agreement and personal documents.¹⁵⁰

The Lebanese government issued a decree in August 2014 that allowed those who had overstayed their visas or entered the country illegally to renew their permits or regularize their stay by December 2014.¹⁵¹

Since January 2015, Syrian refugees over the age of 15 who have had a residence permit can renew it by paying 200 USD, providing a housing commitment and a certificate from a *mukhtar* [village leader, mayor] that the landlord owns the property, and by providing a notarized pledge not to work¹⁵². Refugees also need to have proof that they can manage financially (since March 2015). According to UNHCR “[s]ome refugees are also asked to sign a notarized pledge that they will return to Syria when their permit expires or when requested by the [Lebanese] Government”.¹⁵³

Refugees also need to have a valid passport or ID and an entry and return card to Lebanon. They also need to have two photographs that are stamped by the *mukhtar* and a UNHCR registration certificate.¹⁵⁴

If a person gives a pledge not to work but does it anyway, he or she can be arrested or deported if caught.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁶ UNRWA

¹⁴⁷ IOM

¹⁴⁸ Aina

¹⁴⁹ UNRWA

¹⁵⁰ IOM

¹⁵¹ 3RP in Response to the Syria Crisis (undated), p. 6

¹⁵² Recently the Lebanese Government has accepted an attestation from UNHCR instead of a housing commitment. The changes have not been implemented yet. There are also plans that the Government of Lebanon is replacing the pledge not to work with a commitment by the refugee to abide by the Lebanese law. UNHCR 10 August, 2016.

¹⁵³ IOM; UNHCR7 April, 2015; Amnesty International June 2015, p. 13, 15

¹⁵⁴ Amnesty International June 2015, p. 14



If refugees are not registered with the UNHCR, they need to have a sponsor who is a Lebanese national. The sponsor needs to have a work permit for the Syrian refugee and is responsible for the refugee in Lebanon. If one has a sponsor, one needs the sponsor's permit in order to leave the country.¹⁵⁶

Having a sponsor does not always make life easier as they can exploit the refugee as he or she is dependent on the sponsor. The sponsorship needs to be renewed annually. If a refugee wants to re-apply for a new sponsor he or she needs to exit Lebanon and enter it again from Syria - a procedure which is nowadays impossible for many people.¹⁵⁷

Paying 200 USD or providing the required documents in order to renew the residence permit is impossible for many Syrians; hence, they cannot renew their permits and stay in Lebanon illegally.¹⁵⁸ According to Amnesty International, there have been cases where the residence permit has not been renewed even though all documents and payments have been in order. Some refugees interviewed by the organization stated that the GS did not believe that they were not working and would not renew their permits.¹⁵⁹ According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), especially working age men have been denied renewal of their residence permit unless they have a sponsor.¹⁶⁰

There are no official statistics of how many of the refugees have a residence permit, but according to international agencies working with Syrian refugees most of them do not have a residence permit.¹⁶¹ Norwegian Refugee Council estimates that in early 2016, 53 to 70 per cent of Syrian refugees did not have a valid residence permit.¹⁶²

3.7. Residence permit for PRS

PRS can also get a residence permit to Lebanon and previously they needed to pay 200 USD/year in order to renew it. This was too much for many and hence many did not renew the permit.¹⁶³ Also according to UNRWA, many PRS did not seek to renew their residence permits because of the cost or because they do not want to be in touch with the GS because of fear of arrest or deportation and because the process takes a lot of time.¹⁶⁴ According to Amnesty International's report, some PRS in Lebanon have not been allowed to renew their residency.¹⁶⁵ PRS cannot in practice get a sponsor in Lebanon.¹⁶⁶

According to UNRWA, since October 2015 Palestinians did not have to pay the 200 USD fee in order to renew their residency in Lebanon. This rule was renewed in

¹⁵⁵ HRW January 2016, p. 24

¹⁵⁶ Amnesty International June 2015, p. 14, 16; IOM

¹⁵⁷ Freedom Fund April 2016, p. 18; HRW January 2016, p. 19–20

¹⁵⁸ UNHCR April 7, 2015

¹⁵⁹ Amnesty International June 2015, p. 15, 18

¹⁶⁰ HRW January 2016, pp. 13–14

¹⁶¹ HRW January 2016, p. 10

¹⁶² NRC April 2016, p. 10

¹⁶³ Aina

¹⁶⁴ UNRWA April 2016, p. 3

¹⁶⁵ Amnesty International July 2014, p. 15

¹⁶⁶ Aina; UNRWA



March 2016. Hence, if a person has entered Lebanon before May 2014 and has a residence permit, he or she can renew the permit for free.¹⁶⁷

According to Lebanese and international aid workers working with PRS in Lebanon and interviewed by HRW, almost all of PRS, as well as Syrian refugees, were without legal status in Lebanon in 2015.¹⁶⁸ According to Norwegian Refugee Council, in early 2016 only 14% of PRS had valid residence permits.¹⁶⁹ There are no official statistics on people without residence permits. It remains to be seen if the change made by Lebanon in October 2015 concerning renewing residence permits for PRS will affect this.

3.8. Safety in Lebanon and refoulement of Syrian refugees and PRS

Refugee settlements can be raided by Lebanese security forces. Raids, arrests of those refugees that are in Lebanon without residence permits and checkpoints have become common since August 2014 after the clashes between the Lebanese army and Isis and Jabhat Fath al-Sham (previously Jabhat al-Nusra), armed groups fighting in Syria.¹⁷⁰

If a person, a Syrian refugee or a PRS, is caught at a check point without a residence permit, the consequences might vary. It is possible that nothing happens to the person, he or she might be arrested for two weeks and investigated or given a departure order or be threatened with it. According to UNRWA, at least when it comes to PRS, the above mentioned departure orders have not been implemented. Refugees interviewed by HRW have reported mistreatment, such as beatings while arrested or in detention. In addition, a person's papers can be sent to the Syrian-Lebanese border where the person would then have to pick them up. Many are scared to do it as there is fear that he or she would be asked to leave the country.¹⁷¹

If refugees or PRS are in Lebanon illegally, it can be harder for them to move in and out of the Palestinian refugee camps as they need a permit for it. Permit holders often need to have legal status in Lebanon. UNRWA has observed that especially adult males are at risk of detention.¹⁷²

Those refugees that do not have a residence permit cannot report crimes against them to the authorities as they will check first the person's legal status.¹⁷³

According to HBS, it is more in Hizbollah's interests to control people and not to arrest them, though random arrests are not out of the question. Hizbollah and the Lebanese General Security (GS) can arrest Syrian refugees, though the GS would operate through official channels.¹⁷⁴

Because of the closeness of Hizbollah and the GS, Hizbollah can find anyone in Lebanon through the GS. According to Sari Hanafi, professor at the American Uni-

¹⁶⁷ UNRWA

¹⁶⁸ HRW January 2016, p. 7

¹⁶⁹ NRC April 2016, p. 10

¹⁷⁰ HRW January 2016, p. 15; ICG 23 February, 2016, pp. 9–10

¹⁷¹ UNRWA; UNRWA April 2016, p. 3; HRW January 2016, p. 15

¹⁷² UNRWA April 2016, p. 3; HRW January 2016, pp. 15–16

¹⁷³ HRW January 2016, pp. 21–22

¹⁷⁴ HBS



versity in Beirut, Hizbollah could find people in the Palestinian refugee camps as well. Lebanese security officials could not oppose Hizbollah. As a result, Hizbollah can be a threat to the Syrian refugees. It can kidnap people to its secret prison without publicity. Hizbollah does not deport Syrian refugees, but it can hand them over to the Syrian officials in Lebanon.¹⁷⁵

The Syrian secret service can operate in Lebanon through its contacts¹⁷⁶, for example political parties. The secret service can monitor people in Lebanon and report back to Syria. They also cooperate with the Lebanese army and the GS, they can for example get interrogation reports from them.¹⁷⁷

Syrian men who have fled the army to Lebanon can be afraid that Hizbollah could take them back to Syria. Therefore, they try to avoid Hizbollah. HBS has heard of a person who was on a wanted persons' list that was taken in Beqaa Valley and deported to Syria.¹⁷⁸

According to KAS, United Nations agencies in Lebanon and the Lebanese army can protect Syrian refugees from Hizbollah. Hizbollah does not want criticism from these and it is a very disciplined organization. Also, it has not made public statements against the refugees.¹⁷⁹

Most of the Syrian refugees are Sunni Muslims. According to KAS, they are afraid of Hizbollah. This fear is, however, different from the fear in Syria. There is more fear than actually things happening to the refugees, such as violence.¹⁸⁰ Also partners to UNHCR have reported of feelings of insecurity within refugee communities. They are often afraid of being arrested because they do not have valid residence permits.¹⁸¹ According to UNRWA 60% of PRS fear deportation from Lebanon, the highest number is found in Beqaa (83%).¹⁸²

According to IOM, refoulement does not happen if a person is registered at the UNHCR. IOM has not heard of any refoulement cases of PRS, though it sees only very few Palestinian cases.¹⁸³

According to UNRWA, there were cases of refoulement in May 2014 when a group of around 40 PRS were arrested in the Beirut International Airport for trying to leave Lebanon with allegedly falsified visa documents.¹⁸⁴ Recently, there have been few cases where PRS have been sent to the no-mans-land between Lebanon and Syria. Between June 2015 and April 2016 there were four such cases. However, because of international pressure, they were let back into Lebanon.¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁵ Hanafi

¹⁷⁶ The Syrian army was in Lebanon from 1976 until 2005, when it withdraw its forces. During the years tight connections with the countries' intelligence services and armies among others were formed.

¹⁷⁷ Hanafi

¹⁷⁸ HBS

¹⁷⁹ KAS

¹⁸⁰ KAS

¹⁸¹ UNHCR April 7, 2015

¹⁸² UNHCR 2016, p. 146

¹⁸³ IOM

¹⁸⁴ UNRWA April 2016, p. 3

¹⁸⁵ UNRWA



3.9. Acquiring Lebanese nationality

Syrian refugees and PRS face the same restrictions on acquiring Lebanese nationality as do PRL (see chapter 2.3).

3.10. Access to work

There have been a lot of Syrians working in Lebanon before the Syrian war. KAS estimates that there were about 400 000 Syrians working in Lebanon in professions that the Lebanese were not willing to do, for example in olive harvest, agriculture or construction work.¹⁸⁶

Now Syrian refugees cannot in practice work legally in Lebanon. The Lebanese Ministry of Labor imposed employment restrictions on foreigners in Lebanon in 2015. It requires employers to justify formally that the given task or profession cannot be done by a Lebanese citizen.¹⁸⁷ Some Syrians have started their own businesses despite not having work permits.¹⁸⁸ Even if a refugee has a sponsor, it does not mean that he or she has a work permit.¹⁸⁹

When Syrians work, the wages are low.¹⁹⁰ ILO estimates that the average monthly income is less than the Lebanese minimum wage, less than 300 USD.¹⁹¹ There are a lot of Syrians working in the countryside in Lebanon and in smaller towns. People can wait for example on the street that someone takes them to work.¹⁹² At times work done by Syrian refugees amounts to forced labor. For example, land owners, or landlords anywhere in Lebanon, might force the people living on their land to work on their fields and a middle man can take part of the salary.¹⁹³

Syrian people working in Lebanon send a lot of their earnings to Syria.¹⁹⁴

Refugee women who work can be prone to harassment and abuse. Especially when women are the heads of households they might have to continue working despite exploitation. Sexual harassment at work is not prohibited by law in Lebanon. Women workers might be more preferred by employers as they get paid less and are easier to control.¹⁹⁵

3.11. PRS's access to work

The same restrictions that are in place concerning Syrian refugees also apply to PRS.¹⁹⁶ The situation of PRS is more difficult than for PRL, since PRS need to pay fees for work permits and more profession (several administrative and commercial

¹⁸⁶ KAS

¹⁸⁷ KAS

¹⁸⁸ KAS. The number unemployed in Lebanon has doubled from 1990 to 2010, when it stood at almost 9%. In 2010 youth unemployment (people aged between 15 and 24) was estimated to be 34%. Women's unemployment rate was estimated to be 18%. ILO 2015, p. 21.

¹⁸⁹ HRW January 2016, p. 23

¹⁹⁰ KAS

¹⁹¹ ILO 2015, p. 37

¹⁹² IOM

¹⁹³ Freedom Fund April 2016, p. 14

¹⁹⁴ IOM

¹⁹⁵ HRW January 2016, pp. 27–28

¹⁹⁶ KAS



professions) are prohibited to them than for PRL. Only 48% of PRS are working. Men are almost twice as much likely to work as women.¹⁹⁷

Over half of PRS families do not have any family members who work. The situation varies between areas, the percentage is the highest in north of Lebanon and Beqaa and lowest in the capital, Beirut. Also households headed by women are more likely to have no family members working (80% of the households).¹⁹⁸

3.12. Housing and living expenses

The Lebanese government has not allowed UNHCR or other agencies to set up formal refugee camps for people fleeing Syria. Syrians often rent apartments, warehouses and garages with other families to live in. At the end of June 2016, 57% of Syrian refugees lived in apartments, 27% in substandard buildings and 16% in informal settlements. Lease agreements can be vague and upholding them might lead to abuse. Rented places are not always adequate in terms of electricity, water or ventilation.¹⁹⁹

Some people live in camp-like tent settlement, of which there are 1,800 to 2,600 in Beqaa Valley alone for example, and pay rent for this kind of accommodation as well.²⁰⁰ In military-sensitive areas, such as the areas close to the Syrian border in the Beqaa Valley refugees can be under threat of eviction.²⁰¹ In addition to Syrian refugees this applies to PRS as well.

Living expenses are higher in Lebanon than in Syria. In some places rents have increased even four times.²⁰² Some Syrians decide to return to Syria, because living in Lebanon has become too expensive²⁰³. People are running out of their savings that they might have taken with them from Syria.²⁰⁴ According to Freedom Fund, almost 80% of Syrian refugees have more than 200 USD debt and 40% have more than 600 USD debt.²⁰⁵ Taking on debt and saving on essential non-food items has grown significantly between 2012 and 2015.²⁰⁶

3.13. Housing and living expenses for PRS

UNRWA's cash assistance is the main source of income for PRS. The organization believes that some PRS have left Lebanon and returned to Syria because of the high living expenses and otherwise bad situation in Lebanon.²⁰⁷ 89% of PRS are poor and 9% are extremely poor.²⁰⁸ 63% of PRS are severely and 31% are moderately food insecure.²⁰⁹

¹⁹⁷ UNRWA 2016, pp. 180–181

¹⁹⁸ UNRWA 2015 (A), p. 15

¹⁹⁹ Freedom Fund April 2016, p. 19; UNHCR 10 August, 2016

²⁰⁰ Freedom Fund April 2016, p. 19

²⁰¹ UNHCR 5 May, 2015

²⁰² IOM; Freedom Fund April 2016, p. 19

²⁰³ Although according to a Western embassy, for example Damascus is expensive nowadays and the rents are high for people moving in there from elsewhere in Syria.

²⁰⁴ IOM

²⁰⁵ Freedom Fund April 2016, p. 19

²⁰⁶ Inter-Agency Coordination Lebanon September 13, 2016, p. 3

²⁰⁷ UNRWA

²⁰⁸ UNRWA 2016, p. 152

²⁰⁹ UNRWA 2016, p. 206



UNRWA has given a cash assistance of 27 USD per person and a housing assistance of 100 USD since February 2014. Due to funding shortages the housing assistance was suspended in July 2015. UNRWA started a new monthly assistance of 100 USD to replace these. It was distributed from March to June 2016.²¹⁰ In June 2016 it was announced that assistance of 100 USD per family to cover the basic needs will be extended until October 2016 and assistance 27 USD per person will continue until end of 2016.²¹¹

According to UNRWA, PRS are more vulnerable than the PRL.²¹² A lot of PRS live with PRL, most of them live in the Palestinian refugee camps²¹³ (according to UNRWA 55%²¹⁴), some live also in villages in Beqaa Valley where there are many Syrian refugees. There are different reasons why people would move to the camps. People might choose their location also if people from their area in Syria or their relatives live there already. Between the groups there can be some jealousy if PRS get more assistance than PRL.²¹⁵

Also UNRWA brings out personal contacts in the camps that get PRS moving in there. The rents in the camps are the cheapest in Lebanon. Also, if a person has entered Lebanon illegally, he or she might decide to live in the camps as the Lebanese authorities do not have control of them.²¹⁶ UNRWA only provides housing-related services in the 12 official camps.²¹⁷

The Palestinian refugee camps have become overcrowded. There is lack of electricity and water and difficulties in managing waste. The fact that many PRS and PRL are poor makes the situation even harder.²¹⁸ 46% of PRS report overcrowding in their accommodations. It is most frequent in Beqaa (67% of households).²¹⁹

If a PRS is legally in Lebanon he or she can change the place of residence freely. However, if they are being threatened their ability to move depends on the area. New people are often noticed in the camps. PRS move a lot inside Lebanon because they search for cheaper accommodation.²²⁰

There are also other reasons for movement inside Lebanon. For example, when UNRWA had evacuated Nahr al-Bared²²¹ refugee camp in order it to be demolished, it was taken over by PRS overnight who came to live there. In August 2015 during the fighting in Ain al-Hilwa refugee camp many PRS fled from there and moved to different places inside Lebanon. People also change their place of residence because of security reasons.²²²

²¹⁰ UNRWA April 2016, p. 3

²¹¹ UNRWA 15 June 2016

²¹² UNRWA. According to a survey by UNRWA and American University in Beirut published in 2015 extreme poverty is three times higher among PRS than PRL populations. Chaaban et al. 2015, p. 155.

²¹³ UNRWA. More details for the conditions in the camps see Chapter 2.5.

²¹⁴ UNRWA 2016, p. 141

²¹⁵ Aina

²¹⁶ UNRWA

²¹⁷ UNRWA 2016, p. 222

²¹⁸ Aina

²¹⁹ UNRWA 2016 p. 225

²²⁰ UNRWA

²²¹ For more information on the events in Nahr al-Bared, see International Crisis Group 1 March, 2012.

²²² <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/117-lebanon-s-palestinian-dilemma-the-struggle-over-nahr-al-bared.pdf>

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People also try to leave Beqaa Valley because the living conditions there are bad, especially in the winter. Partly due to bad housing conditions and inadequate sanitation and water services, people in Beqaa are more prone to acute illnesses. People can in general move to better areas, also outside the camps, if they have more salary. Finding better accommodation is not likely, since the work situation for Palestinians has not improved and it is harder to get more salary. People are allowed to access UNRWA's services from outside the camps but the physical distance can be a real obstacle. Also, social networks are not available outside the camps.²²³

3.14. Access to health care

According to KAS, Syrian refugees can only access primary health care in Lebanon. UNHCR assists with the fees, but not when it comes to secondary or tertiary health care. These are all free in Syria and people are entitled to these if they go back to Syria.²²⁴ According to UNHCR, it subsidizes secondary health care in 53 hospitals in Lebanon for Syrian refugees.²²⁵

According to information from January 2015, UNHCR covers 75% of the cost of the delivery of a baby for refugees. If one is not registered with UNHCR, deliveries at home are more common.²²⁶ There are not any treatments for cancer or orthopedic deformities in children available for Syrian refugees in Lebanon.²²⁷

According to some estimates, as many as 20% of refugees from Syria may have mental health disorders, though there are no statistics. According to a representative in Lebanon's Ministry of Public Health, the country does not have enough resources to provide enough mental health care. It is provided mainly by private companies and the refugees are dependent on aid from NGOs. However, even if they could financially, all people do not seek treatment, either because they do not see a need for it or because of fear of stigma.²²⁸

3.15. Access to health care for PRS

PRS are entitled to the same services provided by UNRWA as PRL. Access to the services might be their biggest obstacle in receiving health care. If a PRS does not have residence permit and is living in the Palestinian refugee camps in order to avoid the Lebanese authorities, it can be hard for him or her to access secondary or tertiary health care. In the camps there is only primary health care available. The camps are surrounded by Lebanese check points, hence, it is hard for people without permits to get out of the camps.²²⁹

According to UNRWA, 5% of PRS do not have access to UNRWA's hospitalization services. The most common reason is that the person has not registered at UNRWA. The cost of transportation and the distance to services were also mentioned as obstacles. Both of the latter reasons were most common in Beqaa.²³⁰

²²³ UNRWA; UNRWA 2016, p. 195

²²⁴ KAS

²²⁵ UNHCR 10 August, 2016

²²⁶ NRC January 2015, p. 20

²²⁷ UNHCR 10 August, 2016

²²⁸ Reuters 29 February 2016

²²⁹ UNRWA

²³⁰ UNRWA 2016, p. 202



UNRWA covers all of costs of the delivery of a baby for PRS.²³¹

3.16. Access to education

According to UNHCR, there are approximately 147,000 Syrian children at school in Lebanon, which is less than half of school-aged children. All of them are not necessarily at school all the time. For example some children might have to work during the school year. Syrian children work for example in agriculture.²³² Some people cannot reach the schools if they are too far away and if transportation would be too expensive. Some parents or older children do not want to cross checkpoints if they do not have residence permit in Lebanon.²³³ In September 2015, there were 200,000 refugee children in Lebanon who were not at school.²³⁴

In Lebanon the schools have two shifts for Syrian and Lebanese students. In the cities it is possible for Syrian children to attend Lebanese schools but the school does not have to take Syrian students in if the classes are already big.²³⁵

If refugee children or their parents do not have residence permit in Lebanon, the children can still attend Lebanese public schools. HRW has reported, however, that some children without the permit were denied access to schools.²³⁶

There have been campaigns and there are plans to get all refugee children to school, but so far these have not succeeded.²³⁷ Syrian refugees lack access to higher education in Lebanon.²³⁸

Many of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon come from the country side and they are not highly educated. For example, children's language skills are often on low level.²³⁹

3.17. Access to education for PRS

Education in UNRWA schools is free for PRS. Still not all children go to school; some families do not put their children to school, for example if they need them to work or help at home.²⁴⁰ Cost of schooling (transportation and materials for example) and need to work are the most common obstacles to schooling. Other reasons for not enrolling to a school are inability to register to a school, not liking school, low achievements, disabilities or illnesses and marriage.²⁴¹

88% of elementary school-aged children are at UNRWA's elementary schools, 70% of preparatory school-aged children are in preparatory schools and 36% of second-

²³¹ NRC January 2015, p. 20

²³² UNHCR 10 August, 2016; KAS

²³³ HRW January 2016, p. 31

²³⁴ UNICEF, Government of Lebanon, UNHCR 21 September 2015

²³⁵ KAS

²³⁶ HRW January 2016, p. 29–30

²³⁷ UNICEF, Government of Lebanon, UNHCR 21 September 2015

²³⁸ UNHCR 10 August, 2016

²³⁹ KAS

²⁴⁰ UNRWA

²⁴¹ UNRWA 2016, p. 169



ary school-aged children are in secondary schools. School attendance is lower outside the Palestinian refugee camps. Therefore, costs such as transportation might create an obstacle for those children to attend.²⁴²

UNRWA's schools used to have two shifts, morning and afternoon, where PRL and PRS students were separated. Now the organization is decreasing them and only four schools have two shifts, others have mixed classes. In this way UNRWA hopes to tackle bullying and discrimination faced by PRS at school.²⁴³

If a PRS is in Lebanon without a valid residence permit, the person will not get his or her exams approved by the Ministry of Education, not even if the person did the exams in an UNRWA school. However, they can attend to the exams. The situation improved slightly from last year because this year, in 2016, students were informed in advance that they could sit for exams.²⁴⁴ The situation still leads to the fact that PRS children cannot study after finishing schools upheld by UNRWA.²⁴⁵

3.18. Syrian refugee and PRS children

3.18.1. Birth certificates

Both Syrian refugees and PRS can face difficulties if they do not have a valid residence permit. Then, for example, a person cannot get marriage, divorce or birth certificates. Growing up without birth certificates poses people to protection concerns. It can also decrease the ability to get services offered only to family units. According to a survey by UNHCR in 2014, 72% of the refugee children born in Lebanon did not have birth certificates.²⁴⁶ Norwegian Refugee Council researched birth registration also in 2014 and found that 92% of the refugees they interviewed could not register their children's birth in Lebanon.²⁴⁷

One does not need to have a residence permit in order to start the birth registration process, but many families decide not to approach authorities if they do not have the permit. A marriage certificate of the parents, on the other hand, is needed for birth registration. 14% of people interviewed by Norwegian Refugee Council did not have any document to prove the marriage. NRC advises refugees to start the birth registration procedure (up to step 3a²⁴⁸) in Lebanon, so that they can finish it eventually at some point in Syria.²⁴⁹

According to HRW and NRC, some refugees have returned to Syria in order to get birth certificates.²⁵⁰ Some refugees pay for another person to get identity documents from Syria and pay a broker to get fake documents. If refugees get documents from Syria through a middle man, the documents can be fake but the refugee does not necessarily know this.²⁵¹

²⁴² UNRWA 2016, p. 167

²⁴³ UNRWA

²⁴⁴ UNRWA

²⁴⁵ UNRWA April 2016, p. 3

²⁴⁶ UNRWA; UNRWA April 2016, p. 3; UNHCR March 2015, p. 4

²⁴⁷ NRC January 2015, p. 6

²⁴⁸ For the outline of the procedure, see NRC January 2015, p. 13.

²⁴⁹ NRC January 2015, p. 7, 12, 21

²⁵⁰ HRW January 2016, p. 33; NRC January 2015, pp. 24–25

²⁵¹ NRC January 2015, p. 25



PRS without residence permits also cannot have an exam approved at school. Even if they have done the exams in UNRWA's school, the Ministry of Education will not approve them and hence, they will not get into a university.²⁵²

3.18.2. Child labor

Children of Syrian refugees as well as of Palestinian refugees exiting Syria increasingly need to work in order to earn money for the family. Their demand is higher than for adults as they are cheaper labor force. Families might put children instead of adults to work because children are not as often stopped at checkpoints. The Freedom Fund reported in April 2016 that some children work without getting paid. As much as 60 to 70 per cent of refugee children are estimated to be working. In the Beqaa Valley the rate is higher. Children living in tented settlements might be forced to work for the farmer hosting the camp or a child can be sent by the farmer to close by place to work. A person coordinating the camp might take a part of the child's salary.²⁵³

The work that children do depends on the area where they live; in cities the work can be begging, selling small things such as tissues, cleaning shoes or car wind-screens on the street, but they can work also in more formal work places such as construction sites and coffee shops. There have also been allegations of children being forced to work in the sex industry. In the country side children often work in agriculture. Most of the work is done in places that are unsafe and unsuitable for children.²⁵⁴

3.18.3. Early marriage

Early marriage is becoming more and more common among Syrian and PRS refugee girls. It has been practiced to some extent in rural parts of Syria but families seek early marriage for their daughters in Lebanon as well. The reasons are the same: to protect the girl from sexual harassment, to provide economic security for her and to reduce the family's economic burden. If married underage, girls are more prone to domestic violence and abuse. The possibilities to leave a forced marriage are limited.²⁵⁵

3.19. Attitudes towards Syrian refugees and PRS in Lebanon

The economic consequences of Syrian refugees to Lebanon have been substantial and they are being blamed for the bad economy. The attitudes towards refugees are negative.²⁵⁶

Lebanese people can distinguish Syrians from their accent. The two groups often live their lives separately and might be in contact only at school²⁵⁷ or when paying

²⁵² UNRWA

²⁵³ Freedom Fund April 2016, pp. 7–8, 18; HRW January 2016, p. 25

²⁵⁴ Freedom Fund April 2016, pp. 7–8; HRW January 2016, pp. 25–26

²⁵⁵ Freedom Fund April 2016, p. 10

²⁵⁶ Hanafi

²⁵⁷ Although double shifts at school separate Syrian and Lebanese children from one another.



the rent. For example in Beqaa Valley, where there are a lot of Syrian refugees, they live separately from the Lebanese people.²⁵⁸

According to UNRWA, PRS face the same discrimination in Lebanon as Syrian refugees. Also, the Syrian accent can be distinguished from the Lebanese one. There is discrimination and bullying also at UNRWA's schools and the organization is trying to answer this by having more mixed classes.²⁵⁹

4. Security situation in Lebanon

Overall the political polarization has increased in Lebanon. People do not trust politics as much as before. The Lebanese army's future role is unclear and the militarization of the society has grown.²⁶⁰ The Sunni population in Lebanon has increased as a result of the refugee influx, but they have not had joint demands. KAS does not see a serious growth in religious antagonism in Lebanon as it was already existent before the war in Syria.²⁶¹ Most of the tensions between people have been about resources: water and electricity of which there is even more scarcity now than before.²⁶²

The people in Lebanon are divided in their views on the Syrian civil war. Many people see it as important for their country that the Syrian army has the areas close to Lebanese border under its control as they are afraid of Isis and other extremist groups.²⁶³ There are tensions between Sunnis and Shias in Lebanon, but there has not been fighting except in parts of the country.²⁶⁴

The situation is most tense in Aarsal. According to HBS, people do not travel there that much anymore since it can be threatening to civilians as well. For example, there is random firing between different groups on the fields. Also, the Lebanese army and Hizbollah have training camps among civilian neighborhoods.²⁶⁵ There have also been tensions between the Syrian refugees and the local Sunni population.²⁶⁶

Different armed groups fighting in Syria²⁶⁷, such as the FSA, are present in Aarsal.²⁶⁸ Also Jabhat Fath al-Sham and Isis are present there and there is fighting. Hizbollah and the Lebanese army cooperate in the area and they have managed to keep things relatively calm.²⁶⁹

²⁵⁸ KAS

²⁵⁹ UNRWA

²⁶⁰ HBS

²⁶¹ KAS

²⁶² KAS

²⁶³ Western embassy

²⁶⁴ Hanafi

²⁶⁵ HBS

²⁶⁶ HBS

²⁶⁷ On recruitment to armed groups fighting in Syria, see Finnish Immigration Service's report on military service, National Defense Forces, Armed groups supporting Syrian regime and armed opposition, 23 August 2016.

http://www.migri.fi/download/69645_Report_Military_Service_Final.pdf?5941c18d32d3d388

²⁶⁸ HBS

²⁶⁹ KAS



Fighting in Syria has at times spilled over to Lebanon, for example in March 2016 Isis and Jabhat Fath al-Sham (at the time Jabhat al-Nusra) were fighting in Ras Baalbek and Aarsal, in Beqaa Valley.²⁷⁰

Lebanese officials, including the Lebanese army have ordered refugees living close to military-sensitive areas in the Beqaa Valley to relocate. For example in 2015 between January and March 6,800 people had to move to another location, almost as many were at risk of eviction. There is a lack of alternative shelters for refugees.²⁷¹

4.1. Palestinian refugee camps

The security situation in Palestinian refugee camps has not changed according to Hanafi.²⁷² Most of the problems, as elsewhere in the country, have to do with scarce resources and humanitarian issues that have decreased even further.²⁷³

The refugee camps are lawless environments where there are no Lebanese authorities and the rights of the people cannot be guaranteed. There are criminals, Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians, who have moved to the camps in order to escape from the authorities.²⁷⁴ Armed and political groups can abuse the vulnerability of Palestinian youth and children and their lack of positive future prospects in recruiting.²⁷⁵

The security situation varies in different camps. Each camp has a security committee in which there are representatives of different parties. The committees and the Lebanese police cooperate, for example the committee can look for people who are wanted by the police.²⁷⁶

The situation is bad in Ain al-Hilwa refugee camp. Islamist groups and Fatah have been in several clashes with each other.²⁷⁷ For example in July 2015 Palestinian groups Jund al-Sham and Fatah fought there.²⁷⁸ There was also a grenade attack into the home of a member of the Palestinian Security Forces in September 2016.²⁷⁹

Palestinian refugee camps have become kind of safe havens also for extremist groups fighting in Syria.²⁸⁰ According to Hanafi, the groups do not pose a threat to civilians, because they are more interested in fighting in Syria than concerning themselves with issues in Lebanon.²⁸¹

Palestinians can in general move to live in another camp, except if they are wanted by the Lebanese authorities. Islamists, however, cannot move to another camp.²⁸²

²⁷⁰ Reuters 28 March 2016

²⁷¹ UNHCR 5 May, 2015

²⁷² Hanafi

²⁷³ KAS

²⁷⁴ UNRWA

²⁷⁵ UNRWA April 2016, p. 4

²⁷⁶ Aina

²⁷⁷ Hanafi; Aina

²⁷⁸ Aljazeera 29 July 2015

²⁷⁹ Daily Star (The) 27 September 2016

²⁸⁰ Western embassy

²⁸¹ Hanafi

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