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Readmission of Palestinian Refugees from Lebanon

Report based on a Fact Finding Mission to
Beirut, Lebanon, from 7 to 10 January 2020



Ministry of Immigration
and Integration

The Danish
Immigration Service

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Content

Disclaimer.....	2
Introduction and methodology.....	3
Abbreviations	5
Executive summary.....	6
1. Procedure for obtaining travel documents at Lebanese embassies for PRLs without travel documents.....	7
1.1. Procedure for PRLs with residence permit.....	7
1.2. Procedure for PRLs without residence permit	7
2. Procedure for return of PRLs with valid Palestinian travel documents	8
3. Processing return cases in practice	8
3.1. Prevalence of return of PRLs to Lebanon	9
3.2. Negotiating return.....	10
3.3. Impact of involvement of foreign countries' authorities	11
3.4. The political context	11
Consulted sources.....	13
Oral sources	13
Written sources	13
Appendix 1: Meeting minutes.....	14
Meeting with Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants (MFA)	14
Meeting with diplomatic source (1),	15
Meeting with diplomatic source (2)	17
Appendix 2: Terms of Reference	20

Disclaimer

This brief report is written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology.¹ The report is based on approved minutes from meetings with carefully selected sources in Beirut, Lebanon. Statements from the sources are used in the report, and all statements are referenced.

This report is not and does not purport to be a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed in the report and should be weighed against other available country of origin information on Lebanon's readmission of Palestinian refugees from Lebanon (PRLs).

The report at hand does not include any policy recommendations or analysis. The information in the report does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service (DIS).

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

¹ European Union: European Asylum Support Office (EASO), *EASO Country of Origin Information report methodology*, June 2019, [url](#)

Introduction and methodology

This brief report focuses on stateless Palestinian refugees from Lebanon (PRL) and their possibility to re-enter Lebanon from a third country in which their application for asylum has been rejected. It is a follow-up to the report: *DIS: Lebanon - the Situation of Palestinian Refugees from Syria in Lebanon*, September 2019,² as regards information on readmission of PRLs to Lebanon.

The report at hand contains information on the possibility of re-entry both for PRLs who are in possession of Palestinian travel documents from Lebanon and those who are not.

The report is the product of a fact finding mission conducted by the Country of Origin Information (COI) Unit of DIS to Beirut, Lebanon, from 7 to 10 January 2020.

The purpose of the mission was to collect updated information on recurring issues identified in cases pertaining to rejected PRL asylum seekers. Taking this into account, the terms of reference (ToR) was written by DIS in consultation with the Secretariat of the Refugee Appeals Board ('Flygtningenævnets sekretariat'). An advisory group on COI ('Referencegruppen') was also informed about the mission and the ToR before the departure.³ The ToR is included at the end of the report (Appendix 2).

Prior to the mission, sources were identified on the basis of ToR and the expertise, merit and role of each source relevant to the mission. During the mission, the delegation consulted four interlocutors in connection with the topic addressed in this report comprising the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants (MFA), two diplomatic sources and one international organisation in Lebanon.

The sources were briefed about the purpose of the mission and informed that their statements would be included in a publicly available report in accordance with their preferred referencing. The meeting minutes were forwarded to each source for approval with the possibility to amend, comment or correct the statement. The Lebanese MFA and the two diplomatic sources approved their statements. Since the international organisation did not have much information on the issue of readmission of PRLs, the information from this source was used as background information and no minutes from the meeting with this source is included in the report.

The report is a synthesis of the sources' statements and therefore does not include all details and nuances of each statement. In the report, care has been taken to present the views of the sources as accurately and transparently as possible. The statements of all sources are found in their full extent in Appendix 1 of this report.

During the interviews, the sources may have highlighted issues that are not addressed in ToR. As these issues could be relevant to refugee status determination, they are included in the meeting minutes in Appendix 1, but they are not addressed in the report.

² DIS, *Lebanon - The Situation of Palestinian Refugees from Syria in Lebanon, Report based on a Fact Finding Mission to Beirut, Lebanon, from 30 June to 7 July 2019*, September 2019, [url](#)

³ The group consists of the Danish Refugee Council, Amnesty International in Denmark, the Danish Institute for Human Rights, Dignity, representatives of two Christian organisations ("Europa Missionen" and "Åbne Døre"), the National Commissioner of Police and the Danish Bar and Law Society (representing asylum lawyers).

For the sake of reader-friendliness, transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the meeting minutes in Appendix 1 have been given consecutive numbers which are used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes.

The Danish Embassy in Beirut provided valuable assistance in the planning and execution phases of the mission.

The research and editing of this report was finalised on 12 February 2019.

The report can be accessed from the website of DIS and is thus available to all stakeholders in the refugee status determination process as well as to the general public.

Abbreviations

COI	Country of Origin Information
DIS	Danish Immigration Service
EASO	European Asylum Support Office
GDGS	General Directorate of General Security
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants
PRL	Palestinian Refugees from Lebanon

Executive summary

Since the elections of May 2018, the Lebanese authorities have been reluctant to allow stateless Palestinian refugees from Lebanon (PRLs) residing abroad to return to Lebanon if they do not have a residence permit in the country in which they currently stay. This applies regardless of whether the return is to be carried out voluntarily or by force. The number of successful returns within this period has been highly limited.

Applications for new or renewal of Palestinian travel documents from Lebanon as well as issuance of laissez-passer to such PRLs are being put on hold by the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants (MFA).

The current practice is based on a political decision by the Lebanese MFA.

1. Procedure for obtaining travel documents at Lebanese embassies for PRLs without travel documents

1.1. Procedure for PRLs with residence permit

According to the Lebanese MFA, all PRLs living abroad can apply for and obtain a new travel document or have their expired travel document renewed at a Lebanese embassy, provided that they have a valid residence permit in their current country of residence. In such cases, even if the travel document have expired long time ago, it is possible for the individual to obtain a new travel document and travel to Lebanon without facing any difficulty. If a PRL does not have the documents required to obtain a new travel document (e.g. UNRWA registration, ID etc.), his/her family and relatives in Lebanon can obtain the required documents by power of attorney which can be granted through the embassy.⁴

1.2. Procedure for PRLs without residence permit

In the event a PRL is obliged to leave a foreign country due to the rejection of his/her asylum application or revoked residence permit, the individual's application for a new Palestinian travel document or a laissez-passer will be processed through a special procedure. In such cases, when the application for a new travel document or laissez-passer is submitted to a Lebanese embassy together with the required documents, the embassy will send the documents to the MFA's Foreigner Section in Lebanon. Here a committee will process the case and make a decision about whether the person should be issued a new travel document or laissez-passer.⁵

When processing such cases, the MFA will look at a number of issues such as whether the person entered his/her current country of residence illegally, which countries the individual stayed in on his/her way from Lebanon to the current country of residence etc. If a PRL for instance has stayed in Turkey for a while on his/her way to Denmark, the Lebanese authorities expect that he/she will be sent back to Turkey and not Lebanon.⁶

If the MFA approves the issuance of the travel document, the case will be forwarded to the General Directorate of General Security (GDGS) that will initiate an investigation about the person and check the PRL's identity and registration in Lebanon. The travel document will be issued by the GDGS as soon as the PRL's identity and his/her registration in Lebanon are confirmed. It takes a couple of days for the MFA to process a case and make a decision, and it takes maximum one month for the GDGS to investigate the person. It rarely happens (maybe one percent of all cases) that a case approved by the MFA will be rejected by the GDGS.⁷

If the application for a new travel document is rejected by the MFA, no document will be issued to the PRL by the MFA stating that the application has been rejected. If the MFA approves a case, but the GDGS on the

⁴ MFA: 1

⁵ MFA: 2

⁶ MFA: 6

⁷ MFA: 3

basis of its investigation does not find that the person should be allowed to re-enter Lebanon, the applicant will be issued a paper by the GDGS documenting the GDGS' rejection.⁸

The above-mentioned special procedure applies regardless of whether the individual is to return to Lebanon voluntarily or by force. The nature of return (voluntary or forced return) will not have any impact on the decision taken by the MFA.⁹

2. Procedure for return of PRLs with valid Palestinian travel documents

According to the consulted sources, in the event a PRL is a rejected asylum seeker or is compelled to leave a foreign country due to a revocation of his/her residence permit, a special permission/approval by the MFA and the GDGS is needed for him/her to be able to return to Lebanon. This applies even if the individual has a valid Lebanese Palestinian travel document¹⁰ and regardless of whether it is a voluntary or forced return.¹¹

No airline will allow a PRL (who does not have a legal residence in his/her current country of residence) to board their flights to Lebanon without an explicit permission to return from the MFA and the GDGS. This is because the airline will have to pay the cost of flying the person back to the country of departure if the Lebanese authorities do not let the person enter Lebanon.¹² This applies as well regardless of whether the return is taking place voluntary or by force.¹³

It was the perception of the diplomatic source (1) that the requirement for the special permission/approval to return to Lebanon is due to the fact that the Lebanese authorities wish to have the opportunity to review and approve any case of return. Without such permission, it is not possible to return any PRL to Lebanon.¹⁴

3. Processing return cases in practice

In an interview with the MFA in summer 2019, the ministry informed the delegation from DIS that *"...applications submitted by the authorities from a third country for return of PRLs, who are denied*

⁸ MFA: 7

⁹ MFA: 8

¹⁰ MFA 4; the diplomatic source (1): 12; the diplomatic source (2): 23

It is implicit here that it will appear on the individual's passport whether he/she has stayed legally in the country from where he is to return to Lebanon. Thus, even if a PRL residing abroad has a valid Palestinian travel document, he still needs a special permission to re-enter Lebanon if it does not appear on his/her passport or any other document that he has had a legal residence abroad. (*ed.*)

¹¹ The diplomatic source (2): 23

¹² MFA: 4; the diplomatic source (2): 31

¹³ The diplomatic source (2): 31

¹⁴ The diplomatic source (1): 12

residence permit in those countries and who do not have valid travel documents from Lebanon, are being processed [on a] case-by-case [basis]; however, only humanitarian cases are given priority.”¹⁵

When approving the minutes from the meeting of 8 January 2020, the MFA confirmed that the situation remained the same.¹⁶

The diplomatic source (2) advised that Lebanese authorities were very reluctant to allow PRLs to return to Lebanon if they did not have a residence permit in their current country of residence (e.g. rejected asylum seekers or persons whose residency permit have been revoked).¹⁷

According to the diplomatic source (1), since the Lebanese elections in May 2018, the Lebanese MFA has stopped issuing travel documents to PRLs residing abroad whose asylum applications have been rejected or whose residence permits have been revoked in the foreign country where they are staying.¹⁸ Similarly, the diplomatic source (2) mentioned that readmission of such PRLs has been completely stalled by the Lebanese authorities since May 2018.¹⁹

When PRLs who do not have a residence permit in a foreign country (i.e. rejected asylum seekers or those whose residence permit has been revoked) go to a Lebanese embassy to apply for new or renewal of their Palestinian travel documents, their cases will be put on hold by the MFA.²⁰ The diplomatic source (1) had been informed by the MFA that the priority in processing these cases was given to humanitarian cases.²¹

3.1. Prevalence of return of PRLs to Lebanon

As far as the diplomatic source (1) knew, since May 2018, no European country had succeeded in returning rejected PRL asylum seekers to Lebanon, whether it was a voluntary or forced return.²² Other European colleagues had informed the source that it was likewise impossible for their respective countries to deport rejected PRL asylum seekers to Lebanon. The source had not heard any European colleague stating that his or her country did not have a problem in this regard.²³

The diplomatic source (2) was only aware of one particular case in which a foreign country was able to return a PRL without valid Palestinian travel documents to Lebanon. The return was in this instance allowed because the returnee had committed crimes which was reported extensively in the press. The Lebanese authorities thus felt compelled to allow him to return to Lebanon in order to protect the reputation of Lebanon abroad.²⁴ However, the diplomatic source (1) opined that committing serious crimes abroad would lessen the possibility of obtaining permission to return to Lebanon. In general, Lebanon does not want criminal refugees to return to the country, according to the source.²⁵

¹⁵ DIS, *Lebanon - The Situation of Palestinian Refugees from Syria in Lebanon, Report based on a Fact Finding Mission to Beirut, Lebanon, from 30 June to 7 July 2019*, September 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶ MFA: 5

¹⁷ The diplomatic source (2): 21

¹⁸ The diplomatic source: 10

¹⁹ The diplomatic source (2): 24

²⁰ The diplomatic source (1): 11; the diplomatic source (2): 22

²¹ The diplomatic source (1): 11

²² The diplomatic source (1): 13

²³ The diplomatic source (1): 16

²⁴ The diplomatic source (2): 26

²⁵ The diplomatic source (1): 20

After the meeting with the delegation on 9 January 2020, the diplomatic source (1) had received information that one European country had lately succeeded in returning 18 rejected PRL asylum seekers to Lebanon, and few other European countries had also returned a few (max. five) PRLs. All these cases were voluntary returns.²⁶

The diplomatic source (2) confirmed this information about the recent successful cases of return mentioned by the diplomatic source (1). He added that these cases were most likely voluntary return. However, the source underlined that there were sometimes confusions and misunderstandings about what was meant by 'voluntary' in the reported cases of return: some countries/organisations define 'voluntary' return as following the authority's decision on not to grant residence permit; others perceive the term as a choice to return even though the person has a residence permit and is thus not compelled to return. There are also countries which only operate with 'assisted' and 'not assisted' returns. Against this background, one could doubt the nature of the reported voluntary returns as it is not entirely clear what is meant by 'voluntary'.²⁷

3.2. Negotiating return

According to the MFA, the decisions on issuing travel documents to rejected PRL asylum seekers and allowing them to return to Lebanon are to be discussed in bilateral meetings between the MFA and the foreign countries' representatives in Lebanon.²⁸

The diplomatic source (2) was aware of one European country that had return agreements with Lebanon at the time of the interview. The source also knew of another European country that had negotiated a return agreement which was never signed.²⁹

The source mentioned that there was a legal framework for EU countries to refer to when negotiating return of PRLs with the Lebanese authorities. In this connection, the source referred to Lebanon's commitment to accept returnees under article 68 and 69 of the Euro-Mediterranean agreement between EU and Lebanon (2006/356).³⁰ Under the agreement, individual EU member states and Lebanon can bilaterally negotiate return arrangements for the readmission of third country nationals.³¹

The source also mentioned that article 25a of EU Regulation 2019/1155 regarding the EU Visa Code, which came into force on 2 February 2020,³² addresses cooperation on readmission of third country nationals from EU member states to third countries. By linking returns from EU countries with EU visas issued to third country citizens, article 25a gives EU member states a tool to limit the number of visas granted to citizens from a certain country if that country is not willing to take back its own citizens or individuals with the right to residency in the country in question. Furthermore, if the EU Commission is informed by a member state about a third country being reluctant to accept forcefully returned individuals, the EU Commission can

²⁶ The diplomatic source (1): 13

²⁷ The diplomatic source (2): 33

²⁸ MFA: 9

²⁹ The diplomatic source (2): 27

³⁰ Official Journal of the European Union, *Council Decision of 14 February 2006*, 30 May 2006, [url](#)

³¹ The diplomatic source (2): 28

³² Regulation (EU) 2019/1155 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 amending Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas (Visa Code), [url](#)

enact sanctions within the visa code against that country by using article 25a of the EU Regulation 2019/1155.³³

Moreover, since September 2019, Immigration Liaison Officers representing the EU or individual member states have been allowed to assist in the return of third country citizens to their countries of origin, in accordance with the EU Regulation 2019/1240.³⁴ The regulation furthermore stipulates that third countries must cooperate with the EU and EU member states on return issues.³⁵

3.3. Impact of involvement of foreign countries' authorities

The diplomatic source (1) had been informed by the MFA that in cases of voluntary return of PRLs, in which no foreign authorities were involved in the process of return, the MFA would approve the returns to Lebanon. However, the source was not able to confirm whether this was implemented in practice as the source only had information about returns in which the authorities in the source's country had been involved.³⁶

According to the diplomatic source (2), if the authorities of a foreign country are involved in the process of return, the Lebanese MFA tends not to approve the issuance of travel documents (if the person does not have a valid Palestinian travel document) or the permission to return. It is thus only in cases where PRLs want to return voluntarily without the involvement of the authorities of the current country of residence that the PRLs may have a chance to obtain travel documents and a permission to return.³⁷

3.4. The political context

According to the diplomatic source (1), the above-mentioned practice by the Lebanese MFA is based on an order from the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants,³⁸ Gebran Gerge Bassil. The order stipulates that no return of refugees from abroad should be approved by the MFA. The minister's argument was that Lebanon already had enough refugees and that it did not receive sufficient support from the international community with regards to the large number of refugees in Lebanon. During the elections in May 2018, one of the main promises of the minister and his party, the Free Patriotic Movement, was to reduce the number of refugees in Lebanon. According to the source, the Lebanese government is generally not unhappy about PRLs leaving the country.³⁹

³³ The diplomatic source (2): 29;

When approving the minutes, the source also referred to information from the Schengen Visa Info website, which according to the source provides background information on the new revised visa code and the link between article 24 and the newly amended article 25 a; Schengen Visa Info, *EU to Penalize Non-Cooperative Countries on Migration by Restricting Visas*, 10 June 2019, [url](#)

³⁴ Regulation (EU) 2019/1240 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on the creation of a European network of immigration liaison officers, [url](#)

³⁵ The diplomatic source (2): 30

³⁶ The diplomatic source (1): 17

³⁷ The diplomatic source (2): 23

³⁸ As of 21 January 2020, a new government was formed in Lebanon, and Nassif Hitti, a former ambassador to the Arab League, was named foreign minister with the backing of the Free Patriotic Movement. The New York Times, *Lebanon Forms Government With Backing of Hezbollah and Allies*, 21 January 2020 [url](#)

³⁹ The diplomatic source (1): 14

The diplomatic source (2) stated that the line of reasoning of the Lebanese authorities was that PRLs living in other countries, who did not have valid residence permits in those countries, were an issue for those countries and not for Lebanon.⁴⁰

The diplomatic source (2) found it unlikely that the government's strict policy towards refugees in Lebanon would change in the foreseeable future given the current political climate and fiscal challenges that Lebanon is currently facing.⁴¹

⁴⁰ The diplomatic source (2): 25

⁴¹ The diplomatic source (2): 24

Consulted sources

Oral sources

The Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants, MFA

Diplomatic source (1)

Diplomatic source (2)

Written sources

Official Journal of the European Union, *Council Decision of 14 February 2006*, 30 May 2006, http://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/8c9c2e85-2f0d-4b74-b313-f888432a42e6.0005.02/DOC_1, accessed 12 February 2020

Regulation (EU) 2019/1155 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 amending Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas (Visa Code), https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2019.188.01.0025.01.ENG, accessed 12 February 2020

Regulation (EU) 2019/1240 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on the creation of a European network of immigration liaison officers, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2019/1240/oj>, accessed 12 February 2020

The New York Times, *Lebanon Forms Government With Backing of Hezbollah and Allies*, 21 January 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/reuters/2020/01/21/world/middleeast/21reuters-lebanon-crisis-government-baabda.html>, accessed 12 February 2020

The Danish Immigration Service, *Lebanon - The Situation of Palestinian Refugees from Syria in Lebanon, Report based on a Fact Finding Mission to Beirut, Lebanon, from 30 June to 7 July 2019*, September 2019, https://www.nyidanmark.dk/-/media/Files/US/Landerappporter/Landerappport_Lebanon_FFM_rapport_2019.pdf?la=da&hash=B84C33D9CA5FA5D95E2D4FB2BF29E1820F079E78, accessed 12 February 2020

Schengen Visa Info, *EU to Penalize Non-Cooperative Countries on Migration by Restricting Visas*, 10 June 2019, <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/eu-to-penalize-non-cooperative-countries-on-migration-by-restricting-visas/>, accessed 12 February 2020

Appendix 1: Meeting minutes

Meeting with Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants (MFA), the Foreigners Section, Beirut, 8 January 2020

About the source: The Foreigners Section of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants is in charge of the consular affairs of foreign citizens residing in Lebanon and of Palestinian refugees from Lebanon (PRL) living abroad. The section is among others responsible for processing requests received from Lebanese embassies abroad regarding PRLs residing abroad. The section is the link between Lebanese embassies and different government bodies inside Lebanon such as the General Directorate of General Security (GDGS), Ministry of Justice etc.

1. All Palestinian refugees from Lebanon (PRL) living abroad, who do not have Lebanese travel documents or whose travel documents have expired, can apply and obtain a new travel document at a Lebanese embassy provided that they have a valid residency permit in the foreign country of residence. In such cases, even if the travel document has expired long time ago, it is possible for the individual to obtain a new document and travel to Lebanon without facing any difficulty. If a PRL does not have the documents required to obtain a new travel document (e.g. UNRWA registration, ID etc.), his/her family and relatives in Lebanon can obtain the required documents by power of attorney, which can be granted through the embassy.
2. In the event a PRL is obliged to leave a foreign country of residence due to rejection of asylum application or revoked residence permit, the individual's application for a new Lebanese travel document for Palestinians or a laissez-passer will be processed through a special procedure. In such cases, when the application for a new travel document or laissez-passer is submitted to a Lebanese embassy together with the required documents (a copy of the old expired travel document, the Palestinian ID, a copy of the UNRWA card etc.), the embassy will send the documents to the MFA's Foreigner Section in Lebanon. Here a committee will study the case and make a decision about whether the person should be issued a new travel document or laissez-passer to be allowed to return to Lebanon.
3. If the MFA approves the issuance of the travel document, the case will be forwarded to the GDGS, which will make an investigation about the person and check the PRL's identity and registration in Lebanon. The travel document will be issued by the GDGS as soon as the PRL's identity and his/her registration in Lebanon are confirmed. It takes a couple of days for the MFA to study a deportation case from a foreign country and make a decision and it takes maximum one month for the GDGS to make an investigation about the person. It rarely happens (maybe 1 percent of cases) that a case approved by the MFA will be rejected by the GDGS.
4. Even if a PRL, who is obliged to leave a foreign country due to rejection of his/her asylum application or revocation of his residence permit, has still a valid Lebanese Palestinian travel document, an approval by the MFA and the GDGS is needed for him/her to be able to return to Lebanon. In such cases, no airlines will accept to fly the individual back to Lebanon without an approval from the MFA

and the GDGS as the airlines will have to pay the cost of flying the person back to the country of departure if the Lebanese authorities do not accept to let the person enter Lebanon.

5. When approving the minutes, the MFA stated that processing of PRL cases still took place in the same way as described by the source in summer 2019. During a fact finding mission to Lebanon in summer 2019, the MFA informed the delegation from the Danish Immigration Service that “...*applications submitted by the authorities from a third country for return of PRL, who are denied residence permit in those countries and who do not have valid travel documents from Lebanon, are being processed case by case; however only humanitarian cases are given priority.*”⁴²
6. When studying a case, the MFA will look at issues such as, whether the person entered his/her current country of residence illegally, which countries s/he stayed on his/her way from Lebanon to the country of residence etc. For instance, if a PRL has stayed in Turkey for a while on his way to Denmark, s/he is expected to be sent back to Turkey and not Lebanon.
7. In the event the application for a new travel document is rejected by the MFA, no document will be issued by the MFA stating that the application has been rejected, whilst the GDGS will issue a paper to the applicant if they on the basis of their investigation find that the person should be allowed to re-enter Lebanon.
8. The requirement of processing cases through the above-mentioned special procedure and the outcome are not dependent on whether the individual wants to return to Lebanon voluntarily or if he is to be sent back by force.
9. The decisions on issuing travel documents in connection with rejected PRL asylum cases and allowing the rejected PRL asylum applicants to return to Lebanon are to be discussed in bilateral meetings between the MFA and the foreign countries’ representative in Lebanon.

Meeting with diplomatic source (1), Beirut, 9 January 2020

Issuance/renewal of travel documents to Palestinians from Lebanon at Lebanese embassies

10. As far as the source is informed, since the Lebanese elections in May of 2018, the Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants (MFA) has stopped issuing travel documents for Palestinians from Lebanon (PRL) abroad whose asylum applications have been rejected or whose residence permits have been revoked in a foreign country.
11. When PRLs, who do not have residence permit in a foreign country (i.e. rejected asylum seekers or those whose residence permit has been revoked) go to a Lebanese embassy abroad to apply for new or renewal of their Palestinian travel documents, their cases will be sent to the MFA to be studied.

⁴² DIS, *Lebanon - The Situation of Palestinian Refugees from Syria in Lebanon, Report based on a Fact Finding Mission to Beirut, Lebanon, from 30 June to 7 July 2019*, September 2019, [url](#)

However, these cases end up being put on hold by the MFA. The source mentioned that he had been informed by the MFA that the priority in processing these cases was given to humanitarian cases.

12. Every deportation case regarding PRLs must be approved by the Lebanese MFA in order for the authorities of a foreign country to send rejected PRL asylum seekers to Lebanon. This applies even if the rejected asylum seeker has a valid Palestinian travel document from Lebanon. This is due to Lebanon's wish to have the opportunity to review and approve any case of return. Without such permission, it is not possible to return any PRL to Lebanon.
13. As far as the source knew, since May 2018, no European countries had succeeded in returning rejected PRL asylum seekers to Lebanon, whether it was a voluntary or forced return.
When approving the minutes, the source advised that after the meeting with the delegation on 9 January 2020, he had received information that one European country had lately succeeded in returning 18 rejected PRL asylum seekers to Lebanon, and a few other European countries had also returned a few (max. five) PRLs. All these cases were voluntary returns.
14. The above-mentioned practice is based on an order from the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants, Gebran Gerge Bassil,⁴³ not to approve any return of refugees from abroad. The minister's argument is that Lebanon already has enough refugees and that it does not receive sufficient support from the international community with regards to the large number of refugees in Lebanon. During the elections in May 2018, one of the main promises of the minister and his party, the Free Patriotic Movement, was to reduce the number of refugees in Lebanon. According to the source, the Lebanese government is generally not unhappy about PRLs leaving the country.
15. The source mentioned a case of a Palestinian family, which he followed up on for a period. In this case, the family wanted to return to Lebanon, because they were home sick. The family applied for Palestinian travel documents at the Lebanese embassy in the source's (European) country in order to return to Lebanon. Their application was however not forwarded by the Lebanese MFA to the General Directorate of General Security (GDGS) that is responsible for investigating the family. The source lost the track later on and could not follow up on the case, but as long as he did, no PRL travel documents were issued to the family. Their request was apparently put on hold by the MFA.
16. In meetings with other European colleagues, when the source mentioned the problems he faced regarding the MFA's refusal to approve deportation cases, he was informed by other European colleagues that it was also impossible for their respective countries to deport rejected PRL asylum seekers to Lebanon. The source had not heard any European colleague stating that his or her country did not have problem in this regards.

Impact of involvement of the foreign country's authorities in the process of return

⁴³ As of 21 January 2020, a new government was formed in Lebanon, and Nassif Hitti, a former ambassador to the Arab League, was named foreign minister with the backing of the Free Patriotic Movement. The New York Times, *Lebanon Forms Government With Backing of Hezbollah and Allies*, 21 January 2020 [url](#). (ed.)

17. The source had been informed by the MFA that in cases of voluntary return of PRLs, in which no foreign authorities were involved in the process of return, the MFA would approve that the person returns to Lebanon. However, the source was not able to confirm whether this information proved correct in practice as the source or other authorities in the source's country only had information about the returns in which they were involved.

Impact of reason for and the time of expiration of travel documents

18. The source had no information on whether the amount of time that passes after the expiry date of a Palestinian travel document from Lebanon had an impact on whether or not Lebanese authorities will issue/renew a travel document for Palestinians from Lebanon.
19. Neither did the source have any knowledge about if the reason why a PRL does not have/has lost a legal residency in the foreign country in question (i.e. rejection of asylum application, revocation of work permit etc.) had any significance with regard to the chance of being allowed by the Lebanese authorities to return to Lebanon.
20. Committing serious crimes abroad would further lessen the possibility of obtaining permission to return to Lebanon. In general, Lebanon does not want to have criminal refugees in the country.

Meeting with diplomatic source (2), Beirut, 9 January 2020

Issuance/renewal of travel documents to Palestinians from Lebanon at Lebanese embassies

21. Lebanese authorities are very reluctant to allow Palestinians from Lebanon (PRL) to return to Lebanon if they do not have residence permit in a foreign country (e.g. rejected asylum seekers or those whose residency permit have been revoked).
22. When such PRLs apply for new Palestinian travel documents or renewal of travel documents at Lebanese embassies abroad, no response is given by Lebanese authorities. The cases are put on hold by the Lebanese MFA.
23. If a PRL without residence permit in a foreign country (e.g. a rejected asylum seeker) is to return to Lebanon, it requires a special permission/approval from the Lebanese MFA in order for the PRL in question to be able to return. This applies regardless of whether it is a voluntary or forced return. It also applies even if the individual has a valid Palestinian travel document from Lebanon. If the authorities of the foreign country from where the individual is to return to Lebanon are involved in the process of return, the Lebanese MFA tends not to approve the issuance of travel documents (if the person does not have a valid Palestinian travel document) or the permission to return. It is, thus, only in cases, where PRLs want to return voluntarily without the involvement of the authorities of the foreign country in question that the person may have a chance to obtain travel documents and permission to return.
24. Readmission of PRLs who do not have residence permit in a foreign country (e.g. rejected asylum seekers) has been totally stopped by the Lebanese authorities since May 2018. This policy is unlikely to

change in the foreseeable future given the current political climate and fiscal challenges that Lebanon is currently facing.

25. The thinking on the part of the Lebanese authorities is that PRLs living in other countries, who do not have valid residence permits in those countries, are an issue for those countries and not for Lebanon.
26. The diplomatic source was only aware of one particular case, in which a foreign country was able to return a PRL without valid Palestinian travel documents to Lebanon. This was due to the fact that the individual had committed crimes which were reported extensively in the press to such an extent that Lebanese authorities felt compelled to allow him to return to Lebanon in order to protect the reputation of Lebanon abroad.
27. The source was aware of one European country that at the time of interview had return agreements with Lebanon. The source also knew of a second European country which had negotiated an agreement that never came to be concluded and signed.
28. The source mentioned that there was a legal framework for EU-countries to play on when negotiating return of PRLs with the Lebanese authorities. In this connection, the source referred to Lebanon's commitment to accept returnees under the Euro-Mediterranean agreement between EU and Lebanon, 2006/356 art: 68 and 69.⁴⁴ Under the agreement, individual EU member states and Lebanon can bilaterally negotiate return arrangements for the readmission of third country nationals.
29. The source also mentioned that EU Regulation 2019/1155 (art 25a) in relation to the EU VISA Code, in force from 2 February 2020,⁴⁵ addresses the issues of cooperation on readmissions between EU-member states and third countries. This means that article 25a in the VISA Code links returns from EU-countries together with EU Visas issued to third country citizens. This gives EU-member states a tool to limit the number of visas granted to citizens from a certain country if the country in question is not willing to take back its own citizens or individuals with the right to residency in the country in question. Furthermore, if the EU-Commission is made aware by EU-member states of the reluctance of a third country to accept forcefully returned individuals, the EU Commission can enact sanctions on the visa code for that country by using article 25a in EU Regulation 2019/1155.⁴⁶
30. Since September 2019, EU Regulation 2019/1240⁴⁷ has also allowed for Immigration Liaison Officers representing the EU or individual member states to assist in the return of third country citizens to

⁴⁴ Official Journal of the European Union, *Council Decision of 14 February 2006*, 30 May 2006, [url](#)

⁴⁵ Regulation (EU) 2019/1155 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 amending Regulation (EC) No 810/2009 establishing a Community Code on Visas (Visa Code), [url](#)

⁴⁶ When approving the minutes, the source also referred to information from the Schengen Visa Info website, which according to the source provides background information on the new revised visa code and the link between article 24 and the newly amended article 25 a; Schengen Visa Info, *EU to Penalize Non-Cooperative Countries on Migration by Restricting Visas*, 10 June 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁷ Regulation (EU) 2019/1240 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on the creation of a European network of immigration liaison officers, [url](#)

their countries of origin and that third countries must cooperate with the EU and EU-member states on return issues.

31. Airlines will not allow a PRL or a Syrian national on board on flights to Lebanon without an explicit permission to return from Lebanese authorities even if a person wishes to return voluntarily. This is because Airlines have an agreement with Lebanese authorities that if any individual gets flown to Lebanon and the person is not granted access to the country, the airline will have to pay the cost to fly the individual back to the departure country.
32. When sending the minutes to the source for approval, the delegation informed the source that since the meeting with the source, the delegation had received information on that a couple of European countries had lately succeeded in returning about 20 rejected PRL asylum seekers to Lebanon. The source was asked whether he could confirm this information.
33. When approving the minutes, the source confirmed the above-mentioned information received by the delegation. The source added that these cases were most likely voluntary return. However, he underlined that there were sometimes confusions and misunderstandings about what is meant by 'voluntary' in the reported cases. According to the source, whilst some countries/organisations define 'voluntary' as following the authority's decision on not granting residence permits, others perceive the term as choosing to return even though the person has a residence permit and is thus not compelled to return. There are also countries which only operate with 'assisted' and 'not assisted' returns. Against this background, one could doubt the nature of the reported voluntary returns as it is not entirely clear what is meant by 'voluntary'.

Appendix 2: Terms of Reference

1. Issuance/renewal of travel documents to Palestinians from Lebanon at Lebanese embassies
 - 1.1. Procedures for issuing/renewal of travel documents, including length of processing the applications
 - 1.1.1. Impact of reason for and time of expiration of travel documents
 - 1.1.2. Impact of application by the person him-/herself or by the authorities in the third country