

LEBANON

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This submission is presented for consideration as part of the Universal Periodic Review Stakeholder Report. It includes a summary of the human rights conditions in Lebanon along with recommendations on how the Lebanese government can improve these conditions and put an end to violations.

A. Executive Summary

The deterioration of the financial and socio-economic situations in Lebanon, coupled by the Lebanese protests and the COVID-19 pandemic, will require much humanitarian and development support to respond to the needs of refugees but as well the Lebanese host community.

Social stability that is under threat while protection issues such as access to legal documentation, SGBV, forced evictions and deportations have increased. The onset of COVID-19 has exacerbated socio-economic vulnerability, with the full extent of related lockdown measures not yet revealed. Worrying signs are already seen with inflation of the Lebanese lira, which is wiping out the value of incomes and aid assistance, in addition to rapidly rising unemployment.

B. Social stability

1. There is growing hostility between refugees and host communities as a result of the deteriorating economic situation in Lebanon. Since the start of the Syria crisis, nine years ago, it is estimated that 200,000 Lebanese have been pushed into poverty, adding to 1 million of their fellow citizens already in poverty.ⁱ
2. This trend has only accelerated in the past year as the economic crisis has worsened and unemployment among Lebanese shoots up. Research by InfoPro, which is based on a survey of 300 businesses, has recorded 220,000 job losses since September 2019.ⁱⁱ
3. In light of this situation, Lebanese host communities have increasingly turned their frustration and anger toward refugees, encouraged by political figures that have blamed the economic crisis on Syrian refugees and have made unsubstantiated claims that Syrian refugees are planning on permanently staying in the country.
4. Data from the 2019 UNHCR Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees (VASyR 2019) illustrates that since 2018 13% more Syrian refugee households believe that competition for jobs is the main reason for inter-communal tension.ⁱⁱⁱ In all, 51% of households surveyed cited this factor. Given that the economic situation has worsened since 2019, and a long expected crackdown on undocumented foreign labor was instituted in June 2019 by the Ministry of Labor, it is highly likely that competition for jobs, and resources more broadly, will further drive inter-communal tension in 2020 and beyond.^{iv} Therefore, it is critical that responses from humanitarian organizations and donors should include vulnerable Lebanese and vulnerable refugees. Extra attention should be paid to peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts to diffuse tensions between host communities and refugee communities. This requires a coordinated response that looks at vulnerability, and not nationality.
5. Even if many host communities in the North and the Bekaa have strong links with refugee communities, there is an increasing risk that small incidents flare up into more sustained violence as a result of squeezed living conditions and acute economic competition.^v

6. For example, on 5 June 2019 clashes in the town of Deir al-Ahmer broke out between Civil Defense and some Syrian refugees which led to the expulsion of hundreds of refugees from their camp.^{vi}
7. Likewise, the Covid-19 pandemic in Lebanon has already contributed to further hostility directed against refugee camps. Many residents and some local authorities consider refugee camps particularly prone to large outbreaks of the virus, and have called for strict, discriminatory measures directed against Syrian refugees. These measures range from extended curfews, reinforced controls, and stigmatizing narratives targeting specifically Syrian and Palestinian refugees.
8. It is important to note that these measures were implemented by local authorities not the Lebanese authorities. In several cases, local organizations and the Ministry of Social Affairs intervened to settle disputes between the host and refugee communities, or the local authorities and refugees.
9. In relation to refugees, the economic crisis has dramatically affected access to food, access to education, access to healthcare, and informal employment security.
10. Access to food has been impacted by the closure of participating WFP food e-card shops, leaving many vulnerable refugees to travel further to access food.
11. Access to education has been hindered by the increasingly prohibitive cost of transport and educational materials, both of which have become more expensive since the onset of the economic crisis. In 2019, 13% of respondents (aged 6-14) to the VASyR 2019 cited the cost of transport as the main reason for not attending school, while 10% (aged 6 – 14) cited the cost of educational materials.^{vii} Among Syrian refugees, around half of children do not have access to either formal or informal education.^{viii} It is important that the Lebanese authorities invest the support and funding received in order to ensure the progress made in educating refugee children under RACE I & II is not lost to rising costs in accessing education.
12. Access to healthcare has been affected both at the level of patient and hospital. Refugee patients are increasingly being asked to pay a higher share of their treatment, or in dollars. And hospitals are struggling to import essential supplies and medicines from abroad as the shortage of dollars in the country has increased the cost of operations.
13. Finally, refugees have been detrimentally affected by a crackdown on undocumented foreign labor, leading many employers to dismiss workers or risk expensive fines by the Ministry of Labor; the business activity downturn, which has increased unemployment across all groups; and a rise in labor violations, such as withholding wages, as vulnerable refugees are exploited by unscrupulous employers.

C. Forced Evictions

14. The rate of evictions has increased since the onset of the economic crisis. This is primarily the result of sudden changes to rental agreements. Landlords are increasingly requesting payment in dollars;

requesting payment 1 year upfront; and imposing rent hikes. Data from UNHCR demonstrates that between April and June 2019, 7.7% of alleged new eviction notices occurred due to an inability to pay rent, while 19.2% occurred because of host-community tension (most likely as a result of economic competition).^{ix}

15. In addition to economic constraints cited above, there are security reasons behind forced evictions, such as the eviction of refugees from lands abridging property owned by the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), for example the collective eviction of refugees next to the Riyak air base in 2017.^x
16. Some evictions take place under the auspices of clearing pollution, such as the 2019 collective eviction of refugees from their camp by the Litani River Authority because it was increasing pollution into the river.^{xi}
17. While cases of forced evictions are increasing, a significant amount of vulnerable families that have not otherwise been evicted – yet – are at serious risk of being evicted soon due to the crisis, and therefore the level of vulnerability is increasing. Another leading cause prompting forced evictions includes social hostility and host community tension, including arbitrary evictions resulting from conflicts.^{xii}

D. Deportations

18. A decision by the Higher Defense Council (HDC) on the 13th of May 2019 required the deportation of anyone arrested and found to have entered the country illegally after April 24, 2019, despite Lebanon's earlier commitment to refrain from conducting deportations.
19. The Directorate General Security reported it had deported 2,731 Syrians under this order between 21 May and 28 August 2019. However, the actual number is expected to be much higher than the number reported.
20. The decision ignores the fact that Lebanon imposes on Syrian nationals' entry conditions that contravene laws and judicial rulings. On 8 February 2018 the Lebanese State Council annulled the conditions of entry and residence for Syrians that were issued in early 2015, declaring these conditions illegal because they were issued by an incompetent authority.^{xiii} Yet, to date neither the government nor the General Security have implemented this ruling.
21. Deportees are handed over to Government of Syria (GoS) authorities, after which their fate becomes unknown. The deportation policy seems one of several measures that increased pressure on Syrian refugees to return, including forced demolition of refugee shelters and more rigid applications of the labour code.
22. UN bodies and international and Syrian human rights organizations have documented widespread and systematic violations of international law by all actors to the conflict in Syria. Reports by Human Rights Watch have documented widespread abuses against refugee returnees, including those who were deported, in government areas.^{xiv}

23. The COVID-19 lockdown resulted in a halt of deportations due to the closure of the Lebanese-Syrian border in March 2020. Though, there will invariably be a return to discussions about continuing deportations.
24. As risks upon return cannot be determined, the forcible return of Syrian refugees is a clear violation of Lebanon's non-refoulement obligations and a breach to the rule of law since no due process and legal proceedings are being respected.
25. The decision taken by HDC has put on the bench the essential judiciary component of due process. A refoulement decision taken by a security institution without any legal oversight and space of appeal can only lead to abuse. This situation sets a precedent for security institutions to violate the law when they must deal with a sensitive security situation in the name of "national security."

E. Legal Residency

26. There have been positive and negative changes in providing civil documentation to Syrian refugees. The number of Syrian refugees with legal residency has decreased from 2018 to 2019 and now stands at 22%^{xv}.
27. There was also slow progress in increasing the capacity of the Directorate General of General Security (DGGs) in processing legal residency applications. Further, due to the COVID-19 lockdown, the economic crisis and the protests, a large backlog of temporary residency applications will need to be taken care of urgently.
28. Further, less Syrians are approaching the DGGs (a decrease from 60% to 51%), in addition to a decrease in the number of refugees registered under the UNHCR (33% to 28%).^{xvi} This can be explained by the lack of trust in the Lebanese authorities, the inability to afford renewal, municipalities' travel restrictions due to COVID-19 and the roadblocks related to the protests.
29. Almost 97% of newborn children had their birth registered by a medical professional, while there was an increase in marriage registrations at the Foreigners Registry in 2019 from 6% to 26%.^{xvii}
30. This trend has been supported by simplifying the registration process for births and marriages, although disruption to accessing public offices caused by COVID-19 will likely have a deleterious impact on registrations in 2020 due to backlogs leading to processing delays.

F. Recommendations

- 1) The GoL should support inter-community dialogue to diffuse conflict/disputes that have the potential to lead to forced evictions.
- 2) The GoL should continue to commit to the principle of non-refoulement, uphold the principle of rule of law, and halt deportations without due process indefinitely, ensuring they are not resumed after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3) The GoL should give a guarantee that authorities will not arrest or deport Syrians for any medical treatment related to COVID-19, including vaccination (when it is available), and that testing and treatment are not contingent upon legal status.

- 4) The GoL should ensure that all restrictions implemented in response to COVID-19 apply equally to Lebanese citizens, refugees, and other migrants, and that these policies are clearly communicated.
- 5) The GoL should allow UNHCR to resume the registration of refugees as prior to 2015.
- 6) The GoL should not take advantage of movement limitations to suppress dissent, and refrain from summoning or arresting human rights defenders denouncing or condemning duty bearers and civil representatives' actions.
- 7) The GoL should ensure needs-based humanitarian response throughout all communities residing in Lebanon
- 8) The GoL should access to services, particularly health services, in non-discriminatory manner
- 9) The GoL should implement any necessary restrictions of movement in a non-discriminatory manner and ensure that local execution of any restrictions is likewise non-discriminatory Non-discrimination, incl. re. curfews.
- 10) The Ministry of Interior and General Security should identify the gaps in terms of processing capacities regarding residency applications and increase their capacities, in addition to expand the fee waiver for legal residency.
- 11) The Personal Status Department should extend the waiver for late birth registration for children born after 9 February 2019; and simplify the death registration process to increase access for Syrian refugees.
- 12) The GoL should implement the State Council's ruling No. 421 of 8 February 2018 and suspend the General Security regulations issued in 2015 and its subsequent amendments regarding the conditions of entry and residence for Syrian nationals in Lebanon.

ⁱ The World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview> (2019) (accessed 23 March 2020).

ⁱⁱ The Executive, 'Lebanon faces growing unemployment', <https://www.executive-magazine.com/opinion/leaders/lebanon-faces-growing-unemployment> (accessed 23 March 2020).

ⁱⁱⁱ UNHCR, 'Vulnerability assessment for Syrian refugees' (2019), p. 32. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/73118.pdf> (accessed 24 March 2020).

^{iv} The Daily Star, 'Labor ministry starts crackdown on foreign labor', <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Jul-10/487248-labor-ministry-starts-crackdown-on-foreign-labor.ashx> (accessed 24 March 2020).

^v The 961, 'Prime Minister says Lebanon can no longer protect its people', <https://www.the961.com/prime-minister-says-lebanese-government-can-no-longer-protect-its-people/> (accessed 24 March 2020).

^{vi} The International Crisis Group, 'Easing Syrian refugees' plight in Lebanon', p.6, <https://www.executive-magazine.com/opinion/leaders/lebanon-faces-growing-unemployment> (accessed 23 March 2020).

^{vii} UNHCR, Vulnerability Assessment for Syrian Refugees 2019 (VASyR), p. 66. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/73118.pdf>

^{viii} El-Kogali SET, "Expectations and Aspirations: A New Framework for Education in the Middle East and North Africa" (The World Bank, November 2018)

^{ix} UNHCR, 'Collective Evictions and Eviction Notices', <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/70762> (accessed 25 March 2020).

^x News Deeply: "Nowhere left to run", <https://www.newsdeeply.com/refugees/articles/2017/09/28/nowhere-left-to-run-refugee-evictions-in-lebanon-in-shadow-of-return>

^{xi} The Daily Star: "Litani Authority evicts 300 Syrian refugees in South", <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2019/Apr-02/480210-litani-authority-evicts-300-syrian-refugees-in-south.ashx>

^{xii} SAWA for Development and Aid’s questionnaires with refugees subject to forced evictions and PASC Working Group’s Survey Results.

^{xiii} See [State Council Decision no. 421/2017-2018](#).

^{xiv} Human Rights Watch: “Syrians deported from Lebanon, arrested at home”, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/09/02/syrians-deported-lebanon-arrested-home>.

^{xv} Independent Monitor’s Report: Lebanon Commitments from the London and Brussels Conferences. P.6.

^{xvi} Brussels Monitoring Framework, Commitment 41.

^{xvii} Ibid.